

# Definitions

# 01

This chapter looks at these 10 creative elements:

<sup>2</sup> <b>N</b> Novelty	<sup>9</sup> <b>I</b> Idea	<sup>28</sup> <b>Sr</b> Surprise	<sup>16</sup> <b>V</b> Value	<sup>39</sup> <b>K</b> Knowledge
<sup>3</sup> <b>Ev</b> Evaluation	<sup>10</sup> <b>Unk</b> Unknown	<sup>17</sup> <b>S</b> Serendipity	<sup>29</sup> <b>Ar</b> Art	<sup>40</sup> <b>Sc</b> Science

## What is creativity?

*Creativity is almost infinite. It involves every sense – sight, smell, hearing, feeling, taste and even perhaps the extrasensory. Much of it is unseen, nonverbal, and unconscious.*

**Pioneering creativity researcher E Paul Torrance, 1998**

This chapter shares research from some of the key thinkers in creativity, along with definitions to help inform your work and creative conversations. I'll share how companies like Google and Heineken use shared definitions to shape their work, and my go-to definition. We'll also look at factors beyond the rational, including serendipity.

Creativity is a famously tricky thing to define:

**Figure 1.1** Typical one-word definitions of creativity from workshop delegates



I've evaluated many definitions, asked business leaders and hundreds of professionals in our workshops for their thoughts on creativity. Here's a selection:

Michael Acton Smith, internet entrepreneur and founder of UK entertainment company, Mind Candy says:

I think creative people are very curious and I think I am, too... I think that mindset of always being open and excited and looking at different things rather than being stuck in a rut (as many people are) exposes you to new ideas and you start to be able to connect the dots between different industries. That's when the more creative things start to emerge.

Matt Trinetti, co-founder of The Escape School believes that 'creativity is simply letting the little things stirring inside you come out and play in the real world. Ideas, sentences, art, businesses, movements. Anything really. It's giving space for things to emerge from you and through you, and then unleashing those things into the world.'

Bruce Daisley, UK Managing Director at Twitter told me that 'creativity isn't a skill, it's a practice'. Ed Catmull (2008), President at Pixar and Disney Animation Studios might agree. He observes:

People tend to think of creativity as a mysterious solo act, and they typically reduce products to a single idea: This is a movie about toys, or dinosaurs, or love... However, in filmmaking and many other kinds of complex product development, creativity involves a large number of people from different disciplines working effectively together to solve a great many problems.

A movie contains literally tens of thousands of ideas.

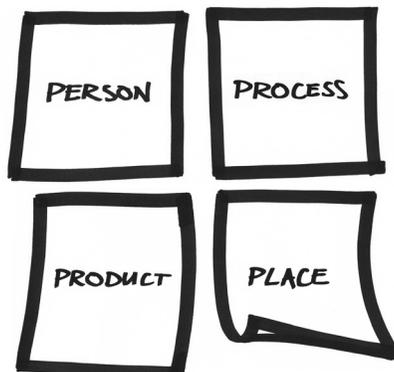
‘No organization is creative,’ says NASA’s Jim Hodges (2011): ‘People are creative, but the organization can foster or inhibit the creative by how work is conducted and how individual initiative is encouraged.’

Jackie Lynton (2016) is the former head of transformation at the National Health Service (NHS), whose story features throughout the book. She told me: ‘Creativity for me is connecting with people, making things happen, and having hope for what is possible. When someone says the word “can’t” I get excited because there could be a way, a possibility of something waiting to be born and [we shouldn’t] impose limits on ourselves.’

Do you have your own definition?

While there are many and varied responses, answers tend to lend themselves to key aspects of creativity. Michael Acton Smith and Matt Trinetti focus on the *person*. The go-to response of ‘thinking outside of the box’ refers to *process* and Ed Catmull describes the output or *product* as well as process. NASA refers to aspects of environment or *place*.

