



Cultivating the 4 kinds of creativity: a team exercise

If there's one thing people agree about on the future of work it is the conviction that our jobs will become increasingly creative. This guide introduces the four types of creativity — Integration, Splitting, Figure-Ground Reversal, and Distal Thinking — developed by Dr. Gabriella Rosen Kellerman and Martin E.P. Seligman, Ph.D., the authors of [“Tomorrowmind”](#) and the HBR article, [“Cultivating the Four Kinds of Creativity.”](#) Explore how you can use each type of creativity to enhance the innovation and problem-solving of your team.

The 4 kinds of creativity

1 Integration

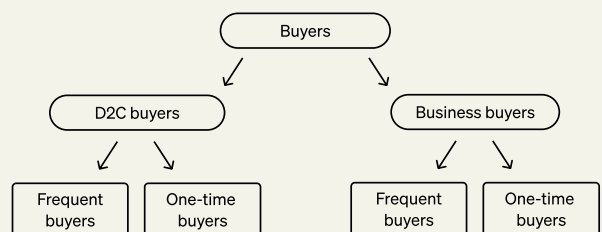
Definition: Merging concepts or theories to discover connections.

Example: Isaac Newton's law of gravity: When Newton realized an apple 20 feet away and the faraway moon took up the same visual space, he wondered whether the force drawing the apple to the ground was the same as what held the moon in orbit, an idea that gave rise to his inverse square law.

2 Splitting

Definition: Distinguishing or separating concepts that appear unified.

Example: Audience segmentation



3 Figure-Ground Reversal

Definition: Merging concepts or theories to discover connections.

Example: GPS: In 1957, the U.S. military used two widely separated points on Earth to track Sputnik's speed and position using the Doppler effect. A year later, it became clear that the far more profound application of the technology was for the exact opposite purpose — using points in space to track objects on Earth. Today, we know this technology as the Global Positioning System or GPS.

4 Distal Thinking

Definition: Imagining futures vastly different from the present.

Example: Paypal: When it launched, in 1999, adoption of its full slate of intended uses was low. So rather than try to advance an ambitious vision before consumers were ready, the company focused on developing its user base through eBay, a platform where such payments were becoming the norm. In 2023, PayPal's revenue topped \$29.7 billion.

Conclusion

Understanding and applying the four types of creativity can transform how your team approaches problem-solving and innovation. By recognizing and developing each type of creativity, you can unlock a comprehensive suite of solutions and perspectives, driving your team toward success.

TEAM ACTIVITY

1

Read the [HBR article](#).

2

Discuss together:
Which of the four creative types does each person identify with? Why?

3

Discuss together:
What types of innovation does your team/organization tend toward? What are some examples?

4

Pick a team innovation challenge. Think of solutions that represent each of the four types of creativity.

Increase innovation with creative leaders, teams, and people.

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