



# What is?

## Creativity

Creativity is about engaging in behaviours that are designed to produce new ideas, processes, products and services. These new ideas can be large or small, radical or incremental, caused by a need or by insight and beneficial to an individual, team or organization.

**In other words, creativity is simply making things better.**

### Why is Creativity Important?

In 2000, the UK Prime Minister said, “creativity and innovation are at the heart of a successful business”. Creativity is recognised as a key driving force behind organizations and the economy, and both the public and private sector are striving to improve their levels of creativity.

### What Activities are Involved?

Recent research suggests that creativity encompasses a number of different activities that are done both alone and with colleagues. Some of these activities include:

- ◆ Recognising a problem or opportunity – Before engaging in creativity, employees must first recognise the problem or opportunity and make the decision to engage in creative problem-solving.
- ◆ Problem definition – Often the core problem is not the one presented in the trigger. Employees must spend time defining and redefining the problem until the most useful definition is found.
- ◆ Concept generation – Coming up with ideas is the core of creativity, and often where most creativity training stops. Generation can come about through three

means: self-generation, borrowed ideas, and discussion.

- ◆ Fleshing out – Very few concepts emerge that are fully ready for release. Fleshing out the concept puts meat on the bones and allows for a more thorough evaluation.
- ◆ Disclosure – Employees often look to others for advice on their ideas. This can take the form of “bouncing ideas around” or “sanity checks”. This is a very important, and often overlooked, stage of creativity.
- ◆ Idea modification - Through disclosure, fleshing out, and concept evaluation, problems will often arise regarding the initial concept. Ideas must be modified as these problems arise.
- ◆ Concept evaluation – Evaluation occurs throughout the creative process. At the beginning, “half-baked” concepts are evaluated and are often rejected without further fleshing out. This can be advantageous under situations of high time pressure, but may result in the loss of potentially good ideas. As ideas become more solid, evaluation becomes more rigorous.

These activities do not necessarily occur in this order, as many feedback loops and iterations occur within each stage of idea generation.

### What Predicts Creativity?

Hundreds of factors have been shown to affect creativity over the many years of creativity research. Recent research on

employee creativity however, suggests that there are three groups of factors that act as proximal predictors.

1. The first affects whether an employee will actually engage in creativity and includes
  - ◆ *Opportunities to be creative.* This is facilitated by: tasks that encompass aspects of creativity; feelings of responsibility to be creative; empowerment; and a culture that supports and encourages creativity.
  - ◆ *Willingness to be creative.* This is facilitated by: reducing both the amount of effort needed to implement the change and any negative consequences of being creative; and increasing both the likelihood of successful implementation and the amount of recognition, rewards and positive consequences for being creative.
2. The second concerns personal factors affecting the success of idea generation and includes:
  - ◆ Questioning and challenging established practice; thinking both laterally and linearly; using creative skills such as brainstorming and lateral thinking; confidence to take new ideas forward; and knowledge and experience to know both what needs to be changed and ways in which it can be changed.
3. The third concerns focus and time pressure which affect the success of idea generation. Too narrow a focus can mean that employees don't consider a sufficient number of alternatives, however time pressure often means that they are pushed to this narrow level of focus.

## How Can Employee Creativity Be Increased?

Ten good practices:

1. Encourage employees to spot real or potential problems and allow them to take the time needed to solve the problem.
2. Encourage employees to feel responsible for generating ideas for new products and new processes.
3. Empower employees and give them control to implement improvements to their job.
4. Develop employees to question, challenge and think divergently.
5. Develop the knowledge and experience of employees both within their field and in other fields.
6. Develop the confidence and self-esteem of employees.
7. Make creativity worthwhile by providing positive consequences such as recognition and rewards.
8. Encourage managers to be responsive to employees' ideas (i.e., listening, giving feedback, implementing changes when appropriate).
9. Show that the organization values creativity and change through communication, training and support for creativity.
10. Don't initiate change for changes' sake.

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