**Figure 1.2** The 4Ps of creativity



These categories are known as ‘the 4Ps’ (Rhodes, 1961). I’ll look at them later in the book.

## Creativity and innovation – one and the same?

These two terms are frequently used interchangeably, but there are key differences. When the conceptual idea tips into being a concrete product that's where creativity and innovation meet. The UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (2010) says innovation is 'the successful exploitation of new ideas'.

I have predominantly used the term 'creativity' throughout the book, but of course nascent ideas lead to innovations. The economist Theodore Levitt (2002) writes: 'Ideas are useless unless used. The proof of their value is their implementation. Until then they are in limbo.'

Below are my go-to definition and three examples of how a shared definition can benefit a business.

For application to business problems, I admire creativity guru and UK government adviser Sir Ken Robinson's definition of creativity as 'the process of having original ideas that have value' (2013).

### <sup>2</sup> N Novelty

I like the definition above because one can dismantle the concepts into manageable chunks – *process* suggests that there is a systematic way to approach a problem, *original* brings in the idea of *novelty* as a way to measure the *idea*.

### <sup>9</sup> I Idea

#### ***So what makes a creative idea?***

Millward Brown work with some of the world's biggest companies to research and develop brand marketing campaigns. They define a big idea as 'a game-changer'. It shifts paradigms and turns category convention on its head. It must 'resonate, be disruptive, have talk value, transcend cultural and geographic boundaries and stretch the brand without straining credibility or believability'. (Hernandez, 2012)

Vicki Maguire, Executive Creative Director at advertising agency Grey London (responsible for award-winning advertising campaigns for Volvo and the British Heart Foundation) describes what makes a great creative idea for her:

It's a mix of experience and gut feeling. If it answers the brief perfectly. If you can see it having a role in culture. If you can see people talking about it, writing about it in the press. If that idea's time is right, it's a good idea. Ideas have an energy that's infectious. If the team are excited and there's a buzz around it, then it's a good idea. (Maguire, 2016)

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## Sr Surprise

When evaluating ideas, I like to add a further dimension. Researchers in the field of Artificial Intelligence, Maher and Fisher (2012) bring together the criteria 'novelty, value and surprise' as ways to assess creative designs.

The aspect of surprise, for me, reflects the emotional aspect to creativity – invoking a feeling, a visceral response to an idea or a product.

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## V Value

Value suggests that the idea (or product or service) must be useful to the creator. Sales of course come under this element, as does return on investment (ROI), share of voice, brand reputation scores and shifts in behaviour.

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**CASE STUDY** Simples! How creative thinking and a talking Russian meerkat helped double the value of comparethemarket.com

Prior to 2009, price comparison websites were a low-interest, highly commoditized category with little differentiation. In a category where market share is determined by spend, [www.comparethemarket.com](http://www.comparethemarket.com) were behind all their competitors, compounded by a long and unmemorable name (Campaign, 2009).

Responding to these challenges, and inspired by the highly successful Cadbury's gorilla ads, Aleksandr Orlov – a Russian meerkat aristocrat – was created, to play on the similarity between the words 'meerkat' and 'market'.

According to advertising agency VCCP, who created the campaign, one small footnote in the brief provided the unlikely insight for the final creative idea.

*We asked the creatives if they might be able to find a way of introducing a cheaper term or phrase into the advertising that could exist alongside 'market'... The cost per click on meerkats was in the region of 5p (market was £5)... So we rebriefed the idea to the creatives asking them to create layers of character, warmth and affection. Aleksandr Orlov was born. (Campaign, 2009)*

The integrated campaign has evolved over the past seven years to include prime-time TV sponsorship, merchandise and PR with a social media presence at its centre. Using Sir Ken Robinson's (2013) creativity definition above – 'the process of having original ideas that have value' – the briefing story gives us a sense of the process involved behind the strategy and the creative idea.

