

Understanding and Developing Creativity

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Most of us when we think of creativity think of artists and sculptors as being highly creative. The rest of us are inclined to think of ourselves as not very creative.

What Actually is Creativity?

“Creativity is the act of turning new and imaginative ideas into reality”

Linda Naiman – founder, Creativity at Work.

“Creativity is the tendency to generate or recognise ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others.”

Robert E. Franken from his work in relation to Human Motivation.

“Creativity is having an ability to look at things differently. I believe creativity is creating something that was not there before, whether this be a solution to a problem or a new piece of computer software. Creativity can also be adapting an existing idea to make it different such as inventing a new ice cream flavour.”

Gary Bertwistle, The Keys to Creativity

By reviewing these definitions it enables us to see that we are all creative. Our issue is more in how we define and view creativity as opposed to whether we are creative or not. We also have a tendency to rate our level of creativity compared with what we perceive other people's creative abilities to be.

What Does Creativity Involve?

It has been determined that there are two key processes involved with being creative. These are:

- Thinking
- Producing

It is not enough to just think about a creative idea or concept. Some action needs to be taken to produce something from the idea or concept that has been generated. So for an idea to be truly creative it needs to be novel and most importantly appropriate to a given situation.

Creativity actually requires "Whole-Brain Thinking"

- Right-brain – imagination, artistry and intuition
- Left-brain – logic and planning

What Motivates People to Become Creative?

1. The need for novel, varied and complex stimulation
2. The need to convey ideas and values
3. The need for problems to be solved

Situations are encountered frequently by individuals where they are required to view things from different perspectives. It isn't just quantity of options that is a consideration it can be their uniqueness, applicability, clarity, ability to implement etc.

Creativity actually encompasses the ability to produce the required innovative ideas/concepts and the capacity to be able to turn those ideas/concepts into practical reality.

How Do I Develop My Creativity?

Research has highlighted that everyone has creative abilities. Like any skill or ability it needs to be nurtured and developed in order for you to become more proficient at it. Just like training to learn a sport or play music.

A key question to start with here is what beliefs and attitudes have you built up around creativity? Are you prone to say? "Oh I am not creative!" or "Mary is creative she creates great pictures I cannot do that so I am not creative."

These types of thoughts and attitudes will impact your ability to develop your level of creative competence. So where do you stand in this regard?

Start telling yourself you are creative make use of affirmations if necessary, to assist you in this process. A good strategy can be when you have a chance to approach a situation or solve a problem differently say to yourself "I can do this" rather than "I cannot do this". Your brain cannot hold two contradictory thoughts at once. Hence your brain will either believe it or it will not.

As stated earlier creativity requires and utilises "Whole-Brain Thinking". Gary Bertwistle in his book "The Keys to Creativity" states, "Creativity and "Whole-Brain Thinking" are learned processes, and everyone can learn new techniques that will enable them to develop more and better ideas."

So when generating ideas it is ideal to engage both sides of the brain. This means we are seeking to access both sides of the thinking mind. By doing this we increase the number of options available to us which in turn increases the likelihood of more and better ideas being generated.

The goal or objective is to think analytically without being overburdened by logic.

Why is Creativity Important?

This begs the question why should we invest time in developing our creative abilities? The answer to this is because it can provide the following benefits:

- It brings joy
- It makes life interesting
- It helps us to move forward as individuals as well as culturally
- The creation of new ideas is a key foundation to human progress
- It provides points of differentiation both individually and collectively
- It is a highly sought after and admired skill
- It is a factor that identifies and highlights our uniqueness as individuals

How Can I Remove Barriers I May Have in Relation to Creativity?

