



A Blend of Brilliance:

Breaking Down Barriers to Creative Collaborations



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Abstract

The Table and Chair Analogy

Have you ever considered your desk and chair? Your chair tenaciously holds your weight all through even the longest workdays, and your desk? It is a multipurpose platform that supports both you and your work accessories. Individually, a desk and a chair can fulfil their functions, but there is greater potential for comfort and productivity with the desk-chair collaboration.

Using a desk and chair is unity of utility — a blend of brilliance. So is creative collaboration.

Creatives are referred to as such because they have the ability to come up with novelties on their own. When they collaborate — combine their strengths, they are able to achieve bigger and better results.

Many definitive moments are a product of creative collaborations — from the first person landing in space, to Barack Obama being sworn in as the first Black president of the United States in 2009. Different creatives connect to make such moments possible.

However, this connectedness between creatives can be hindered by certain barriers. Amongst many are **lack of active listening**, **misinterpretation of neurodiversity** — having different cognitive abilities from the norm, and **perpetuation of cultural biases**.

Learning about these hindrances will better equip creatives and creative industries, in the creative economy, to foster a more conducive atmosphere for creative collaborations.



The Need for Creative Collaborations

The Power of a Creative



Russia launched missiles into Ukraine on Thursday, February 24, 2022.

The attacks meant that Russia was willing to go to war unless Ukraine surrendered ownership of their country. In response to this, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy gave a thought-provoking speech that touched the hearts of people worldwide.

Zelenskyy called on regular Russians to prevent war. He then mentioned 10 groups of people who had the ability to influence Russia's decision. Six out of the 10 were creatives: journalists, musicians, actors, bloggers, stand-up comedians, and TikTokers.

Zelenskyy highlighted how important creatives were, noting they have the ability to influence public views on crucial events such as the war.

Clearly, creatives have social power.

The Need for Creative Collaborations

Who is a Creative?

Bestselling author Jeff Goins defines three characters through which creatives exercise their social power:

1. **The artist** — A creative is more than a designer, a musician or a poet. A creative sees the world differently from others. Where others see a straight line, the creative spots patterns and intricacies. Elements are hardly black or white to a creative — they often see and highlight the shades of grey in between.
2. **The black sheep** — A creative is usually the one to stray off the pack, or at least be different from the bunch. Jeff Goins calls them “iconoclasts” — the innovators who find their way around status quo. Sometimes, they are viewed as rebellious, but when their uniqueness is channeled to good use, the results can be phenomenal.
3. **The thought leader** — A creative influences people in their community through their talents. They inspire others to explore outside conventions. This is why you find the creative thinking outside the box or innovating inside the box.

A lot of creatives fall into one or more of these three categories.

Why do we need creative collaborations?