The search strategy was smart and original. Using 'meerkat' as a way around the cost per click for the more expensive word 'market' ultimately led to the mascot's creation. For me, this epitomizes creative thinking at its best – if you can't outspend the competition, outthink them.

In the UK insurance category the Churchill's dog had previously been used effectively, and using characters itself is not new. Think of Tony the Tiger (Kellogg's) or the Cadbury's Gorilla, which inspired this campaign. Orlov's character builds on what has gone before. For this category, the work was groundbreaking and upped the creative ante for the whole category, spawning other character-led campaigns from competitors.

There is no doubting the value that the comparethemeerkat campaign has delivered – a year's worth of objectives were met nine weeks after its initial launch with the cost per visit reduced by 73 per cent and quote volumes increased by over 83 per cent (*Campaign*, 2009). The campaign doubled the value of the brand (*Daily Mail*, 2014).

Was the campaign surprising? A talking Russian meerkat and the use of storytelling and humour in this space was unexpected. The campaign also shows *risk-taking* Rt in challenging the norms of the category. The character has made an impact in popular *culture* C with the meerkat's catchphrase 'simples' being included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2016).

With 68,000 Twitter followers and demand outstripping supply for merchandise, customers have high levels of engagement with Orlov. The ad agency commented: 'We couldn't differentiate rationally. People were sick of the rational stuff and

weren't really listening.' Their strategy in one word was *love*. We'll explore the elements of *emotion* **Em** and *logic* **L** further in Chapter 4.

### So would you define the campaign as creative, and in what ways?

There will always be subjectivity and questions about how novel, or surprising or valuable something is (one could begin perhaps to apply a scale or rating) but having a clear and agreed definition can make discussing creative ideas easier, as we'll see with Heineken's creative ladder below.

<sup>39</sup>  
**K**

<sup>3</sup>  
**Ev**

## Knowledge and evaluation

Any output of the creative process is subject to scrutiny and consideration as to its merits. In order to decide how creative something is you'll need to apply your *knowledge*, which is also required for the element of *evaluation*. In Chapter 4 I'll bring together insights from neuroscience and psychology to understand how we make decisions, along with evaluation tools in Chapter 8.

Dr Ruth Noller (2001), one of the leading contributors to the field of creativity research, created this equation:

$$C = f_a(\text{KIE})$$

This suggests that creativity is the interaction of knowledge, imagination and evaluation. *f* is a mathematical term that means everything inside the brackets is affected by what's outside – the 'a' represents a positive attitude.

'Knowledge is essential for judging the products,' says Ferran Adrià, three-star Michelin chef and founder of the much-lauded (now defunct) restaurant El Bulli. Adrià is widely regarded as one of the most innovative chefs on the planet. He describes the years spent experimenting, tasting and gaining experience as 'the mental palate' which all contribute to a 'chef's mental database' (Adrià and Soler, 2012). His famous 'deconstruction' process uses traditional ingredients that are creatively transformed, preserving the original flavours so that they are identifiable to the diner in some ways, while being completely surprising in others.

Take Adria's version of the classic Spanish omelette (Carlin, 2011):

*First, he reduces the old-fashioned tortilla to its three component parts: eggs, potatoes and onions. Then he cooks each separately. The finished product, the deconstructed outcome, is one-part potato foam... one-part onion purée, one-part egg-white sabayon. One isolated component is served on top of the other in layers, and topped with crumbs of deep-fried potatoes. The dish, minuscule, comes inside a sherry glass.*

This description of Adria's process perfectly sums up combinational creativity (Boden, 2004) – the rearrangement of existing ideas (here, ingredients) to create something new.

## Why defining creativity matters for your business

*There are still businesses that see creativity as little more than a cosmetic: a final touch of lipstick to make a product look more appealing. They are profoundly wrong... Applied creativity can be as central, as integral and as functional as any operating system; and should be expected to be so.*

**Phil Lader, WPP Chairman, 2014**

A shared understanding and definition of creativity can help to set the direction and creative ambition for a business, and act as a filter for which ideas to pursue.

