



The Deliberate Creative Podcast with Amy Climer

Transcript for Episode #073:

Understanding Creative Processes

July 6, 2017

Amy Climer: Welcome to The Deliberate Creative Podcast Episode 73. The inspiration for this episode came from a few conversations I have had with different people, who mostly, are people who teach or think about creative processes. They have some background in Design Thinking or Creative Problem Solving. They have a little bit of depth of knowledge. But in talking with them, I realized that they did not know the big picture of how the process that they knew, whether it was Design Thinking or Human Centered Design or Creative Problem Solving, how those processes all fit together.

I thought I would put together an episode to explain the similarities and differences between these three different processes because they are all very common today, they are used today, they all are excellent in different ways. I think it helps to understanding like if you are teaching something or if you are using a process, how does it fit with the bigger picture. That is what I am going to talk about in today's episode.

Before we dive into that, I would like to share a review that came in on [iTunes](#). This is a review from Josh Edgar. Josh says:

Amy brings an honest and authentic voice to creativity and leadership development. As someone who hasn't viewed himself as creative, Amy has inspired me to view creativity and leadership as muscles that need to be developed and a process to be practiced with discipline. Thank you for helping shift that world's mindset of creativity.

That was a five star review titled "We Are All Creative". Josh, thank you so much. I appreciate your taking the time to write a review and I am so glad to hear that the podcast is helping shift

1



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your mindset about creativity. That is what this is all about. If you are listening, I would love for you to go over to [iTunes](#) and leave a review, or to [Google Play](#), whichever you prefer. I try to read all the reviews on future episodes to share them with everyone. I really appreciate it. It helps me know that you are listening. It helps me know what you like and it is a great way to help spread the word about the podcast.

The History of Creative Process [02:40]

Let's talk about the creative processes. I am going to start with some background, some history. I am going to go way back to 1926. In 1926, Graham Wallas wrote a book called *The Art of Thought*. In that book, he outlined four steps for a creative process. Those steps are: (1), Preparation, (2), Incubation, (3), Illumination, (4), Verification. I will explain each of those.

1. Preparation

Preparation is that stage when you have a problem and you are trying to really figure out, what exactly is this problem? It is where you are investigating it and hopefully getting a lot of different perspectives. You can think of like investigating in all directions. That is the preparation stage.

2. Incubation

The second phase that Graham Wallas talked about is Incubation. This is where you let your mind just not consciously think about the problem. Unconsciously or subconsciously your mind is working on that problem. This might be like say on Monday you have this problem, you do this research, you are talking to people, you are really preparing and then you just let it go and you do not think about it again until Friday. During that time, Monday through Friday, your mind is in that incubation stage and then on Friday you come into illumination.

3. Illumination

Illumination is where the ideas are coming. The appearance of the happy idea, if you will. Today, we might think of like brainstorming or ideation, but I kind of wonder with the term illumination is where the light bulb icon came from. We get the ideas. That would be the Illumination stage.

4. Verification

The fourth stage that Wallas talked about is Verification. This is where you start describing the phase in detail. You start really developing it and finishing it. Because when it just comes to you,

2



it is just this idea. It is just like a sentence or two. And so you have to really work on that and develop it further.

Again, those four stages are Preparation, Incubation, Illumination and Verification.

Since 1926 when that came out, in the 50s and 60s was a period where there was a lot of work around creativity. Some of this came from a 1950s speech done by the American Psychological Association President where he talked about, "Hey, we need to spend some time in understanding creativity." The speech really charged a lot of psychologists and scientists to dig into creativity. However, a lot of the creative processes actually came from practitioners at around that same time.

Commonalities of Creative Process [05:37]

I want to back up a little bit and talk about some of the commonalities of Creative Process. When I talk about Creative Process, it is a process that we humans use. It is one that some of us naturally have used and that is where we have basically outlined it. It's by looking at people who are highly creative, whether it was artists or designers or marketing people, and looking at what is the process that they use to come up with ideas or develop new solutions. Practitioners and researchers have come up with a number of different processes, starting with Graham Wallas in 1926.

1. They are Solution-Focused

Some of the commonalities of all the creative processes are they are solution-focused. We are not wallowing in the problem, we have to identify the problem and really understand it, but then there is a push to come up with a solution. To really find that solution. In fact, there is a three stage process that all creative processes fall under and that is: problem finding, solution finding and then solution implementation. That is like the high level general process that all creative processes kind of follow those three steps.

