

# CHAPTER 3

## Fostering Creativity

*Creativity is perhaps the most important concept in public administration.*

—Marshall Dimock (1986, p. 3)

Creativity is one of the hallmarks of leadership and is a central component in the science and, most particularly, the *art* of public administration. Goodsell (1992) stated, “The concept of creativity infuses and transcends . . . the values and lessons of artisanship for the everyday tasks of administration” (p. 252). The notion of creativity suggests innovation and originality—the ability to see old problems in novel ways and to devise new ways of thinking, analyzing, and doing. Creativity is critical to organizational success as it helps people and organizations to respond to new challenges and opportunities for change. As Denhardt (1993) said, “Today’s problems are different—more than anything else, they require creativity. . . . Rigid and unchanging organizations are more likely to fail while those promoting change and innovation succeed” (pp. 131–132). How can we foster creativity in ourselves and others? How can we manage people in public organizations in a manner that enhances and encourages their creativity consistent with public values and accountability?

The creative process is intuitive, is fluid, and thrives on the freedom to think and act outside of normal procedures. For these reasons, some may suggest that creativity is antithetical to government. Certainly, some of the common stereotypes concerning the so-called creative types as artistic, eccentric, and unpredictable stand in stark contrast to the stereotypes of government bureaucrats as rule bound, inflexible, and rigidly unchanging. But both stereotypes are wrong. It is not necessary to be artistic, eccentric, or mentally unusual to be creative. We all have the capacity to be creative, so in a sense we all are the creative type (Rawlinson, 1981; West, 1997). As we explore in this chapter, there are different

types of creativity, all of which can help organizations to solve problems and work better. Furthermore, creativity and innovation are alive and well in the public sector (West & Berman, 1997). For example, Denhardt and Denhardt (1999) found in their case studies of leading change in Fairfax, Virginia; Altamonte Springs, Florida; and Fremont, California, that city managers and their teams of executives had successfully developed a culture of creativity and innovation with tremendous benefits for the cities and citizens they serve. It is important to build on and enhance this creativity if public organizations are to meet their goals and serve the public well.

## Where Do We Begin?

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Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 = *not skilled at all*, 10 = *very skilled*) on the following dimensions of creativity:

- Perceiving problems
- Thinking intuitively
- Developing lots of ideas
- Being imaginative
- Visualizing my thoughts
- Creating new combinations of ideas
- Communicating ideas
- Reconceptualizing problems
- Relaxing and allowing my mind to wander
- Discovering new ways of doing things
- Seeing things from multiple perspectives

Based on this inventory, think about the following questions:

1. What are your creative strengths?

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2. What are your challenges in the creative process?

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3. What do you do to stimulate and support the creativity in others?

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## Ways of Thinking

What is creativity? There is no single, commonly accepted definition of creativity. Perhaps this lack of agreement on a single definition is appropriate given the nature of creativity, but it is nonetheless useful to look at what various writers and scholars have written about the concept. Creativity has been described as “any form of action that leads to results that are novel, useful, and predictable” (Boone & Hollingsworth, 1990, p. 3); as “seeing things that everyone around us sees while making connections that no one else has made” (Wycoff, 1995, p. 21); as “a process or change from what is and has been to what might be” (Singh, 1985, p. 108); and as “the entire process by which ideas are generated, developed, and transformed into value” (Kao, 1996, p. xvii). Definitions and interpretations of creativity differ, in part, because they are emphasizing different aspects of creativity in different settings. As shown in Figure 3.1, these varying perspectives can be grouped according to whether they focus on the personal characteristics or attributes of individuals, the possession of a group of conceptual abilities, the demonstration of particular

<i>Perspective on Creativity</i>	<i>Main Points</i>	<i>Practical Implications</i>
Creativity as a trait	People have innate characteristics that predispose them to be creative.	Some people have traits that make them naturally creative; such people probably will be creative wherever they are situated.
Creativity as cognitive skills and abilities	Creativity is based on conceptual skills and abilities such as divergent and abstract thinking.	Creativity can be enhanced by learning and improving certain cognitive skills.
Creativity as behavior	Creativity is whatever results in the formation of new ideas or solutions that are useful.	The value of the creativity lies in what useful outcomes are produced.
Creativity as a process	Creativity is a process of generating and testing ideas.	The creative process may or may not yield a new product or process; individuals can play different roles in the process.
Integrated views of creativity	Creativity is a function of the interaction among the person, the environment, and the task.	Some types of tasks and organizational environments can be more or less conducive to creativity.

**Figure 3.1** Alternative Views of Creativity

behaviors, or creativity as an integrated process (Gundry, Kickul, & Prather, 1994). As discussed in what follows, each of these perspectives provides insights and has practical implications for how we view creativity in ourselves and others.

## Characteristics of Creative Individuals

One way of looking at creativity is in terms of the traits, attributes, or characteristics that predispose a person to be considered “creative.” In this view, if a person possesses these traits, then he or she is deemed to be creative. The trait perspective also assumes that personal characteristics are more important than the nature of the organizational environment in which the person works. In other words, creative people probably will be creative wherever they are situated. Conversely, in this view, people who do not have these characteristics will not be creative, regardless of where they are situated. For example, some people are said to be naturally intuitive in that they do not amass facts and test theories; they simply “sense” things and therefore are thought of as creative. Creativity also has been described as synonymous with originality. People who demonstrate originality also have been found to be more intelligent and to have a preference for complexity—traits that also are associated with creativity (Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, 1958; Gundry et al., 1994).

This trait approach to creativity also has included attention to the personalities of creative people. For example, Gough (1979) developed and tested a creative personality scale based on the types of adjectives that people used to describe creative individuals. Some of the adjectives used that were positively correlated with creativity were *capable, clever, confident, humorous, original, reflective, resourceful, and self-confident*. Some of the adjectives used that were negatively associated with creativity were *affected, commonplace, conventional, submissive, and suspicious*. Others have emphasized personality characteristics of creative people, such as sensitivity, high energy, independent judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, self-confidence, and broad interests (Barron & Harrington, 1981). Traits such as persistence, curiosity, energy, intellectual honesty, and internal locus of control also have been suggested (Amabile, 1988).

Those who see creativity as residing in the personal characteristics of the individual would not deny that we all have some creative potential. This view of creativity suggests that although we all can exercise a certain degree of creativity, some of us simply have greater innate creative potential, in the same way as we all can learn to express ourselves artistically even though only some of us will become artists. But there are limits to this approach. As with trait theories of leadership (which we examine in Chapter 7), trait theories of creativity give us only part of the picture. Creativity involves more than simply the presence of certain traits; it also involves certain skills, motivations, behaviors, and environmental factors. Nonetheless, an understanding of the traits associated with creativity provides a partial explanation for why some of us feel more comfortable expressing ourselves creatively and why others of us might have to exert more effort to access our creative potential.

## Conceptual Skills and Abilities

Creativity also has been described as involving the use of a particular set of conceptual skills and abilities. This perspective differs from trait approaches in that it focuses more on cognition than on personality characteristics. Koestler (1964), for example, suggested that creativity is based on the ability to think on more than one plane or more than one level at a time. As Dimock (1986) characterized it, “The more adept a person is at rising from lower applied areas to higher intellectual and imaginative planes, the more creative such a fortunate individual is likely to become” (p. 5). This manifestation of creativity can take many forms. For example, a creative person such as Jan Perkins, city manager of Fremont, California, might liken organizational change to successive waves of the ocean, drawing from that metaphor to better understand the ebb and flow of the change process (see the case study in Chapter 12). Creative people are said to possess cognitive skills in divergent thinking and ideational fluency (the ability to generate alternatives or a stream of ideas), linguistic ability, and a strong ability to find associations between things or ideas (Barron & Harrington, 1981).

