

# Creativity that Lasts

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and getting tougher.  
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But so is unprecedented success.  
What's the difference? It's called . . .

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# Creativity that Lasts

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By Deirdre Taylor



It's seven o'clock on a Wednesday night. The setting is the town hall in a small New England village. You've been asked to chair a meeting of people representing various parts of the community. Over the years, your town has been subject to some unwieldy development, so the group is searching for ways to improve its architectural appeal in order to catch up with its prospering neighbors. Everyone is cordial and enthusiastic — at least to begin with. Soon, however, the vested interests in the room begin to make themselves felt. Someone breaks the tension with a creative suggestion — how about an architectural detail that could be incorporated into many future buildings to bring a feeling of unity to the town? Great idea! Everybody breathes a sigh of relief, ready to move on. Then the inevitable happens. Someone disagrees. The reasons for the protest are vague, but appear to involve keeping the character of the town as it is. Tension returns. Discouraged, you adjourn the meeting without resolution.

At different times, we're all called upon to be leaders, and with minor alterations of the details most of us can relate to that story. Some of us lead Fortune 500 companies through mega-mergers, and some of us lead small children through the perils of Little League. Some negotiate international trade agreements, and some negotiate zoning regulations with the local town council. One thing we can all agree on is that leading is never easy. The follies and foibles of our fellow humans often drive us to distraction, no matter what the project. Think about the last time you were attempting to lead a group to accomplish something, whether at work, in the community, at church, at school. Chances are there was someone (some jerk, you were probably thinking) who seemed to block progress at every turn. Chances

## Co-Creation on Prince Edward Island

The principles of Generative Leadership proved so helpful on Prince Edward Island that two of the key players there were inspired to found a Center for Co-Creative Leadership on PEI. Paul Hickey, manager of human resources for Island Tel, and his colleague Marie MacDonald, director of learning and development for PEI Federal Council, aim to foster leadership on Prince Edward Island, in Atlantic Canada, Canada, and the world. The co-founders envision the center as a place for others "to nurture their genius and glean practical tools for achieving extraordinary results." Focusing on the idea that "leadership is not about isolation, but co-creation and partnership,"



. . . and it works because it values the uniqueness of each individual's contribution.





are there were factions, misunderstandings, and hard feelings along the way. Probably there were times when achieving the goal simply seemed too difficult. How many times have you marveled that anything gets accomplished at all? It's no wonder that the command-and-control leadership model predominated for so long, but as we all know, its effectiveness is limited in solving modern problems.

Now ask a different question. How often have you achieved results way beyond what you might have imagined possible? Can you put your finger on what made the difference?

Throughout his successful business career, leadership guru Mel Toomey has been fascinated by two questions: What keeps things from working? What elements of leadership come together to make things work? Over a decade ago, he began a careful study of situations where extraordinary results had been achieved. His goal was to see if the elements could be broken apart, analyzed, reassembled, and transferred to others. He and his colleagues at Generative Leadership Group (GLG) in Somerville, New Jersey, have been proving that they can. Over the years they have worked within organizations of all types — large and small, national and international — as well as between organizations. They have developed a system called Generative Leadership, enabling leaders to transcend many of the obstacles inherent in complex situations, frequently with transformative results.

What makes Generative Leadership unique and powerful, claims Toomey, is a shift in context. "Most people are trained to manage using tools and processes designed to achieve a specific result. However, when dealing with issues that require discontinuous change and innovation, something else is required — leadership that invites thinking beyond unexamined assumptions, including what is viewed as 'the truth.'"

## Commitment

GLG begins by teaching leaders that, despite individual differences, people are fundamentally committed to making a lasting and sustainable contribution. Most of us are driven by a desire to make a difference, and we want to be appreciated for our efforts. "It isn't about getting the right people in here, or getting people more committed," says Toomey. The problem is that, "Given the structures we work in, people don't always clearly see how to contribute. As leaders, it is our job to help each member of our group to express their commitment in their own style, and feel truly appreciated for doing so." GLG starts by helping people understand and appreciate the different types of contribution each individual makes to the whole (see self-test, page 42). "In our experience," says Toomey, "this understanding generates renewed creative energy in organizations and frequently enables breakthrough results — far beyond what might normally be expected."

