

# Creativity in organisations can be measured and acquired

*The Creativity Awareness Programme*

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## Literature Reference

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**C**reativity plays an ever increasing role in organisations. This article discusses a model consisting of five criteria for creativity in organisations. This model was the foundation of the Creativity Awareness Programme, which is being applied with much success at Unilever Research Vlaardingen (URV). Like many others, URV want to stimulate the creativity in its workers to reach big and bold innovations.

This article is particularly interesting for organisations striving for a continuous innovation flow. After all, no innovation without creativity. The article explains how creativity and its many aspects can be made subject of discussion.

## **The Creativity Awareness Programme**

The Creativity Awareness Programme [CAP in short] is a tool to place creativity in an individual and organisational context. As such the programme can be used by individual staff members, teams and departments or entire organisations.

CAP comprises three elements: the Creativity Awareness Model, the Creativity Climate Questionnaire and the Creativity Awareness Training Modules, together forming an all-in package suitable for both individuals and organisations looking for ways to enhance the use of creativity. Using creativity leads to solving problems using Creative Problem Solving, it leads to new creative projects and new patents and to a new mentality. The package is available in English and Dutch.

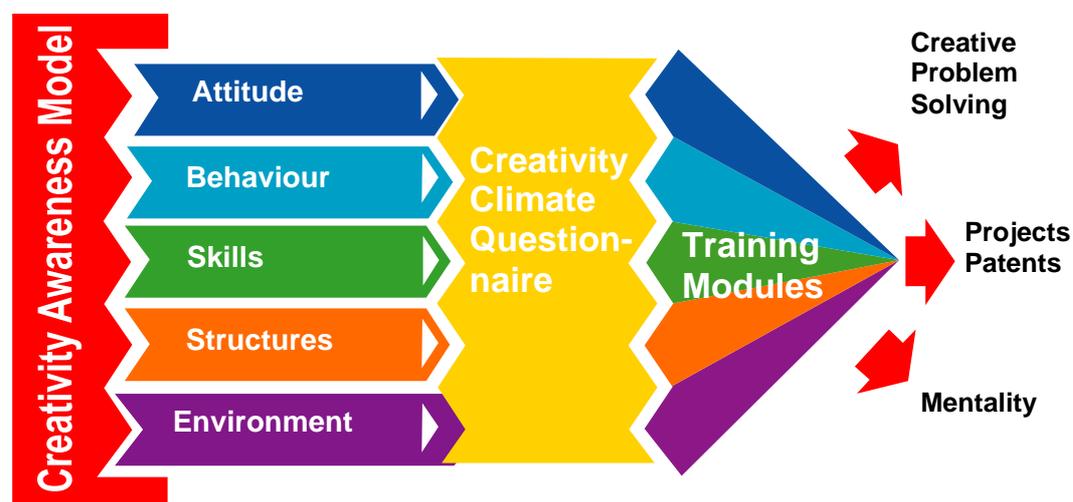


Figure 1: The Creativity Awareness Programme

## The Creativity Awareness Programme objectives

The Creativity Awareness Programme aims to make creativity subject of discussion within organisations. All too often, creativity is a vague and hard to describe concept. With this programme creativity becomes tangible and concrete, as it focuses on measuring and learning to use creativity. Participants are offered a set of tools to tap and use their own creativity and that of the team and to implement the results in the work and structures of the organisation.

By singling out the organisational aspects of creativity, such as required resources, time, rewards, idea management structures and high-level support, the participants, after having followed the Creativity Awareness Programme, will be able to actually change their work processes and environment and remove barriers in the way of creativity once and for all.

## The Creativity Awareness Model

The Creativity Awareness Model has been made to support the programme. It defines five creativity criteria each covering a few areas of attention. The five criteria are: Attitude, Behaviour, Skills, Structures and Environment.



Figure 2: The Creativity Awareness Model

This model has a multiple-level focus: personal attitude and creativity skills, team behaviour and organisational structures and environment. The first three criteria relate to employees and serve to find out what employees think of their own creativity - "Am I creative?" - or the way they handle creativity within the team - "How do we react to each other's ideas?" - and "Which creativity skills are used frequently?". The last two criteria are aimed specifically at the implementation of creativity in the work place. They relate to organisations focusing on the implementation of creativity in the daily routines, such as having time to work on creative ideas, rewards, idea management structures and high-level support. They facilitate employees to actually ban all obstacles in the way of implementing creativity in their work processes and environment.