Although there is a degree of overlap between views of creativity that rely on personal characteristics and those that emphasize conceptual and cognitive skills, there is an important distinction. Skills can be learned, whereas characteristics cannot. Accordingly, in this view, we all can learn to be more creative by expanding and enhancing our conceptual and cognitive abilities.

## Creativity as Behavior

The behavioral view of creativity focuses on actions and activities that result in the development of something new. Thus, creativity is something a person does rather than what the person is. Amabile (1983), for example, suggested that creativity is behavior that results in a novel and useful response to a problem or situation. Amabile (1997) also stated, “The ideas must be novel—different from what’s been done before—but they can’t be simply bizarre; they must be appropriate to the problem or opportunity presented” (p. 40). But the emphasis is on the behavior, not on the innate characteristics or cognitions of the individual. So, a person who designs an innovative and useful new approach to neighborhood crime prevention is creative because he or she has engaged in behavior that resulted in a creative response to a problem. Here, the focus is on the creative product rather than on the personality or skills of the person who developed it.

This view of creativity focuses on the outward behavioral manifestations of creativity and places them in context. Importantly, this view of creativity adds the element of usefulness, thereby distinguishing creativity from simply bizarre, erratic, or unusual behavior. Accordingly, creativity not only brings forward new ideas; it is a process that results in actions or behaviors that are functional and useful in a given situation. In that sense, it is not nonconformity for its own sake but rather nonconformity with a purpose.

## Creativity as a Process

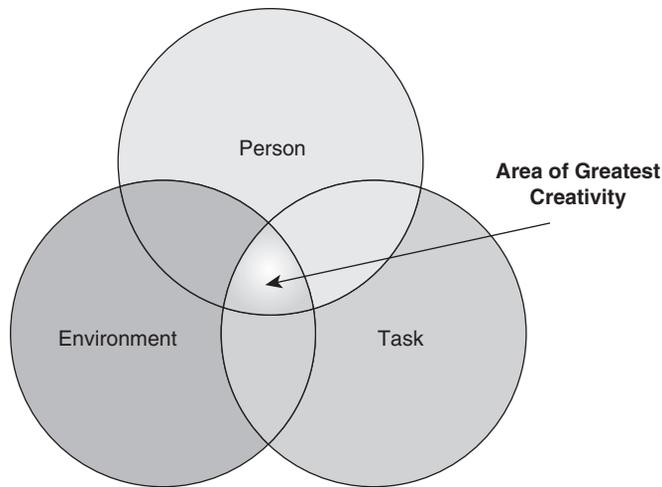
Creativity also can be seen as a process. In this view, creativity is a highly complex phenomenon involving multiple phases and stages. Torrance (1988), for example, described creativity as a process of sensing problems, making guesses, formulating hypotheses, and communicating ideas. Drazin, Glynn, and Kazanjian (1999) defined creativity as the engagement of a person in a creative process where the person “behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally attempts to produce creative outcomes” (p. 290). The emphasis here is on the process rather than on the outcome. The creative process involves both the generation of ideas and the testing of ideas. As such, creativity in the generation of ideas may or may not result in creative outcomes. This process perspective on creativity is useful for thinking about the stages in the creative process and about the roles that different individuals might play in each of these stages.

## An Integrated Perspective on Creativity

Finally, some have suggested that creativity is best viewed as encompassing all of these views. For example, Amabile (1997) offered what she called a componential theory of creativity that takes into account expertise in a particular domain, creative thinking ability, and the intrinsic motivation of the individual in a particular work or social environment. Similarly, Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin (1993) linked individual, group, and organizational factors to creative outcomes. They indicated that creativity can be viewed as the development of a valuable and useful new product, service, process, or procedure by people working together in a complex social system.

This integrated perspective is illustrated in Figure 3.2, which indicates the mutual influence of personal factors, environmental characteristics, and the nature of the task. Some integrated perspectives, in particular, emphasize the intrinsic motivation of an individual in a particular context. In this case, the focus is shifted from what levels and types of creativity people are capable of to what they are willing to do. That is, people are most likely to be creative when they love what they do and do what they love (Amabile, 1997; Drazin et al., 1999). Intrinsic motivation is included as part of an integrated perspective because it involves not only the personal interests and personalities of individuals but also how interesting the problems or tasks are.

This approach is a useful one for public administrators and students of organizational behavior. It recognizes that we all are potentially creative, although some of us might be more naturally suited to some parts of the creative process than others. It suggests that we can learn skills that will enhance our own creativity and that we can support creativity in others. It recognizes that creativity takes place in context and that creativity must be useful and appropriate to the setting or problem at hand. It leads us to think about ways in which the organizational environment may enhance or impede the development of creative ideas and solutions to problems. Finally, it suggests that creativity is an important component of a larger process of change and innovation (a subject that is dealt with in more depth in Chapter 12).



**Figure 3.2** An Integrated View of Creativity

## Why Do We Need Creativity in Public Organizations?

Before continuing our examination of creativity, it is important to first ask some fundamental questions. What are the consequences of creativity for public organizations? Why should public servants strive to be creative and to support the creativity of others? How do individuals respond to opportunities to be creative in the workplace? The answers to these questions provide insights about both the nature of creativity and the importance of creativity to the public service.

For public organizations to be effective, they must craft and facilitate creative responses to increasingly complex societal problems. Organizations and the individuals who work in them must innovate and change as community needs and demands shift. Meeting these challenges requires the full use of all human and mental resources available. Among the most important of those resources is creativity—the capacity to think of old problems in new ways, to change our perspectives, or to create novel and useful approaches to making our organizations work better and serve the needs of citizens. To fail to do so is wasteful to individuals and organizations and is inconsistent with the values of public service. It is incumbent on all of us, then, to use our imaginations and expertise as we work to achieve public goals.

Creativity is directly and positively linked to organizational effectiveness and to improvements in quality and productivity. It increases the quality of solutions to organizational problems, helps to stimulate innovation, revitalizes motivation, and promotes team performance (Raudsepp, 1987). Creativity helps organizations respond to challenges, demands, and opportunities for change.

There are other benefits to creativity as well. There is evidence that the opportunity to be creative is important for employee motivation and retention. There is evidence that employees and potential employees strongly value the chance to use their creativity. For example, in a poll conducted by Louis Harris and Associates

of the class of 2001, the top-ranked qualities desired in a job were committed coworkers, creativity, responsibility, and the ability to work independently (“Committed Co-workers,” 1998, p. 14). It also has been found that managers who are creative and have opportunities to use their creativity on the job are less likely to want to leave their organizations (Koberg & Chusmir, 1987). It even has been demonstrated that innovation and creativity can reduce workplace stress. Helping people to become more innovative and creative “not only makes the work environment less stressful but also leads to the introduction of procedures which enhance productivity and quality of work” (Bunce & West, 1996, p. 210).

Creativity allows public organizations to be responsive and to develop new and better ways of serving citizens and using resources wisely. The opportunity to be creative can help to motivate people, keep them interested in and committed to their work, and reduce stress. So, creativity is not just something for “creative types” or a matter of a “flight of fancy” if people happen to have some extra time. It is a critical component of managing organizational behavior and achieving public service goals.

