

## Personal Report from the American Creativity Association Meeting Austin TX USA, March 22-25, 2006;

By Ellen Domb

[editor@triz-journal.com](mailto:editor@triz-journal.com)

I went to the American Creativity Association meeting with two purposes in mind:

1. To tell the non-TRIZ creativity people about TRIZ
2. To learn what the non-TRIZ creativity people do

As a TRIZ consultant and editor of the TRIZ Journal, I had some strong biases, and I hoped to challenge my own biases by learning more about other creativity methods. I expected that the other participants would know something about TRIZ, since Jack Hipple (TRIZ Journal sponsor and frequent author) has done a series of tutorials for them over the last several years. I found that the other participants generally were interested in TRIZ, and about 15% of them had heard about it (unscientific polling of the lunch tables—there's lots of work to be done!)

The major theme of the conference was Creativity @ Work, with a minor theme of sharing information about collaborative creativity tools.



I was invited to participate in a panel discussion of emerging trends in collaboration. The panel was organized by Paul Schuman, with participants Mark Fox, Renee Callahan, Jeff De Cagna, Jon Lebkowsky, and Ellen Domb. Paul certainly recruited a panel with diverse backgrounds—Mark and myself from the aerospace industry, Renee from journalism, Paul himself from marketing consumer products, Jeff from non-profit organizations, and Jon from software development and marketing.

From my TRIZ Journal experience I made the point that people are collaborating to develop the creativity methodologies, as well as collaborating on specific individual projects. This seemed to be an assumption of the

conference, but it was gratifying to see the positive reception that it got. The other point that I drew from TRIZ was that when one uses the TRIZ methods, he/she is “collaborating” with many thousands of people who have contributed to the databases of solutions—patents, business cases, etc.—that we use when pursuing a solution to a problem by looking for somebody, someplace, who has solved a similar problem, but in a different industry or different circumstances. Although Jeff and Mark were strong proponents of brain-based creativity, it was interesting that both of them recommend including 1/3 people from outside the area of interest in order to get ideas that come from other technologies, industries, etc. The rest of the collaboration discussion focused on specific software systems for creativity workshops, and the general agreement by the

panel that which specific software is used matters much less than the facilitator's skill in using it; that is, the facilitator should be sure that the use of the software doesn't interfere with the flow of ideas and the communication among participants, which is certainly something that the users of TRIZ-related software have also seen.

Generosity with intellectual property is another form of collaboration that abounded at the conference. Mark Fox has made his book *Sly as a Fox: A Practical Approach to Creative Thinking* available as a free download from [www.slyasafox.com](http://www.slyasafox.com) and Renee announced a new family of innovation-oriented blogs she has developed with the publishers of major newspapers and magazines, [www.courant-innovation.com](http://www.courant-innovation.com).



Futurist David Snyder (shown with the talking toy he uses when his future stories are too depressing) used a combination of forecasting techniques familiar to TRIZ practioners with his own observations of social trends. Regular TRIZ Journal readers know that Darrell Mann and I have been calling attention to Ray Kurzweil's book *The Singularity is Near*, which offers a lot of evidence that S-curves are becoming obsolete, which Snyder confirmed.