The following is a short outline of the five criteria.

### Attitude

Attitude is about the perception the employees have of their own personal creativity. Its areas of attention are: flexibility, sharing creativity and disposing of mental models.

### **Behaviour**

Behaviour is about the actions and interactions of the team with respect to creativity. Its areas of attention are among others: team behaviour, team composition, coaching style and the extent to which risk taking is allowed within the team.

### **Skills**

Skills are about knowledge, learning and using creativity techniques. Its areas of attention are among others: availability of creativity courses and the application method of creativity skills during work or problem solving processes.

### **Structures**

Structures is about idea management structures and the organisational processes that stimulate creativity. Its areas of attention are among others: idea management, creativity measuring plans, availability of time, money, resources and creativity rewards.

### **Environment**

Environment is about aspects in the organisation that do or do not encourage creativity. Its areas of attention are among others: high-level support, strategy definition, decision-taking, communication, corporate culture, work place layout, and maintaining external contacts.

## **The Creativity Climate Questionnaire**

The Creativity Climate Questionnaire is a tool to measure the individual, team and/or organisational creativity.

The Creativity Climate Questionnaire bases on the five creativity criteria, each consisting of a number of questions relating to its specific areas of attention.



Figure 3: The Creativity Climate Questionnaire

The Questionnaire can be used in two ways. When used as a self-assessment tool, the employee fills in the Questionnaire, determines his/her score using the enclosed score sheet and asks for 'tips and hints' to improve on specific areas. It can also be used as a measuring tool for creativity within a team or entire organisation. After the self-assessment, all score sheets are sent to the facilitator who works out the results and analysis for the teams or organisation. The anonymity of participants can be guaranteed. With the outcome, the facilitator advises the employee or team a training route by designing the Creativity Awareness Training Modules using parts or all the five modules.

If necessary, the Creativity Climate Questionnaire is repeated after a specific period of time to establish better scores and thus better creative abilities of the employee(s) and the creative climate of the organisation.

## The Creativity Awareness Training Modules

Creativity training helps to make individuals aware of their own creative abilities and the abilities of the team. The outcome of the Creativity Climate Questionnaire may lead to the conclusion that creativity training is needed. The training modules which have been developed especially for this purpose can be used in any sequence desired, their contents and duration being adjustable to each specific team or work environment. Each complete training consists of separate modules composing a training route:



Figure 4: The Training Modules

Supported by management science and psychological theories, the modules relate to the areas of attention defined earlier. With the use of assignments, participants experience the theories themselves. After the training, participants will be aware of the meaning of creativity and its influencing factors. A score of creativity skills and techniques that are used in practical assignments are offered to them as well. After the training participants will be capable of structurally eliminating barriers and promoting boosts in the organisation.

So far, 300 Unilever Research Vlaardingen staff members have followed the Creativity Awareness Training modules and their reactions are full of praise.

### **Reactions by participants:**

- *Now I know what creativity is.*
- *Now I understand that creativity is a crucial ingredient for innovation and know how to stimulate it.*
- *Profound theoretical information.*
- *Now I know that everybody is creative and how to deploy it in me.*
- *You learn to "redirect" your thoughts.*
- *You learn about the idea-acceptation process.*

Both internal and external reactions to the programme are positive, because it is a comprehensive programme that can be used by individuals, as well as by groups or organisations.

## The Creativity Awareness Route

If a principal or group wants to have more information on creativity, the following route might be applicable:

- An intake discussion with the principal determines a person's/group's objectives and the best step to be taken at that time.
- The person/group completes the Creativity Climate Questionnaire.
- The facilitator discusses the report with the principal.
- Based on the report a programme is designed in consultation with the principal and the group. Multiple-level intervention may be an option.
- The facilitator adjusts the training modules depending on the Creativity Climate Questionnaire results and the principals' and groups wishes.
- Ongoing intermediate assessments takes place with the principal.
- If necessary the CCQ is repeated after a certain period.

### Where does it get me?

Having followed the Creativity Awareness Programme, staff members start to attend Creative Problem Solving (CPS) sessions more. During these sessions ideas are generated to solve difficult problems with the use of creativity skills.

**CPS**



At Unilever Research Vlaardingen the result of these sessions reflects in a number of projects that have started from the ideas generated in the sessions. Some of the ideas sprung from a Creative Problem Solving session have even resulted in a patent and some project teams, using the sessions in their project, have been nominated for the annual Unilever Research Vlaardingen Award where creativity is a criterion.



