

The Business of Creativity

TBOC White Paper
NO.1



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How many *creative leaps* will *you make* this year?

NOBODY HAS NOTICED – BUT WE’RE ALLOWING A MAJOR MILESTONE TO SLIP PAST. Where the English language is concerned, ‘creativity’ is a recent addition. Its first recorded use is thought to appear in a book written by the historian Adolphus William Ward in 1875. In *A History of Dramatic English Literature*, Ward refers to William Shakespeare’s “poetic creativity”. We are more than halfway into 2025, and no-one has observed (much less celebrated) that this year marks the 150th birthday of creativity.

Or at least its definition. On such an anniversary (by the way, 150 years is known as a sesquicentennial), it’s only right that we remember how much we owe to creativity. It drives culture. It energises business. It captures imagination. It also increases empathy and deepens ties in our communities. It gives meaning to who we are – helping us to care, enjoy, and value our time on the planet. I am convinced that it is the most important component of our civilisation. Creativity is life.

Creativity is also responsible for propelling us into the future. Humans perform poorly when trying to predict what’s around the corner. (Don’t believe me? Remember that the US Postal Service thought rocket-propelled letters would become a thing.) But we are exceptional at building the new and the next – with whatever we have access to in the *now*.

This is why the team and I have become preoccupied lately with the notion of the creative leap. There have been moments in history when humanity witnesses a sudden, audacious, and uproarious bound into tomorrow. The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Sixties. The printing press, the spinning jenny, the internet. Galileo, Picasso, Elvis Presley. Baroque, rock, hip-hop.

Creative leaps don’t need to be huge in size or scale. They can occur in the life of an individual, or be initiated by a business determined to take charge of its future. At **The Business of Creativity**, recent years have represented a figurative run-up

to our own vault into the air. We began with a single masterclass – ***Creativity for Growth*** – and have built this into a global roster of events, seminars, and academies. The impetus for our leap comes from a simple idea: that creativity is oxygen for growth and as essential for business as breathing is for athletes.

In the following pages you will find an examination of creativity in 2025. We tried to gauge just how many leaps are in progress around the world, and take a reading of the state of creativity at the midpoint of the decade. Our research saw us delve into the studies that have already approached this subject. We conducted a global survey exploring how leaders view and leverage creativity. We also assembled a panel of 20 virtuoso creatives to get a more human perspective on how ideas are changing the world.

The team and I hope you enjoy our findings, and that, on the 150th anniversary of the first recorded use of the word *creativity*, you are winding up for a leap of your very own.

SIR JOHN HEGARTY



Executive summary

5 key takeouts

Creativity drives economic growth – even in uncertain times.

- > Amid geopolitical turbulence and economic slowdown, creativity remains a reliable growth engine. From the digital economy’s projected \$16.5 trillion valuation to record-breaking new business formation, creativity is driving prosperity through entrepreneurship, innovation, and reinvention across every sector.

Businesses are reframing creativity as a core competency.

- > 87% of global business leaders surveyed believe creativity is as critical as efficiency and cost control. Far from being confined to marketing departments, creativity is seen as essential for innovation, employee engagement, and futureproofing against change. In short: creativity is business-critical.

The CEO is now the chief creative officer.

- > Creativity is increasingly viewed as a leadership issue, with 40% of respondents identifying the CEO as the person most responsible for embedding it across the organisation. As AI redefines work and productivity, human ingenuity (led from the top) is becoming the defining corporate advantage.

A new creativity culture is emerging.

- > Culture is the most visible signal of a creative business. High levels of employee engagement, diverse perspectives, and organisation-wide idea generation are seen as the strongest indicators of creative health. Companies must design structures and environments that encourage risk-taking, experimentation, and playful thinking.

The AI age will not replace creativity – it will intensify the need for it.

- > 69% of leaders believe AI will make human creativity more important, not less. Tools such as generative AI are seen as augmenters, not substitutes. As technology democratises access, the differentiator becomes the originality, courage, and imagination of human ideas.

About us At **The Business of Creativity**, we believe that creativity is not just a talent, it's a strategic imperative. We exist to help leaders unlock the commercial and cultural power of creativity in their organisations. We created this white paper to mark the 150th anniversary of the first recorded use of the word creativity, and to examine its role in shaping business success in 2025 and beyond. This will be an annual report.



SECTION ONE

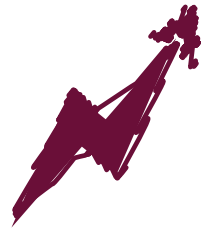
The global state of creativity in 2025

While creativity might be hard to measure, the signs of how it adds value, increases prosperity, and enriches society are plain to see. In our opening chapter we take stock of the global state of creativity in 2025. >

“Creativity is hard to understand. It is also the greatest driver of value available to humanity.”

