

# Why creativity?

(An excerpt (Chapter One) from [‘Creativity in Coaching’](#) by Angela Dunbar)



## The value of creativity

*“From creating works of art, producing abundant inexpensive water, developing non-invasive health devices or net zero energy homes, finding medical cures, restoring and improving urban infrastructure, generating new energy sources, and preventing nuclear terror, to developing sustainable ways to solve complex geopolitical problems, the ability to produce and implement new, useful ideas is rapidly becoming a critical attribute for leveraging knowledge success and increasing quality of life.”*

(Plucker et al, 2015)

Creativity is becoming an increasingly valued commodity in a fast-changing, unpredictable environment such as the world we all live in today. In fact, it is considered one of the four core 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills that people need to succeed in work, life and citizenship – along with collaboration, communication and critical thinking. This has been well-documented and acknowledged by the international coalition “Partnership for 21st Century Learning” (known as

‘P21’<sup>1</sup> , whose mission is to unite business, government and education leaders worldwide to make innovative learning a reality.

It is the single most important leadership quality, according to a large scale commercial study by IBM, at the beginning of this decade <sup>2</sup>. More recently, the DDI Global Leadership Forecast (2014/2015) highlighted ‘innovation’ as one of the core topics keeping CEOs up at night, with only 26% of those surveyed feeling up to the challenge that today’s business world demands of them in this regard.

More widely, other research has indicated that only 25% of people believe they live up to their creative potential (Adobe 2012)<sup>4</sup> .

In summary, we need more of it than we have!

So what exactly is it? As this book will highlight, much of that seems to depend on your perspective. Creativity can be many different things to many different people, and how you view it affects how you use it.



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<sup>1</sup> P21 website: <http://www.p21.org/>

You can download P21’s research briefing document on creativity through this link:  
[http://www.fotip.org/uploads/4/8/0/4/4804162/p21\\_4cs\\_research\\_brief\\_series\\_-\\_creativity.pdf](http://www.fotip.org/uploads/4/8/0/4/4804162/p21_4cs_research_brief_series_-_creativity.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> IBM report “Capitalising on Complexity” produced 2010, can be accessed here:

[http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE\\_GB\\_TI\\_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF](http://www-01.ibm.com/common/ssi/cgi-bin/ssialias?subtype=XB&infotype=PM&appname=GBSE_GB_TI_USEN&htmlfid=GBE03297USEN&attachment=GBE03297USEN.PDF)

<sup>3</sup> The Adobe study can be found here:

[http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pdfs/Adobe\\_State\\_of\\_Create\\_Global\\_Benchmark\\_Study.pdf](http://www.adobe.com/aboutadobe/pressroom/pdfs/Adobe_State_of_Create_Global_Benchmark_Study.pdf)

**Personal Exercise:**

***For you, creativity is like what?***

Please spend some time reflecting on the question above. Then, take some paper and *write down* and/or *draw* your reflections in any way that you want, using words, symbols, doodles or drawings, before you read on. There is no right or wrong answer to this question!

## **What is creativity?**

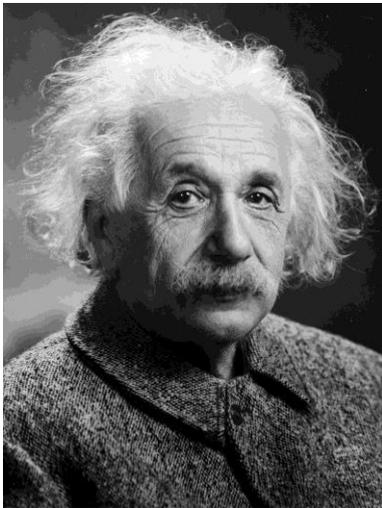
Creativity is an elusive spark that appears to separate humans from animals. It describes what happens when something new, original and valuable is created. Once thought to belong only to the divine, 'everyday' creativity gets problems solved and enables people to go beyond habitual thinking and behaviour. Einstein had it when he discovered the theory of relativity. Steve Jobs had it when he came up with the iPhone. Every child demonstrates they have it when they step beyond what they have been told to imagine something different. You have it whenever you discover a new way to do something, however trivial it may seem.

