



## Understanding Creativity and Innovation (Short Course)

### Learning Outcomes

**By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:**

- ✓ Identify the difference between creativity and innovation
- ✓ Recognize your own creativity

# Understanding Creativity and Innovation

## What Is Creativity and Innovation?

### Creativity and Innovation: A Breakdown

#### Defining the Terms

What is creativity? What is innovation? Are they the same thing?

**Creativity** can be defined as the generation of ideas in the attempt to solve a problem or produce something new. **Innovation** can be defined as the implementation of the ideas generated from the creative process. Innovation transforms the idea into something concrete.

Here is an example of creativity: A bank creates a new program intended to offer mobile banking services for their customers. If they do not have the means to carry out this idea, like the proper Internet platform to support the program, they must use innovation to build the platform.

Being creative and innovative can be much simpler and on a much smaller scale. Imagine a painter who is creating a landscape portrait. They run out of orange paint for the sky as the sun begins to set. Since they are working on a hilltop in the middle of nowhere, they have a choice: they can get innovative or lose the perfect opportunity to finish the painting. By mixing yellow and red, the painter gets his orange paint. He creatively thought of a solution and used innovation to achieve success.

#### What Am I?

Am I creative? Am I innovative?

Regardless of our personal belief, we all possess the ability to be creative. You don't have to be considered "artistic" to be creative. If you need proof, think back to when you were a child. A tree house was not just wood; it was a space used to create our own imaginary worlds. Blankets and pillows were not just bedding; they were fort building materials!

The challenge for creativity lies in our confidence. Some of us have convinced ourselves that we are not creative. What we fail to recognize is that we do creative and innovative things every day, like stretching budgets. Even picking our clothes in the morning can be a creative activity. Getting better with creativity and innovation will take practice. It's like a muscle – you use it or you lose it. But, with practice and effort, the creativity process will become easier.

**Know Your Creative Potential**

**Describe a time when you felt most creative. This event can be either personal or work related.**

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**Why do you feel this event reflects your creativity?**

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**What made this event a success?**

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**How can you replicate this feeling of success both at work and in your personal life?**

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**Individual Creativity**

**Know Yourself**

Working in a group can help you with your own creativity, but it is essential to get to know your own creative rhythm. Understanding your creative groove comes with having a high degree of self-awareness. You need to pay attention to instances when you felt particularly creative. Ask yourself questions like:

- What sparked my creative thinking?

- Where was I when I did my creative thinking? What was my environment?
- What time of day did I think the best?
- What strategies or tools did I use to aid my thinking?
- What challenges did I have when trying to generate creative solutions?
- How long could I sit and think before needing to take a break?

Asking yourself questions to increase your self-awareness can help increase your creative thinking potential.

### **Tips for Increasing Your Individual Creativity**

**Practice.** Another key element to developing your creative rhythm is practice. High levels of creativity can come naturally to some people, but most of us have to work at it. Giving yourself plenty of time and opportunity to flex your creative muscle will help you increase your creative potential.

**Give yourself some distance.** When looking to increase your creativity, you need to understand that your creative level can be situation or context dependent. Have you ever helped a friend generate ideas on how to solve their problems? Don't you sometimes find it easier to offer solutions to their problems rather than figuring out solutions for your own? Sometimes when we are too close or emotionally involved in a situation, we find it hard to see our options.

With this in mind, a way to work on increasing your creativity is to put distance between yourself and the problem you are looking to solve. Looking at the problem you are facing with a bit of psychological distance can help to decrease stress and increase focus. A strategy for increasing distance is to look at the issue from someone else's perspective. Ask yourself questions like: "How would my spouse look at this issue?" or "How would Donald Trump solve this problem?" Creating distance between yourself and the problem can help give you the psychological edge you need to develop insight.

**Give yourself time.** You can also increase your creativity by giving yourself enough time to be creative. Too often, we are working under tight deadlines. Without a sufficient amount of time to think and percolate ideas, we tend to panic. Panic does nothing for creativity. In fact, it makes you react instead of acting with clarity, purpose, and direction.

A good technique to help take your focus off time might be to pretend you are on a desert island. You are going nowhere and you have all the time in the world! Adopting this mindset can help you focus on the creative process rather than other factors.

**Organize your life.** Another tip to increase your own creative potential is to organize your life so your energy is being spent in the right places. Here is an example to illustrate this point.



