



THE INSTITUTE OF  
**LEADERSHIP**  
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## Leadership Essentials

# Creativity

Visionary leaders encourage idea generation



# Creativity means using your imagination to create ideas that will add value for the organisation and/or stakeholders. It is about:

Perceiving the world in new ways and looking beyond the obvious

Making connections between apparently unrelated things

Finding hidden patterns

Generating solutions

Two processes - thinking, then producing

It is vital that you are able to lead creativity and encourage idea generation so that your team and organisation find new and better ways to solve problems, especially when there is no previous experience of the issue and so no guarantee that logical or tried and tested approaches will work. Creativity will also help your organisation to deal successfully with a rapidly changing economic, technological or cultural business environment.

## What is creativity?

Guilford (1950) identified two different ways of thinking:

- A** Convergent thinking – coming up with one right logical answer
- B** Divergent thinking – associated with creative thoughts; the capacity to access memory and find unique and numerous answers

When confronted with a problem, in divergent thinking, you look from many perspectives, search for different ways of solving the problem, and come up with many different ideas, some of which may be quite unconventional and often unique. You see the relevance of different or unrelated things that others cannot see, and you can accept contradictions. Divergent thinking has four components and you can develop each of them to enhance your creativity:

### Fluency

you can generate a quantity of ideas

### Flexibility

you can generate a varied mix of ideas, none of which are similar

### Originality

you can generate ideas which are new, novel, unique, improve on existing

### Elaboration

you can expand on an idea, generate detail, depth, mixtures of viewpoints or perspectives

## The Creative Self

If you have ideas, you are imaginative; if you act upon those ideas, you are creative.

Psychologists have found that measures of intelligence do not explain highly productive creative thinking. If you are a creative thinker, you are willing to investigate many different approaches to an issue. Even after you have noticed a promising option, you are prepared to explore other less obvious, or unconventional ones. George Land (1998) found that, as we grow up, our creativity can become buried, perhaps by:

- the influence of adults
- learning about the importance of rules and regulations
- education teaching us the value of logic and structure, and our knowledge becomes an extension of what we already know, rather than being really new.

Typically we learn non-creative behaviours. This means we must develop our creativity:

**Creative Behaviours:**

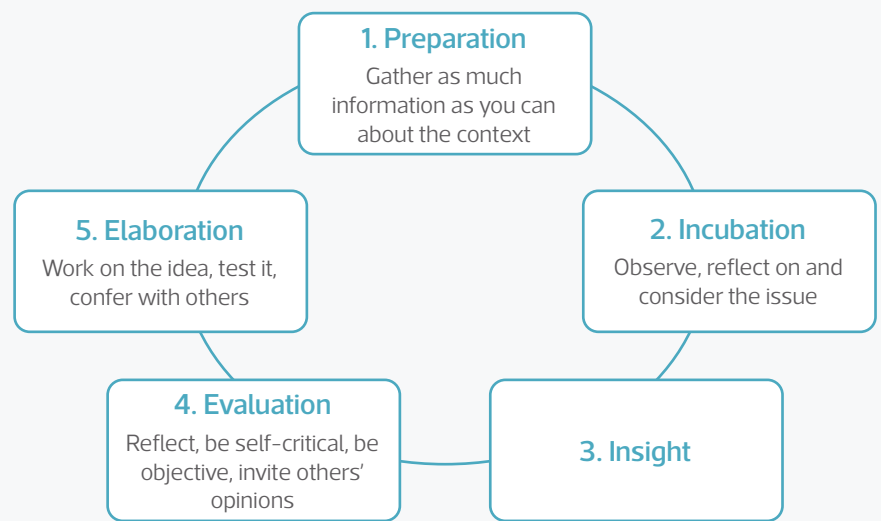
Challenge assumptions	Curious	Imaginative	Takes initiative
Challenge existing situation	Likes to investigate new possibilities	Prepared to make mistakes	See connections between things; synthesises
Often thinks visually	Not afraid to take risks	Adaptable	Future oriented

Generating ideas is a crucial work skill, and everyone can be creative. However, ideas do not appear by chance. You need to be curious, enquiring and actually look hard for ideas, opportunities, possibilities, answers or inventions. There are many techniques that you can practice to force your mind to break old patterns of thought and identify new possibilities. This will help you to become more open-minded, and to think differently.

**Managing the Creative Process**

As a creative leader you actively search out new problems and you are successful in handling new challenges. You have vision and you are able to inspire others by your creativity. Creativity is an important human resource and you need to encourage a positive work environment to help it to flourish in your team. Most successful innovations happen through creative collaboration by combining ideas, with many false starts and missteps. Discussion, debate, argument, diversity of thought and conflict are therefore part of the creative process. You make sure that decision making is integrated so that opposing views are combined into new ways.

The creative process has five steps, not necessarily in a cycle; sometimes you may go back and forth between each of the different stages:



Many tools are available to help you manage this process. Possible obstacles that you may need to overcome include:

- Fear of failure
- Information overload
- Doing too many things at once
- Impact of criticism

Fast paced industries develop new ways of boosting their people’s creativity. **Hack days (hackathons)** were introduced by technology companies as a way for developers to get together, collaborate and synthesise in creating new products or features, often working all night writing the code to bring their ideas to life. Some examples of approaches used to encourage creativity are on the next page.

Professor Pin (2015) of IESE, the graduate business school of the University of Navarra, gives three tips for managing creative team members:

- Promote their creativity - give them independence at work, and make sure they feel passionate about the project
- Help them feel valued - show authority but also be flexible enough to deal with their more intuitive way of working
- Help them feel they are working for themselves, but in line with your organisation’s overall goals

## How different organisations manage the creative process

<b>Google</b> <b>WHAT:</b> Gives engineers up to 20% of their work time away from their jobs to work on creative projects <b>WHY:</b> People work on what they really believe in <b>WHAT:</b> Famous people visit to give talks <b>WHY:</b> 'Keeps brains learning , growing and thinking'		<b>Hewlett Packard; Microsoft</b> <b>WHAT:</b> <b>The Garage</b> – equipped with lots of technology and comfortable furniture <b>WHY:</b> Gives employees time to be involved in fun activities and projects <b>WHAT:</b> Science fair twice a year <b>WHY:</b> Employees show what they have worked on in The Garage. Motivates; encourages collaboration		<b>IBM</b> <b>WHAT:</b> <b>Innovation jam</b> – massive on-line brainstorming sessions focused on a specific topic <b>WHY:</b> Involves up to 150,000 people from 104 countries and 67 countries in joint creativity yielding 10 valuable ideas
<b>HubSpot</b> <b>WHAT:</b> Allows any employee to be with another team <b>WHY:</b> To learn about that aspect of the organisation or their business area	<b>Eventbrite</b> <b>WHAT:</b> <b>Zen room</b> – dim lighting; no noise <b>WHY:</b> Shown to boost creativity; Employees meditate and think	<b>Yammer</b> <b>WHAT:</b> 24 hour hack days; employees dress up in wild costumes <b>WHY:</b> Fun; encourages creativity; collaborative idea generation	<b>Pinterest</b> <b>WHAT:</b> Hackathons – all employees get to choose a creative idea they believe in and work together <b>WHY:</b> Collaborative idea generation	

### References

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- Proctor, T (2013). *Creative Problem Solving for Managers* Routledge



## Dimensions of Leadership

The Institute of Leadership & Management's Dimensions of Leadership offer, often elusive, insights into great leadership. This is not a static representation but an evolving description of the complex nature of leadership activity.

Find out more at [www.InstituteLM.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html](http://www.InstituteLM.com/learning/dimensions-of-leadership.html)