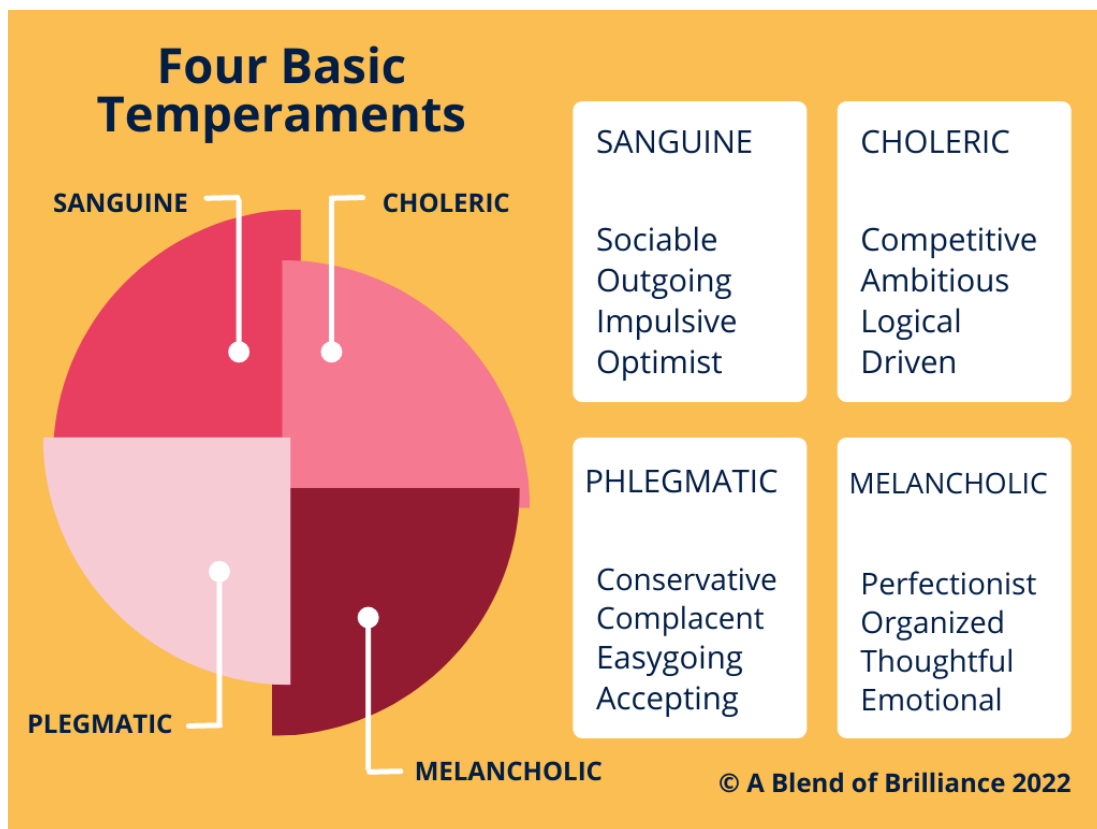
When creatives get together, the sum is greater than the parts — they are able to achieve more in groups.

The Need for Creative Collaborations

It is important to note that even though creatives have similar tendencies, they also have varied temperaments and backgrounds. For instance, artists in Africa differ from artists in North America, though they might have similar characteristics.

In the same vein, a phlegmatic artist, according to Ancient Greek philosophers, will respond to events with less urgency than a choleric one (see annotation below), though they are both creatives.

Collaboration unites strengths and subdues weaknesses.

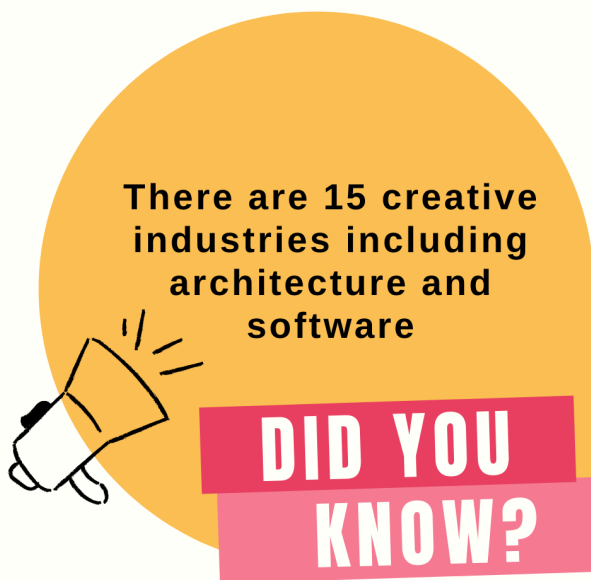


It is possible to exhibit more than one of these four temperaments, but most people have one dominant personality type.

The Need for Creative Collaborations

When creatives work together on projects, they complement each other's abilities. Projects are like puzzles requiring a combination of talents to complete. In the creative economy, different industries represent different parts of that puzzle.

Analyst and author John Howkins categorizes creatives industries into 15 groups in his book *The Creative Economy*. They include advertising, architecture, art, crafts, design, fashion, film, music, performing arts, publishing, research and development, software, toys and games, TV and radio, and computer games.



