

## chapter one UNDERSTANDING CREATIVITY

### THE FIVE MOST IMPORTANT MISCONCEPTIONS

Why is it that after so many years of research and application in the field of creativity, the most crucial insights still haven't reached the greater part of the population? One of the reasons could be that schools don't consider creativity to be a subject worth emphasising. After reading this book, you will probably agree with us that the following misconceptions need to be addressed with greatest urgency.

#### **Misconception 1: 'You're either creative or you're not! You can't learn it.'**

Creativity can be learned. Creativity is a skill. Like any skill, some people are endowed with a greater natural talent than others. This is the case with languages or mathematics, balance, memory, etc. It also applies to creativity.

Just as you can improve your basic level in all these skills by actively working on them, so can you improve your creative skills. In this book you will find lots of exercises that will offer you the opportunity to enhance your present creativity skills. Our aim is for you to develop the necessary confidence to be able to find a solution to every single problem you come across. Remember that for every problem there are always several solutions and it is possible to turn problems into opportunities.

#### **Misconception 2: 'Creativity is batik work or flower arranging. It's for softies.'**

Creativity has become one of the most important developmental aspects for individuals and organisations. A large number of companies and organisations have discovered that creativity provides the means to bring together both personal and corporate goals. People want interesting jobs. Companies need to change constantly because a status quo can bring complacency. For many years multinationals have offered their employees the opportunity to develop their creative potential within the professional arena. The current trend of accelerated innovation proves it: creativity and result-oriented management go hand in hand. And this is anything but soft.

**Misconception 3: 'My boss keeps me from being creative.'**

YOU are the only one who decides how to use and develop your creative potential. Obviously, one environment is more stimulating than another but acting the victim has never helped anyone. Consider the obstacles in your environment as a challenge. If your boss doesn't assist you, you have two options: either you help your boss to change, or change bosses.

Do something about your environment. This book will offer you plenty of tips. You can try some of these within your organisation and see what happens. Be bold, but also, be patient: this kind of change takes time. If this doesn't work, find another environment. Many organisations are looking for people who are willing to invest their creative potential in their jobs. And companies (bosses) who refuse to get this message don't have much of a future.

**Misconception 4: 'I don't have the time for creativity.'**

Creativity doesn't require a lot of time, it requires focus. Of course, we live in a hectic world and we work under pressure – allow this to stimulate your creative potential. Creativity can help you to escape the vicious circle of working in a reactive rather than a proactive way. By asking yourself the right questions about your current way of functioning and managing, new opportunities will arise.

Thinking up new ideas doesn't take a lot of time but it requires focus. Sometimes it is necessary to create some distance from the problem at hand. When you are trained to work creatively, the best ideas will occur to you when you least expect them. Being able to pay close attention to a problem is much more important than having a lot of time.

**Misconception 5: 'We already do brainstorming sessions.'**

A little learning is a dangerous thing. In many companies people meet for a so-called 'brainstorm'. Often these brainstorming sessions are organised in an unprofessional manner and even the most elementary rules such as 'postponing judgement' are overlooked. These sessions sometimes appear to be based on the shouting out of as many ideas as possible, ideas which nobody really knows how to deal with afterwards. Such performances usually result in a frustrated 'problem owner' as well as frustrated participants. We shouldn't be surprised that the word 'brainstorm' has a negative connotation in many companies.

Some training and a little attention to a number of basic rules can easily enhance the results of these creative sessions. The target should be for the session to render at least twice as many new and useful ideas as a normal meeting would do. *Creativity in Business* explains how to achieve this.

**IT WAS A DAY  
LIKE THIS  
WHEN  
MARCO POLO  
LEFT FOR CHINA**

**WHAT ARE YOUR  
PLANS FOR TODAY**

*Loesje*

P.O.-BOX 1045 6801 BA ARNHEM  
HOLLAND

In order to process original ideas (both others and your own) in a sensible way, you will need to develop a more subtle use of judgement. We call this: postponing judgement.

