

# CREATIVITY

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## 1 THE OBJECTIVE – WHAT YOU WILL LEARN

In this session, you will learn:

- About the importance of creativity as a skill;
- How you can solve problems and find solutions in different ways;
- To explore your own creativity and its uses at the workplace.

## 2 WHAT IS CREATIVITY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY

Creativity is the ability to think about a task or a problem in a new or different way. It allows you to solve complex problems and approach tasks in a completely new way. Creativity is the ability to use the imagination to generate new ideas. Creative people see things from a unique perspective and make new connections to find solutions and opportunities.

Many people believe that creativity is a natural talent, limited only to the expressive arts. This is just one of many misconceptions. Creativity is a skill that can be learnt and developed. Moreover, creative thinking applies in every subject.

In the table below, you can see other misconceptions about creativity that were proven wrong:

Misconception	Proved by research
Limited to the arts	Applies in every subject
Pure talent	Skill to be learnt
Fun	Hard work
Originality	Both originality and value
No prior knowledge needed	Field of knowledge is necessary
Major breakthrough	Thinking skill
Free play and discovery	Stimulation of play and discovery

## 2.1 Four building blocks of the creativity skill

We can identify 4 fundamental building blocks of the creativity skill. Combined, they are the driving force for finding unique ideas and solutions:

- **Curiosity:**
  - Being constructively inquisitive;
  - Desire to learn and know about different things;
  - Asking effective questions;
  - Researching, exploring and investigating;
  - Noticing patterns and anomalies.
- **Open-mindedness:**
  - Being more receptive to what life has to offer;
  - Being open to new ideas;
  - Using lateral thinking;
  - Exploring multiple viewpoints;
  - Being flexible and adaptable;
  - Being able to see a range of possible outcomes.
- **Imagination:**
  - Forming images and ideas in the mind without direct input from the senses;
  - Being able to harness your imagination;
  - Generating and refining ideas;
  - Inventing;
  - Exploring and refining multiple options.
- **Problem solving:**
  - Being able to understand and defining problems;
  - Crafting, delivering and presenting solutions;
  - Demonstrating initiative, discipline, persistence and resilience;
  - Evaluating impact and success of solutions.

## EXERCISE

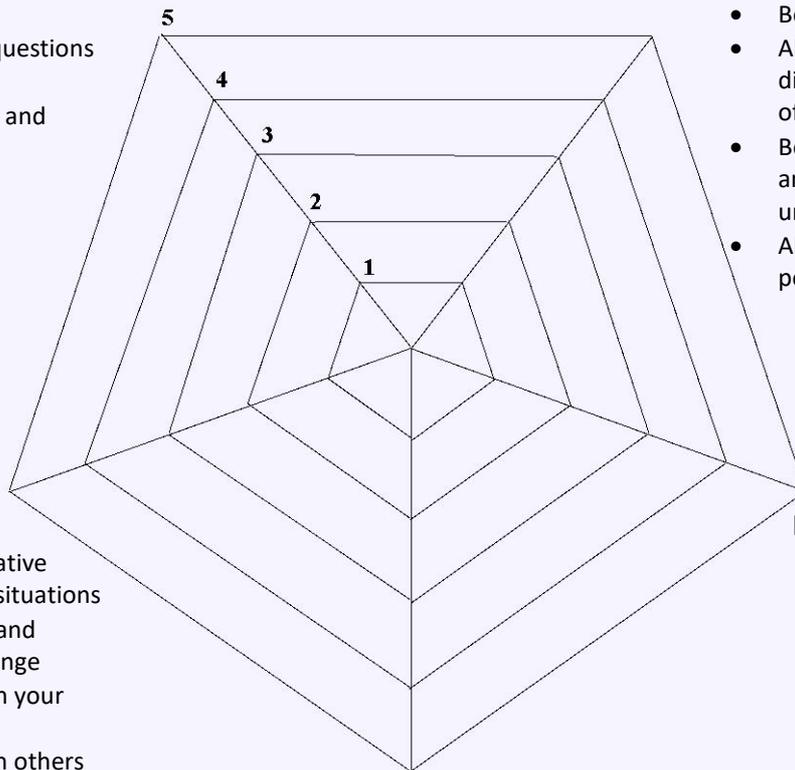
Reflect on your creativity skills using the spider-gram: consider your strengths against the 5 statements and evaluate them from 5 (being strong) to 1 (being weak). Next, connect the dots to create a shape that will offer a visual of your creativity skills.