### The Creative Process

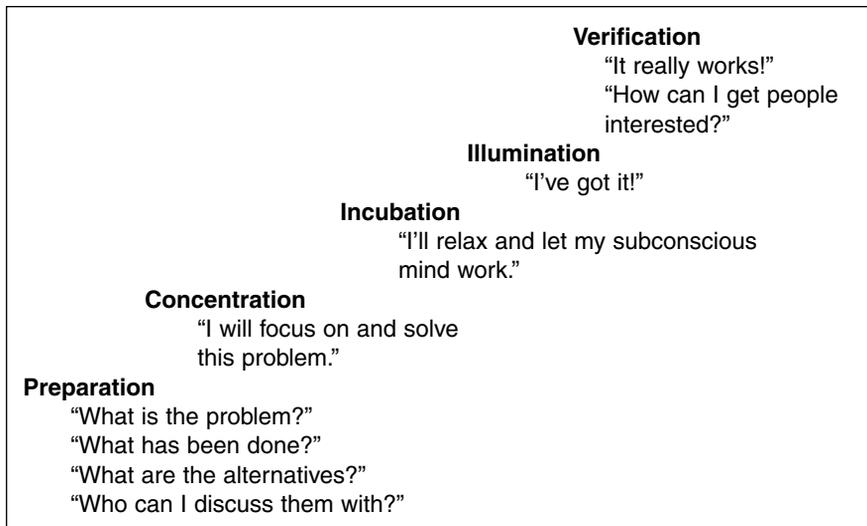
Creativity is more than a flash of insight. Instead, creativity can be thought of as a process with five identifiable steps or stages: preparation, concentration, incubation, illumination, and verification (Boone & Hollingsworth, 1990). These stages are illustrated in Figure 3.3.

*Preparation* is the first step in the creative process. In the preparation stage, all parts of the problems are thoroughly investigated. This includes consciously gathering and examining information, defining the problem, and generating alternative ideas for addressing the problem. The purpose is to ensure that all parts of the problem are fully understood. In the preparation stage, a person not only searches for facts but also searches for ideas and alternative perspectives. Preparation is a conscious mental activity. Therefore, most efforts at enhancing creativity are focused on this stage of the creative process.

In the *concentration* stage, the energy and resources of the person (or of the organization) are focused on solving the problem. The individual, in essence, concentrates his or her efforts on the problem or situation. There is a choice to engage with the process and a commitment to find a solution. This stage is not so much a matter of mental activity as it is a matter of choice.

The *incubation* stage is a largely unconscious phase of the creative process. It is, in essence, the “black box” of creativity. There is an internalization and subconscious ordering and reordering of information gathered in the preparation stage. The person cannot force this process; the best that he or she can do is attempt to relax and allow the subconscious to work and ideas to surface. This may involve the combination of previously unrelated thoughts and a subconscious struggle between what is and what might be. Conscious thought and effort probably interfere, rather than help, in this stage.

*Illumination* is the “Eureka!” of the creative process. This is the moment of insight or discovery when the answer simply seems to arrive in the person’s conscious mind



**Figure 3.3** Steps in the Creative Process

from his or her subconscious mind. It has been called an epiphany, a revelation, or a brainstorm—a sudden realization of something new or novel. But when viewed as part of the creative process, such insights actually occur after the individual has gathered information and gone through a period of subconscious mental activity during which the brain has “worked on” the problem.

The final stage of the creative process is *verification*. This involves testing and verifying the idea or insight as viable. In other words, the creative solution is evaluated against some standard of appropriateness or acceptability, and the creator seeks corroboration and acceptance of the idea.

In addition to these identifiable stages, Foster (1995) provided a useful summary of the characteristics of the creative process, including the following:

- Long rather than short in duration
- Ambiguous rather than certain and concrete
- Information rich rather than based on “existing” information
- Involving multiple mental models rather than a particular point of view
- Oriented to defining problems rather than finding short-term fixes
- A continuing process rather than a one-time event

Recognition of the steps in and characteristics of the creative process is important from several perspectives. First, creativity does not just “happen.” It is a process that can be observed, nurtured, and supported over time. It is a process that requires an investment in time, a search for information, a commitment to openness, and a tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. Second, we do not all have to be highly skilled at all stages of the creative process; some of us might be better at generating ideas, others might be skilled at synthesizing concepts, some might be good information

gatherers, and still others might be excellent “validators” of others’ insights. Thus, we can play different roles in the creative process—an idea that is elaborated in the sections that follow. Third, not all of the stages of the creative process are amenable to conscious mental effort. As a result, most techniques and training to improve creativity are focused on the preparation stage when conscious mental activity is dominant. Such techniques and training activities, which have been shown to be highly effective, are described in later sections of this chapter.

## Roles in the Creative Process

Because there are different stages in the creative process, and because we differ from one another in terms of personality and preferences, it can be useful to think of the different roles that people can play in the various stages of creativity. As Filipczak (1997) pointed out, “Once you understand that all employees are creative, the next step is finding out which part of the creativity spectrum each employee occupies” (p. 34). One way of thinking about roles in the creative process is to consider the different types of creativity. Hollingsworth (1989) defined four types:

- *Innovation*: Seeing the obvious before anyone else does (e.g., some states have innovated by offering multiple services at one site such as offering kiosks in shopping malls or one-stop service centers)
- *Synthesis*: Combining ideas from various sources into a new whole (e.g., a city police department, a state social service agency, and the courts might create a multi-agency approach to dealing with child sexual abuse investigations and prosecutions)
- *Extension*: Expanding an idea to a new application (e.g., many jurisdictions have taken the fast-food idea and created drive-through services such as book drops in libraries)
- *Duplication*: Copying a good idea from others (e.g., as cities have experimented and had success with photo-radar technologies in traffic control, other cities have learned from those experiences and followed suit)

Although these are organizational-level examples, all of these types of creativity ultimately stem from the work and insights of individuals. But as we saw in our discussion of the Jungian psychological types in Chapter 2, there are different types of individuals. Similarly, different individuals might be more or less adept at various types of creativity or might play varying roles in the creative process. Kirton’s (1976) Adaptation/Innovation Inventory helps us to understand where different individuals might fall on the creativity spectrum. Kirton described *adaptors* as the type of people who try to find better ways of doing their work. These are the people who make improvements in existing practices, devise ways of cutting costs, and develop approaches to modify programs so as to better meet citizens’ needs. Goldsmith (1989) found that adaptors prefer short-term efficiency, seek consensus, and value conformity to rules and group norms. *Innovators*, on the other hand, are the dreamers and big thinkers. They have an ability to take two previously unrelated ideas of things and combine them in a new way. Innovators seek change-oriented

solutions, look for new paradigms, are less tolerant of rules, and prefer big changes over small ones. In simple terms, adaptors do things better and innovators do things differently.

Obviously, organizations need multiple types of creativity and people who fall on both ends of Kirton's (1976) adaptor/innovator scale. The key is to find a balance. Too much innovation can result in organizations being in constant flux, thereby failing to secure and perfect improvements before changing to something else. The goal may be creativity, but too much innovation can lead to chaos. On the other hand, if creative efforts are limited to making only small improvements and changes to the status quo (as preferred by adaptors), then organizations might stagnate. Sometimes incremental improvements simply are not enough; in all organizations, there are times when quantum change is needed. According to Kirton (1989), when innovators and adaptors collaborate, adaptors provide stability, order, and continuity; are sensitive to people; help to maintain cooperation; and provide a safe foundation for the innovators' riskier ideas. Innovators, on the other hand, bring to such collaborations the task orientation and dynamics needed to bring about change.

## Social and Structural Connections

Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) relate creativity with the social connections within and outside the organization. "Communication with others in the domain should enhance one's understanding of the area and facilitate the generation of approaches that are feasible and appropriate, but also unique" (p. 91). When individuals connect with other people, they exchange information and ideas, increasing the likelihood that new approaches and solutions will be created.