BEN LEE, CEO, THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY





Unknowable, unmeasurable, and imperative

What is creativity?

The question might be simple, but the answer is not. While most of us can claim to know what creativity is, fewer are able to express it in words. Throughout history, we have tried to nail its definition and – with less success – explain where it comes from. Some have argued that our subconscious mind is responsible for the birth of an idea. Others take the view that creativity is born from focus and mental effort. When describing creativity and identifying its source, all views are relevant – but none are complete.

This unknowable quality of creativity is part of what makes it valuable. Creativity can’t be measured: it defies process, confounds theory, and eludes scientific enquiry. Still, it would be foolish to understate its influence or underestimate its power. Humans are creative animals and we can observe the presence of creativity in all facets of our civilisation. It is not limited to people who work in the arts, with brands, or in entertainment (and certainly not to individuals who refer to themselves as “a creative”). Instead, it is behind every act of self-expression ever to happen.

The clothes you wear, the way you decorate your house, the places you frequent, the people you gravitate towards, the career you pursue – these are all articulations of your persona and, therefore, creative acts.

Trying to define creativity, or explain how it happens, might be a vain effort. It is more useful in 2025 to look at how it might be used to serve us better. To understand clearly how it is the most effective driver of value available to nations, organisations, and people. To see it as oxygen for commercial growth.

As you will see from our enquiry in section two, we have set out on a multi-year mission to discover a system of truly measuring creativity. In this inaugural report, we undertook a study of business leaders to gauge how they perceive it, where they believe it adds value, and how they feel its purpose might change in the age of AI.

Ideas are free, and while creativity is everything, it is also – in a liberal society – available to everyone. We can’t measure creativity in the way we would a consumer sentiment,

or a commodity like steel or oil. But we can attest to its presence by examining the impact it leaves behind in the places it has been. The signs of creativity can be read in new forms of value creation, bursts of innovation, invention, and prosperity. In short, the number of creative leaps that are taking place across industries.

Leap one: Driving global growth

It would seem that such stories would be harder to find than usual. The International Monetary Fund warns that the world economy has entered

digital economy will be worth **\$16.5 trillion** by 2028, which also means that it will account for **17% of global GDP**.

While political instability and economic headwinds frustrate the usual progress of trade, growth will be helped along by technical innovation. Another signifier of creativity can be found in intellectual property – specifically, in the number of patents being filed. Europe’s inventive potential has been soaring in recent years. The European Patent Office reported a record number of applications – **199,275** – in 2023. This was followed by a slight decline (of 11) the following year. Globally, the World Intellectual Property

and the rate at which they are given life should tell a story of how easily (or keenly) we are able to imagine something with our head, then build it with our hands. If this logic follows, then entrepreneurship tells an uplifting story of how much creativity is contributing to life and business in 2025.

In the US, over **5.4 million new businesses** were formed in 2023, according to the **Commerce Institute**. In the UK, new businesses set a record **5.63 million active companies** that registered with Companies House by the end of 2024, according to the **NatWest and Beauhurst New Startup Index**. That means nearly **850,000**

Organization reports that around **273,900** international applications were filed last year – an increase of **0.5%** on the year before. The highest number of applications by country came from China (tech giant **Huawei** registered **6,600** alone).

Leap two: Entrepreneurship upsurge

Another way we might gauge the role of creativity is by looking at the health of entrepreneurship globally. Businesses are creative constructs,

businesses joined the UK’s corporate register last year – and at least as many founders decided to take the helm of a venture that began as an idea.

The figures tell a positive story in the EU, too. In 2024, the EU was estimated to have **26.06 million enterprises**, a slight increase from the 25.80 million in 2023, according to the European Commission. Since 2008, there’s been a net increase of some **5.9 million business enterprises**. This includes a significant number of small and ➤

> medium-sized firms, with **26.1 million** estimated in 2024.

In Africa, a vast number of young people aspire to be entrepreneurs, according to the African Youth Survey, which suggests that **71%** of young Africans plan to run their own venture. And what about the appearance globally of unicorns? (Unicorns are new companies that are valued at over **\$1 billion**.) The US, with its mature technology ecosystem, tops the list by country at **702**, according to **Founders Forum**. China and India will be jostling for second place in the coming years, with **302** (worth **\$1.4 trillion**) and **119** (valued at **\$0.4 trillion**), respectively, as of April 2025.

