



Creativity Unleashed

Module 1 – What and Why

Welcome

Welcome to the Creativity Unleashed Course. The 25 modules provide an opportunity to explore the nature of creativity, its implications for you as an individual and for business, the techniques that can stimulate creativity and the skills required to help others be creative. This is a very practical course. We will touch on theory where necessary, but the aim is to build up a powerful toolkit of knowledge that can be immediately applied to enhance creativity.

Before rushing into any enterprise it is worth taking a step back and asking what we are doing and why we are doing it. This is the purpose of the first module.

Throughout the course you will encounter a wide range of activities and exercises. The intention is that, with the exception of ‘offline’ exercises, you undertake the exercises as you go along. Don’t be tempted to skip over them and come back to them. You will not return, and a lot of the learning depends on the outcome of the exercises.

You will also see factoid boxes. These help expand on the information in the section. Feel free to follow these up as you proceed through the course.

The course can be undertaken directly on the screen, or printed off – whichever suits you. Where possible you can type answers into boxes on the screen if you prefer the on-screen approach.

Reading

Although it can be undertaken perfectly well without it, we recommend that you accompany the course with the book *Imagination Engineering*. You will also find in the factoids and the exploration section mention a number of other books. It is quite possible to complete the course without reading any of these books, but each has been chosen to expand on points within the course.

To make it easy to find out more, each book named in the course has links to a page with Amazon.com and Amazon.co.uk links. Try clicking on the *Imagination Engineering* name here or above. Clicking on the link will take you to the appropriate page to find out more about

the book. You also have the opportunity to jump to Amazon and order a copy of the book at that point.

Books will generally be referenced as you come to the appropriate point in the module. The following are a small number of recommend books for general reading on creativity:

Creativity and Innovation for Managers by Brian Clegg (Butterworth Heinemann, 1999) - A practical agenda for bringing creativity into your company. Looks at what business creativity is, how it can benefit the company, how to get the most out of it and how to encourage it.

Crash Course in Creativity by Brian Clegg and Paul Birch (Kogan Page, 2002) - A packed resource book of creativity techniques and exercises in a flexible format that allows you to pull out a technique to attack a problem or generate new ideas at a moment's notice.

Serious Creativity by Edward de Bono (HarperCollins, 1996) - The de Bono book that pulls it all together, summarising a range of creativity techniques and methods. A very dry, serious approach to creativity as the title suggests, railing against the more extreme, Californian-style, let it all hang out creativity.

A Whack on the Side of The Head by Roger von Oech (Warner Books 1983) - Champion of the less formal style of business creativity, von Oech's approach may be a bit too zany for some European audiences, but he knows his stuff and puts it across with verve. Don't let the surface gloss put you off a very solid content.

What is creativity?

Creativity is such an integral part of human life that it is sometimes difficult to define just what it actually is. It is a very human characteristic, involving the development of new ideas, constructing new ways of looking at the world, grasping new perceptions. This requirement for newness is seen in the roots of the alternative word 'innovation'.

Almost everyone sees creativity subtly differently – about all we can agree on is that it is a good thing (unless, perhaps you are an accountant). In fact arguably, creativity is not a single entity but an amalgam of three related concepts, a view we will return to in a few minutes.

Some writers on creativity put subtly different meanings on the terms 'creativity' and 'innovation'. Theodore Levitt of Harvard Business School sees creativity as the act of *thinking* of new things, where innovation involves actually *doing* new things – but this division does not fit well with the way the words are used in the English language. Sometimes innovation is restricted to the generation of ideas, while creativity is also used to encompass problem solving, but such a distinction is artificial. In this course we will use the terms interchangeably.

Before exploring the three components of creativity, we will take a first step into the practical side of creativity.



Exercise – the paperclip

Take two minutes to note down in the box below every possible use you can think of for a paperclip.

Don't go on until you have undertaken this stage of the exercise.

