

**The World According to the Creatives
....a global network emerges to connect creative practitioners...**

**By Ralph Kerle©
September 16, 2007**

In November 2005 Colin Funk, Executive Director, the Leadership Lab Programme, the Banff Centre, Canada and I set out on a research project involving a series of meetings and interviews with senior Australian government, public servants and industry figures to find out what they knew, understood and experienced in regard to applied creativity and innovation.

For the previous 5 years, the business media globally had been running hot with articles and stories on the importance of creativity and innovation as economic and organisational drivers.

Such prestigious research reports as The IBM Global Executive Summary in 2006 revealed that most CEO's expected fundamental changes in their organizations over the next two to three years. To effect these changes, the CEO's concurred that business model innovation was the prime consideration, external collaboration was indispensable and innovation required orchestration from the top. For CEO's to address those notions properly, they needed to think broadly, act personally and manage the innovation mix; to make the business model deeply different; to defy collaboration limits and to force an outside look every time.

Governments globally had spent hours and substantial funds with committees and consultants developing creativity and innovation policies and strategies. Third world countries such as Nigeria, Kenya and Ethiopia, emerging powerhouse economies such as China, India and Brazil and first world countries such as Australia, UK, USA and Denmark amongst others all now have well articulated, well researched, well documented government policies on innovation enmeshed with wonderful statements exhorting the importance of creativity underpinning the innovation effort. Phrases such as "the smart state" "innovate to succeed" "creative imperative" "the necessity of innovation" appear with monotonous regularity juxtaposed against dire warnings of impending doom if this phenomena is not manifest.

What these research papers and policies both have in common is the recognition and enshrining of creativity and innovation as vitally important priorities in stimulating and driving cultural as well as economic development for the common good of mankind.

So how did governments and their public servants implement these policies?

Let me paraphrase a conversation.

Colin and I : Nice to meet you and thanks for speaking with us, Head of Department and Senior Government Adviser. Could you tell us a little bit about your creativity and innovation policy and programme

Head of Department: Yes, well it is as we all know vital for the development of the economy

Colin and I: Of course. And what does that mean as far as the government is concerned

Head of Department (proudly): We have developed several industry initiatives, particularly in the area of industry hubs and our universities are setting up research centres of excellence to assist them!

After 4 or 5 meetings involving politicians, senior government advisers and their department heads from traditional industries, arts and treasury portfolios, it became apparent that whilst

there was genuine enthusiasm, there was little understanding of how applied creativity and innovation worked.

In frustration, after one particularly dismal meeting, Colin and I considered withdrawing from the project.

Then 5 minutes after we left, out of the blue, I received a phone call on my mobile phone from somebody I had not previously met - Gretel Bakker, Director, Performance Frontiers and now a CSTC Member.

"I have been asked to call you because my contact thinks I might be working in your area" said Gretel. ' I am a former theatre director and performance artists and I now have a successful business delivering creative leadership and executive training programmes across the Asia Pacific region using theatrical and visual arts methods to explore values, ethics and performance."

Here was our first contact with somebody who worked in creative skills development by applying creativity and innovation! What ensued was a very similar pattern. It was as if the shadow knew!!

After the completion of a meeting, my mobile would ring or we would be referred to somebody and would phone them. What we had discovered was a subterranean network of creative practitioners nearly always working in isolation. They had designed or created methods for applied creativity themselves out of their experience and practice either as artists or as everyday workers who had found a way to share their creative skills commercially for the common good.

We met an artist who used visualization techniques to create and draw corporate vision and mission statements, an actors group who provided improvisation workshops to develop communications skills; a theatre director who provided workshops developing emotional intelligence for senior executives; a former comedian turned facilitator who specializes in the use of cognitive behavioural tools to reveal creative thinking styles; a corporate storyteller working at the top end of the financial services industry helping executives to write business strategy in the form of fictional narratives.

Some of them moved in and out of the academic world experimenting with their theories, others came from professional coaching or applied psychology backgrounds; others simply artists with their practices seeking new sources of income and new fields in which to create.

All had in common a desire to experiment with the aesthetic as a way of developing human skills and capabilities. All had in common an ability to be able to convince organisations that their skills and knowledge had economic and social value.

So if there was a subterranean network of creative practitioners in Australia might this be the case globally. I was aware of a global network of academics and artists operating under the acronym ACORN - the Aesthetic, Culture and Organisational Research Network that had grown out of the Academy of Management in the US and Europe. They are predominantly interested in theory rather than practice.

In May 2006, seeking an answer to this conundrum, I sent 20 emails to creative practitioners in Australia, Canada, Singapore and the United States asking them whether they, and through them, their colleagues, might be interested in establishing an on-line community of practice and knowledge around creative skills training in the Asia Pacific region.

The response was overwhelming. I had accidentally stumbled on a rich vein of experience and knowledge that was eagerly waiting to be surfaced and its owners to be connected. The Creative Skills Training Council, Asia Pacific was born.