### Curiosity

- Being inquisitive
- Asking effective questions
- Researching
- Noticing patterns and anomalies

### Open-mindedness

- Being open to new ideas
- Able to think about different people's points of view
- Being flexible, adaptable and coping well with uncertainty
- Able to see a range of possible outcomes



### Applying Creativity

- Able to apply creative process to other situations
- Being motivated and ambitious for change
- Being confident in your own views
- Working well with others

### Imagination

- Having ideas
- Exploring, combining and refining multiple options
- Inventing

### Problem solving

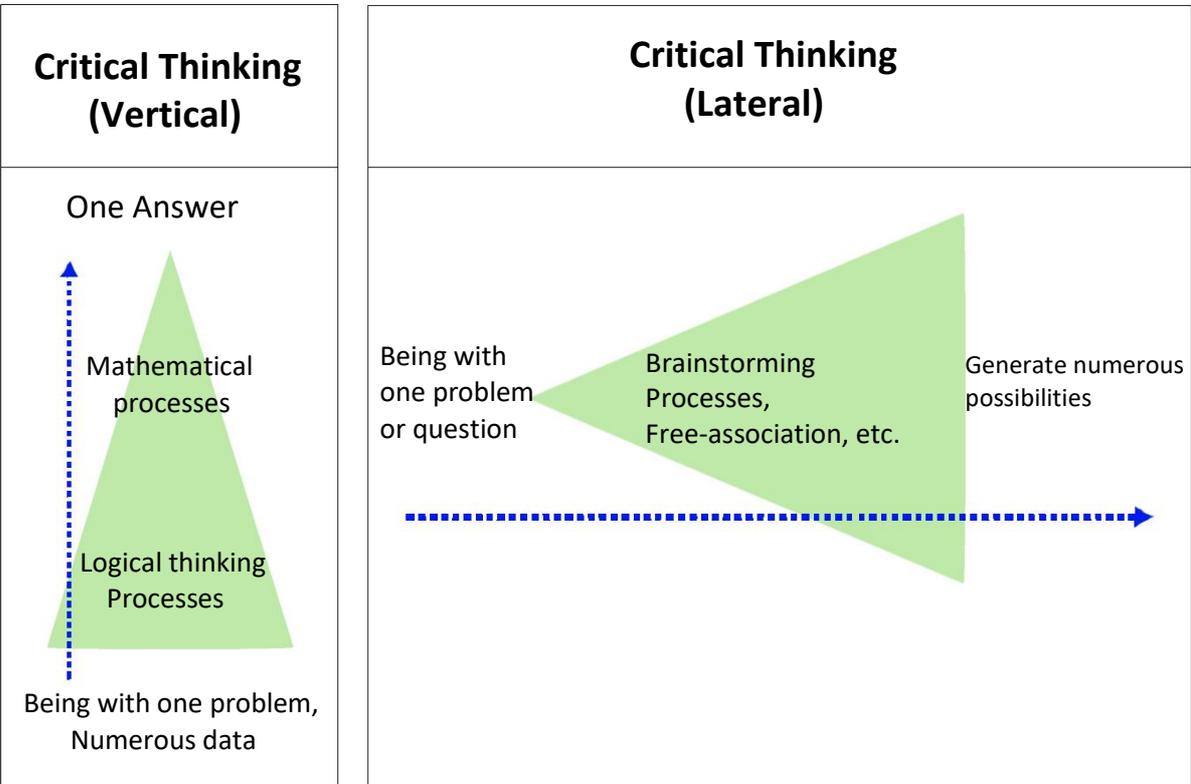
- Able to identify problems
- Developing, refining and presenting solutions
- Demonstrating initiative, discipline, persistence and resilience

## 2.2 Vertical vs lateral thinking

We talk about vertical or traditional thinking when we move step-by-step to a logical conclusion, based on the available data. The goal is to select a single idea, which represents a solution to a problem. In the process of selecting, we are focusing on the right and wrong, eliminating the wrong. Thinking is sequential and analytical. On the other hand, lateral thinking (we also call it “out of the box” thinking) is horizontal, where we try to generate as many ideas as possible while de-emphasizing the details of how those ideas could be

implemented. During the process, which is not sequential, we do not worry about right and wrong and instead of the analytical approach, we use the provocative one.

Both, vertical and lateral thinking, are complementary: without lateral thinking, vertical thinking would be too narrow-minded; without vertical thinking, lateral thinking would produce many possible solutions but no plans to implement them. You can use lateral thinking when solving a problem, when you are looking for new ways of doing something, as well as when working in the process of invention/innovation.



**EXERCISE**

Think of one situation at your workplace, school or home, where you had to solve a certain problem. What kind of thinking process was prevalent? Were you looking for a single solution or trying to find several new ways to do something more effective?