Clearly, the creative economy is very broad. Different creative industries must learn how to work together to achieve bigger and better successes.

In a musical for instance, performing artists serve as on-screen talent for media producers in film. Fashion designers come up with costumes, architects design the theatre, and so on.

Working together is more effective than working individually.

None of the creative industries can function at their best without collaboration. There needs to be a network of connectivity within the creative economy. Collaboration facilitates stronger networks.

In many situations, however, barriers limit creative collaborations and projects do not reach their full potential.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

This paper covers three barriers to creative collaborations:

- 1) Lack of active listening
- 2) Misinterpretation of neurodiversity
- 3) Perpetuation of cultural biases

1. Active Listening

Listening is a mental process of paying close attention to what we hear. We listen for various reasons which include, but are not limited to the following:

- gaining understanding
- obtaining information
- enjoying content
- learning concepts

Active listening is a sophisticated version of listening. The active listener is in the moment, grasping all that a speaker is communicating through speech or body language. This helps the listener to take in new information and provide a well-informed response if appropriate.

What are the steps to active listening?

According to Mind Tools, a career hub that provides professional development resources, there are five keys to active listening.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

Active listening Keys	Practical Examples
1. Pay close attention	Eye contact with the speaker, putting away distractions such as cellphones
2. Show you are listening	Nodding, taking notes, facial expressions
3. Withhold judgement	Not interrupting the speaker, not listening with a bias
4. Ask for clarification	E.g. "Do you mean to say that..." "Pardon me, I do not quite understand..."
5. Responding appropriately	Communicate response in an honest and respectful manner

These five keys to active listening improve the quality of creative collaborations step by step.

What prevents creatives from actively listening?

There are a lot of reasons why people do not actively listen. A common one is information overload.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

The average person hears between 20,000 to 30,000 words per day. This is a lot of words. Psychologists say that we choose what we pay attention to, so we can avoid stress and strain. The creative is not any different.

While listeners should pay close attention during creative collaborations, speakers can also help their audiences actively listen by doing the following:

1. Enunciating words
2. Maintaining a friendly tone
3. Maintaining eye contact
4. Using stories to capture their audience's attention from the get-go
5. Preparing to avoid taking too much time. Long meetings are a disincentive to active listening

When employed strategically, active listening can help creatives achieve a whole lot in little time. This is especially important when there are people with different abilities and cultural backgrounds in a creative group.

2. Neurodiversity

Qualities that make creatives different from other people, such as abstract thinking and unorthodox perspectives or work ethics, are often a result of significant difference in their brain — neurodiversity.

The term neurodiversity is used when a human being has brain structures that differ from what is considered typical. Neurodivergence can be acquired or be innately part of an individual from birth.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

Neurodiversity terms and their usage

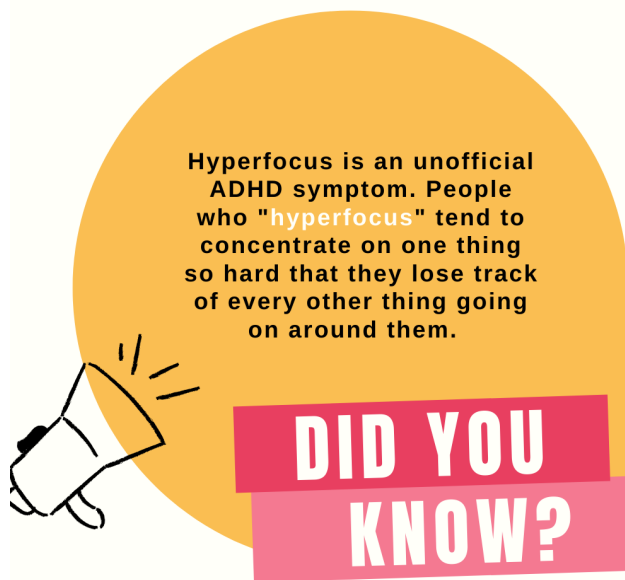
Term	Definition	Usage
1. Neurodivergent	A term used to describe a person who has cognitive abilities that differ from the norm.	Sheila has been diagnosed with dyscalculia — a cognitive condition that makes it difficult for her to understand mathematical problems. She is neurodivergent.
2. Neurodiverse	A term used in place of neurodivergent, but better suited for groups.	Sheila and Moses have both been diagnosed with dyscalculia; they are neurodiverse.
3. Neurotypical	A term used to describe a person who is not neurodivergent.	Pamela, unlike her sister, Sheila, is very good at maths; Pamela is neurotypical.
4. Neurominority	A term used to describe a group of neurodiverse people with a similar neurodiversity.	Sheila and Moses have been enrolled into a school for people with dyscalculia; they now learn in an environment that recognizes and caters to their neurominority.