- Believe you are creative
- Be willing to regularly and consistently exercise, display and demonstrate your creative muscle
- Regularly ask the question 'what else'

- Actively choose to be creative
- Don't use excuses such as fear to preclude you from being creative
- Recognise creative ability and creative behaviour are 2 different things
- Mix with people who encourage and foster your creativity
- Respect other people's creativity rather than be put off by it
- Learn from other people's creativity
- Eliminate the fear of failure
- Be committed and make developing your creativity a priority for you
- Be brave and try new things, activities and experiences
- Regularly work on refining your view of thinking and creativity
- Develop an inner belief that ideas/creativity will come to you
- Allow the child within you to be exposed and visible – give yourself permission to let this happen
- Allow yourself to have 'fun' with your creative pursuits
- Learn to look for the positive and potential in a situation before assessing and review any concerns you may have in relation to creativity
- Realise that ideas don't have to be completely original in order for them to be creative

- Keep your body functioning well when in a creative period ie: take regular breaks, eat food to help maintain your creativity not hamper it, minimise the amount of fatty, heavy foods eaten when in a creative situation
- Be prepared to slow down to enable creativity to work its way through
- Mix up your creative experience as much as you can
- Ensure exercise is part of your creative regime
- Integrate music into the creative process as much as possible

What Tools & Techniques Can Be Used To Help Unlock Creativity?

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Make effective use of your subconscious</p>	<p>A good start here is to forget about the issue or aspect you are trying to solve. This means the aspect is allowed to percolate in your subconscious mind before you seek to offer a potential solution or insight.</p>
<p>Employ visualisation techniques</p>	<p>Imagine yourself in a situation or having already solved the problem you are faced with. What would it be like for you? What would be different? Answers to these questions can help you find the creative solutions/ideas you may be looking for. It can be a case of 'see it then do it.'</p>

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Break the issues down into smaller pieces</p>	<p>Don't just look at the whole problem what are some of the component parts related to the aspect that needs solving?</p> <p>Using drawings, graphs, mind maps and other visual techniques can be helpful in this instance. Smaller pieces enable more focussed and detailed questions to be possible in order to derive a potential creative solution. It also enables the ability to look at the issue from a number of different perspectives.</p>
<p>Brain writing can be helpful if working in a group</p>	<p>Each person writes down the issue being discussed on the top of a piece of blank paper. They then write down one potential solution to the issue and pass the paper on to the person next to them who then writes down their potential solution taking into account ideas and thoughts generated by the people before them. Each piece will be different at the end because they have each had different ideas and concepts to work with as the pieces of paper have been passed around. Then the results of this are shared with the group to see any common themes/possibilities that may eventuate.</p>
<p>As if</p>	<p>This is where a scenario is created and then the thoughts and ideas are created based on the scenario not on the reality of the factor requiring a solution. This may provide some freedom that is not available if it is taken from the realistic day to day perspective.</p>

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Utilise the power of questions</p>	<p>Creativity is usually expanded by asking questions and exploring possible options. Some useful fundamental questions are: 'What if?', 'Why not?', 'What else?' These questions have the potential to start the ball rolling towards creativity.</p>
<p>Make effective use of listening</p>	<p>Be prepared to listen to what people say. This can provide a great basis for meaningful questioning. You can find a 'hook' to the questions you might want to ask by really listening to what people have to say to you.</p> <p>Using good open questions can enable you to elicit significant and sufficient information to help develop your creative solution.</p> <p>Open questions are those that require more than a 'yes/no' answer. Similar to 'What if?', 'Why not?', 'What else?' type questions.</p>
<p>Brainstorming</p>	<p>Again this is a good technique if a number of people are involved in trying to generate creative ideas. There are many methods that can be used here and this is a specialised subject so obtaining specific resources dedicated to this approach may be useful to help develop skills in this area.</p> <p>Some key concepts are that everyone gets to voice ideas, ideas/thoughts are not vetted or challenged initially, not so obvious ideas are encouraged.</p>

