



## CHAPTER ONE UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY

### THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT MISCONCEPTIONS

Why is it that after so many years of research and application in the field of creativity, the most crucial insights still haven't reached the greater part of the population? One of the reasons could be that schools don't consider creativity to be a subject worth emphasising. After reading this book, you will probably agree with us that the following misconceptions need to be addressed with greatest urgency.

#### **Misconception 1: 'You're either creative or you're not! You can't learn it.'**

Creativity can be learned. Creativity is a skill. Like any skill, some people are endowed with a greater natural talent than others. This is the case with languages or mathematics, balance, memory, etc. It also applies to creativity.

Just as you can improve your basic level in all these skills by actively working on them, so can you improve your creative skills. In this book you will find lots of exercises that will offer you the opportunity to enhance your present creativity skills. Our aim is for you to develop the necessary confidence to be able to find a solution to every single problem you come across. Remember that for every problem there are always several solutions and it is possible to turn problems into opportunities.

#### **Misconception 2: 'Creativity is batik work or flower arranging. It's for softies.'**

Creativity has become one of the most important developmental aspects for individuals and organisations. A large number of companies and organisations have discovered that creativity provides the means to bring together both personal and corporate goals. People want interesting jobs. Companies need to change constantly because a status quo can bring complacency. For many years multinationals have offered their employees the opportunity to develop their creative potential within the professional arena. The current trend of accelerated innovation proves it: creativity and result-oriented management go hand in hand. And this is anything but soft.

**Misconception 3: 'My boss keeps me from being creative.'**

YOU are the only one who decides how to use and develop your creative potential. Obviously, one environment is more stimulating than another but acting the victim has never helped anyone. Consider the obstacles in your environment as a challenge. If your boss doesn't assist you, you have two options: either you help your boss to change, or change bosses.

Do something about your environment. This book will offer you plenty of tips. You can try some of these within your organisation and see what happens. Be bold, but also, be patient: this kind of change takes time. If this doesn't work, find another environment. Many organisations are looking for people who are willing to invest their creative potential in their jobs. And companies (bosses) who refuse to get this message don't have much of a future.

**Misconception 4: 'I don't have the time for creativity.'**

Creativity doesn't require a lot of time, it requires focus. Of course, we live in a hectic world and we work under pressure – allow this to stimulate your creative potential. Creativity can help you to escape the vicious circle of working in a reactive rather than a proactive way. By asking yourself the right questions about your current way of functioning and managing, new opportunities will arise.

Thinking up new ideas doesn't take a lot of time but it requires focus. Sometimes it is necessary to create some distance from the problem at hand. When you are trained to work creatively, the best ideas will occur to you when you least expect them. Being able to pay close attention to a problem is much more important than having a lot of time.

**Misconception 5: 'We already do brainstorming sessions.'**

A little learning is a dangerous thing. In many companies people meet for a so-called 'brainstorm'. Often these brainstorming sessions are organised in an unprofessional manner and even the most elementary rules such as 'postponing judgement' are overlooked. These sessions sometimes appear to be based on the shouting out of as many ideas as possible, ideas which nobody really knows how to deal with afterwards. Such performances usually result in a frustrated 'problem owner' as well as frustrated participants. We shouldn't be surprised that the word 'brainstorm' has a negative connotation in many companies.

Some training and a little attention to a number of basic rules can easily enhance the results of these creative sessions. The target should be for the session to render at least twice as many new and useful ideas as a normal meeting would do. *Creativity Today* explains how to achieve this.

**IT WAS A DAY  
LIKE THIS  
WHEN  
MARCO POLO  
LEFT FOR CHINA**

**WHAT ARE YOUR  
PLANS FOR TODAY**

*Loesje*

P.O.-BOX 1045 6801 BA ARNHEM  
HOLLAND

## Welcome to the Work-Out Room!

The training pages are marked with torn edges as shown here.  
Good luck putting theory into practice.