The degree of creativity fostered by these social connections, according to Perry-Smith and Shalley, will depend on the "strength and the position" of the relationship. Under some circumstances, weak ties can actually facilitate creativity more than strong ties. When the relationship is strong, the "parties truly like each other and are concerned about one another, see each other relatively frequently, and have similar perspectives and outlooks on the importance of their relationship" (p. 92). Since the parties involved in a close relationship often share very similar points of view, they may be less likely to challenge ideas. Weak ties, on the other hand, may give individuals more information and "the exposure to different approaches and perspectives" (p. 94).

There is a limit, however, to how many of these social connections a person can effectively and productively handle. When an individual has too many weak ties, he or she may spend too much time exchanging and processing information. This can result in higher levels of stress and conflict rather than in higher levels of creativity. So, weak relationships may foster creativity up to a point, beyond which the number of ties may even constrain creativity at work. The position of the person in the relationship is also very important. The people who have the greatest potential for creativity are those who occupy what the authors call "peripheral network positions." People in these positions have enough connections within the organizations to stay informed and gain organizational knowledge, but their outside connections give them the opportunity to hear something new.

## Impediments to Creativity

There are a number of common impediments or barriers to creativity (Gundry et al., 1994). Removing these barriers can be the first step in fostering creativity in ourselves and others. Each of these impediments is considered in the following subsections.

### *Defining the Problem Incorrectly*

If the problem is defined incorrectly, incompletely, or inappropriately, then creative approaches to solving it will be misplaced. One of the ways in which this can occur is when individuals engage in what de Bono (1992) called *vertical thinking*. Vertical thinking occurs when a problem is defined in a single way and there are no deviations or alternative definitions considered until the solution is reached. For example, an organizational problem might be defined as one of excessive costs in a particular service unit. If there are no challenges to this definition of the problem, then people will logically pursue cost-cutting efforts such as reducing hours of service, laying off staff, decreasing the variety of services, and postponing purchases of equipment and supplies. But such approaches might make the problem worse if it is later discovered that the real problem was failure to understand and respond to changes in citizens' needs (which had reduced the effectiveness of existing approaches and caused unproductive uses of staff time). The cost-cutting measures might even result in the development of new and more serious problems. If the problem were redefined, then it might be possible to come up with new approaches that would not only reduce costs but also provide services better tailored to citizens' needs.

Ironically, language also can be a barrier to problem definition. If people are accustomed to, and limited by, using only certain terms and language in defining a problem, then they will think about that problem only in a manner that the terms will allow. In this way, language actually can serve as a barrier between the thinker and reality (Koestler, 1964). In addition to verbal language, there are other languages, such as symbolic, emotional, sensory, and visual languages. In other words, sometimes it is useful to represent problems or ideas using symbols or drawings (to consider their emotional aspects) or even to express them in terms of touch, smell, or sensation. In some cases, people can seem stuck not only with verbal language but also with a particular set of organizationally sanctioned terms. For example, if people in police organizations were to consistently and exclusively use the language of "crime" and "criminals" to understand their roles and responsibilities, then they might be less likely to consider factors such as citizens' perceptions of safety; a sense of neighborhood and community; the roles of other institutions such as schools, churches, and social services; the physical environment; and aesthetic and quality-of-life issues—all of which might influence the roles of police officers and the nature of their relationship with community members. For example, it might lead them to ask what citizens would like their neighborhoods to look like or to feel like.

### *Judging Ideas Too Quickly*

People often reject ideas that are inconsistent with their current thinking. We all have heard people defend current practices by saying, for example, “We’ve always done it that way.” Although constancy and consistency might be a human need and a virtue in certain circumstances, blind adherence to the status quo in organizations is not. As Allison (1971) argued in his analysis of the Cuban missile crisis, sometimes organizations (and the people in them) try to fit problems into particular organizational routines, whether or not the situation really calls for a novel response.

### *Stopping at the First Acceptable Idea*

Because people often are under pressure to come up with solutions to problems, sometimes the response is to accept the first good idea that comes along. Time pressures, different problems competing for our attention, or simply lack of recognition that other ideas might be better can lead us to choose alternatives too quickly. Obviously, this can result in forgoing what might have been a later—but better—idea.

### *Lack of Support*

Creative ideas can wither on the vine. If someone comes up with an interesting and original idea but no one listens or considers it, then the idea probably will not go anywhere. We might learn over time that curiosity and questioning are not welcome in our work environment. Sometimes we are not creative because it takes a great deal of mental energy, and the demands of our daily jobs simply consume all of our reserves. Moreover, thinking does not *look* like working. We might be concerned with appearing busy and engaged with our work and, as a result, become mentally and creatively lazy. The truth is that it often is easier and less demanding to keep doing things and thinking about things in the way we always have.

### *Hostility to Sharing Knowledge*

In some organizations, there is not only a lack of support but also an outright hostility to creativity and the sharing of ideas. In such cases, Michailova and Husted (2003) suggest that “it is unrealistic to expect or assume that individuals are basically willing to share knowledge even when incentives are introduced” (p. 60). For example, if there is an organizational norm that employees should not know more than their managers, it is unreasonable to expect any initiative from the lower levels. If managers believe that they are solely responsible for innovation, “competition” from someone who is at a lower level in the organizational hierarchy may be unwelcome. Creativity is also thwarted in organizations where mistakes are taboo. When mistakes are punished, employees will avoid risk and are often scared to admit when they make a mistake. Finally, Michailova and Husted suggest that what they call the “NIH syndrome” (Not-Invented-Here Syndrome) can be deleterious to creativity. In organizations with the NIH syndrome, things that come from outside the organization are considered less valuable than the things that come from the inside. This obviously limits a potentially important source of information and inspiration for creativity.

## Other Ways of Thwarting Creativity

Morgan (1968) suggested 12 tongue-in-cheek “rules” for killing creativity that we have adapted and reduced to 9 rules for the public sector manager:

1. Drag your feet. Just keep going through the idea over and over until people lose interest.
2. Say yes, but do not act on the idea. That way, people will be momentarily pleased and will leave you alone.
3. Wait for full analysis. Who can argue with this logic? This will give you lots of time because public sector problems rarely can be *fully* analyzed.
4. Do not follow up. Drop the idea on your associates and see whether anything happens.
5. Call many meetings. This will kill time and interest.
6. Put the idea into channels and forget about it. Anything novel or original will not go far.
7. Boost the cost estimates. Public organizations never have much money, and you will be the hero for saving some by vetoing the idea.
8. Wait for someone else to try the idea first. Why put yourself out in front?
9. Stick to standard operating procedures and rules. They still will be there long after the idea has died.

Although these “rules” are, of course, written with a humorous edge, they remind us of how easy it can be to stifle creativity. Public organizations often are underfunded and overextended while being asked to simultaneously meet multiple and conflicting goals. It is not all that surprising that we sometimes can lose track of the importance of creativity, imagination, innovation, and renewal to organizational success. Fortunately, there are a number of things we can do to foster such efforts.

## Fostering Creativity in Organizations

A supportive organizational environment can enhance and encourage individual creativity. If people are to choose to exercise their creative abilities, then they have to be motivated to do so. That motivation resides in part within individuals, but it also is influenced by people’s social environment.

A positive climate can create an atmosphere in which creativity and innovation flourish, whereas a negative one can squash such efforts. Scott (1965) stated, “Creative behavior, a product of the creative individual in a specifiable contemporary environment, will not occur until both conditions are met. . . . An unfavorable contemporary environment will inhibit creative behavior no matter how talented the individual” (p. 213). It is also necessary to have the capacity to adapt and use innovations developed elsewhere (Chesbrough, 2003). Innovation requires

resources and time, and organizations do not possess limitless amounts of either. This does not suggest deemphasizing internal innovations but creating an organization that can benefit from a combination of internal and external innovations.