Participants at the Center for Co-Creative Leadership on Prince Edward Island: (top photo, left to right) Mel Toomey, Generative Leadership Group; Marie MacDonald, PEI Federal Council; Paul Hickey, Island Tel. (Individual photos, clockwise from top): Ann-Marie Arsenault, Public Service Alliance of Canada; Michael Ives, UNISYS; Susan MacKenzie, Dept of Health and Social Services; John Baird, Holland College; Joanne Hunt, New Ventures North; Tom Garland, Human Resources Development Canada.



participants spend three days designing an important organizational project. The goal, says Hickey, "is to learn ways of thinking, listening, and leading that will produce high personal satisfaction and allow people to contribute much more to the success of their organizations."

Since its origin in 1998, the center has attracted participants from around the country, and although still in its development stage, an international meeting is planned. The next program, Generative Leadership Group's "Designing and Producing Breakthrough Results," is scheduled for May 1-3, 2000. Contact Mary Saunders at 902-566-7098 for information.

## Corporate Creativity Gone Underground

Mel Toomey offers this example of the way creativity can assert itself inside organizations, even when the odds are against it: “A decisionmaker at General Motors decided the Corvette was done for and should be retired. But someone inside the organization was an enthusiast for the model, so he diverted some funds and kept work on the Corvette alive. When he eventually brought the design out of the little black hole that people were working in, it was approved for production and became enormously successful. He got a slap on the wrist for violating policy, and they set up procedures so that it could never happen again. Which is interesting, since in another part of the company no doubt they were wondering, ‘How can we have more creativity around here?’”

Paul Hickey, human resources manager at Island Telcom, Inc. on Prince Edward Island, Canada, and longtime client of GLG, observes, “Nobody gets up in the morning and kisses their spouse good-bye and says, gee, I’m going to work today to try and screw something up. So what’s missing is an organizational design that allows people to express who they are, because it’s very natural for us to want to make a contribution.”

Hickey learned this leadership lesson firsthand several years ago when Island Telcom was working with the federal and provincial government to examine ways for Prince Edward Island to become a self-sustaining, knowledge-based economy. He explains that, “To fully understand the magnitude of this, you have to appreciate the complexity of the issues in the room. We needed the agreement and participation of the university, several levels of government, and the private sector. And we needed to engage the World Bank and convince them that Prince Edward Island, which is heavily subsidized by the Canadian government, was a good place to conduct this study. These are all good people, but they were all coming from different perspectives. For example, the taxing authority of the provincial government and the telephone company were in court at the time over how much tax the telephone company should pay.”

The meetings could easily have deteriorated as participants jockeyed with one another for control. As group leaders, Hickey and his colleague Marie McDonald, director of learning and development

at the PEI Federal Council, were able to use their leadership training to focus the group on the larger purpose, and reframe competing voices as unique contributions. “Eventually everyone was able to transcend the domains that gave them the authority to be there, and all the conflicts that would normally have been present were set aside. Within two weeks it was an approved project, which was unheard of. We picked six possible projects that would become knowledge-based businesses. In the two years of the project all six have gone from being virtual to being real!” People were so impressed with this experience that one of the businesses they created was an institute for Generative Leadership (see sidebar, page 36).

## Generous Listening

So, how does it work? According to Joyce Dowdall, president of GLG, we can begin by learning to “listen generously.” “Most of us, most of the time, aren’t really listening. We’re waiting for our turn to speak,” says Dowdall. “So, when I say listen generously, I don’t just mean being more attentive. I mean taking listening further and fully receiving what another person is saying in a way that allows us to see something we didn’t see before — the possibility of change. Listening this way becomes opportunity.” Listening for the commitment in the background of what people are saying changes the way we hear. It opens up the possibility that what appears at first to be negative may actually be a good idea in disguise.