**What does postponing judgement mean?** When judging a new idea, it is not necessary to fully understand it right away. The art is to be open and accept the idea (by postponing your judgement), even though the idea might not fit into a certain box. By doing so, you create the space in your mind in which the idea's potential can develop. This needn't always require a lot of time. It's more a matter of attitude.

**How does this work?** The first three activities take place simultaneously. Only then can you start judging.

- |   |           |
|---|-----------|
| 1. What is meant here? What is this idea?         | Opening   |
| 2. Accept this new thought                        | Accepting |
| 3. Explore the opportunities created by this idea | Exploring |
| 4. Judge what you are going to do with it         | Judging   |

Let's be clear about one thing: postponing judgement does not mean cancelling judgement. In every creative process there is an explicit phase of postponement of judgement. After having explored the potential, we do have to judge the ideas very seriously. There are techniques for this and we will consider them in Chapter Six.

Practising postponement of judgement will also prove beneficial in other aspects of your life. A creative thinker who can easily postpone his judgement will automatically be more open to other opinions, other visions, other cultures. It will be a lot easier for him to explore other opinions without renouncing his own values. It enhances his capacities to discern the various aspects of 'the truth'.

On page 37 you can get to grips with what this creative skill means in practice and you can train your ability to postpone your judgement.

### Flexible Association

Let us return for a moment to the structure of the brain, how all of the brain cells are interconnected and continuously transmit signals to one another. The nature of this construction allows for the spontaneous associations to occur.

Association happens when one thought generates another: 'This makes me think of...'

The mention of the words 'weather forecast' might make one think of the television. With association it's almost possible to visualise an impulse travelling via a cable from one cell to another and in doing so, creating its own trail of connections through the brain structure. There are an enormous number of possible paths (via the thousands of dendrites) through the brain structure.

# IDEA KILLERS...

Yes, but... It already exists! Our customers won't like that!

WE DON'T HAVE TIME... **NO!** It's not possible...