Leap three: Creative industries

While launching any business is a creative act, what about the portion of the global economy that can be described as the creative industries? The state of businesses in areas such as advertising, architecture, publishing, design, and the arts are an indicator of creativity’s impact on business, and how companies in these areas can sustain creative workers. In the UK, the impact of this sector is well studied. Official statistics show that creative industries contributed **£124 billion** in gross value added (GVA) to the UK economy in 2023. This is equivalent to **5.2% of the GVA** of the whole UK economy.

The creative industries have form for outpacing the performance of the economy more broadly. Take the US: in 2023, arts and cultural economic activity reached **\$1.17 trillion**, representing **4.2% of the US GDP**, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA). The sector also grew at a lick more than twice the rate of the wider US economy between 2022 and 2023, according to BEA figures. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the creative economy is roaring, according to the Centre for International Private Enterprise. It contributes **2.2%** to the region’s GDP and employs **1.9 million** people.

But behind these encouraging figures, more recent findings exhibit worrying signs of a creative industries recession. In the UK, government data shows that for the 12 months up to the end of March 2024, the total number of creative industries jobs was **2,387,000** – a fall from the 2,457,000 recorded the year before. The sector’s value to the economy for the 12 months up to the end of June 2024 was **£123.74 billion** – down **1.3%** on the £125.36 billion recorded for the 12 months up to June 2023.

Leap four: Flourish – or decline?

In the sphere of major brands, it is clearer than ever that enabling creativity is the difference between a prolonged reign or an inevitable decline. Each year, research consultancy **Kantar** releases its Brandz index of the world’s most valuable brands. The top five this year? **Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and NVIDIA**. While it’s a sign of the times that the highest performers are all tech giants, their commitment to creativity and innovation shouldn’t be overlooked. Beyond this, businesses that are solving complex problems, setting cultural agendas, and moving audiences in 2025 are able to do so because they have creativity in their DNA. For instance, **Waymo** – which was crowned No. 1 in **Fast Company’s** list of the world’s most innovative companies – was a spin-out of **Google**, which famously allows teams to focus on, and prioritise, individual projects.

Some research indicates that companies’ willingness to apply creativity isn’t as strong as it should be. For instance, a report by CANNES LIONS shows that creative confidence is being threatened by a shyness to put forth new work and an aversion to risk. Its poll of marketers and creative workers concluded that as few as **13%** of companies are “creative risk friendly”, while **29%** of brands admitted to being “highly risk-averse”. The main reason?

A problem that researchers call the “insight famine”. Over half of brands studied (**51%**) complain their insights are too weak to produce bold creativity, and only **13%** in the poll describe their own insights as “strong”. Perhaps it’s time that brands learned to trust their own instincts, rather than waiting for the data to dictate the next move.

Leap five: Creators rule commerce

One cohort that has no problem coming up with new ideas is creators. In recent years, a deeply consequential movement has taken place on social media. For decades, platforms such as **Facebook** and **Instagram** nudged users towards glorifying depictions of their own lives. Content featured a screen roll of our greatest hits – anniversaries, holidays, engagements. Then, with the adoption of **TikTok** and the rise of **YouTube**, the way we used social shifted – away from self-obsession and towards self-expression. The term influencer was retired and in its place we got creator (and the nuance between these two words is important to note). Those with potent

Only humans are capable of imagining, then bringing about, the future

personal brands and audiences in the millions are re-writing the rules of commerce.

An increasing number of creators are producing material for a rapidly expanding audience online. **Deloitte** estimates that there are currently **50 million creators**, who generate content for **five billion social media users globally**. And people are getting paid. Social commerce is growing in the creator economy and is anticipated to be worth **\$2 trillion** by next year. How helpful is it to have a creator involved with your brand? Very. Consider the recent beauty mega-deal between **E.l.f. Beauty** and **Rhode**, the skincare brand founded by Hailey Bieber. The former has bought the latter for **\$1 billion**. **Vogue Business** reported that in 2024, Bieber contributed **\$400 million** to her brand in earned media value – the equivalent advertising spend required to generate the same number of impressions through social media.

Leap six: AI tension

Data might be able to give leaders a clear picture of the past, but only imagination, innovation, and inventing the new can bring about

a future we’d choose to live in. And most sensible predictions describe a world where humans are no longer the only form of intelligent life on the planet. Advances in large language models and generative AI are propelling human creativity into a new epoch. One that is full of potential and uncertainty.

The projected value of the category offers an indication of how profoundly these tools will impact creativity in the coming years. **Bloomberg Intelligence** reckons that the generative AI market will grow from \$40 billion in 2022 to **\$1.3 trillion** by 2032.