Generous listening becomes even more essential when people from different organizations (or cultures, or enterprises, or ethnic groups) have to step outside their normal domains and work together toward a common goal, something that more and more of us will do as we attempt to meet the challenges of the new century.

## Organizational Paradox

Anyone who has ever worked in an organization of any size will agree that there is something in the very nature of any organization that seems to discourage change and innovation — and yet it is creativity that gives organizations their lifeblood. It is this tension — between those who favor the status quo and those who argue for change — that lies



NATIONAL CORVETTE MUSEUM

at the heart of the organizational paradox and at the root of most leadership challenges.

Toomey explains, "Organizations at their inception are all creative systems. Over time they become preservative systems, because the right thing to do with what you create is to take care of it. So stewardship sets in, in the best possible way. But eventually, the work that made the system be creative in the first place becomes less and less tolerable."

To understand why organizations become less creative over time, Toomey looks at how they evolve. "All forms of organization — the communities we live in, the nations we form, our systems of worship, business organizations — are chaotic systems. Order gets imposed inside those systems. It's out of the question for a large company not to get the payroll out. You don't drop babies in the maternity ward. So you set things up so that there's an absolutely reliable and predictable result, with backup systems and everything in place. Once you establish order in chaos, you then have to set up systems of maintenance, and bring diligence to them." The irony, according to Toomey, is that maintaining the status quo takes ever-increasing amounts of energy until organizations become so self-absorbed they fall back into chaos.

"Business organizations become increasingly self-absorbed, not because they are all that interesting, but because it takes more and more of the resources of the organization to maintain the performance standards which give them their gold stars in the first place. Management is about reliability, predictability, and certainty. Leadership, on the other hand, is about possibility. No organization of any consequence precludes having to deliver both management and leadership as major dimensions of the job. With the management model as the only way of interacting with an organization, stability is created — yet, ironically, it is stability that is the precursor to decline."

So how do you create a balance? That's where appreciating a variety of contributions comes into play. Says Toomey, "We have to stop ascribing all this stuff to bad people who can't understand, or evil systems just out to make money. Those are superficial assessments of a far more complex system."

## Honoring the Past

One way to bring the various factions out of their separate rooms is to develop a context (or culture) that honors the past. Organizations seem to fall into two camps: those that cling to their past and resist change, and those that embrace change at the expense of their history. In GLG's analysis of organizations that achieve breakthroughs, tearing down the old in the process of creating the new dishonors the contributions people have made in the past. It is almost always counterproductive.

Gail Reneke, director of learning and development at Genentech, the super-hot biotech pioneer in San Francisco, has had considerable experience with Generative Leadership training. "Genentech is a 20-year-old company that still clings passionately to the entrepreneurial spirit," she explains, "and at the same time is struggling with how to bring in infrastructure that doesn't create bureaucracy." In an environment where historically you're only as good as your latest invention, she recognized that something was being lost in their forward-looking approach. "One of the most effective things we've done has been to advocate a perspective on change that honors the past. The past here is so compelling. We've created such life-changing things!" While it is still in the early days, Reneke believes that this new corporate culture, which focuses on building the future out of the victorious stories of the past and has been embraced from the top down, is already showing results.

## 21st-Century Leader

The forces that have conspired to create an environment marked by accelerated and unprecedented change will continue long into the future. Many of us are secretly waiting for a visionary leader to help us navigate the changes. GLG's Joyce Dowdall imagines a different scenario. "What if there were no experts who knew what the 21st-century leader looked like?" she asks. "What if no one really knew how to transform organizations to thrive in a changed world? What if all of the answers we are seeking are not outside of us, but within us, and through dialogue with one another we have the capacity to create this future together?"