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Piggy Backing</p>	<p>This is where you allow people to build on an idea initially generated by someone else. The objective is to develop a long list of ideas that can be prioritised &/or culled as part of the process.</p> <p>Some key factors to remember when using this approach are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determine the focus ○ Create alternatives ○ Narrow down the options ○ Develop criteria to assess the ideas against ○ Evaluate ideas based on established criteria
<p>Panel of Experts</p>	<p>This is another possible group approach. Identify some people who can operate as a 'panel of experts' and pose questions to them. The 'panel' can determine how real or creative they choose to be with their responses in order to stimulate thoughts and potential solutions.</p>
<p>Challenge old beliefs</p>	<p>Write down your beliefs regarding creativity. Sort them into supportive and inhibiting. Then see how you might be able to take your inhibiting beliefs and turn them into a supportive one. Once having done this determine how can you apply this new belief to a creative activity. Try it and record the outcome. What difference did it make?</p> <p>Eg: 'I cannot draw' change it to 'I am learning how to draw.'</p> <p>The change that occurred was I was able to start drawing and I felt a sense of freedom as a result. I was surprised because I actually liked the image I created.</p>

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Define a good idea</p>	<p>Document the criteria you might use to define what you consider to be a good idea or not. Then consider whether these criteria encourage or discourage creativity?</p> <p>What could you and would you be prepared to change to help facilitate creative development?</p>

What are the Characteristics of Creative Thinkers?

Tool/Technique	Description
<p>Confidence</p>	<p>They are prepared to take risks and step out when it comes to creativity</p>
<p>Curiosity</p>	<p>They are inquisitive and are keen to learn 'what else' might be possible. How could it be done differently? What's next? Why can't we? etc.</p> <p>They are prepared to challenge the status quo. They ask questions of themselves and others. They ask lots of questions.</p>

<p>Persistence</p>	<p>They are not defeated easily. If something does not work they learn from it and try again. They never give up and they have a belief that there is <u>always</u> another way. It's not just that they are smart it's more that they are prepared to stay with the problem longer. This is a characteristic that Einstein displayed.</p>
<p>Courage</p>	<p>Creativity in any form requires courage. They don't allow fear or doubt to hold them back. They give ideas a go and are prepared to take chances. This is not to imply recklessness. More that they are considered risk takers. They have a confidence and belief in their own ideas.</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>Creative people take time out to be creative. They don't try to cram it into everything else they are doing. They actually schedule time to think. Leonardo Da Vinci once said: "The greatest geniuses sometimes achieve more when they do less"</p>

In short the idea is to build up your self belief, in relation to creativity, and you will build up your creative muscle.

Skills Development Exercises

Here are some exercises to help you take the information from this document and apply it to your situation in a practical manner. There are some questions posed throughout the document that would also be beneficial to work through.

- A first step to take would be to define a SMART goal in relation to creativity. What this means is that the goal is Specific, Measurable, Achievable/Attractive, Realistic and Time-bounded. A sample goal could be 'I wish to be able to generate two ideas a day consistently within six months'.

- Write down any beliefs and attitudes you may have in relation to creativity. Outline how these may either be encouraging or limiting your creativity.
- Review each of the barriers outlined in this document. Identify your top 10 barriers to creativity. On a case by case basis describe how these may have limited you in the past.
- What are two small steps you could undertake to be able to start to address the barriers identified? Define how these might be able to assist you in achieving your goal.
- On a scale of 1(not willing) – 10 (very high priority) how willing you are to work on developing your creativity? On another scale of 1 (no confidence) – 10 (highly confident) how confident you feel about taking the required steps to develop your creativity?
- Identify what is holding you back. What can you do to remove or reduce the impact of what is holding you back in developing and exercising your creativity?
- How do you most like to express yourself is it words, pictures, scribbling, writing, painting, drawing etc. How can this preference be effectively used to help develop your creativity?

Documenting your discoveries regarding your perspective and insights on creativity in a journal or notebook could be highly valuable and provide a good baseline for developing your skills in this regard.

Acknowledgements & Further Reading

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Three key sources of information have been used by Carol to create this document. The main reference used was:

The Keys to Creativity – How to Unlock Your IMAGINATION and Creative POTENTIAL, Gary Bertwistle, 2006, Blue Moon Publishing, Moore Park NSW, Australia.

This was supported by information obtained from the following websites.

<http://www.csun.edu/~vcpsy00h/creativity/define.htm>

<http://www.creativityatwork.com/articlesContent/whatis.htm>

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