What can we do to create a climate that encourages creativity? Three organizational factors seem particularly important: challenging work, supportive supervision, and an organizational/work group culture that supports and encourages creativity.

### *Challenging Work*

As suggested previously, intrinsic task motivation is an important component of creativity. Intrinsic task motivation is driven by “deep interest and involvement in the work, by curiosity, enjoyment, or a personal sense of challenge” (Amabile, 1997, p. 44). Intrinsic motivation is the motivation to work on something because a person wants to—because it is exciting, satisfying, involving, challenging, and personally interesting. A key factor in this regard is choice. Research has shown that if a person chooses to do something just because he or she wants to, then that person will approach the task more creatively than if he or she were given external incentives or rewards (Amabile, 1997; Kruglanski, Friedman, & Zeevi, 1971). Obviously, then, intrinsic motivation is heavily influenced by an individual’s preferences, values, interests, and attributes. But it also has to do with the nature of the task. Even the most curious, committed, and creative individual might not exhibit these talents if placed in a repetitive, rigid, and uninteresting job. Moreover, the individual probably will be miserable. With a high level of intrinsic motivation, on the other hand, the individual will be more likely to fully engage his or her expertise and creative thinking abilities. Intrinsic motivation can be so powerful that it even can make up for deficiencies in expertise, knowledge, and creative thinking skills because it drives people to look to other domains or to exert the effort to acquire those skills (Dweck, 1986; Harter, 1978).

Job design is critical in this respect. Amabile (1997), one of the leading researchers on creativity in organizations, stated,

Because a positive sense of challenge in the work is one of the most important predictors of creativity, it is imperative to match people to work that utilizes their skills, stretches their skills, and is clearly valued by the organization. As much as possible, all work should be designed to maximize intrinsically motivating aspects. (p. 55)

Challenging jobs with complex tasks, high levels of autonomy, skill variety, significance, and feedback are associated with higher levels of motivation and creativity than are jobs that are simple and routine (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989; Hackman & Oldham, 1980). When jobs are designed to be interesting and challenging, people are more likely to be excited about and willing to invest themselves in their work in the absence of external controls and constraints (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). It also has been found that intrinsic interest and creativity can be enhanced by designing jobs in a way that gives people choices about how to

perform their job tasks (Woodman et al., 1993). Intrinsically creative jobs, then, are jobs in which there is a measure of worker control and freedom in deciding what work to do and how to do it.

### *Supportive Supervision*

How you interact with your employees can have a significant effect on their creativity at work. Supervision that is supportive of employees fosters their creative achievement, whereas supervision that is controlling usually diminishes it (Cummings & Oldham, 1997). Supervisors can be supportive by demonstrating concern for employees' feelings, encouraging employees to voice their concerns and needs, providing positive and information-rich feedback, and facilitating worker skill development (Deci & Ryan, 1987). Doing so can bolster workers' feelings of self-determination and control, which in turn can positively influence intrinsic motivation and creativity.

Because intrinsic motivation is enhanced by offering people more choices in what they do, participative decision making also is important in creating an organizational climate supportive of creativity. Plunkett (1990), for example, found that workers who believed that they had meaningful input into organizational decision making were more creative than those who did not. Thus, management and supervisory approaches that increase opportunities for participation can enhance creativity.

Conversely, supervision that is controlling and limiting, sometimes called *micromanaging*—where employees are closely monitored, allowed few choices, denied opportunities to participate in decisions, and pressured to think, act, or behave in particular ways—can easily thwart creativity. Supervision that is overly controlling undermines intrinsic motivation and shifts workers' attention away from the job itself and toward external concerns (Deci & Ryan, 1987).

### *Organizational and Work Group Culture*

In addition to supervision, creativity is influenced by overall organizational culture and climate. Hollingsworth (1989) identified the following key elements of a creative organizational climate:

*Trust:* People are allowed to suggest and try new things without fear of reprisal.

*Open communication:* Everyone in the organization feels free to put forward ideas and is kept informed of needs and goals.

*Diversity:* The organization provides for the presence of different personalities and recognition of the varying contributions that each can make to the creative process.

*Change:* The organization values innovation and change, and it recognizes their importance to organizational success.

*Rewards:* The organization rewards creativity including both the development and the implementation of new and useful ideas.

Similarly, Amabile (1997) described creative cultures as those in which there is fair and constructive evaluation of ideas, reward and recognition for creativity, mechanisms for developing new ideas, and a shared vision. An organization with a climate or culture that supports and enhances creativity might express these values in a number of ways. In addition to supervisory attitudes and practices discussed in the preceding subsection, organizations can cultivate these values, for example, by talking about the values of creativity, developing a shared sense of organizational vision, providing time and opportunities to develop new ideas, offering special recognition and rewards for creative solutions to problems, providing creativity training and education, and other activities and actions that reflect an attitude or mindset that is receptive to creative efforts. The climate of an individual's work group also can have a positive effect. When group leadership is democratic and collaborative, the structure is flexible, and the group is composed of people with diverse backgrounds, creativity is enhanced (King & Anderson, 1990).

Cultural artifacts are also important in communicating and reinforcing a culture of innovation. Higgins and McAllaster (2002) suggest that cultural artifacts "shape the attitudes and behavior of new as well as veteran employees" (p. 77). In order to create a culture of innovation, organizations often have to modify or even create new myths and stories, language, and metaphors. Telling success stories about innovation can reinforce those cultural values and make the employees feel free to express their ideas. Value systems and behavioral norms are also powerful tools that can enhance innovation. If innovation is rewarded over time, employees can become more aware that the organization values such behavior. Physical artifacts and surroundings can be important in fostering creativity as well. Higgins and McAllaster also suggest that the shape and the size of the office, the building itself, the amenities around the building—sport courts, parks, and so forth—not only encourage creativity but also can increase overall productivity of the organization (2002).

### *Workload Pressures and Resources*

The effect of workload pressure on creativity is difficult to gauge. On the one hand, excessive workload demands can undermine creative efforts. On the other hand, some degree of pressure or urgency can have a positive influence, particularly when it arises out of the nature of the problem itself (Amabile, 1988). Similarly, some time pressure can enhance creativity, but too much can stifle it (Andrews & Farris, 1967). Part of the issue seems to be whether the time and workload pressure is externally imposed as a form of control (in which case it would tend to hamper creativity) or the urgency and challenge come from the person's perception of the problem or the work itself (in which case creativity can be enhanced).

The resources allocated to a project also can affect creativity. The obvious effect of extreme resource restriction is to limit what people can accomplish. However, if an organization does not commit adequate resources to a particular project or task relative to others, then that also can have a psychological effect in that it may lead to the belief that the work is not valued or considered important by the organization (Damanpour, 1991). Of course, money is not the only resource that can be invested in creative efforts. Another way in which organizations can emphasize

creativity is to provide the time needed to think about problems and to develop innovative solutions (Redmond, Mumford, & Teach, 1993).