**Management is about reliability, predictability, and certainty. Leadership, on the other hand, is about possibility.**

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To achieve unprecedented success on this journey, keep the following in mind:

- Recognize that everyone wants to make a contribution. We all want to be appreciated for making a difference, even when (perhaps especially when) everything we do and say appears to be gumming up the works.

- Listen generously, particularly to those whose views you don't share. Listen for the commitment behind the comment, because relationship resides in the commitment, not in the words.

- Understand that all organizations are chaotic systems upon which humans are trying to impose varying degrees of order. Maintaining order in the midst of inherently chaotic systems requires increasing amounts of energy over time. Unless organizations find creative ways to renew themselves, this energy drain eventually leads to decline (and demise — witness the Roman Empire, the British Empire, etc.).

- Creativity never really goes away; it just goes underground. So making the organization more creative isn't about getting more creative people, it's about developing a context in which the creativity that already exists can flourish.

- Honor the past. It is the platform upon which the future is being built.

- Leadership and management are not the same thing. Management is about stability, predictability, certainty (preserving what already exists); leadership is about possibility (creativity and change). They are equally important to the life of an organization.

Mel Toomey sums it up this way: "Generative Leadership is a way of thinking and being that embraces creativity and change as a way of life. It enables organizations to design the future and cause the change they need proactively, rather than simply reacting to the demands of external forces, and allows them to fulfill visions that would previously have seemed impossible." Viewed this way, leadership is an exciting adventure. Good luck! ❖

Deirdre Taylor was *Spirituality & Health's* founding publisher and is now its executive editor. She wrote "The Spiritual Traditions of Yesterday for the Church of Tomorrow" in our premiere issue.

## We're All Here to Make a Positive Contribution... So Why, Oh Why, Is He Such a Pain in the Neck?

By Stephen Kiesling

*The answer, says leadership guru Mel Toomey, is that we operate from different "creative domains" that develop in turn from different "thinking strategies." Once you locate yourself on his Generative Leadership Compass, you'll understand why your groups sometimes achieve breakthrough results and other times explode in all directions. Better still, you'll be able to do something about it.*

Note: to open this file you may first need to install ConsultantSpeak 3.0 — the free version of the more powerful CS 3.5. To install version 3.0, place your mouse against your tongue and click three times. To install version 5.0, buy a live mouse.

Got that? Good! (This is well worth the trouble.)

Think of lasting creativity as having three domains: First is **Leading**, which means bringing forth new possibilities. Second is **Developing**, which means nurturing those new possibilities until they're solidly grounded. Third is **Managing**, which means providing a stable platform from which the next round of new possibilities can spring forth. You can also think of these three domains as different orientations toward time. Leading is informed by the future, shaped by a vision, and committed to creation. Developing is informed by the present, shaped by demonstration, and committed to possible realities. Managing is informed by the past, shaped by accomplishment and committed to reliability.

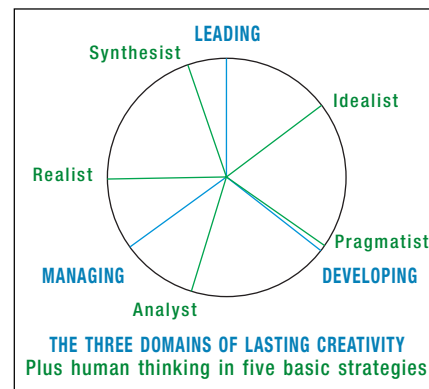
It should be obvious that to thrive over the long haul, companies and groups (and even domestic partnerships) need to operate in all three domains. But it should be equally obvious that these three domains provide not just the seeds of conflict, but

the roots, trunks, and dense foliage for guerrilla warfare. Rather than roll forward smoothly propelled by mutual effort, many companies, groups, and marriages lurch spastically as if propelled by stabs in the back.