Creative workers and business leaders are getting to grips not with just the function of these new programs – such as learning how to write a good prompt – but also deciding how they could best be used. Jenny Nicholson, a creative technologist who specialises in AI, has a simple way of describing how creatives should think about the new tools: “I don’t use AI to do what I do, but faster. ‘Push a button, get a whole campaign’ – that’s not what I’m interested in. I work with AI to do what I couldn’t have done before.”

Creating the future

While data and AI can respectively (i) tell us where we’ve been, and (ii) regurgitate what’s happened, only humans are capable of imagining – then bringing about – new products, services, spaces, designs, or works of art. Across categories and geographies, creativity is essential for human progress. And when casualties occur in the sphere of brands, the contagion is often a creeping under-investment in new ideas. On an individual level, creativity is a vital life skill. It is a way of thinking that enables you to view troubling scenarios from a more favourable angle, and come up with ideas that enhance (or reverse) your fortunes. Beyond this, to be creative is to be optimistic, and in today’s deeply uncertain political, social, and technological landscape, a little extra buoyancy is what everyone needs.

Where creativity – or the absence of it – is concerned, the stakes are high. If we want progressive societies, flourishing institutions, and fulfilled individuals, it must be nurtured, cultivated, and supported. In the next section, you will discover our first foray into measuring creativity in business.

SECTION TWO

The state of creativity in business

In this pioneering study, we analysed The State of Creativity in Business. Our global poll of business leaders unearthed a raft of startling facts to do with how we perceive and prioritise acts of invention, imagination, and innovation. >

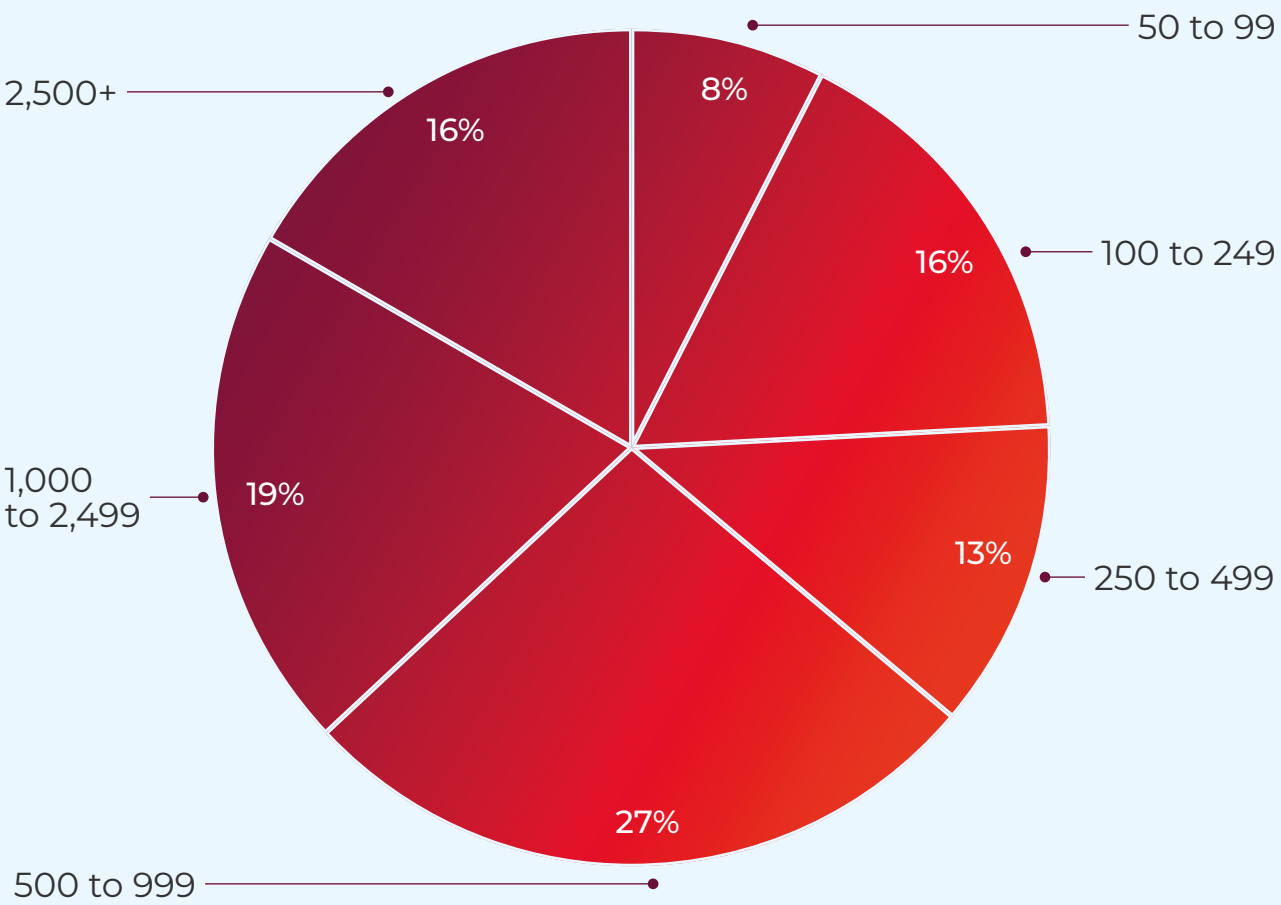
“Those on our panel take a holistic and hard-nosed commercial view of the benefit of creativity. They see it is as powerful a driver of longevity, prosperity, and resilience as cutting costs.”