### *Positive Emotions*

Emotions also play an important role in creativity. Put simply, positive emotions foster creativity and creativity fosters positive emotions. Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, and Staw (2005) have found that “Creative activity appears to be an affectively charged event, one in which complex cognitive processes are shaped by, co-occur with, and shape emotional experience” (p. 367). Their research showed that positive emotions can lead people to discard time-tested ideas and think in novel ways. They also found that individuals who are successful with creative problem solving often experience positive emotions as a result. Conversely, individuals who could not develop appropriate solutions often had negative feelings (anger, dissatisfaction, etc.). In fact, positive affect and creativity can happen at the same time. Individuals may start some process of solving a problem, and as they feel satisfied or pleased with the progress, their creativity may increase even more. This can produce an “organizational affect-creativity cycle . . . whereby influences at any point can begin a dynamic pattern of increasing or decreasing positive affect and creativity” (Amabile et al., 2005, p. 386). This suggests that when people have opportunities to exercise creative problem solving, and have success in doing so, they can experience positive emotions, which can lead to more creativity.

### *Fostering Creativity—Putting It All Together*

Taken together, job design, supervision, organizational climate, and the allocation of adequate time and resources can have a potent and synergistic effect on individual and organizational creativity. When people have interesting and challenging jobs, when they are supervised in an open and supportive manner, and when they work in an environment that encourages and rewards creativity, they are more likely to respond with creativity and enthusiasm (Amabile, 1987; Gundry et al., 1994; Oldham & Cummings, 1996).

But it should be remembered, as we will see in Chapter 6, that motivation—including the motivation to be creative—resides within the individual. Although it can be influenced, it cannot be directly controlled. In other words, despite environmental conditions designed to promote creativity, different individuals will respond in varying ways. Furthermore, we can unintentionally and unwittingly contribute to inhibiting our own creativity by blaming others or by blaming the organization for producing conditions that discourage creativity (Wesenberg, 1994). In this case, our own defense mechanisms might lead us to blame the organization for our lack of creativity, to avoid change, and to deny the importance and intrinsic value of public service work. It is important to remember that just as all of us are products of our work environments, we also contribute to shaping those environments. So, as we work to foster creativity in others, we also need to be self-reflective and take responsibility for the levels of enthusiasm, creativity, and energy that we invest in our work.

## Techniques for Improving Creativity

Creative skills can be enhanced by learning and practicing. Both business and government organizations use creativity training to build and foster creativity approaches and skills. In the following subsections, a sampling of some of the tools used in organizations to enhance creativity is offered.

### *The Idea Box or Matrix Analysis*

In matrix analysis, a two-dimensional “idea box” is used to explore new ideas or alternatives (Miller, 1987). There are four steps to generating an idea box: (1) specifying your purpose or what you are trying to accomplish, (2) identifying the parameters of the problem, (3) listing variations, and (4) trying different combinations. Consider a situation in which your purpose is to gain citizen input and involvement in the city’s recreation department, but you are not sure how to do it and resource limitations are such that you will be limited in the number of approaches you can use. You could begin by asking yourself what the parameters of the problem might be. For example, perhaps you could consider methods of input, timing or frequency, subjects, and target groups as your parameters. For each of those parameters, you would develop options. Methods of input might include citywide open meetings, neighborhood forums, mailed questionnaires, or suggestion boxes. For target groups, you might think about seniors, teenagers, preschool children, and businesspeople. The resulting table might look something like this:

	<i>Input</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Target Group</i>
1.	Meeting	Once	Programming	Seniors
2.	Forum	Quarterly	Facilities	Teenagers
3.	Questionnaire	Semiannually	Access and hours	Preschoolers
4.	E-mail	Ongoing	Volunteering	Business

Using the idea box, you then would randomly combine one item from each column (e.g., a forum held semiannually on volunteering for seniors, a questionnaire mailed quarterly on facility construction to businesspeople). The matrix, or idea box, provides a structure to combine and recombine ideas to develop new alternatives. The  $4 \times 4$  box depicted yields 1,024 different combinations—a far greater number than you are likely to generate without the aid of such a structure. Of course, it is not necessary to consider all of these combinations. The purpose of the idea box is simply to get you to start thinking about multiple options.

### *Synectics*

Synectics is a technique developed by Gordon (1961) for improving creative problem solving. The word *synectics* means joining together different and apparently unconnected or irrelevant elements. In *synectics*, problems are defined by “making the strange familiar,” and ideas are sought by “making the familiar strange” (Gordon, 1961, p. 33). In the former case, the aim is to understand or define the problem using terms that are familiar to you. In the latter case, the purpose is to make the familiar strange by purposely distorting, inverting, or transposing the problem to something unfamiliar. This can “transpose both our usual ways of perceiving and our usual expectations about how we or the world will behave” (Gordon, 1961, p. 36). *Synectics* uses four types of metaphors in this process: (1) the personal analogy, (2) the direct analogy, (3) the symbolic analogy, and (4) the fantasy analogy.

In using a *personal analogy*, you actually imagine yourself as the object or problem. For example, if the purpose is to reduce the incidence of panhandling on city streets, then you might want to imagine yourself as a panhandler. Or if the purpose is to reduce pollution in a lake, then you might want to imagine yourself as the water. This might sound far-fetched, but such an exercise probably will increase the number of ways that you think about the problem. As Gordon pointed out, even Einstein used visual and muscular analogies in understanding mathematical constructs. The *direct analogy* is similar to the problem or issue in terms of facts, knowledge, or technology. For example, in organizational theory, we often talk about organizations functioning as organic systems, using a biological metaphor where there are inputs, a conversion process, outputs, and a feedback loop. The *symbolic analogy* uses an image or symbol to represent the problem. For example, developing a work team might be thought of as analogous to creating a collage with a common theme, or your role as a supervisor might be thought of as analogous to the role of a conductor, a coach, a gardener, a teacher, or a tugboat. Finally, in a *fantasy analogy*, you might ask yourself, “What is my wildest fantasy about how to make this work?” The purpose is to imagine the best of all possible worlds or outcomes. This frees you to think about problems without becoming prematurely limited by present constraints and limitations.

Playing with analogies as a means to making the familiar strange and the strange familiar can lead us to think about problems and solutions in new ways. By thinking about the problem in the form of a metaphor, new insights about the nature of the problem and possible solutions can emerge. For example, imagine that the problem is a work group with low levels of creativity and innovation. You might ask yourself what this problem reminds you of or how it makes you feel:

Is it like working underwater? If so, then how can you create bubbles that will allow ideas to float to the surface? Ensure that people have flippers and oxygen tanks? Build islands of dry land? Drain the pool?

Is it like trying to open a rusted lid on a jar? If so, then how can you loosen the lid? Remove the rust? Prevent rust? Break the jar?

Is it like going to the mall but finding that all the stores are closed? Where else can you go to get what you need? Plan ahead and time your trips differently? Get

the shopkeepers to open their stores? Make the items yourself? Use what you already have? Shop on the Internet instead?

Does it look like a bleak winter landscape? How can you add color? Change the season? Get yourself out of hibernation?

What if our work group became the nationally recognized model for creativity? Business experts and public executives from all over the world would visit us and seek our advice. What would they see when they arrived? What would we tell them? What would we do that is unique? How would we be organized? How would people behave? How would they feel?

### *Mindmapping*

Mindmapping is a technique designed to help us think visually and spatially about issues and problems. Mindmaps help to guide us through mental explorations in much the same way as ordinary maps help us in our travels (Rickards, 1988). Mindmapping uses pictures and images to define a vision, a problem, or a situation. It can be a simple representation intended to be used as a memory trigger or as a detailed representation of a situation, process, or "territory." Wycoff (1995) suggested that a mindmap should begin with a central image in the middle of the page. Then colors, pictures, and symbols should be used to map the situation, using only one key word per image. All lines branch from the central image. Mindmapping can be done individually or in a group. One possibility is to draw individual maps and then pair people off to explain their maps to each other and create a shared map. The map can be a depiction of a process, a goal, an interaction, or the multiple facets of a complex problem. Wycoff suggested the following questions to get the process going:

How can we visually describe our goals?