Now here are breakthroughs that can cut through the dense foliage separating these three domains and allow everyone to become visible and even transparent to each other. Breakthroughs that not only predict sources of conflicts but provide the tools to head them off — to remind us all that we are in fact on the same team.

How do we do it? The first step is to complete our short version of a questionnaire called the InQ (p. 42) from InQ Educational Materials, Inc. Developed by behavioral psychologists Allan Harrison and Robert Branson, authors of *The Art of Thinking*, the InQ organizes all the myriad ways of human thinking into five basic strategies. These strategies do not represent types of people. Instead, they represent people who have preferences for particular ways of thinking. We can learn to operate using all five strategies if we want to or if we have to. (See box, upper right.)

The next step is to plot your five scores from the InQ onto our simplified version of Mel Toomey's Generative Leadership Compass. You'll then have a snapshot of your own creative domains (see Dede's sample at right). Better still, you'll get a sense of how others are likely to respond to your ideas. If you copy this test and swap scores with colleagues, teammates, and/or your spouse, you'll begin to see what opportunities and catastrophes are built into each and every interaction. Armed with that knowledge (plus some generous listening skills), you'll be much better able to achieve breakthrough results.



## Human Thinking in Five Basic Strategies

**Synthesists** (roughly 11% of us) ask, "What is possible?" They see likeness in apparent unlikes. They seek conflict and change. They find data meaningless without interpretation.

**Idealists** (roughly 37% of us) ask, "What can make the necessary difference?" and "What relationships work?" They welcome a broad range of views. They seek ideal solutions. They value data and theory equally.

**Pragmatists** (roughly 18%) ask, "How do we prevent adversity?" They look for whatever works and seek the shortest route to a payoff. They prefer data over theory. Their behavior is frequently unpredictable.

**Analysts** (roughly 35%) ask, "What is the best way to build what is needed?" They seek models and formulas. They are most comfortable operating with prescriptions. They value data over theory.

**Realists** (roughly 24%) ask, "What difference will it make?" They rely on getting the facts from experts. They value reliability, predictability, and certainty. They reason from principle combined with facts, knowledge, and evidence.

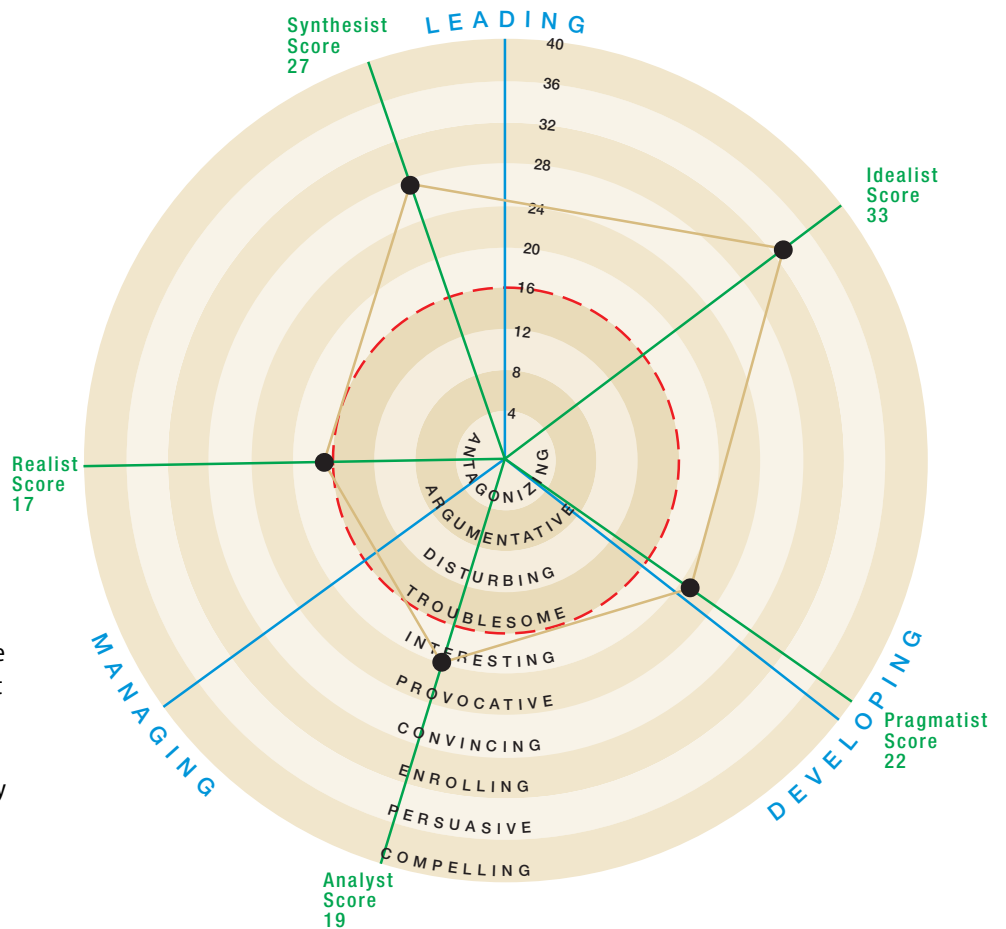
\* Percentages add up to more than 100% because of multiple preferences.