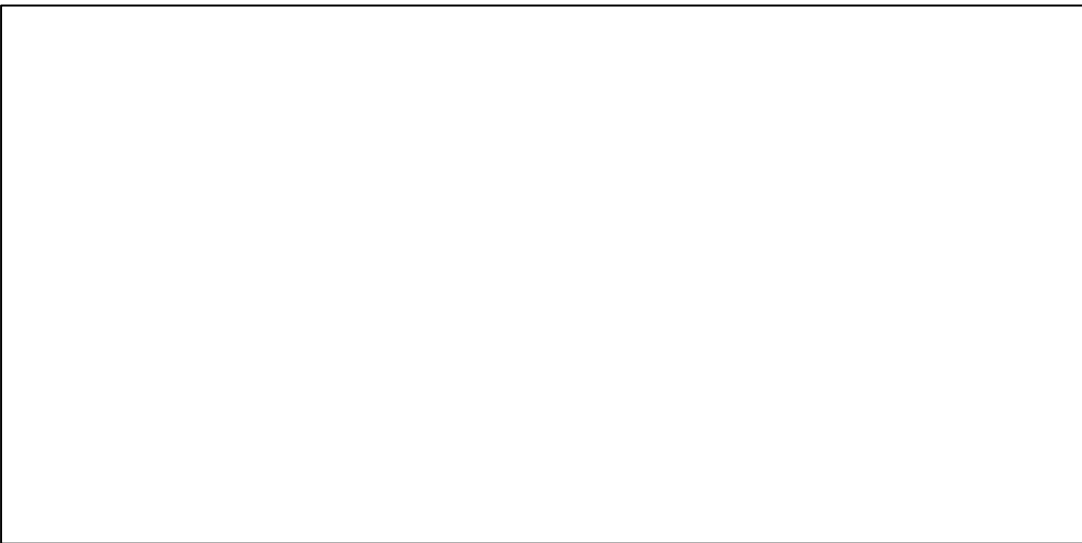
Now take two minutes to note down in the box below everything that you *can't* do with a paperclip.

Again, don't go any further without undertaking this stage of the exercise.

Most people find it a lot easier to find things you can't do with a paperclip than things you can. However, with creativity you can reverse the situation. In fact, in almost every case that you suggested a paperclip could *not* be used, it actually can. Take another look at your list:

Select a few of your suggestions where a paperclip was not usable. Could you turn things around if a paperclip could be made out of anything? If it could be any size or material? If it could be processed in any way? If you could describe as a paperclip anything that could be used to hold a few sheets of paper together?

See how many of your suggestions could have been countered before proceeding.



If you are having trouble with any of your requirements, remember how broad our definition of a paperclip now is. For example you could:

- Eat it – if it was made out of a carrot. (Actually you can eat a normal paperclip if chopped into small bits, but we don't recommend it.)
- Drink it – if it was made out of ice and melted first.
- Drive it – either make a vehicle out of metal from melted down paperclips or use the door of a car as a paperclip.
- Go on a date with it – a human being's hands make perfectly good paperclip s.
- ... and so on.

By now you may be irritated. This is cheating. Yes it is – and cheating is the basis of a lot of creativity. Because what we describe as cheating is actually a matter of getting round assumptions. The assumption in this case was that a paperclip was a little bent piece of wire. It was never stated in the exercise that this was what was meant – you just made the assumption.

Similarly, a lot of real world problems are caused by assumptions; a lot of opportunities to develop new ideas are foiled by assumptions. Yet these assumptions can often be broken or got round. Creativity frequently depends on testing assumptions, or on coming at a problem from a

whole new direction so that the assumptions don't get in the way. Cheating isn't always a bad thing.

The three faces of creativity

The idea that creativity is in fact three linked concepts was developed by Arthur Koestler, a key figure in the development of our understanding of thought. Koestler divided creativity into three persona – the sage, the artist and the jester. The sage provides our usual understanding of creativity in business. The sage represents the sudden insight that provides a new idea. The sage is Archimedes in the bath shouting 'Eureka!' The sage is the invention of a better mousetrap.

The artist contributes the traditional concept of creativity that most people in the street would identify. Art, music, literature – the production of a thing of beauty or an inspirational item, requiring in the artist the ability to pull together their direct experience and indirect knowledge to create something new.

The jester forms an aspect of creativity that is perhaps less obvious – humour. Creativity works by seeing the world differently, and so does humour. Humour is, in effect, verbal creativity. Both those involved primarily in the arts and in business tend to take themselves rather seriously, so frequently they do not benefit from the creative value of humour. The persona Koestler employed here was particularly apt. The court jester was the only one in a court full of yes-men who could question the king's actions. This creative (and risky) role is the unsung hero of creativity.



Factoid - Arthur Koestler

Koestler was an unlikely person to contribute to a discipline largely dominated by psychologists and business theorists. Born in Budapest in 1905, he worked as a foreign correspondent for many years. During the Second World War he moved to England, where he concentrated on writing. He committed suicide in 1983.