It's too expensive! Let's be realistic... **That's not logical...**

**We need to do more research...** THERE'S NO BUDGET...

**I'm not creative...** We don't want to make mistakes...

The management won't agree... **GET REAL...**

**It's not my responsibility...** It's too difficult to master...

**THAT'S TOO BIG A CHANGE...**

The market is not ready yet... **Let's keep it under consideration...**

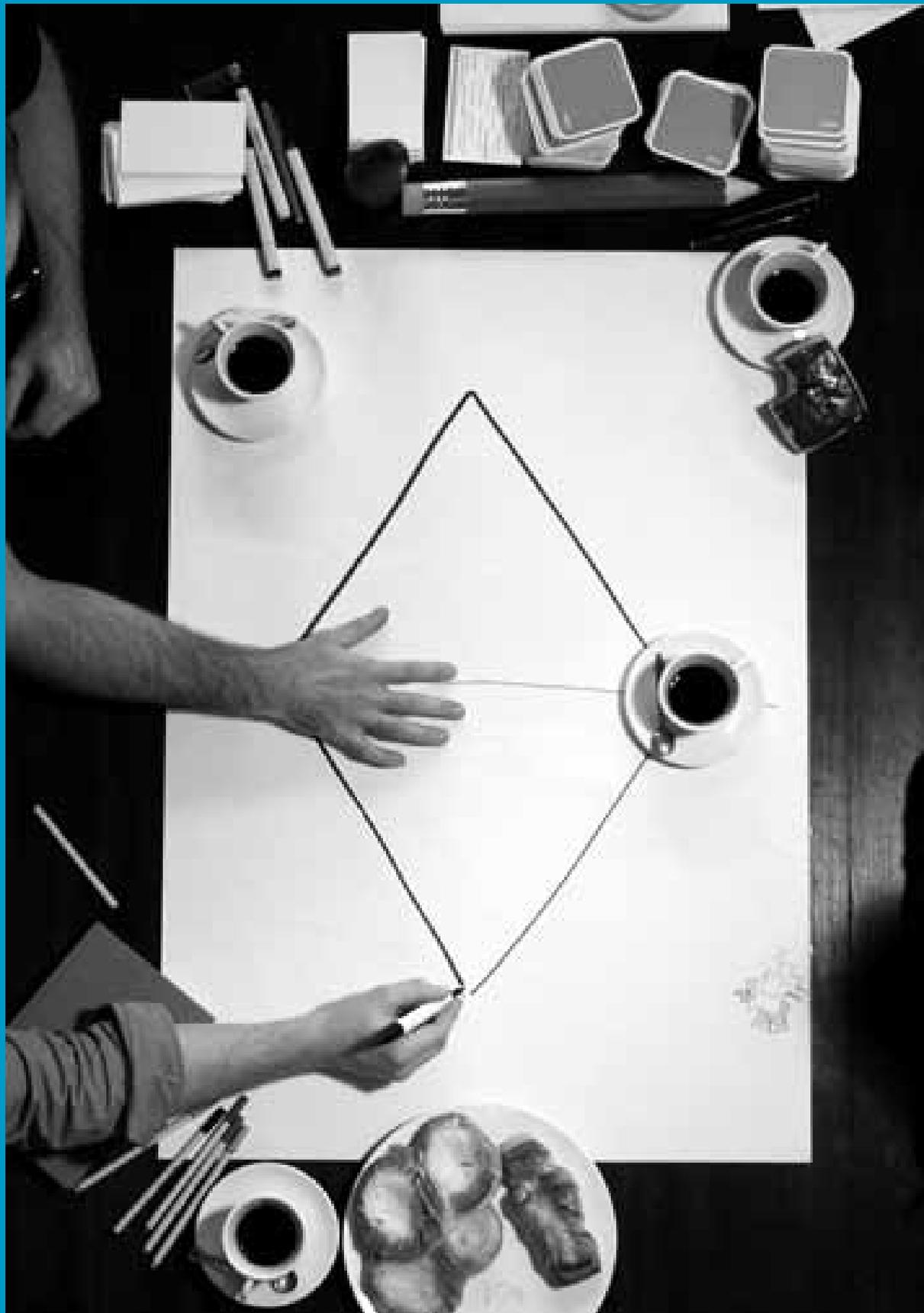
It is just like... **The older generation will not use it...**

WE ARE TOO SMALL FOR THAT...

**It might work in other places but not here...**

SINCE WHEN ARE YOU THE EXPERT?... **That's for the future...**

There are no staff members available... **IT IS NOT SUITABLE FOR OUR CLIENTS...**



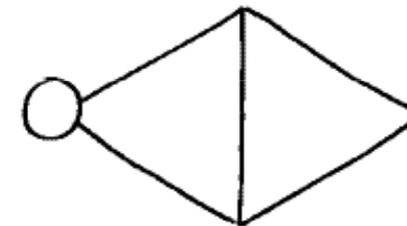
## chapter three THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Models or diagrams help us to get a grip on reality which is often too complex for our comprehension. There are hundreds of ways to express creative processes, from the depictions of a genius' brainwave to the endlessly detailed flow chart of an engineering project. This book offers a very simple general format that will hopefully inspire you by its simplicity.

Some people find it highly inappropriate to try to capture creativity in models. 'How can one even try and catch the elusive in a structure?' However, you will see that some models can be very useful for understanding and steering the creative processes. They help you to direct your thinking and to concentrate on those elements of the creative process where you can make a difference. It works as long as we don't take the models for reality.

The most simple form of the creative process consists of three phases:

