4.1 What is creativity?

Creativity is apparent in many fields of human endeavour, though common usage of the word often erroneously limits it to the fields of art and invention. However, if we consider only these two very ‘visible’ environments, our conception of creativity will tend to look at the products of someone else’s creative process merely in terms of their ‘value’ to us as marketable or functional commodities, when attempting to assess the degree of creativity employed.

Our main interest here is though the applications of creativity within a business environment, for example, in developing new products and services and looking for opportunities for economic growth, and in managerial terms, surmounting barriers to desired goals and objectives. Such a commodified view may not be totally inappropriate, here, but to encourage this narrow view of creativity would be wasteful of many of the ideas and techniques discussed in the later chapters. These can help us be more creative in dealing with many aspects of our lives, and will not always result in a tangible product, let alone one that somebody else thinks is creative.

Carl Rogers (1954) maintained that ‘there must be something observable, some product of creation’ in order for us to talk usefully of a creative process having taken place. He further insists that the product must be a ‘novel construction’ and have ‘the stamp of the individual’ who created it evident upon it. But he also suggests that one of the ‘inner conditions’ for creativity is the realization that determining the value of these products should reside with the individual who created them and not someone else (see Frame 4.1).

Debates on the nature of creativity continue. We will also consider situations where the resolution of a problem is not novel or unusual, but
Conditions for constructive creativity

Carl Rogers (1954, pp. 67–8) suggested the following ‘inner conditions’ are closely associated with our creative potential:

**Openness to experience**
‘a lack of rigidity . . . permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions, and hypotheses . . . a tolerance for ambiguity where ambiguity exists . . . the ability to receive much conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation’.

**An internal locus of evaluation**
A belief that the value of our creative products is established not by the praise and criticism of others but by ourselves.

**The ability to toy with elements and concepts**
‘the ability to play spontaneously with ideas, colors, shapes, relationships – to juggle elements into impossible juxtapositions, to shape wild hypotheses, to make the given problematic, to express the ridiculous, to translate from one form to another, to transform into improbable equivalents’.

the process by which it has been attained is nevertheless ingenious, demonstrating both flair and imagination. Here the process is creative. Simply ‘making out’ in our everyday lives can be a creative process; is being an entrepreneur, an inventor or a Van Gogh any more creative than bringing up four children as a single parent drawing state benefits?

Wherever and however true creativity is manifested, it is commonly believed that the same mental process has been used to produce it. According to Rogers, ‘there is no fundamental difference in the creative process as it is evidenced in painting a picture, composing a symphony, devising new instruments of killing, developing a scientific theory, discovering new procedures in human relationships . . . ’. Much research into creativity has been directed at attempting to discover what is actually involved in these mental processes. The best known of these are the ‘factor analysis’ studies of J. P. Guilford (1962). Factor analysis is a sophisticated statistical method that attempts to uncover the underlying factors or variables that give rise to a set of observed measurements. For example, if we have a group of tests that purport to measure some aspect of creativity and we apply these to a number of people, then factor analysis will help us to identify what factors constitute creativity. In Frame 4.2 we can see a summary of the results of J. P. Guilford’s research (1962).

Since we are concerned with problem solving, we will take these