Koester's key book on creativity, *The Act of Creation* (Penguin, 1989) is not an easy read. It is long and lacks focus, yet it does give some valuable insights into the nature of creativity.

Although we tend to focus on Koester's sage when thinking of business, each of the aspects of creativity can be valuable in a business context. Artistic creativity is particularly valuable in facilitating good communication, while the jester can be just as effective at highlighting the shortcomings of a chief executive as of a king.



Factoid – Beautiful Corporations and Corporate Fools

In their book *Beautiful Corporations* (FT Prentice Hall, 2000) Paul Dickinson and Neil Svensen emphasize the impact of design and style on the success of a business. They suggest

that there is no going back on the importance of style to business popularity with the consumer – a clear example of the artistic aspect of creativity coming into play in a pure business context.

For more on the jester at work, David Firth and Alan Leigh examine the need for *The Corporate Fool* (Capstone, 1998), providing an insight into the value of corporate jesters, and a guide to acquiring one.

The different aspects of creativity all reflect a synthesis of knowledge and originality, seeing old concepts in new combinations and bringing in entirely new directions. Exactly what is happening in the brain to enable creativity to occur will be explored in the next module.

Why creativity?

Creativity is an essential both for the individual and for the company. We are familiar with Lewis Carroll's image of having to run to stay in the same place, but this has never been a more appropriate picture of life than it is today. One critical reason for the need for creativity is simply enabling individuals and companies to keep up with the ever-growing rate of change.



Factoid – Lewis Carroll

Carroll is a popular source of words of wisdom for business, but probably the most quoted of all is the Red Queen's description of her chessboard country in *Through the Looking Glass*:

“Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that.”

The full text of *Through the Looking Glass* is available online at *The Online Books Page*

As individuals we are also more and more dependent on creativity for our working existence. We live in an age where expertise and knowledge are becoming the prime factors that make an individual saleable. Having creativity in the way we work, and in the way we find work is becoming more and more essential. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Being more creative about work makes it more enjoyable – but you do have to be able to be creative.

Companies too have a constant need for creativity. To devise and produce new products and services. To cope with the problems that are constantly thrown up. To deal with increasingly fierce and unexpected competition. And to stand out in a global marketplace.



Exercise – Creative Web sites

Spend five minutes exploring the ways that big name companies try to be creative in putting their message across on Web sites. Explore six different company sites of your choice, looking for a wide range of businesses.



Factoid - Mining the Internet

Finding your way effectively around the Internet is an increasingly essential business skill, and one that will be a fundamental part of this short course. Guessing a company's Web address is often not difficult. Sandwich the company's name between www. and either .com or .co.uk – for example:

www.sony.com [<http://www.sony.com/>]

www.ibm.com [<http://www.ibm.com/>]

www.levi.com [<http://www.levi.com/>]

Try running the words together in a company with more than one word in its name.

My book *Mining the Internet* (Kogan Page, 1999) provides a very effective guide to the skills needed to make the Internet (the Web, e-mail, newsgroups and more) a practical business and learning resource.

Creativity isn't always about using the technology. It can enhance the style of the site, the text and graphical content, the whole approach that is taken, just as much as the use of leading edge effects. This is as true in every other business application of creativity as it is on the Web.

Creativity and competition

One of the principle drivers of creativity is the impact of competition. Among the factors the business guru Michael Porter identified as potential strategies for dealing with competition are differentiation and cost cutting. Arguably, differentiation – making your company and your products stand out from the crowd – is the best sustainable strategy, and inherently requires creativity. Surprisingly, cost cutting also requires creativity to reduce costs without damaging quality and customer service – and to cut costs yet again after it has already been done a number of times.



Factoid – Michael E. Porter

Michael Porter, a professor at Harvard Business School, has cornered the market in expertise in competition. He wrote the definitive book *Competitive Strategy* and regularly speaks on the subject. An idea of the breadth of his thinking on competition can be seen in his book *Michael E. Porter on Competition* which features a swathe of Porter's articles over 15 years of considering this most fundamental aspect of business.

For many companies, the need to differentiate is reason enough for enhancing creativity. This driver is equally applicable to individuals. Like it or not, we live in a competitive environment. We need to differentiate ourselves. To get jobs, to get promotions – to achieve our personal goals. Business creativity is as much a benefit for the individual as for the company.