Neurodivergent people view the world differently, which helps them come up with innovative perspectives during creative problem-solving.

The Need for Creative Collaborations

Their cognitive differences are often associated with special abilities, depression, antisocial tendencies, and so on. Many famous creators in the world are neurodivergent.

Two famous people who turned out to be exceptionally brilliant as a result of their neurodiversity were Musician Ludwig Beethoven and Scientist Albert Einstein. Beethoven wrote exceptional music despite his trauma-induced hearing loss.



Einstein, on the other hand, who was said to have had unusually complex patterns in his brain, developed complex scientific theories like gravity.

There are some common forms of neurodiversity today. They include ADHD, dyscalculia, hyperlexia, and dyslexia.

Autism — or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) refers to a range of cognitive challenges involving social skills, nonverbal communication, and speech.

Interestingly, people with ASD are some of the most highly skilled logical thinkers and problem solvers. About 44 per cent of people diagnosed with autism have IQ scores around or above average range, which means they have IQ scores greater than 85.

ADHD — an acronym that stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. People with ADHD are generally hyperactive and impulsive. However, they are also often very energetic, athletic, and creative. They tend to hyper-focus at times, which can help or hurt group work.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

Dyscalculia – this is a cognitive condition whereby an individual finds it extremely difficult to comprehend mathematical problems and sequences. People diagnosed with dyscalculia are usually skilled in problem-solving and creativity.

Dyslexia and Hyperlexia – Dyslexia refers to a difficulty in reading, while hyperlexia is an uncommon ability to read at a very young age. Individuals with dyslexia usually have a natural aptitude for visual representation, while people with hyperlexia tend to be talented at memorization.

Though people from these neurodiverse groups have varying abilities, they often bring exceptional qualities to the creative economy. Creative collaborations will thrive if creative groups are willing and able to accommodate team members' neurodiverse or neurotypical needs.

3. Cultural Biases

Cultural biases are harmful stereotypes, based on perceptions of a cultural group, that keep getting replicated.

Here are some examples of harmful cultural biases:

- All Asians are shy
- All Africans live in poverty
- All Americans carry guns

Cultural biases involve generalizations, which are usually not correct for most people of the cultural group in question.

Origin of cultural biases

Biases originate from our brains' need to classify similar elements together, for quicker decision making.

Barriers to Creative Collaborations

This way, cognitive energy can be saved for situations our brains have not previously classified. Technically, it is easier to stick with popular opinions of cultural groups. This is problematic, because not all Asians are shy, some of the world's wealthiest people are Africans, and only 32 per cent of U.S. adults own guns, according to Gallup — a data-driven news source.

Cultural biases can erode creative collaborations. Here are some ways to avoid them:

1. **Do not judge a book by its cover** — Meet people with an open mind. Don't assume you already know what a person is like based on surface level appearances. Observe their attitudes and behaviors. Better yet, get to know them personally and respect their cultural customs in doing so.
2. **Unlearn and relearn** — Unlearn negative stereotypes you have about people from cultures different from yours. Own your brain, not the other way around. Professor of neurosurgery at Emory University School of Medicine, Dr. Sanjay Gupta says "your brain is malleable." You can unlearn stereotypes if you like. All that is required is your willingness.
3. **Communicate** — If there is anything you don't understand about someone's culture, ask them about it. Never jump to conclusions.