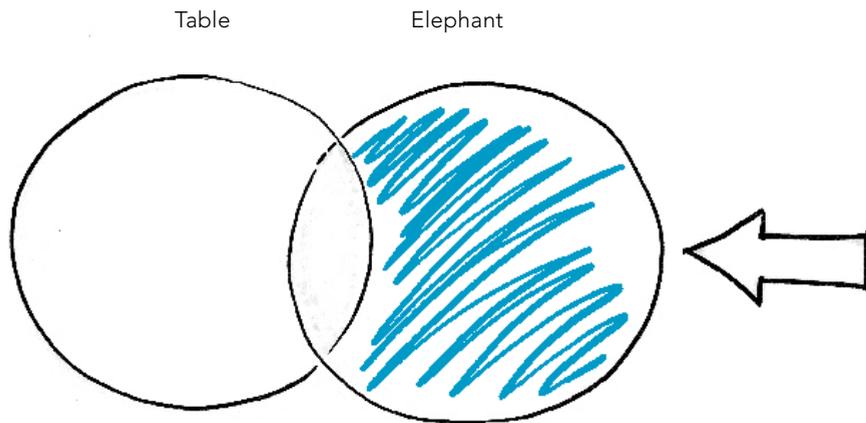
- Starting phase [Chapter Four](#)
- Diverging phase [Chapter Five](#)
- Converging phase [Chapter Six](#)



There is no need to tackle the chapters chronologically. See for yourself what you find interesting or new. Go ahead and experiment. By entering the creative process, you will automatically come across those aspects that follow your learning needs: 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating!'

**B. You write down features and associations of this analogon.**

To serve as an example, let's use our tables on page 118 and choose an animal as an analogon, an elephant for instance. We start from the specific characteristics of and associations with this analogon.



We try to find at least 5 particular characteristics for this analogon.

An elephant

- has a trunk
- lives in a herd
- has a good memory
- comes from Africa or India
- performs in a circus
- has big ears etc.

**C. Resociation**

For example:

- The 'trunk' could make us think of a kind of built-in vacuum cleaner in the table, to be used to clean the tabletop
- The 'herd' generates the idea of a series of smaller tables that can slide into one another
- A good 'memory': why not insert a horizontal computer screen into the tabletop so that you can browse the morning news on the Internet while you have breakfast?

You will observe that a different kind of ideas is generated here than those which resulted from the presupposition technique. Now you can go further and search for ideas based on the other characteristics of an elephant.

**Direct Analogy**

1. Starting formulation
2. First round
3. Choose an analogon
4. What is specific to this analogon?  
Write down its characteristics and associations
5. Make every feature a starting point in the search for new ideas.  
Resociate

This technique is sometimes called 'analogy with nature'. Nature is considered to mean everything that humans are surrounded by and which they are a part of. The idea behind this is that for every single problem, however big or small, nature always offers a solution.

There is even a science called bionics which studies the functioning of organic systems and applies their mechanics to concrete technical problems. Many inventions have their origin in nature: the undercarriage of a fighter jet that has to land on an aircraft carrier is based on the 'hinge joints' in a grasshopper's legs; the surface of Olympic swimsuits is similar to shark skin; the structured surface on the back lights of cars is derived from a dragonfly's wings, for the shape causes mini-turbulence which prevents dust and dirt from becoming attached to the surface.

**TIP FOR THE COACH**

DIRECT ANALOGY IS A HIGHLY ACCESSIBLE TECHNIQUE WITH A BROAD RANGE OF APPLICATIONS AND MOST GROUPS EXPERIENCE IT AS VERY REWARDING.

A FEW PRACTICAL TIPS: THE ANALOGON SHOULD BE INSPIRING AND SUFFICIENTLY KNOWN IN ORDER TO GENERATE A NUMBER OF PARTICULAR CHARACTERISTICS THAT CAN LEAD TO A FLUENT AND VARIED FLOW OF IDEAS. FROM WHAT IS EXPLAINED ABOVE, WE SEE THAT AN ANALOGON CHOSEN FROM NATURE CAN PROVE TO BE VERY INSPIRING FOR MANY PEOPLE.

## Superhero

**What is it?** As a child you probably admired the ingenuity of Batman, Zorro or Mickey Mouse, always able to find a way of turning desperate situations into something good. The superhero technique brings these heroes back to life in concrete problem situations.

'Superhero' is an example of a fantastical analogy. The fantastical analogy is related to the former technique although, unlike like direct analogy, it isn't limited to reality. We can let our imagination go wild when choosing an analogy. This creates another angle from which to view the problem and from there, new ideas can be generated.