## Does It Work? Ask Our Beloved Former Publisher



After meeting Mel Toomey at the State of the World Forum a couple of years ago (when *Spirituality & Health* was a start-up) our former publisher, Deirdre (Dede) Taylor, was intrigued, so she created her own Generative Leadership Compass. Not surprisingly (at least to us editors), her preferences were Idealist, Synthesist, and Pragmatist. In other words, her preferred domain is Leading. She's exactly the kind of person you might expect to gather a new team and launch a magazine. Also not surprisingly, other Idealists and Synthesists find her extremely persuasive.

These qualities come naturally to her. She's exercised them over the years and enjoys using them. They contributed hugely to the success of the project — but they were not sufficient to carry the project forward. She's had to "generate" other skills (as in "Generative Leadership"), such as Analytic, Pragmatic, and Realistic, which are less intuitive for her. She also needed to understand the ways that her drive toward idealistic new ideas — so necessary in a start-up —



### PORTRAIT OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

verged on being troublesome to natural stewards like Realists and Analysts.

Now the magazine is facing the challenges of adolescence. This is the point where many entrepreneurial types are chewed up and spit out, wondering why their brilliance is no longer appreciated. Understanding the dynamics of change has allowed Dede to come up with a creative

way to meet both the magazine's needs and her own. She has arranged to have a new person, a business manager (someone whose natural inclinations lean toward the Analytical), take over her publishing duties and she has become an editor — so that we would be assured of having a roof over our heads while Dede continues in her role of digging up troublesome new ideas.

# Self-Test: Create Your Own Generative Leadership Compass

Each item in this short, ten-question version of the InQ questionnaire is made up of a statement followed by five possible endings. Indicate the order (0 to 4) in which you believe each ending applies to you. 4 is most like you and 0 is least like you. Even if two or more items seem equally like you, rank them anyway.

There are no right or wrong answers. Your scores indicate the strategies that you prefer and are most comfortable using. Take your time. (For a complete self-assessment of your thinking profile, contact InQ at 800-338-2462 or [www.inq-hpa.com](http://www.inq-hpa.com).)

(4) Always (3) Usually (2) Frequently (1) Sometimes (0) Rarely

## Step One:

### Take the InQ Self-Test to Rank Your Five Thinking Strategies

#### Example

When I read a nonfiction book, I will pay attention to  
(2) the quality of the writing in the book.  
(3) the main idea in the book.  
(4) the way the book is organized.  
(1) the writer's logic and reasoning.  
(0) the inferences I make from the book.