Cultural intelligence and rapport

The best creative collaborators are those who have trained their brains to understand different accents, make jokes with people who are culturally different from themselves, and are open to experiencing other people's cultures while at work with them. This is known as cultural intelligence.

Cultural intelligence helps build rapport. It fosters harmonious and profitable relationships among creatives from diverse backgrounds.

Q & A - Canadian organizations and Creatives Succeeding in Creative Collaborations



With:
Jenny Cloutier
Angela Taylor &
Jason Iwunze

YWCA Think Big! Lead Now! Summit





Coordinator Jenny Cloutier

Who is Jenny Cloutier?

Jenny is the senior coordinator for the YWCA Think Big! Lead Now! summit held annually in Toronto. She oversees creation of materials for the summit, as well as presummit activities such as applications, webinars, and performances.

Q: How does YWCA make the Think Big! Lead Now! Summit space more inclusive?

A: We listen for the needs of our participants, collect feedback after each summit, organize the summit with the help of diverse youths across the country and attend staff trainings.

-  **Active listening** — While most summits and conferences choose participants based on the support they are willing to provide, the YWCA Think Big! Lead Now! summit selects participants based on their alignment with the values of the conference. Then, the summit organizers go ahead to customize the three-day event to fit the needs of participants.
-  **Feedback** — The YWCA summit creates an avenue where most participants are willing to give feedback about the summit they attend. The program organizers then take that feedback and use it to improve the next summit.
-  **LSAT** — LSAT stands for Leadership Summit Animation Team. Prior to the summit, the job of the LSAT is to contribute their unique perspectives to summit preparations. The LSAT consists of a small diverse group of around six people who are within the age range of the summit participants.
-  **Staff training** — Every now and then, the YWCA summit staff undergo training to help create a more inclusive and diverse space for collaboration amongst youths during the summit.

YWCA Think Big! Lead Now! Summit

Coordinator Jenny Cloutier

Q: How does the YWCA Think Big! Lead Now! Summit facilitate creative collaborations?

A: Our goal is to gather together folks who are like-minded and give them an opportunity to learn and experience leadership. At the YWCA summit, we value respect and inclusivity, so we try our best to make the space comfortable for everyone who gets sponsored to attend the summit. This way, participants easily connect with their peers.



Neurodiversity Advocate

Angela Taylor

Who is Angela Taylor?

Angela Taylor is the founder of Inspire Community Outreach, a non-profit agency that provides social services to people living with mental health issues and neurological differences. Taylor holds a Post-Baccalaureate in Education, focusing on inclusion, and a Masters in Disability Studies.

Q: What is your experience with collaborations and neurodiversity?

A: Since I was 16, I got to collaborate with people through community work. This was partly influenced by my family members who worked in healthcare and social services. I watched as they celebrated all kinds of people regardless of culture and ability.

It was in doing community work that I learnt a lot about neurodiversity as well as the little or no care and assistance neurodivergent people got. Overtime, Inspire, an outreach that was originally meant to help prevent suicide, evolved into a help center for neurodiverse people and parents of neurodivergent children.

On a personal note, my son was diagnosed with autism, and I was diagnosed with ADHD, PTSD and Bipolar disorder. However, it took the longest time for doctors to confirm these diagnoses, even though we clearly had behaviors that differed from the norm.

Q: Why is it important that people know how to handle neurodivergent individuals?

A: Environment determines how neurodiverse symptoms will show. How people treat us makes all the difference. It is important that people know how to treat neurodiverse people with compassion so that they are comfortable putting down

Neurodiversity Advocate

Angela Taylor

their mask and being exactly who they are. We experience neurological fatigue when we try to be someone we are not. Being able to put down our façades is not only a relief, but it also improves our wellness.

Q: What do you recommend people do to achieve best results when working with neurodivergent people?