**How does the technique work?** Think of a hero or a heroine whom you are in awe of, in a positive or negative way. Fairytales, comics, cartoons or science fiction can be a valuable source of inspiration. Always choose a hero or heroine with whom you are well acquainted. It's preferable not to choose stereotypical heroes. Your hero may also be a real or historical person but for the sake of the exercise you will need to raise this person to a mythical status.

**Now bring the chosen hero or heroine to life in your thoughts.** What does he or she look like? How does she move? What does she feel? What is she capable of? Once you have your heroine in mind, ask yourself how she would react when confronted with the actual problem. How would she tackle this problem? You then transform every solution you find into concrete suggestions for solving the problem.

Examples of heroes or heroines might be: Batman, Leonardo da Vinci, Gandhi, Frodo, Madonna, Lara Croft, Monsieur Poirot, your (late) grandmother, Harry Potter, Philippe Starck, Inspector Morse, David Copperfield, Flipper the dolphin, Andy Warhol, Nelson Mandela, your white blood cells...

How would Leonardo da Vinci handle the queue problem ('How can we create a more pleasant atmosphere during the waiting time at the checkout?' see page 228). His perspective drawing of the Last Supper might make you think of optical illusion: visual tricks could make the waiting line seem shorter or hide it from view. His Mona Lisa could lead you to a philosophical approach towards the whole issue (make the waiting seem worthwhile) or teach people how to paint in the waiting line. His drawings of helicopters could introduce the third dimension. Why not consider putting checkouts on different levels, not only on the ground surface?

On page 113 you can practise with your superheroes.

'Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.' Winston Churchill

# IMAGINATION IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KNOWLEDGE

Albert Einstein



## Superhero

1. Starting formulation
2. First round
3. Think of a hero or a heroine
4. Bring the hero or the heroine to life
  - Which characteristics could you attribute to him or her?
5. How would the hero or the heroine tackle your problem?
6. Transform the suggestions into concrete solutions for the problem.
  - Resociate

A variation on this method is to read a story in which the protagonist encounters several problems. While reading you can pay attention to the solutions proposed in the story. Afterwards, you can try to transform the solutions from the story into solutions for the actual problem.

Fairytales are written in a very expressive language which makes them very useful here. They lead us into a world of wonders and unlimited fantasy. Their structure is remarkably similar to the creative process: there is a problem to be solved, obstacles occur and finally a solution is found. The fantastical solutions that the hero or heroine comes up with can incite you to think up fantastical ideas concerning your own problem. The world is full of fairytales: the tales of Grimm, Andersen, Perrault, Hauff, 1001 nights...

## TIP FOR THE COACH

IN GENERAL PEOPLE LIKE THIS TECHNIQUE VERY MUCH. IT IS OBVIOUSLY VERY PLAYFUL AND BRINGS OUT THE CHILD IN US. WHEN APPLYING THIS TECHNIQUE IN A GROUP, LET EVERY PARTICIPANT CHOOSE A DIFFERENT HERO. THIS BRINGS MORE DIVERSITY TO THE FLOW OF IDEAS.

### Creative Session

Choosing with groups can be divided into two different selection processes.

A. During creative sessions, as a group participant you are invited to be at the service of the problem owner. You will of course have your own opinions but at the same time you consider the ideas from the point of view of the problem owner. You choose and develop the ideas that offer the largest added value from their perspective. This is the selection process that we will develop further in *Creativity in Business*.

B. A totally different situation is when there are elements within the group that need to take one particular standpoint (defensive) and yet a shared decision is necessary. One could call this 'selection by negotiation'. It is very common in political situations; for example, during negotiations between unions and employers. This is a political decision process. We will *not* treat that process in this book.

Choosing within groups has several procedural and psychological aspects. When selecting your 'choice model', consider the following:

- the commitment of the group
- the number of ideas you are starting with, and how many ideas you want to end with
- the degree of innovation you are aiming at
- the culture of the environment in which you will be working

### Technique 1: The COCD Box®

The COCD box was created by a Dutch-Flemish organisation for the development of creative thinking – the abbreviation COCD stands for Centre of Development of Creative Thinking. The COCD box is one of the better techniques to have been developed in recent years to manage the start of the convergence phase. You can apply it to all kinds of problems and in all kinds of groups. By using the COCD box to make a selection of the most promising ideas, you can focus on real innovation and you will increase the group's emotional commitment towards the selection that has been made.