Exercise – Porter perception

To expand your awareness of Michael Porter's theories, particularly around differentiation, spend 10 minutes searching the Web for information on Porter and his work. This exercise is partly to help strengthen your ability to mine the Internet for information before getting further into the course.

If you are having trouble, start with the Google search engine (<http://www.google.com>). Try entering search queries like:

"michael porter" competition

"michael porter" competition

and

"michael porter" differentiation

Creativity and you

A lot of the course will concentrate on creativity from the business viewpoint, but it is equally of value to you as an individual. We are all beginning to realize that the job for life is a fiction. This can be seen as something to fear. Lack of certainty, lack of consistency, frequent change, ever-present stress are all unpleasant symptoms of the new business world. But in true cliché-like fashion, the problem is also an opportunity. Once you accept that a single company is no longer to be your career focus, you can realize the importance of building a career around yourself. Not around what the company wants to do with you, or thinks is best for you, but around your own skills and desires. There is no guarantee of success, but if you do succeed, there is a guarantee of much more fulfilment that would otherwise have been possible.

Creativity will help you along the way by improving your chances of success. Usually in business creativity we focus on solving the problems of Company X and generating new product and service ideas for Company X. With a personal focus you can consider yourself as a company that creativity can help succeed.

Like all creativity exercises, it is not sensible to launch into generating ideas without first knowing where you are heading. The exercise that follows is designed to help you be clear about your own direction, so that the creativity skills and techniques you learn on this course can be applied just as much to your own goals as to those of your company.