But, like many well-documented and discussed concepts, when we try and nail down a clear and specific definition we soon find ourselves on shaky ground. Creativity as a topic for scientific study has been poorly neglected, only really identified as a valuable subject of enquiry since the 1950s. Despite the huge benefit that creativity could potentially bring to the world, if harnessed and developed, research has been haphazard and sparse.

Creativity still remains largely an enigma, especially the moments leading up to that sudden flash of inspiration, commonly known as an 'insight' moment. Uncontrollable and unpredictable, creativity remains a rare and mysterious happening.

What if people were at their creative best all of the time? Can you imagine a world where we could enhance those moments of insight and recreate them at will?

Imagination is creativity's poor cousin. Creativity is seen as an admirable quality and much sought after, but if you hear someone being referred to as 'highly imaginative' a less favourable image is conjured up. Possibly of someone with their 'head in the clouds' or even a little bit 'flaky'. But imagination is a key part of creativity and refers to the ability of being able to conjure up images, sounds, objects and ideas within our internal mind's eye. As children we are all great at this kind of activity, but as adults many of us lose touch with our inner world and choose to prioritise the external world as real-life and therefore much more important. However, our inner world of the imagination is absolutely vital to us, personally and as a society.



Einstein once said  
*"Imagination ... is more  
important than knowledge.  
Knowledge is limited.  
Imagination encircles the  
world."*

(Calaprice, 2000)

Despite popular belief, the truth is that your inner world and external reality are not entirely separate domains anyway. Our perception of the world 'out there' is achieved through much the same network of neurons that we use when we are remembering or imagining things in our heads. In fact, there are always gaps in our perception that we fill in with our imagination anyway!

There is a wealth of evidence in hundreds of studies about perception that supports the finding that people tend to see what they expect to, not what is really there. So, we all project our inner world onto the external, making it difficult to completely separate our imaginative 'perceptual' space from the physical domain. Our mind's eye is not contained within the physical boundaries of our brains, but projected 360 degrees all around us, superimposed onto the physical space that we inhabit and move around within.

Innovation is yet another relative to creativity, but this one is more like its rich aunt. It is a term often used interchangeably with creativity, but more so in the world of business. Innovation has a wider scope than creativity's mere ideas, and includes the process that transforms those ideas into reality, such as developing new products or services that bring greater value and ultimately greater profits. But innovation cannot happen without the creative ideas in the first place.

As a coach, you may seldom meet coachees who directly mention creativity as their main focus of attention. Nor will many set outcomes for improving creativity as their key aim from the coaching experience. However, you would be hard pressed to think of any coaching topic or outcome that could not be more easily achieved should the coachee's creativity 'quotient' be given a boost.

Creativity in coaching is particularly useful when you or your coachee is 'stuck', perhaps trapped within your own circles of thought. This often happens when the issue has been too narrowly defined and an impasse is quickly reached with a sense of frustration: all options appear to have already been exhausted. Or it can be simply because the problem has been around for so long it has become an ingrained habit.

Personally, I think creativity is at the heart of all successful coaching activity. Coaching helps people find ways to achieve their outcomes by discovering new paths of thinking, taking different actions and trying alternative behaviours. It's all about encouraging original and unusual answers to stuck patterns of doing and thinking. The successful coach needs to light that spark of creativity in their coachees. And, if the coach is in touch with their own creative energy, this will be much easier to achieve.



### References:

Calaprice, Alice. (Ed.). (2000). *The Expanded Quotable Einstein*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press.

Plucker, J. A., Kaufman, J. C., & Beghetto, R. A. (2015). What we know about creativity. *4C Research Series. Washington DC: Partnership for 21st Century Learning*.