Membership in September 2007 has grown to 103 members from all four continents, countries represented include Australia, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, India, Portugal, United States, Jamaica, Norway, United Kingdom, Singapore, Hong Kong and membership continues to grow monthly.

Members come from a diverse range of backgrounds and include a nuclear physicist, an Olympic sporting coach, several deans of highly regarded business schools, the Executive Director of one of North America's leading leadership programmes, a major bank's Chief Economist, an opera singer, visual artists, a chemical engineer, authors/writers, CEO Coaches and Chief Executive Officers from highly regarded professional services organisations. Members have consulted globally to governments and defence forces, industry and communities at almost every level of operation.

What all have in common is the desire to share information about their consultations, theories, processes and practices gained through their experiences in applied creativity and innovation. How are creative skills developed? What are the experiences in business and organisations of creative practitioners? What informs the development of their practices? What works in a particular environment, organisation etc? Just recently, an email seeking collaboration in the design of workshops for senior management programmes resulted in 41 responses across the three continents.

Communication within the network is conducted via a blog found at www.cstc-apa.com or through a CSTC yahoo group email. A peer group of activists ensure there is regular activity for discussion on-line in some form.

Anybody can become a member. There is only one protocol. Potential members must either have an existing member submit a 500 word biography on behalf of the nominee or an individual can choose to complete the nomination form at the web site <http://cstc-apa.squarespace.com/nominate-for-membership/>. The biography is then circulated and a seconder sought. Every nomination has been accepted. The purpose for the nomination process is twofold. The Council wanted an active and committed on-line membership, not simply a database. Secondly the nomination system is useful introducing new members and having their experience and knowledge recognised quickly and acknowledged within the Council.

In its latest manifestation, the CSTC has migrated from an on-line to an off-line community with the first live event held in the Royal Botanical Garden, Melbourne, Australia in September, 2007. Further live meetings are planned in Sydney for September and the American Creativity Association is providing the Creative Skills Training Council a full public forum at its international convention in Singapore in February 2008. Discussions are under way to hold a similar meeting in Hong Kong in 2008.

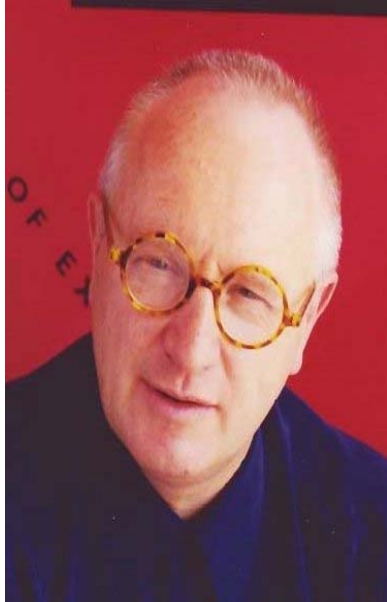
Members in Melbourne had not previously met and the results of the meeting have seen several design collaborations under discussion, the most interesting of which is a proposed 2 day thought leaders forum designed to flesh out new ways of thinking about physical creativity involving arts, sports and leadership.

The latest on-line initiative is an on-line publishing project driven by a wiki entitled "The World According to the Creatives - Experiences of Creative Practitioners in Business and

Organisations" - the outcome, a book authored entirely on-line edited by peers with a publication and print deadline of March 2008.

What's the future? This is an experience that true to authentic creative practice keeps writing itself! The journey has only just begun.

For further information go to the Creative Skills Training Council web site www.cstc-apa.com or contact Ralph Kerle, Founder, the Creative Skills Training Council at rk@cstc-apa2.com



**Ralph Kerle. MCI, DADA
Creative Strategist
Chief Executive Officer
The Creative Leadership Forum**

Ralph Kerle is CEO of the Creative Leadership Forum, a not-for-profit entity dedicated to advancing the practice of leadership and management by designing and delivering executive education and training programmes based on creative thinking tools and arts based processes.

He is the Founder of the Creative Skills Training Council, Asia Pacific; a Board Member and a member of the International Committee of the US Creative Education Foundation, a Leader in the US Creative Problem Solving Institute and a Fellow of the US-based think tank, the Center for Cultural Studies & Analysis. He is faculty adjunct at the Banff Centre of the Arts, Banff, Canada as an Innovation Coach in their Leadership Development Programme and an International Thought Leader in their Leadership Learning Lab.

In 1992, he founded Eventures Australia Pty. Ltd and built into one of Australia's leading event design and production companies. As Creative Director, he worked for such Fortune 500 companies as Caltex, Fosters, Dairy Farmers, Foxtel, General Motors, Hewlett Packard, Kraft Foods, Nestle, Rolls Royce, Peugeot, Toyota, Telstra, Walt Disney, and Yellow Pages

He is a drama graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne Australia and former Associate Director of the Sydney Theatre Company. He holds a Masters in Creative Industries and is currently completing his Professional Doctorate in Creative Industries at Queensland University of Technology, Creative Industries Faculty, Brisbane Australia.

He is a writer, theatre and events producer and director, a former owner of a comedy cabaret and photographer.