TWO TYPES OF CREATIVITY

Creativity is the use of imagination or original ideas to create something; inventiveness.

According to psychologist Michael Kirton, there are two types of creativity:

- **Adaptive creativity** – adapting something that **exists**
- **Innovative creativity** – creating something **new**

Kirton saw Adaption-Innovation as a continuum cognitive style, a "preferred mode of tackling problems at all stages." He emphasises that scores on the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI), are value-free: "Very high, very low or intermediate KAI scores are neither laudatory [good] nor pejorative [bad]." All of us can use both styles of creative problem solving, but we have a preference for either Adaptive/Resourceful or Innovative/Original Creativity.
ADAPTIVE CREATIVITY (RESOURCESFUL)

People who score on the KAI as Adaptive tend to accept the paradigm within which a problem is embedded (current theories, policies, points of view). They are likely to produce a few ideas that aim at continuity with the practices, norms, and current way of doing things, but bring about a better way of doing them.

To be successful over time, most organisations (except the most innovative in their products and/or services) will necessarily be adaptive in their orientation. It is more costly and risky to continually do things in a different way. Kirton remarks that Adaptors are at their best "in the smooth, efficient operation of an existing system; creatively refining, improving, and extending the thinking that underlies it."

INNOVATIVE (ORIGINAL)

People who score on the KAI as Innovative tend to "detach the problem from its cocoon of accepted thought," to step out of the "box" or paradigm. They tend to redefine a problem, produce many ideas, break through what the organization perceives as givens and restraints, provide solutions aimed at doing things differently.

While a company is growing and maintaining itself in predictable ways and in a predictable market, innovative solutions are not necessarily preferable; but organisations cannot survive if they're unable to break through with new thinking when necessary.

THE DILEMMA OF DIFFERENCES

Studies suggest that each problem mode has its advantages, and the most successful organisations (and leaders) are those able to use both problem solving styles flexibly. In many organisations, though, Innovators experience problems in communication because it is difficult to get others to see outside the box, and they are often met with skepticism.

Perhaps as a consequence, Innovators tend to be condescending to Adaptors, who can be very resourceful and come up with excellent solutions to ongoing problems, but who tend to work within the rules, to seek consensus, and to prefer change that occurs gradually. Thus Adaptors are often seen by Innovators as unimaginative, stuck, resistant to change, always focused on problems versus solutions, and/or lacking a view of the big picture.

Because innovative solutions are less easily understood and have unpredictable outcomes, and because such break-through change is threatening, Innovators are often seen by Adaptors as undisciplined, impractical, irreverent, abrasive, and/or insensitive to people. Clearly, a better understanding of these different creative styles – and the value of each under certain circumstances – can lead to stronger, more flexible teams and more successful organisations.