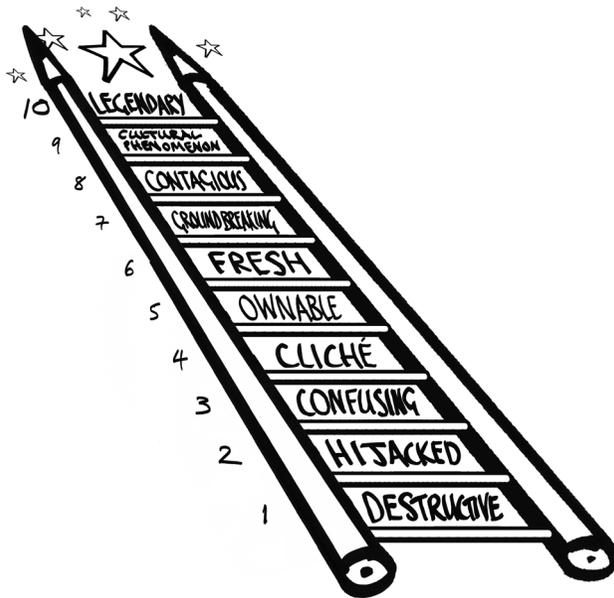
### **Heineken's creative ladder**

The creative ladder is a process designed to produce creative work: 'So brilliant, it will be remembered when we're all dead,' says Søren Hagh, Heineken Global Marketing Executive Director (Magee, 2015).

One of the challenges around creativity is identifying a common language that people can understand and share. Hagh explains: 'People have different interpretations of what it is... there can be misunderstanding and people shy away from discussions around it.' (Magee, 2015)

The award-winning marketing team at Dutch brewing company Heineken has found a way to do this using their 10-step 'creative ladder' as a framework to evaluate ideas. The company uses the ladder to define what great work is, and to evaluate its own creative output as well as that of other brands.

**Figure 1.3** Heineken's creative ladder



The company believes that clichéd work will not have a positive impact for example, and strives for work high on its scale. Arif Haq is an ex-PepsiCo marketer who now leads the creative capabilities practice at Contagious Insider, the consultancy hired by Heineken to develop the ladder. He says: ‘Initially Heineken came to us and simply said “We need better creativity.” The first question that came to mind was obviously “What do you mean by better?” Without a universally understood definition, you can expect lots of frustrating hours spent wasted between clients and their peers, with their bosses and most definitely with their agencies. When clients, who generally aren’t creative professionals, don’t have a consistent language to evaluate creative work, they tend to fall back to their safe space which is quite often overly subjective disqualifiers that aren’t very helpful in building better work. Stuff like “I don’t like cats” or “My wife won’t like it” (they sound ridiculous, but I’ve heard them in real life).

‘This is when we came up with the idea of the ladder. It was based on the idea of Leo Burnett’s Global Product Committee scale, only more practically focused for clients rather creatives. Full credit to Heineken – they absolutely saw the value of it from the start and have continued to embrace it. The real power of the ladder is not in the 1–10 number (that’s really just so we can benchmark over time) but rather in the descriptions of each rung. I’ve seen clients use that language verbatim in creative discussions and it transforms

their ability to have meaningful conversations about an area in which they have not previously been professionally trained.'

'There are many factors in improving organizational creativity, but one of the critical ones is having a consistent language that allows you to define what it is and what it is not. Creativity is frankly a discipline with a disproportionately high level of bullshit merchants who try and hide the topic behind a curtain of magic and mystery. What I've seen is that by having a lingua franca that aims to build literacy in the topic, creative capability can absolutely be taught. We're dealing with a complex part of human cognition, but when you see a marketer who at the start of the day is convinced they are not in any way creative get introduced to a tool like the ladder, and you watch their confidence blossom right there in front of you, it's incredibly worthwhile' (Haq, 2016).