1. When there is a conflict between people and ideas, I tend to favor the side that:  
( ) A. Identifies and tries to bring out the conflict.  
( ) B. Best expresses the values and ideals involved.  
( ) C. Best reflects my personal opinions and experience.  
( ) D. Approaches the situation with the most logic and consistency.  
( ) E. Expresses the argument most forcefully and concisely.

2. When I begin work on a group project, what is important to me is:  
( ) A. Understanding the purpose and the value of the project.  
( ) B. Discovering the goals and values of individuals in the group.  
( ) C. Determining how we are going to go about doing the project.  
( ) D. Understanding how the project can benefit the group.  
( ) E. Getting the project organized and under way.

3. For me, charts in books or articles are:  
( ) A. More useful than the narrative, if they are accurate.  
( ) B. Useful, if they clearly display the important facts.  
( ) C. Useful, if supported and explained in the narrative.  
( ) D. Useful if they raise questions about the narrative.  
( ) E. No more and no less useful than the other material.

4. If I were asked to do a research project, I would start by:  
( ) A. Determining whether or not the project could be done.  
( ) B. Trying to fit the project into a broad perspective.  
( ) C. Trying to formulate the problem as thoroughly as possible.  
( ) D. Deciding if I could do it alone or needed help.  
( ) E. Speculating about what the possible outcomes might be.

5. If I were to gather information from neighbors about a community concern, I would prefer to:  
( ) A. Meet with them individually and ask specific questions.  
( ) B. Hold an open meeting and ask them to air their views.  
( ) C. Interview them in small groups and ask general questions.  
( ) D. Meet informally with key people to get their ideas.  
( ) E. Ask them to bring me all the relevant information that they have.

6. When I read a magazine article in my leisure time, it is about:  
( ) A. How someone resolved a personal or social problem.  
( ) B. A controversial social or political issue.  
( ) C. An account of scientific or historical research.  
( ) D. An interesting, humorous person or event.  
( ) E. A true account of someone's interesting experience.

7. When I read a report at work, I pay the most attention to:  
( ) A. The relation of the conclusion to my own experience.  
( ) B. Whether or not the recommendation can be accomplished.  
( ) C. The validity of the findings, backed up by data.  
( ) D. The writer's understanding of goals and objectives.  
( ) E. The inferences the author draws from the data.

8. When I have a task to do, the first thing I want to know is:  
( ) A. What the best method is for getting the task done.  
( ) B. Who wants the task done and when.  
( ) C. Whether the task is worth doing.  
( ) D. What effect it may have on the other tasks that have to be done.  
( ) E. The immediate benefit of doing the task.

9. If I were to be tested or examined, I would prefer:  
( ) A. An objective, problem-oriented set of questions on the subject.  
( ) B. A debate with others who are also being tested.  
( ) C. An oral-visual presentation covering what I know.  
( ) D. An informal report on how I have applied what I have learned.  
( ) E. A written report covering background, theory, and method.

10. Generally speaking, I am inclined to:  
( ) A. Figure out how existing methods ought to work.  
( ) B. Find existing methods that work, and use them as well as possible.  
( ) C. Speculate about how dissimilar methods might work together.  
( ) D. Discover new and better methods.  
( ) E. Find new ways to make existing methods work better.

## Step 2: Score Your Five Thinking Strategies

Transfer your rankings (0-4) from the 10 questions on this page to the corresponding boxes on the diagram at the top of page 43. Next, add your scores vertically. Finally, add those scores horizontally. You should end up with five scores — Synthesist, Idealist, Pragmatist, Analyst, and Realist — each ranging from 0 to 40. To check your math, make sure the total of all five scores equals 100.

## Step 3: Plot Your Generative Leadership Compass.

Plot each of your five scores along the appropriate five axes of the compass. Then connect the dots to form a pentagon.