## Get Creative

### Pre-Assignment

**What does creativity and innovation mean to you?**

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**When you think of someone as being creative, what traits do they possess?**

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**Is there a difference between creativity and innovation?**

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**When do you feel most creative?**

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**Where do you feel most creative? (Examples: when you are driving, at work, or having a conversation with a good friend.)**

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**In what areas of your life would you like to be more creative?**

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**In what areas of your work would you like to be more creative?**

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**How would being more creative and innovative benefit your life?**

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**On a scale of 1-10, with 1 being not creative at all and 10 being bursting with creativity, give the number that best represents your current creativity level.**

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**Using the same 1-10 scale, give the number that represents the creativity level you would like to be at in the future.**

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## **Developing the Right Environment for Creativity**

### **What Does a Creative Environment Look Like?**

People often think that creativity and insight comes from being in a profound, awe-inspiring place. The reality is that, for most people, a complex environment can be too distracting for deep, prolonged thought to occur. Additionally, most of us do not get to see these awe-inspiring places on a daily basis. The most we see is our usual workspace, whether that's a cubicle, home office, or somewhere else.

The truth of the matter is that idea generation and implementation of ideas takes place in normal settings. A great example of this concept is author Anthony Trollope. Trollope was the most prolific writer of the Victorian literature era, but he did his writing in addition to working for the post office. His writing routine involved writing for three hours each day prior to having breakfast. He disciplined himself to write 250 words in each 15 minute time period, whether he was writing at home or on a train while he travelled for the post office.

Building your best creative environment is a highly individualized activity. What worked for Trollope may not work for you. When trying to create your best thinking environment, pay attention to events that spark your thoughts.

- When are you the most creative?
- Do you find ideas on long drives, over a stimulating conversation with a friend, while reading, or when walking the dog?
- Do you find the best time for thinking in the early morning, afternoon, or night?

Getting to know your own creative rhythm and implementing some general tips will help you create the right environment.

#### **Tips for Building Your Own Creative Environment**

**Work in an easy and uninterrupted concentration.** Interruptions lead to broken thoughts. Trying to think in a disruptive environment can be extremely frustrating and stressful, especially when you are on a deadline. If you work in a cubicle where noise and distractions are just a reality of life, see if you can book time in a boardroom or meeting room. The quiet will allow you time to think.

**Make sure you have everything you need.** This could include pens, paper, sticky notes, highlighters, coffee, music, etc. Each time you have to get up from your workplace is a distraction. Make sure you have what you need to minimize interruptions.

**Take a break when you need to.** When you are feeling like you need some time and distance away from the issue you are trying to solve, take a break. Scheduled breaks can actually help increase creativity. Having time away from an issue can help to forge unexpected connections and creative solutions.

**Make your creative space your own space.** When you are creating, make the space you are working in your own. Put up pictures that have personal significance. Play your favorite music. Light your favorite candle. Construct this space so that you feel comfortable and in control. Try to make your space as unique as you are.

**Exercise and eat well.** Exercising and eating well can help increase our mental and physical endurance. When you do not eat properly, your brain is not functioning at its optimal level. Creativity is not just about cognition. You need your physical self to be well maintained too!

**Get plenty of rest.** Coming up with creative solutions to complex problems can be strenuous at times. Make sure you are well rested. Working with complex problems when fatigued can result in feeling ineffectual and frustrated. Worse still, because of your fatigue, you may jump at the first solution that comes to mind just to have the problem solved.

**Clear your mind.** Even with an optimal creative space, when your mind is cluttered, you will have trouble getting into the creative groove. Use some relaxation techniques to bring focus and direction to your thoughts. Try deep breathing exercises, taking a short walk, or some guided meditation. One helpful technique is to close your eyes and imagine your mind is like a room with many doors. Behind each door is an issue that you are thinking about. Imagine closing each door, one by one. When you have all the doors closed, you are standing in an empty room and have figuratively closed these issues from your mind.

Remember that building your creative environment is a highly tailored, personal process. There is no one perfect pattern that will do the trick. No one can tell you where you think best or what your best thinking environment looks like. Building your creative environment takes time and a high degree of self-awareness.

**Build Your Creative Environment**

**Make a list of 20 things that you would like to have in your creative environment.**

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**For five of the items on the list, provide an explanation for why you chose the item.**

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