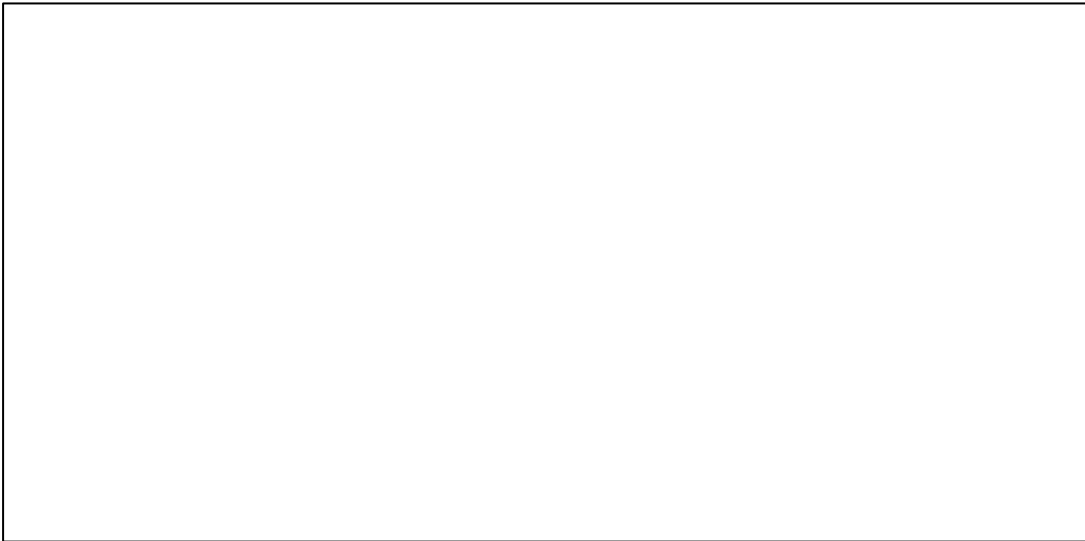


Exercise – Hitting the jackpot

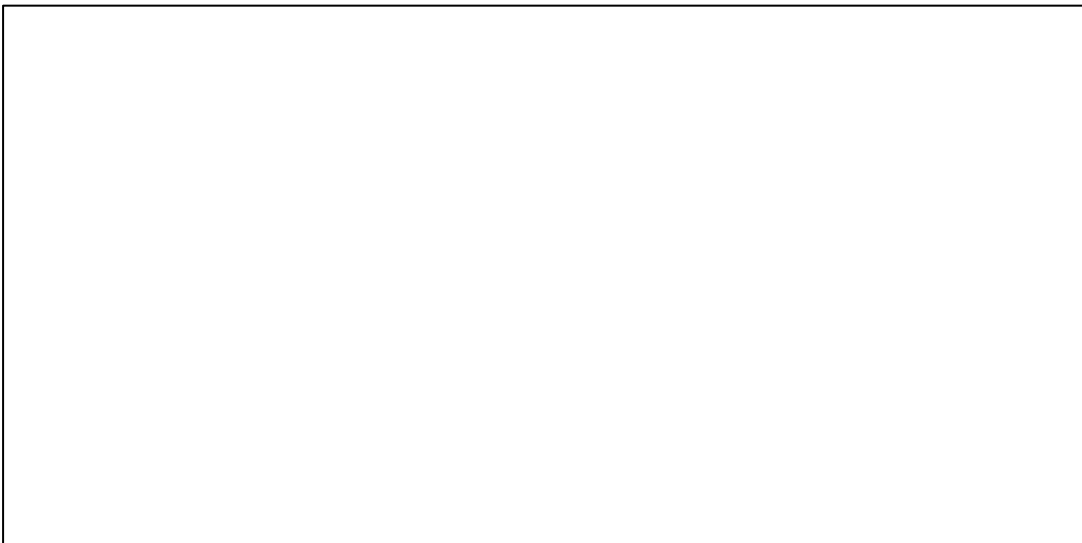
First, jot down in the box below between ten and twenty of the most important work activities (include unpaid work) you regularly undertake.

Now, imagine that you had just won so much money on the lottery that you never have to work again. Take a minute or two to enjoy the sensation and imagine what you would do with five per cent of it. Then revisit your list of activities. In the two boxes below note down which of those activities you would drop:

And which you would still do:



Now make a note of your main skills. Include everything you do currently at work, but also anything you do in your social life, anything you used to do but don't do any more, and anything that you feel you would be good at (be honest with yourself) but haven't had a chance to do.



If you were wealthy, what new activities might you start, based on the skills above? Again, be realistic. Don't put 'play sport for my country' just because you reckon you aren't bad when playing in the park with your friends. (Box is on next page...)

Keep the text you have typed into the three activities boxes above – the activities to keep, to drop and the new activities. You can do this by printing off these pages.

On a regular basis, revisit these activities. Look for opportunities to move from what you currently do towards undertaking the desirable activities. When you are trying out creativity techniques, make one of the problems you address how to do more of the activities you want to be doing and less of those you don't. You owe it to yourself.



Exploration

The penultimate section of each module is an exploration. You will be directed to a number of Web sites. These will provide new insights into the subject – in the case of this introductory module, the sites are particularly helpful for finding out more about creativity in general. Spend around 10 minutes exploring the sites. This is part of the course; don't skimp it. Exploration is a valuable part of creativity.

You will also find a book list, pulling together the books that are noted in the various Factoids. If you have checked them out as you went along feel free to ignore the books here – it's just in case you prefer to follow up your references all in one go.

The Web sites to visit are:

- Creativity Unleashed Limited [<http://www.cul.co.uk>] - wide range of creativity resources.
- Top achievement [<http://www.topachievement.com>] – self development information including goal setting.

Bookmark these sites as you may wish to refer to them again in the future.

The books that have been referenced are:

- *The Act of Creation* (Arthur Koestler – Penguin, 1989)
- *Beautiful Corporations* (Paul Dickinson and Neil Svensen – FT Prentice Hall, 2000)
- *Competitive Strategy* (Michael E. Porter – Free Press, 1981)
- *The Corporate Fool* (David Firth and Alan Leigh – Capstone, 1998)
- *Creativity and Innovation for Managers* (Brian Clegg – Butterworth Heinemann, 1999)
- *Imagination Engineering* (Brian Clegg & Paul Birch, FT Prentice Hall, 2000)
- *Crash Course in Creativity* (Brian Clegg and Paul Birch, Kogan Page, 2002)
- *On Competition* (Michael E. Porter – Harvard Business School, 1998)
- *Mining the Internet* (Brian Clegg – Kogan Page, 1999)
- *Serious Creativity* (Edward de Bono – HarperCollins, 1996)
- *A Whack on the Side of The Head* (Roger von Oech – Warner Books 1983)



Refresher

Each module of the short course contains a refresher section. This revisits the key points of this module, and will reinforce lessons from earlier modules as you pass through the course. Try to answer each of the prompts – but if your memory is failing you scroll back to freshen up.

1. What are Koestler's three persona of creativity?

2. In what areas of competition might creativity help a company (or an individual)?

Congratulations – you have completed the first module of the Creativity Unleashed course.

If you would like to buy other modules of the course, please visit the course website, <http://www.cul.co.uk/consulting/creative6.htm>.

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