2. They Follow an Iterative Process

In addition to being solution-focused, all of them follow an iterative process. Meaning it is a cycle and we might be going through it over and over, or maybe we are doing step 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, before we get to step 4. You can imagine with, say, Graham Wallas that I mentioned



Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, you might go through those three stages a couple of times before you get into the Verification stage. Or maybe in the Verification stage you kind of repeat the entire process again to continue refining and iterating down to the best solution.

3. They Encourage the Use of Divergent and Convergent Thinking

A third commonality of all creative processes is that they encourage the use of divergent and convergent thinking. Where divergent thinking is where we are thinking really big and we are trying to come up with all these ideas and maybe we even get a little wild about our ideas or like thinking about things in a different way. Whereas convergent thinking is where we start analyzing and synthesizing those ideas and honing in a bit more. All the creative processes use those two types of thinking.

I was mentioning that in the 50s and 60s is a period of time where a lot of these processes were developing. I am going to start with Creative Problem Solving.

Creative Problem Solving [08:22]

This is the process that I would say of the three, I know in the most depth. I guess, I know the best. This process came originally from Alex Osborn, who was an advertiser. He was one of the founders of the advertising firm BBDO. He was the O, Osborn. In 1948, he produced this small book. He published a book called *Your Creative Power*. That book described brainstorming and it also described the creative process that he called Creative Problem Solving.

Later in the 50s, Osborn ended up pairing up with a guy named Sidney Parnes. Parnes was a professor at Buffalo State University in New York. Parnes and Osborn worked together for a number of years refining and further developing the Creative Problem Solving Process. There has been quite a bit of research done on the process to look at its effectiveness and over the last several decades, a lot of refining has happened.

The process today that is commonly used, it used to be a seven-step and then a six-step, now it is basically a four-step process or four-stage process. Those stages are: Clarify, Ideate, Develop and Implement. I actually talk about this in a lot of depth in episodes three through eight of this podcast. If you want a lot of depth, go back and, at least, listen to [Episode 003](#) where I walk through the whole process.



In a nutshell, clarifying the problem, which would be the same as Wallas' Preparation. I am clarifying the problem, really figuring out what exactly is this problem. Then I am ideating. I am coming up with ideas. Brainstorming is an ideation technique. It is only one. There are many, many others out there. If you listen to, I believe, it is [Episode 005](#), I talk about some different techniques you can use. That is Clarify, Ideate and then the third one is Develop. That is where you are taking the solution and you are looking to develop it further and really kind of flesh it out a little bit more. Finally, implementation. So clarify, ideate, develop, implement. Those are the four stages of the Creative Problem Solving Process.

Design Thinking [10:45]

Another process that has gotten a lot of traction lately and has become more popular, I would say, in the last decade is called Design Thinking. Design Thinking evolved from looking at how designers create and how they design things and using their process to apply that to other situations like, say, business problems or societal problems. Any problem really where you are looking for a unique solution, you could use Design Thinking or Creative Problem Solving.

The stages of Design Thinking are: Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test. One of the unique pieces of Design Thinking is that they add in that Empathize stage at the beginning. That is where it is really all about who is your user, who is the solution for and how do I best understand their problem and their situation. And how do I empathize with them? What are they really dealing with? What do they really need?

There are a number of different ways you can do that. One way might be by observing. Maybe whomever you are designing this for, you watch how they work and maybe you just sit next to them for a few hours and you see how they do things. Or maybe just having an interview with them and interviewing them and asking them questions about how they work or questions related to the problem that you are trying to solve. I think that is one of the unique pieces of Design Thinking. I think it is a really important element, particularly, if you are not who the problem is for so you do not really know what the challenges are. I think that is an important piece that can be very valuable.

The other four stages: Define, Ideate, Prototype and Test, these follow the Creative Problem Solving Process. Define would be Clarify, Ideate is Ideate, Prototype would be Develop and Test



is Implement. Again, it is iterative so you might be doing this over and over. You could imagine that the prototyping and testing where you would go back and forth. You prototype something, you test it, you are like, “Oh, okay, got to make some changes.” You go back and prototype, you do some more testing and you are doing that over and over again. That is Design Thinking.