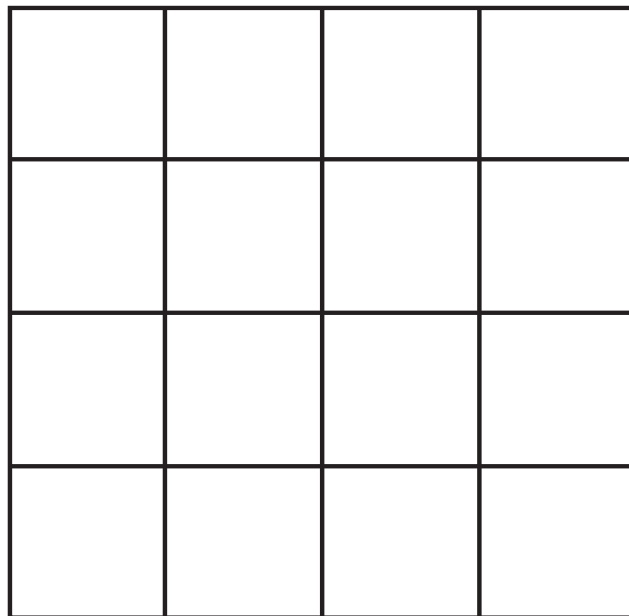
### CREATIVITY TEST

Would you like to test your own current creative ability? This test has no scientific pretensions and doesn't have a scoreboard. The only aim is for you to assess your present creativity, so that you can see for yourself which aspects require attention.

This test is limited to five exercises. You don't have to do them one after the other. Each exercise is accompanied by an explanation of its purpose and indicates the chapter of the book where you can find information on how to enhance a specific skill. Don't feel obliged to take the test right away, if you like you can read further and try it later.

#### 1. Squares: An Exercise in Perception

How many squares do you see here?



Have a close look. Spend two minutes counting the squares, then write down the total. When you have finished, go to page 227 and read the comment.

#### 2. Caesar and Cleopatra: A Briefing and a Question

In a book written by a successful crime novelist we found the following passage which we will use as our briefing. The protagonist is speaking.

'I entered the room and immediately I saw the open window, the broken glass and the water on the floor. The curtains in front of the window were moving, but what struck me most were Caesar and Cleopatra. They were both lying on their sides on the floor, in the midst of water and broken glass. It was obvious – they were dead!'

Our question to you: What could be the cause of death? Play the role of the detective and imagine as many causes of death as possible. Use your imagination. When finished, go to page 227 and read the comment.

#### 3. Queues at the Checkout: Reformulating the Problem

This is a true anecdote about a well-known Dutch supermarket chain (Albert Heijn). Several years ago the company organised a customer satisfaction survey. Eighty percent of the customers declared themselves irritated because they had to wait 'such a long time' at the checkout. Of course the marketing people took this result seriously and examined the cause.

They learned that customers had an average waiting time of five to ten minutes, with peaks from 4 pm onwards and on Saturdays. They also noticed that people had the impression they were waiting longer than they actually were. The survey showed that different means of payment (cash, cheque, credit card, etc.) had little influence on the waiting time.

The marketing department organised a brainstorming session to solve this problem. In a brainstorming session, the way a problem is formulated at the outset is very important because this determines the way the solution(s) will be approached.

How would you reformulate the problem of waiting time in the supermarket? Try to come up with several starting formulations. You don't need to look for solutions at this point. This exercise is meant to help you look at the problem from different angles and work out different ways of formulating it. A good starting formulation for a creative session starts with *How can we...*

For instance: How can we better spread the flow of customers at the check-outs? Write down your ideas and then go to page 228 and discover the starting formulation the company chose for their brainstorming session.

#### 4. Organising a Successful Brainstorm: Checklist

Suppose you want to organise a brainstorming session with a group of friends or colleagues to deal with a problem or an issue that has been bothering you for a while and for which no solution has been found. Of course you want to get the most out of this brainstorm. You want to generate creative results and have the group leave the session with a feeling of satisfaction.