**Projects  
Patents**

The Creativity Climate Questionnaire reveals any bottlenecks in the organisation, which may occur on an individual level, as much as on team level or senior management level. A team may even score high on 'Attitude' and 'own perception of creativity', while falling short in 'Behaviour' and 'team behaviour'. Analysis of the results may lead to the conclusion that individual creativity does not surface in the team. Apparently, team behaviour does not provide members sufficient stimulant to show any creativity they may have. Conclusions like this may demonstrate the need to reopen the discussion on organisational changes needed to break down obstacles in the way creativity.



**Mentality**

The discussion may give rise to a new mentality on the subject of creativity where employees share their problems and accept different opinions and ideas. "Funny" ideas are considered a potential innovation source and are taken very seriously. This automatically means that people appreciate each other more, which, naturally, has a positive effect on the work climate.

## **New developments**

The Creativity Awareness Programme has been designed to be used in any company besides Unilever Research Vlaardingen. To guarantee sufficient coaching it is currently being investigated whether the package could be placed under licence of one or more training or consultancy agencies so that more companies could benefit from Creativity Awareness Programme like Unilever Research Vlaardingen have.

Future plans involve the introduction of the Questionnaire on the Intranet or Internet for those who are interested in filling one out themselves.

### **"The making of ..."**

#### **Creativity within URV**

Late 1998, Unilever Research started the Creative Pathways programme, which involved the training of facilitators in the Synectics method. Early 1999, 45 project leaders held a conference where members of the Synectics crew gave a presentation on creativity. Each member of the conference was asked to name a few creativity enablers and barriers within the organisation. This resulted in a list of subjects which was later used to draw up a Creativity Awareness Programme.

In the years 1999 and 2000, several Creativity Awareness Sessions were held for those groups of employees who wanted to learn more about the potential benefits of creativity to their work. Moreover, various Creative Problem Solving sessions were organised.

The Creativity Awareness Programme followed a literature study on the subject of creativity, which included publications by Gaspersz, Kao and De Bruijn. Also ten senior managers at Unilever Research Vlaardingen grouped to tackle the crucial question: "What is creativity and where does it get us?". Based on the collected information the programme was set up.

As the need arose to make creativity measurable, the Creativity Climate Questionnaire was created. With the help of the Creativity Awareness Sessions that were already organised at Unilever Research Vlaardingen for training the creativity of a few interested individuals, the programme reached its final form comprising the Creativity Climate Questionnaire and the Creativity Awareness Training Modules. The programme has developed into a comprehensive package that can be used by organisations focused to improve creativity.

The concept version of the Creativity Climate Questionnaire underwent careful pre-testing by a representative varied group of Unilever Research Vlaardingen staff members. Their findings were used to validate the questionnaire in consultancy with the Statistics department. A median and the 10 and 90 percentage are used to express the results. In 1999, the Creativity Climate Questionnaire was published as a book and it is currently listed a Unilever Research publication.

Although the validated values are established within a research environment, plans are to establish a benchmark within other environments as well, such as with universities or service industries. So far (July 2001) over 330 people have completed the test. The results are recognised by all, both individuals and teams, which proves it to be reliable.

## More information

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### Curriculum Vitae

Nel Mostert is employed by Unilever Research Vlaardingen as Innovation Process Facilitator for the Facilitation Unit. She has been active in the field of cultural changes for 20 years. In 1999, she graduated Cum Laude from the part-time Marketing study, specialising in Communication at the "Haagse Hogeschool". She graduated for Business Administration, specialising in Organisation & Strategy, in July 2001 at the Open University. She graduated on the subject entitled "Eureka! in research, the place of creativity within Unilever Research Vlaardingen".

Lot Frijling has been part-time employed for 2 years by Unilever Research Vlaardingen as a Creativity Facilitator for the Facilitation Unit. In 1999, she graduated from the Communication Management study at the Utrecht "Hogeschool voor Communicatie en Management", specialising in a subject entitled "Dutch creativity – a study into the market of creativity and creativity courses". Currently she is studying Business Administration at the Erasmus University, Rotterdam.

As designers of the Creativity Awareness Programme, Mostert and Frijling are devoted within URV to improve the use of creativity in employees, focusing on project team members expected to deliver big and bolder innovations, rolled out to the market fast.

### Literature

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