A: Private conversation with a person you don't quite understand always helps. Ask them how you can help make their experience better. It is about you being better, not about the neurodiverse person having to change. This way you can help them feel safe to fully express their potential.

Also, understanding people's needs and being flexible enough to accommodate them goes a long way in helping them be the best versions of themselves.

Q: What are your survival tips for neurodiverse people in collaborative spaces?

A: These are some things I do, and would advise neurodivergent people to put in practice as well:

- Flood your neurology with more positive inputs and avoid negative ones. You don't have to be in social situations where you don't feel comfortable.
- Write down your experiences in a journal of some sort.
- Whenever you can, put down the façade — those characters and personalities we take on for work purposes. Failure to do so can cause neurological fatigue to the point of burn out.
- Have what you need within reach. If you need snacks or sticky notes lying around, get those items because they are pertinent to your functionality as a person. Politely ask for your needs if they fall in the category of services the government provides.

Winnipeg-based Nigerian Music Producer Jason Iwunze

Who is Jason Iwunze?

Jason Iwunze is an economist by day and a music producer by night. He enjoys collaborating with singers and songwriters. He has a knack for bringing their ideas to life. Currently, Jason collaborates with individual music artists and the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) choir.

Q: What motivates you to collaborate with other creatives, especially those from different cultural backgrounds?

A: It is the fact that every music genre has a cultural background. This motivates me to collaborate with creatives of different cultures, so I can get first-hand knowledge of different kinds of music. It also provides me with a wider range of experience and a more sophisticated taste in music.

Q: How do you go about creative collaborations?

A: I love and appreciate organic connections. I like to know the person I am working with. If we do not have an existing relationship, I try to know them better over a cup of coffee or something like that.

Otherwise, I mostly have something in common with the people I collaborate with. It could be our beliefs or affinities. I just notice there is something I like or end up liking about the people I work with. Maybe that is the key — finding common ground and allowing it to be your motivation.

Q: How important is creative collaboration to you?

A: Creative collaboration is extremely important. There are different stages a creative idea passes through before it is ready to be put out into the world. Whenever you hear your favourite artist's new song, or even the soundtrack to a movie you watched, bear

Winnipeg-based Nigerian Music Producer Jason Iwunze

in mind that different creatives, talents, and perspectives have contributed to that final sound you are listening to. It really “takes a village” most times to make an excellent piece of creative work.

Q: What are some cultural hindrances to creative collaborations that you have experienced?

A: The greatest barrier I face is communication. I am a generally shy person, and sometimes my phlegmatic personality is mistaken for complacency.

In addition, I cannot always work on projects I am interested in, because of my immigration status. I came into Canada as an international student, and am still working to gain my permanent residency. My main source of income does not come from anything creative, but I have to keep that job, at least until I get my permanent residence.

This sets me back in comparison to my peers who are citizens or permanent residents. Sometimes, I consider moving back to my home country, Nigeria, but I wonder if I would also measure up to my Nigerian counterparts who have not known the challenges of moving to another country.

Q: When you are the minority in a creative collaboration, what can the group do to make you feel more confident and comfortable working with them?

A: I am at ease in a group that respects my opinions. Canadians are very good at that; they are welcoming people. I am motivated to contribute my authentic perspective when someone from the majority echoes an idea I put forward, which is divergent from the popular opinion in a group. I also appreciate positive feedback. It helps me know what exactly to work on in order to sync with the group.



Conclusion

A Blend of Brilliance: Uniting Differences in Creative Collaboration

Creatives are an essential part of society and the economy. When they work well together in creative collaborations, they maximize individual abilities for better results.

The manner in which those creative collaborations are facilitated, however, can make or mar the whole process. Lack of active listening, misinterpretation of neurodiversity and perpetuation of cultural biases limits creative collaborations. On the flip side, active listening, tolerance for neurodiversity and cultural intelligence fuels creative collaborations.



**Active
Listening**



**Tolerance for
Neurodiversity**



**Cultural
Intelligence**





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