## 3 LATERAL THINKING

### 3.1 “Google job experiment”

One example of lateral or out-of-the-box thinking is the so-called “Google job experiment”. A graduate in New York, who desired to work in a top advertising agency, googled the names of creative directors of these companies. He spent just six dollars on a set of Google adverts that were triggered when the directors searched for their own names. The adverts said “Hey, (creative director’s name), Googling yourself is a lot of fun. Hiring me is fun, too.” Of the five directors he focused on, four gave him an interview and two of them offered him a job. The applicant to this job knew that there were very many people applying and that taking a conventional approach would not work. It required this provocation and a new approach to achieving the goal.

### 3.2 Brainstorming

Brainstorming is an informal approach to problem solving with lateral thinking. You can use it individually or in a group. It encourages you to come up with ideas that may initially seem a bit crazy. Some of these ideas can be crafted into original solutions to a problem, while others can inspire new ideas. With brainstorming techniques, you help people to get out of their normal ways of thinking.

For brainstorming to be effective, you need to follow few simple rules:

- **Focus on quantity not quality of answers/ideas** – At the beginning of the session remove all the expectations of quality ideas, also do not withhold anything during the session.
- **No judgement** – During brainstorming sessions, do not criticize, praise, and analyse ideas. This makes the session flow better and helps generate as many ideas as possible. Evaluate ideas only at the end of the session, when you explore solutions further, using more conventional thinking.
- **Encourage wild ideas** – Embrace the most out-of-the-box notions you can build on. You look for connections later on.
- **Stay focused on the topic** – Keep discussion and idea generating on target.

- **Be visual** – You can write with coloured markers on post-its or flip charts. You can sketch the ideas as well since images make ideas more memorable.

To get the best out of the brainstorming session, you should follow these steps:

**1. Prepare the group** – Set up a comfortable meeting environment (enough light, resources, refreshments). Participants should be prepared as well, but not too much, so they do not limit the free flow of the session. Make sure there are diverse people (from different disciplines) to generate different ideas. If you do not know each other, you can start with icebreakers. Before the start, appoint one person to record the ideas so everybody can see them (for example on flip charts or a computer with a projector).

**2. Present the problem** – Clearly define the problem and explain any criteria that must be met. Highlight the objective of the session, which is to generate as many ideas as possible (quantity over quality). Give participants quite time to write down their own ideas, then ask them to share, making sure everybody participates.

**3. Guide the discussion** – After everyone has shared their ideas, start a group discussion. The objective of the discussion is to develop the ideas further and use them to create new ideas. Again, encourage everyone to contribute and ask them to avoid criticizing. Stick to one conversation at the time and make sure to stay on the topic.

**4. Taking action** – After the session, you will have various ideas. The next step is to organize and analyse them in order to find common themes. Choose and start testing the most promising ones.

## 4 HOW TO IMPROVE CREATIVITY

Creativity can be learnt and improved with practice. Just a few new practices can set you on a more creative path personally and professionally, helping you think differently and see things from a fresh perspective. These practices are:

- **Making connections** – You can look for connections between different ideas to solve problems. Often these connections happen when you are not actively thinking about that problem. Just reading something or hearing someone say something or just

changing the environment can create new connections that help you see the problem or task in a different perspective.

- **Asking questions** – By asking questions, you challenge the current understanding and knowledge about something. You challenge current procedures and ways of doing things that may be already out-dated. Asking questions gives you an opportunity to revise the procedures and make them more relevant.
- **Observing** – When you observe the world around you, you see people doing things in a different way you do them. That can inspire you to get new ideas and improve the way you are doing things or to help others to be more efficient.
- **Networking** – Being around people from different backgrounds, working and discussing with them, can give you new ideas and new perspectives about a certain problem.
- **Experimenting** – Even if the idea is very unusual, do not get discouraged – you test it and check if it works. You should keep adjusting and rethinking the ideas until you find a solution.
- **Do one thing different each day** – Changing work routine can encourage you to think about everyday processes differently, get new ideas and make new connections.

#### 4.1 Exercises to improve your creativity

There are many exercises and simple techniques that can help you improve your flexible thinking, see new concepts and discover new solutions to repetitive problems. Some of them you can implement in your everyday life, making them your habits, while others are more like exercises you use periodically to improve your cognition and idea generation.

Exercises that can become part of your daily life:

- **Read regularly** – Fiction novels can introduce you to interesting creative concepts such as complex worlds, storylines, puzzles and characters.
- **Write a journal** – You can record your thoughts in a journal at the end of the day which will encourage you to think critically about your daily experiences and ideas.