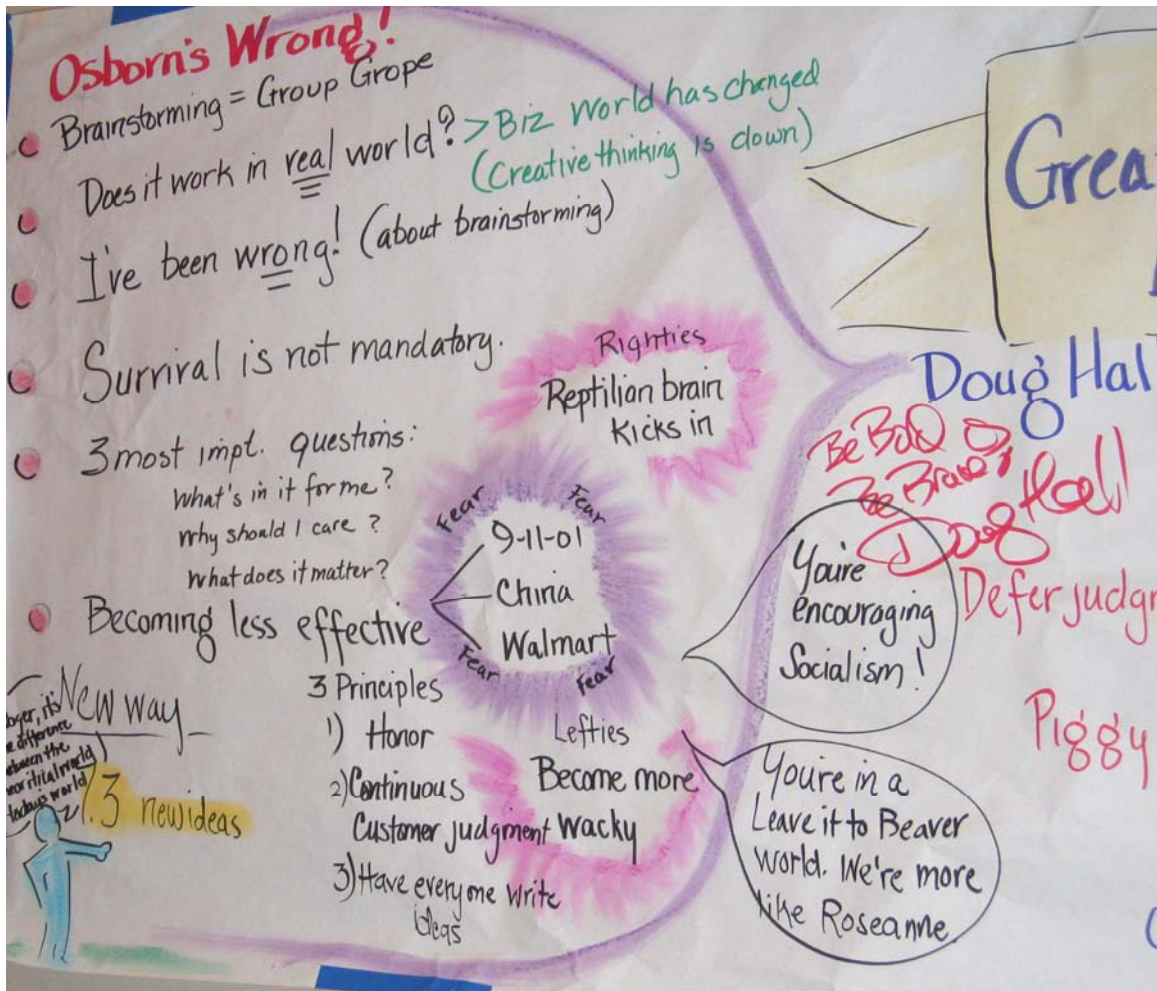
Snyder worked for the US Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service before becoming a consultant for major companies. He introduced the ACA audience to "Coates Law" from classical economics, which is based on an inverse exponential relationship between the cost of gathering information and the size of an organization—the cheaper it is to get information, the smaller the company can be.

TRIZ practioners may want to investigate how this relates to the TRIZ law of evolution of systems to the micro-level. Social observation: I heard Snyder speak at the Central Texas World Future Society meeting as well as at the ACA. His message was the same, but the audience questions were entirely different. More food for thought about psychological inertia???

Many in TRIZ, starting with Altshuller in *Creativity as an Exact Science*, have argued many points of view about classical brainstorming methods, as typified by Osborn's methods, and elaborated by many others. The next three photos give the overview and enlarge some of the details of a very dynamic panel discussion with considerable audience participation.







My thanks to Paul Schumann for organizing the panel discussion and inviting me to participate. You can see the wide range of Paul's work in his newsletter, available at [www.theinnovationroadmap.com](http://www.theinnovationroadmap.com).

Extending the collaborative environment beyond the conference, the ACA has posted conference papers, podcast interviews with featured speakers, and the posters created during the session at [www.amcreativityassociation.org](http://www.amcreativityassociation.org)