Human Centered Design [13:11]

The third one I want to talk about is Human Centered Design. This one is very similar to Design Thinking. I think sometimes these are actually used interchangeably. But IDEO, which is a company that has done a lot to promote Design Thinking and Human Centered Design, they define Human Centered Design as three stages: Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation. You can see that that is pretty much the same as those three problem finding, solution finding and solution implementation stages that I mentioned earlier. Inspiration would be problem finding, like what is going on? What inspires you? What do you actually want to do? Ideation would be solution finding, and Implementation is, of course, solution implementation.

I do some work with the U.S. government, Center for Leadership Development and within that organization, they have an innovation lab and they use a six-phase Human Centered Design process. Those six phrases are: Frame, Explore, Understand, Envision, Prototype and Test. The first three stages: Frame, Explore and Understand are the same as the Clarify stage in the Creative Process or the Empathize and Define stage of Design Thinking. They have just broken that stage down further so that there are six steps.

Why Understanding These Processes is Valuable to Your Work [14:46]

The main point that I want to say here is that all of these processes, there is a lot of overlap. If someone is doing Design Thinking or Human Centered Design or Creative Problem Solving, it is all good. They are all really, really valuable, helpful processes. There may be situations where you want to focus more on that empathize part or that prototype part or maybe clarifying, really going in-depth there is more important. There is so much overlap, to me, they are almost the same thing.

I do not want to say they are because there are some nuances, but I think what is important is that you understand that these are all connected. So that when you see the phrase the Design



Thinking and you see Creative Problem Solving, these are close enough to the same thing. In certain situations you could be like, “Oh yeah, I get that. It’s the same thing.” I think sometimes when people only know one process they get themselves stuck. Because they do not understand how this connects to everything else.

I also think it is important or valuable to know that these all connect together. These all go back to like the 50s and 60s, or ultimately, even to Wallas’ book in 1926. These all have common roots and they have branched out slightly different. Nowadays, you are seeing a lot of companies who are taking Design Thinking or Creative Problem Solving and they are putting their own spin, they are putting their own labels on it. Often, it is the same thing with different headings, and so just pay attention to that and see if you can catch those commonalities.

Keith Sawyer was a guest on my [podcast](#) a number of episodes ago and he is a researcher at University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In one of his recent [books](#), he published a table where he laid out all of these different processes and he lined up everybody’s clarify stage, what did everybody call that? And he laid it all out. It is just kind of a cool table to check it out. I will put a link to the [book](#) in the shownotes, but that can help you understand how all of these are connected and there is a lot of similarity and overlap there.

I hope this was helpful. I hope this gives you a little bit more of a deeper understanding of Creative Process and what it is. I will just add that if you are working with a team and you are trying to help them be more creative, pick one of these processes to use. Or if you want, feel free to merge them together and kind of create your own. But what is important is that the team understands this is the process and if we follow this process, we are going to be more creative together. We are going to come up with more creative ideas. We are going to implement more creative solutions.

We naturally, as humans, want to follow this process, but I talk about this in [Episode 008](#) where I interview Blair Miller of FourSight and he talks about how we each have a preference for one or more of the stages. Some people love clarifying, some people love ideating. And if we do not understand the big picture and the whole process, we can get stuck in our stage that we love. I could ideate all day long, but that is not going to help me. I need to ideate for a little bit and then I need to move into developing and implementing.



Choose a process, use it, apply it with your team. If you want help with this, let me know. This is what I do. I help teams understand these processes. I teach them how to use them. I give them the tools and techniques so that they can apply them in whatever problem they are having, whatever context they need. If you want to talk more about that and how I do that, let me know, but the point is to use the process.

You all, thank you so much for listening to The Deliberate Creative Podcast. I hope this was helpful. If you want to follow me on Facebook, you can find me at [Climer Consulting](#). On Twitter, I am [@amyclimer](#), or you can find me on [LinkedIn](#). If you want to connect on [LinkedIn](#), it is really helpful if you write me a note and tell me that you listen to this podcast so I do not have just some random person connecting and I am like, “Who is this?” But anyway, I would love to connect with you. If you like this episode, leave a review on [iTunes](#). I would love to hear your feedback.

You all, have a wonderful creative week and I will see you next time. Bye.