### Tip

Use the ladder as a framework to judge and improve your existing ideas. Think about what components your company might find useful and create your own.

Heineken also has an internal creative council, comprising its agencies' creative directors and internal marketers to encourage collaboration and debate.

## ***Google's moon shots***

Google CEO and co-founder Larry Page doesn't believe in making small improvements – he's looking for breakthrough ideas that will change the status quo. Google calls this process 10x – making any product 10 times better than its competitors. Google X was established in 2010 to try to imagine the seemingly impossible – the self-driving car and Google Glass were born out of this process.

Page explains (Levy, 2013):

It's natural for people to want to work on things that they know aren't going to fail. But incremental improvement is guaranteed to be obsolete over time. Especially in technology, where you know there's going to be non-incremental change. So a big part of my job is to get people focused on things that are not just incremental. Google calls these big bets 'moon shots'.

**Tip**

Be clear what kind of creativity you are looking for – if it's breakthrough or incremental – and add some real ambition to the problem statement.

***Paddy Power's mischief department***

Bookmaker Paddy Power's creative ambitions are clearly articulated. In order to drive bets, its 'Mischief Department' has hijacked sporting events to create headlines across the world's media. The department's name drives a clear creative direction, one that points to risk-taking and pushing boundaries. Stunts have involved Stephen Hawking, the Vatican, illegal immigrants and the Amazon rainforest. Despite being a listed company Paddy Power's says it has a 'tongue-in-cheek attitude' to marketing.

Harry Dromey was Paddy Power's chief Mischief Maker from 2013 to 2015. He told me: 'The riskiest thing is to be boring. You need an element of risk to make great creative work. You also need to foster a culture, the right atmosphere and the attitude. Things get lost to consumers if messaging is bland.'

So far, so rational. But what about our next element – the unknown?

**10 Unk The unknown**

Despite all the research and debate, there is still much that is unknown in relation to creativity. By reason alone, it is still beyond comprehension. It may be surprising to read that the president of one of the most successful creative companies on the planet, Pixar's Ed Catmull (2014) believes in the importance of this element. In *Creativity, Inc* he writes: 'The mechanisms that keep us safe from unknown threats have been hardwired into us since before our ancestors were fighting off sabre-tooth tigers with sticks. But when it comes to creativity, the unknown is not our enemy. If we make room for it instead of shunning it, the unknown can bring inspiration and originality.'

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## S Serendipity

The element of serendipity – the faculty of making happy and unexpected discoveries by accident – also plays its part in creativity. Fleming’s discovery of penicillin is a well-documented example of finding what you’re not looking for. His accidental observation of bacteria in a Petri dish led to his Nobel Prize in 1945.

Swiss engineer George de Mestral invented Velcro following a walk with his dogs when he noticed that tiny burdock burrs had attached themselves to their fur via their tiny hooks.

Many writers include chance, luck, fate and magic in their descriptions of creativity.

In *Big Magic* (2015) Elizabeth Gilbert writes: ‘The Greeks and Romans both believed in the external daemon of creativity... who lived within the walls of your home and who sometimes helped you in your labours.’ The Romans called this your genius – your guardian deity, the conduit of your inspiration. Which is to say, the Romans didn’t believe that an exceptionally gifted person *was* a genius; they believed that an exceptionally gifted person *had* a genius.

Shakespeare refers to them in his sonnets, and later the Romantic poets like Blake and Coleridge invoked the muse for creative inspiration. Rudyard Kipling noted that he had a supernatural ‘daemon’ that commanded him to write the *Jungle Books* and *Kim*.

Even today innumerable songwriters, designers and artists cite their ‘muse’ as inspiration. The realm of the arts is where society is perhaps more inclined to acknowledge the concept of the unknown and unexplainable in relation to creativity.