What metaphors might describe how we work together?

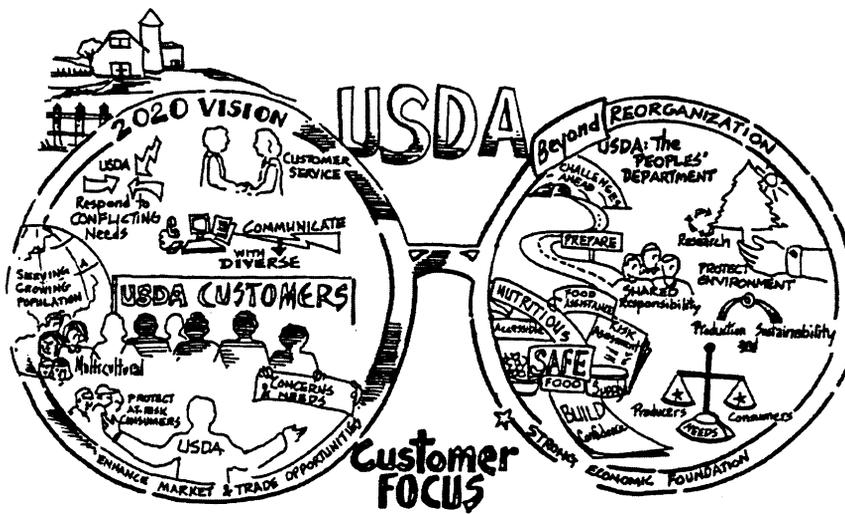
How would we like to see ourselves?

What is the environment we are trying to create?

What are some of the possible scenes from our future?

Figure 3.4 contains a mindmap created at a policy retreat in 1994, when Wycoff worked with the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Mindmapping can be a highly useful tool for organizing information, generating and communicating ideas, and creating a framework for solving problems. There are a number of variations, such as a tree and a fish bone map. Using a tree, some dominant idea or problem is linked to a set of its components or branches. In fish boning (a technique popular in Japan), problems are diagrammed in terms of cause and effect. The head of the fish is the problem, and the fish bones are labeled as the various causes of the problem. Whatever type of picture or representation is used, a map does not need to stand alone. It can be used as a supplement to other forms of idea generation, communication, and presentation.



**Figure 3.4** U.S. Department of Agriculture Mindmap

SOURCE: From *Transformation Thinking*, by J. Wycoff, 1995, New York: Berkley. Copyright © 1995 by Joyce Wycoff. Used by permission of Berkley Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Putnam, Inc.

## Enhancing Your Personal Creativity

In our efforts to create a positive climate for others to be creative, it also is important to think about how to support our own creativity. Miller (1987) made a number of suggestions, summarized and adapted in the following paragraphs, for individuals to improve their own creative process. Many are analogous to the types of things that help to foster creativity in others, but it also is worthwhile to think about them as things that we can do for ourselves.

*Be aware.* To be creative, it often is necessary to have an understanding of the current situation. What are the facts? What information is available? In the public sector, this means not only being well-versed in current practices in our own and other jurisdictions but also being knowledgeable about the legal parameters, community concerns, political considerations, and other factors that might be important in our understanding of the issue. By immersing ourselves in a particular subject, we ground our creativity in reality. After all, as noted earlier, creativity is the development of novel and useful ideas. How can we know what is novel or useful if we do not know how things work at present?

*Be persistent in your vision and values.* Applying consistent energy in a particular direction increases the probability of realizing your goals. A vision, or purpose or goal, guides our efforts and motivates us to be persistent. Creativity is, at its core, a personal enterprise in that it brings forth something that you, as an individual, value. Maintaining a vision requires self-reflection, the creation of a clear idea or picture of what you want to accomplish, and a conscious investment of energy.

*Consider all of your alternatives.* Dream up as many ideas as you can. Do not rush to find a solution. Avoid mental idea killers such as when we say to ourselves, “Oh, that will never work,” “That’s dumb,” or “We already tried that and it didn’t work.” Keep your evaluation of alternatives separate from your development of ideas and alternatives.

*Entertain your intuition.* Allow your intuition to give the answers that you are seeking. Relax and allow your mind to work. Creativity involves hard work, but the importance of the intuitive part of the creative process cannot be overlooked. Your intuitive self compiles information and creates new images and symbols that can lead to new inspirations.

*Assess your alternatives.* In evaluating your alternatives, two factors are critical. First, be open to the best solution. Let go of your ego, hidden agendas, desire for a convenient solution, and even self-interest in considering what the best solution might be. Second, use not only your analytical abilities but also your intuition (or “gut feelings”) in evaluating alternatives. Are you excited about the idea? Does it feel right?

*Be realistic in your actions.* If your creation is to be realized, then it usually requires you to take action. Even the greatest idea will be unlikely to go anywhere unless someone sells it, works out the details, and implements it. Even Einstein had to defend his data and ideas. New ideas have to be supported within formation and then effectively communicated to others. Once you are committed to an idea, share that commitment with others and figure out how to accomplish, or put into practice, what you have envisioned.

*Evaluate your results.* Many of us want external praise and rewards for our creative efforts. It also is important to set up constructive feedback for yourself. For most of us, the creative process needs a point of completion when we acknowledge what we have accomplished and the results we have achieved. Even if things do not turn out as we hoped they might, self-reflection allows us to evaluate the parts of the process that did and did not work well.

## Ways of Acting

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Everyone has creative potential. Creativity is more than simply novelty; it involves the development of new, useful, imaginative, and appropriate approaches to meeting challenges and solving problems. Because creativity is one of the greatest and most important personal and organizational resources, it should be nurtured, supported, and encouraged. There are a number of practical steps that can be taken to bolster your own creativity as well as to encourage the creativity of others in organizations. These methods are highlighted in what follows.

1. *Debunk the myths of creativity.* All people have creative potential; it is not limited to the artistic, eccentric, or unusual among us. Moreover, different people can

contribute to the creative process in different ways, all of which are important and constructive for organizations and the people who work in them. Moreover, creativity need not be feared as too risky for public service. Creativity involves the development of novel and *useful* or *appropriate* ideas. To be creative in organizations, we need not embrace or implement the bizarre or unusual for its own sake. Rather, creativity is about using imagination to make things work better.

2. *Change your vocabulary.* Nothing squashes creativity faster than a negative response. Killer phrases such as “Yes, but . . .,” “We already tried that and it didn’t work,” and “We can’t do that” can be substituted with phrases such as “Yes, and . . .,” “How could we . . .?” “What could we . . .?” and “Let’s build on that to . . .” Remember that it is important not only to use these creativity-building phrases with others but also to use them in our “self-talk.” Do not fall into the trap of being overly critical of your own ideas. Instead, consciously invite yourself to suspend judgment and be mentally receptive to your own ideas.

3. *Use participatory management approaches.* Using these approaches can increase intrinsic motivation and allow you to actively encourage creative thinking as part of the decision-making process. Creative collaboration is enhanced when everyone understands that a democratic process for generating ideas can lead to something unexpected and valuable. This means that the contributions of people at all levels of the organization can be useful, regardless of rank, seniority, or position. Overcontrolling supervisory approaches have been shown to hamper creativity. Open participatory approaches can encourage creativity and a willingness to try new things.