## Step 4: Getting Your Bearings

The general shape of your pentagon will likely point toward your preferred domain in the creative process. Are you by preference a leader? a developer? a manager? Now look at

1      2      4      3      5

10      6      7      8      9

S

I

P

A

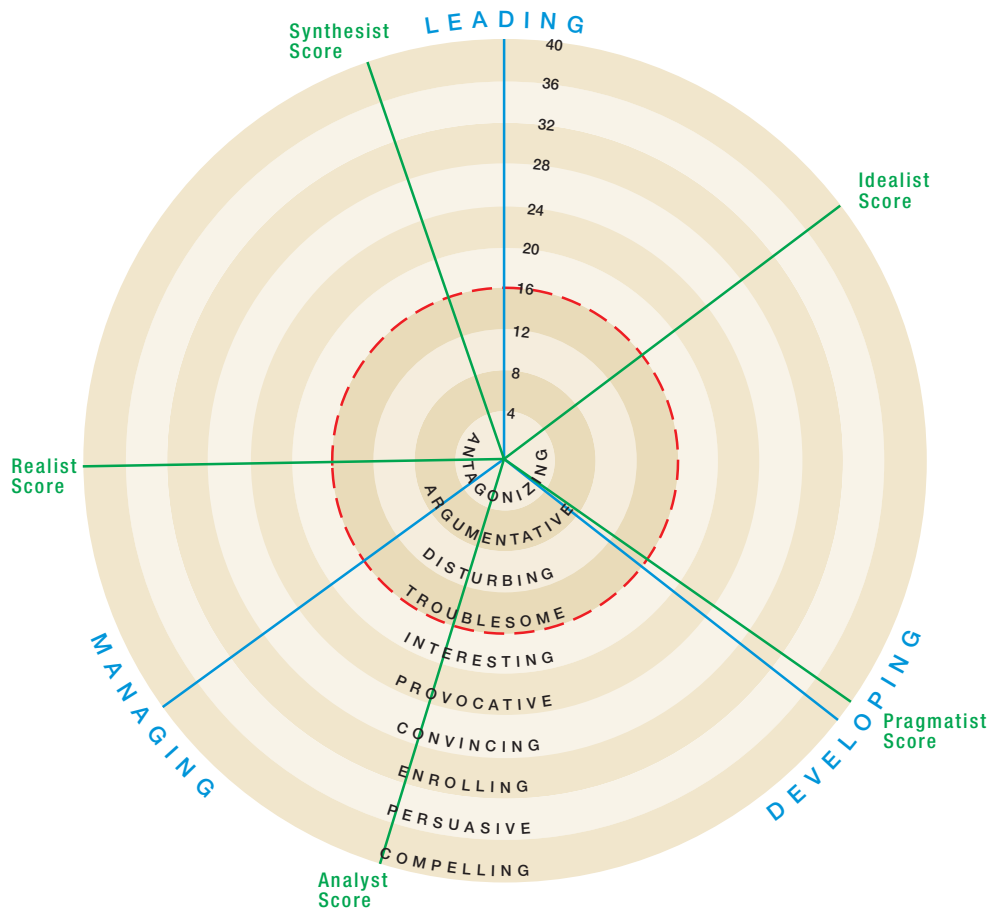
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**RANK YOUR FIVE THINKING STRATEGIES**

your individual scores. For each score, read around the ring to discover how someone with a strong preference for that style will likely respond to you. For example, if your realist score is 12, strong realists may find dealing with you disturbing.

The best use of this self-test is to swap compasses with your team or your partner. You can then predict future conflict. Better still, you may then be able to recognize and acknowledge that all three domains are necessary for lasting creativity. You can then work on listening generously to achieve breakthroughs rather than simply blowing up.

Caution: You'll notice that Dede's numbers add up to more than 100. That's because this self-test contains a short version of the InQ and our simplified version of Mel Toomey's Generative Leadership Compass. Our version has not been scientifically validated, but it's still very useful.



**YOUR SELF-PORTRAIT OF CREATIVITY AND CONFLICT**

(See sample portrait on page 41.)