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Ar

40

Sc

## Art and science

This periodic table would not be complete without a nod to art and science – creativity is often described as a blend of these two elements and there are many books dedicated to both areas.

Picasso is often named when I ask people to list the creatives who inspire them, along with a business maverick like Sir Richard Branson. Scientists crop up less often.

By necessity, scientists are champions of rationality and logical ninjas. Logic is a crucial pillar of the creative process, but this fact tends to get overlooked in favour of the idea of an ‘aha!’ moment that erupts out of the blue.

The focus of this book is ‘applied creativity’ for business, but there are many elements that apply whatever the creative endeavour; the need for grit, failure, passion and imagination to name but a few.

## CREATIVE EXPERIMENT

### THE ARMCHAIR JUDGE

Challenge yourself, your definitions of creativity and your objectivity. From the suggestions in this chapter, pick some criteria to evaluate ideas against – perhaps ‘novelty, value and surprise’ (Maher and Fisher, 2012) or the Heineken creative ladder. Now use these criteria as a lens to judge anything creatively, in your field or beyond. It will challenge your thinking and push you to really explore *why* and *how* something is creative.

Take the list and apply it to a product, service or idea out in the world. You could set up your own ‘creative counsel’ with a group of your colleagues and compare notes.

Find relevant examples from your sector – perhaps The Grocer New Product Awards, Thinkbox TV Planning Awards, the Cannes Lions Festivals of Creativity, Innovation or Healthcare or The Webby or Shorty Awards. Whatever your industry benchmark is, pick 5–10 pieces of work to assess. Using your criteria, take 10 minutes with a coffee and evaluate the work.

Pay attention to your initial (emotional) responses, apply some of the thinking and criteria in this chapter, and then reassess. You could try using the evaluation matrix tool (see Chapter 8) and allocate each item a score.

- What do you notice about your responses?
- How easy do you find it to be objective?
- What might you do differently next time you have to judge creative ideas?

## REVIEW THE CHAPTER

- What's your personal definition of creativity?
- Do any of the quotes included above particularly resonate with you?
- Do you think that you look through any of the lenses more than the others – a person-centric, process, product or place approach over any of the others?
- Would your team benefit from a shared understanding? What about your organization?
- How do you think the definitions affect how you might evaluate creativity?
- What might you do differently at work having read this chapter?

**Table 1.1** Definitions

<b>Element</b>	<b>Key question</b>	<b>Which area most interests you in terms of developing your personal or team action plan and finding out more? Rate your interest level out of 10</b>
Novelty (N)	How new or original is the idea, product or any other output?	
Idea (I)	What defines a creative idea for you or your company?	
Surprise (Sr)	Is there an element of the unusual or the unexpected in the idea or product?	
Value (V)	What is the value of the idea both to the creator and the intended audience?	
Knowledge (K)	Could you improve your knowledge in your own or a related field to improve creative ideas?	

(continued)

**Table 1.1** (Continued)

Element	Key question	Which area most interests you in terms of developing your personal or team action plan and finding out more? Rate your interest level out of 10
Evaluation (Ev)	What criteria do you apply to your own or others' creative work?	
Unknown (Unk)	What do you think about the role of chance, magic and luck in relation to your own creativity?	
Serendipity (S)	Do you have any personal experience of serendipity?	
Art (Ar)	Do you relate to aesthetics, beauty and the need for self-expression associated with being artistic?	
Science (Sc)	Do you relate to the order, logic and process associated with science?	

## IN A NUTSHELL

A shared understanding and definition of creativity can help to set the direction and creative ambition for a business and act as a filter for which strategies to pursue. Later on, the definitions can act as criteria by which to judge your own and others' ideas. As a starting point it's useful to have your own definition and if you're running a team or a company to have a collective definition that can act as the North Star for your initiatives.

**DIG DEEPER**

Ken Robinson's 2006 TED Talk 'Do schools kill creativity?' challenges notions of what creativity is, how it relates to intelligence and what it means for education.