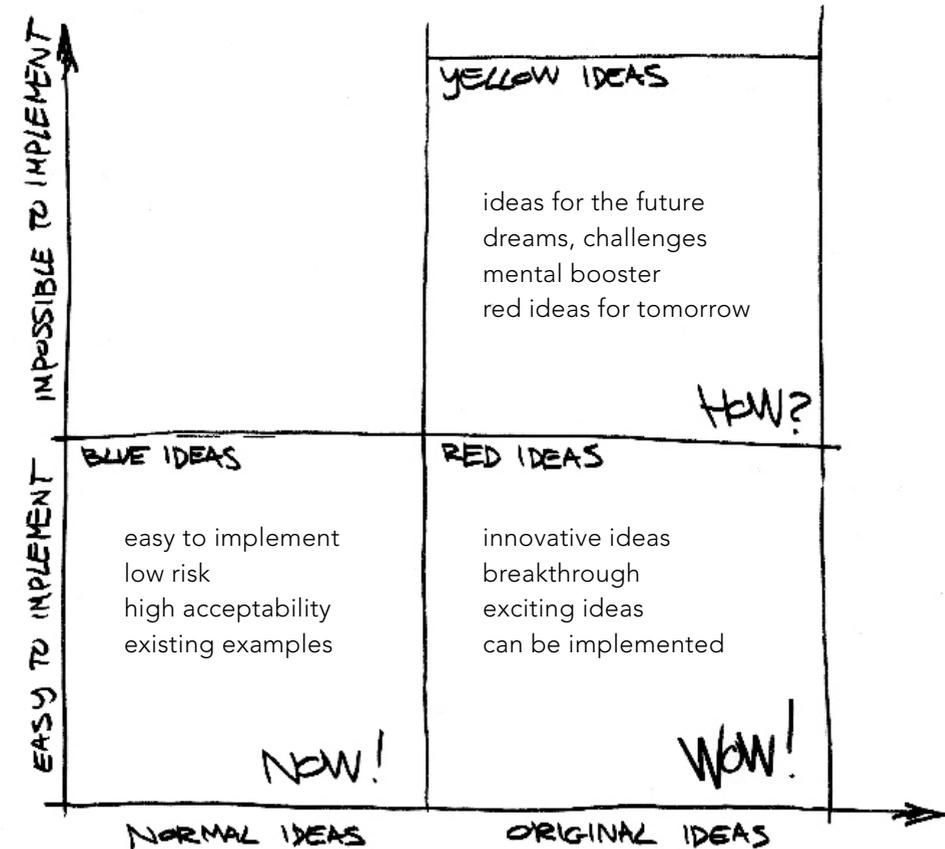
**The COCD box originated from frustration at the creadox. How can we avoid falling back into old patterns and wasting innovative potential?**

When selecting ideas according to the COCD box method, you consider two basic criteria. On the one hand, degree of innovativeness – is the idea old hat or new? On the other hand, feasibility: is the idea easy or difficult to realise? Feasibility should take into account costs, legality, technical feasibility,

strategy, etc – in short, everything that could make you think an idea might be difficult to achieve.

Based on these two criteria – originality and ease of implementation – we get a diagram with three interesting boxes.

### The COCD Box



In the bottom left box we find the **blue ideas**. These are common and feasible ideas. They are very useful, there's nothing wrong with them. These ideas would probably have resulted from an ordinary meeting.

The bottom right box shows the **red ideas**. In fact, a creative session is meant to generate red ideas. The red ideas are exciting and innovative, and yet, your intuition tells you that these ideas could be realised without too much trouble.

On the top right there is a category of ideas that normally get lost at the end of almost every creative session: the **yellow ideas**. You know that these