4. *Make time and information available for creative efforts.* Information fuels creativity by triggering the imagination and providing the foundations of innovation. Make sure that people have the information they need to think creatively, but also realistically, about finding new and better ways of doing their jobs and meeting organizational and community challenges. Individuals and groups also need time to be creative. Time pressures are undeniable and often unavoidable. But unless it is absolutely necessary, demanding that a task be done or a problem be solved immediately might cost time and money in the long run if it hampers the development of more creative and effective approaches. When possible, give yourself and others some time and room to think about new and appropriate ideas.

5. *Analyze your organizational climate.* Ask yourself the following questions. Does your organizational climate encourage or hinder creativity? Are interactions between people characterized by trust and respect? Are new ideas welcomed and encouraged? Do people feel safe in asking questions and making suggestions? Are they treated as capable and competent adults? Is supervision characterized by control and micromanagement or by guidance, support, and openness? Are people allowed to follow their interests? Does the organization provide enough flexibility to take advantage of differing talents, abilities, and interests? Within a framework of a shared vision and organizational goals, are people encouraged to do what they love and to love what they do? Are you doing what you can to create an environment that is conducive to creativity?

6. *Relax and let your mind work.* There is a point in the creative process when you just need to allow the mind to work, letting your subconscious make new connections and recombinations of ideas. This means that taking a short walk, doodling, or simply taking a “breather” or mental break can be important in allowing creative ideas to emerge in your mind. Laughter also can be a good way of breaking down barriers and relaxing your mind. It is not only OK to laugh and have fun at work; it actually can help you to work more effectively and creatively.

7. *Use techniques and tools to foster creativity.* Use techniques and tools to foster your own creativity as well as that of others. A sampling of techniques discussed earlier in this chapter included idea boxes, mindmapping, and synectics. These and other tools can help you and others to stimulate your creativity. Training programs also are available to build creative thinking skills. When using these techniques and tools, do so within the overall framework of fostering trust, mutual respect, collaboration, and support for the creative process.

8. *Identify problems that need creative solutions.* Identify problems that need creative solutions, and challenge yourself and others to find answers. Creativity requires a willingness to look at what is and consider what might be. This willingness can be encouraged by explicitly identifying issues and problems and by asking people to contribute creative energy to addressing them. If your behavior and language convey the idea that the current way is the best way, then people might be hesitant to make suggestions or ask questions. So, ask people to be creative and to imagine what could be new solutions to existing problems or how to make a good processor service better.

9. *Make work interesting and do not oversupervise.* Ask yourself what you can do to make your work and your employees' work more complex, challenging, and interesting. Creativity is enhanced when people have choices in their work and when they feel challenged to do complex and important tasks. Allowing workers to have some flexibility and discretion in how they will accomplish work tasks creates situations that invite innovation, experimentation, and creative approaches. Too much routine and repetition can drive the creative impulse underground. So, try to avoid unnecessarily controlling or overspecifying *how* someone must accomplish a particular objective. Leave room for innovation and improvement.

10. *Challenge yourself and others to be creative.* Public service demands and challenges us to be creative. It is important to periodically remind yourself and others of the significance of what public servants do for their communities, their states, and their country. Public sector organizations are not charged with solving easy problems. Rather, public service is focused on addressing some of the messiest, most difficult, and most complicated problems that society faces. We would suggest that, despite their complexity and difficulty, these problems are the most important ones. In the middle of work demands, deadlines, and routines, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that public service is intrinsically valuable and important to making our communities and world a better place in which to live. In other words, what we do matters—and it deserves and demands our most creative, energetic, and imaginative efforts to do it well.

## Thinking in Action

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Go back and review your answers to the questions in the section titled “Where Do We Begin?” at the beginning of the chapter. Do you have any new ideas about what you might do to enhance or develop your creativity? How might you help others to be more creative? Try the following exercises.

### Mindmapping Exercise

Think about a goal that you have for your career or education. Spend a few minutes visualizing the goal. Then create a mindmap that represents how you see the process for achieving that goal. Be attentive to choosing a central image that you think best captures your goal. What has to occur for you to reach that goal? Who and what is involved? What is the nature of the goal? What are the consequences of achieving it? What are the barriers and obstacles? How do you view the future? What factors will influence your efforts? Include pictures, images, and symbols for as many facets of the process and the goal as you think are important.

Sometime after completing your mindmap, go back and look at it again. What can you see that might help you to think differently about your approach to the goal? What does the map tell you about the key factors involved? What are the barriers to reaching the goal? What are the things that might contribute to its attainment? What do you want to change? Does the map satisfy you as a depiction of how to reach the goal? What would you like to add? What would you like to erase? What can you learn from the process?

### Using Analogies

Think about your present role in an organization. It can be work, school, family, or any other organization or group with which you are involved. Identify a problem that you encounter in this role that you would like to resolve. Using the following as a guide, take a piece of paper and write down some ideas and create some doodles using four types of analogies:

1. *Personal analogy*: If you were this problem, what would you look like? How would you feel?
2. *Direct analogy*: What is the problem like? What metaphors could you use to describe it?
3. *Symbolic analogy*: What symbol or image best captures what this problem looks like? Feels like? Sounds like?
4. *Fantasy analogy*: What is your wildest fantasy about how to solve this problem? How would solving the problem change the future? What is the best possible outcome?

Now go back and think about your analogies and their implications. If the problem you are trying to resolve actually *was* one of these analogies, then what would you do? For example, if you compared the problem with your present organizational role to a flower that was not blooming, then how could you actually make a flower bloom? Fertilizer? Water? Sunshine? What ideas does that give you for addressing the problem?

## A Creativity Challenge

You have just received a promotion to become the supervisor of the public information office for your agency. You are thrilled about your new job and are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to work with your staff of seven people both to improve how your agency responds to requests for information and to create new avenues for communication between your agency and citizens.

At the conclusion of your first staff meeting, you ask your staff to help you begin identifying what they think are some of the problem areas and opportunities that the unit can and should address. The silence that follows is very unsettling to you. Nonetheless, you wait for someone to speak. Finally, the most senior staff member says, "There is never any money around here to try anything new." Another comments, "What's the point? Our unit isn't a priority. Everything we've tried has been shot down." Another adds, "Citizens don't respond to our efforts to communicate with them. They are completely apathetic." After a few more similar comments, you conclude the meeting by expressing appreciation for their comments and your hope and vision that things will change for the better. Still, you feel rather discouraged.

Later, in private meetings, you talk with your staff about your desire to approach problems creatively and to come up with some new and innovative approaches to achieving the unit's mission. In the course of these discussions, you learn that the prior supervisor not only did not solicit ideas but also routinely shot them down if they were raised. His favorite response to suggested innovations was, "We tried that once and it didn't work." Staff confided that they had learned a long time ago that they just needed to keep their heads down and do their jobs. One commented, "Besides, it's enough to just keep up with all the requests we get. We don't have staff to do anything else!"

What are some of the characteristics of the past management practices and organizational climate that are thwarting creativity? What are some measures that you can take to begin to foster creativity in the individuals you work with and in your unit as a whole? What tools might be helpful?

## Adapting Innovations

One of the best ways to fuel your creativity is to seek out ideas from other individuals and organizations. For example, the Alliance for Innovation has a Web site

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that describes innovative practices in local governments. Go to [www.transformgov.org/govnews.asp](http://www.transformgov.org/govnews.asp) and choose one of the examples that you think might or should be adapted and adopted in your community. Then answer the following questions:

1. What particularly intrigues you about this innovation? Why do you think it is needed and might or might not work in your community?
2. In what ways might the innovation be adapted to your particular community characteristics or needs? How can you build from or depart from what is already being done in another community?
3. Where and how would you begin to work toward getting such an innovation implemented? What factors do you think will support its adoption? What might be the significant barriers?