- **Exercise** – Regular exercise can improve your physical and mental health, thus improving your creative thinking as well.

Creative exercises you can use individually or within a team:

- **Use a sketchpad** – You can process information better when you draw or write down ideas while listening to a presentation, reading a book...
- **The circle challenge** – Draw twenty circles, then set a stopwatch for 1 minute. Make each circle into a unique picture before the timer ends. This exercise forces you to think about the same thing in different ways (quantity over quality).
- **Paper clip test** – A team receives a box of paper clips and try find many other ways to use them, apart from holding papers.
- **Dictionary story** – Select a word at random from the dictionary. Use the word you chose, the word above it and the word below it to create a short story. The exercise can improve your ability to make connections with random elements.
- **Draw it again** – Draw the same object of your choice every day for a week. Observe new details examining the object every day. The exercise improves your attention to details and noticing new elements.

## EXERCISE

Try out some of the described exercises. Choose a few and repeat them periodically to see how your thoughts change over time.

## 5 CREATIVE SKILLS AT THE WORKPLACE

In the business world, creativity is highly valued and many people can benefit from including creativity in their work process. Creativity can help you with everyday tasks or long-term goals. Successful businesses always challenge old ways of thinking and encourage new and innovative ideas. Creativity is a helpful tool for developing new ideas, improving work processes, increasing efficiency and developing solutions to complex problems.

There are simple steps to improve work conditions in order to enhance creativity at your workplace. In chapter 4 we have already introduced some that can be implemented at the workplace as well. We are introducing several more you can use in the workplace:

- **Diversifying the team** – Surround yourself with people with different perspectives to broaden your own point of view.
- **Changing the process** – Make a change to the way you normally do things. If there is no good reason why you do a certain task a particular way, you should try doing it differently.
- **Changing your environment** – Just changing your working space (for example rearranging your office space, decorating it, adding plants) can already stimulate you to think in fresh ways about your work. We can also use work-at-home days, if the company policy allows it.
- **Listening to music** – Music improves your mood and increases your creativity. If possible, you should play music while working.
- **Taking a break** – When you are working on a particularly hard task, taking a break will allow you to come back to the task with a clearer mind and see it from the perspective you didn't before the break.
- **Thinking about long term goals** – Being caught in small tasks, you may lose the sight of the end goal and consequently the motivation, which can limit your creativity at work. You need to step back and remember what you are trying to achieve with the tasks.
- **Taking risks** – Looking for new ideas and solutions means you are delving into the unknown. You are unavoidable taking a risk when sharing new ideas at the workplace or asking your manager to implement new procedures. To be creative at the workplace, you need to have the confidence to take risks.
- **Brainstorming** – Regular brainstorming sessions with your team can promote a positive atmosphere where new ideas are welcomed. During the session consider every opinion – even if it does not make any sense at the moment, could help formulate new concepts.

## EXERCISE

Think about your last employment (or any home project). What strategies described here have you been using to be more creative and efficient?

### 5.1 Step-by-step process of creative thinking

When you try to develop an original idea, or overcome a known problem with a new approach, the following steps will help you find unique solutions. Practicing and following these steps will allow you to approach the tasks and problems with an innovative mind-set.

- 1. Gather available information** – You can prepare a more thorough solution when you prepare well. Preparing well in creative thinking means gathering all available information.
- 2. Consider the obvious solution or process** – It is important to know the most obvious solution available so you can use it as a foundation for finding a more successful answer (for example less time consuming or more financially efficient).
- 3. Brainstorm additional solutions** – You need to dedicate enough time for brainstorming as many solutions as you can. Compile a list of your strongest ideas and try to approach the topic from a new perspective. The benefit of a team brainstorming is gathering multiple perspectives at the same time. You can form new ideas based on another person's suggestion.
- 4. Consider how the topics connect** – Think about how two or more topics relate to one another and form connections between different ideas. Make a new list of combined ideas and discard ones that do not relate to others.
- 5. Apply the solution** – Review the list and apply the process you believe is the most effective. While testing the results, think of additional ideas. Testing the results also helps you to determine what aspects of your thought process you can improve or apply differently to result in a successful solution.

## EXERCISE

Think of a task and go through the described 5-steps thinking process.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In a global competitiveness, creativity has become an important part of modern work; from the shop floor to the boardroom, from the individual employee to the organization as a whole. Research shows that employee creativity can make a considerable contribution to organizational growth. In addition, teams that are more creative perform better and work more effectively within budgets. Creative organizations are more profitable, because they intentionally harness the creativity to improve or invent new products, processes and services.

Creativity can be learnt and improved with practice and experience. Are you developing your creativity to prepare for the modern world of work?

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