NICK KENDALL, STRATEGY DIRECTOR, THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY



Time for a new age of *creativity*

Company size (among respondents)



GLOBAL GROWTH IS DAWDLING AGAIN. Economists continue to publish reports about diminishing prospects, trade snarl-ups, and a lack of consumer confidence. Progress is expected to slow down this year, a deceleration that is forecast to continue in 2026, according to **Morgan Stanley**. US trade policy has put the brakes on commerce, and this year will mark the slowest growth since the pandemic. Most business leaders will shudder at the memory of the inertia that defined that period.

Looking at specific markets, there isn't much to lift the spirit. China is still facing economic turbulence, not just from its trade scuffles with the US, but also from deflationary pressures and vulnerabilities in its housing sector. In Latin America, Mexico's progress is sputtering, and Brazil is expanding at a slower rate than before. Of the major world economies, only India appears to be faring well – analysis projects growth there to proceed at a lick of **5.9% in 2025** and **6.4% in 2026**.

With the movement of commerce proceeding at more of a grind than a spin (imagine a millstone rather than a flywheel), creativity is the only reasonable recourse for leaders and the teams that sit beneath them. Business is at its heart an idea. And companies themselves – from **OpenAI** to **Coca-Cola** – are creative constructs. Surely then, the response to stagnation is more imagination, invention, and innovation. New ideas, and fresh ways of cultivating wealth. As our creative director **Sir John Hegarty** often asks: “Creativity is oxygen for growth. So why are so many businesses holding their breath?”

We'd love to know the answer. But one of the difficulties in understanding, applying, or gauging the importance of creativity lies (as discussed earlier) in how hard it is to measure. Organisations have no trouble in measuring KPIs such as revenue, profitability, customer satisfaction, retention rates, and employee productivity. But creativity as a quality that is to varying degrees present or absent in a company

proves more elusive. In this white paper – the first in a series – we attempted to open a new enquiry into the value of creativity. How willing are businesses to invest and place their trust in it?

“Creativity is oxygen for growth. So why are so many businesses holding their breath?”

To answer these questions (plus a few others), **The Business of Creativity** partnered with **Opinium**, an award-winning insight consultancy. The sample consisted of **450 business leaders**, spread across three global markets: the US, the UK, and Singapore. The panel consisted of senior figures and future leaders, spanning all generations, company sizes, and business sectors. The following section offers a snapshot of how these cohorts view, value, and cultivate creativity in their organisations. >



87%

“Creativity is as critical for core business functions as factors like efficiency and cost control.”



The Business of Creativity


> When businesses find themselves in choppy waters leaders have form for responding with subtractive measures. These include tactics like cutting expenditure, slimming down teams, and trying to do more with less – and more quickly. While these tactics help in the short term, they often come with hidden costs. In the extreme, they prove disastrous for businesses. Plane maker **Boeing**’s campaign of aggressive subtractive measures on its **737 Max** initiative resulted in tragedies and \$20 billion in direct costs. Despite the dangers, these levers of efficiency tend to be the most readily pulled by leaders who feel a crisis looming (and shareholders twitching). So how would business leaders perceive creativity, which can be viewed as an additive measure? Anecdotally, we might assume they believe it is the preserve of the marketing department, or for brand executions. Not so, according to our survey. Those on our panel take a holistic and hard-nosed commercial view of the benefit of creativity. Encouragingly enough, they see it is as powerful a driver of longevity, prosperity, and resilience as cutting costs. >

Our panel sees creativity is as powerful a driver of longevity, prosperity, and resilience as cutting costs

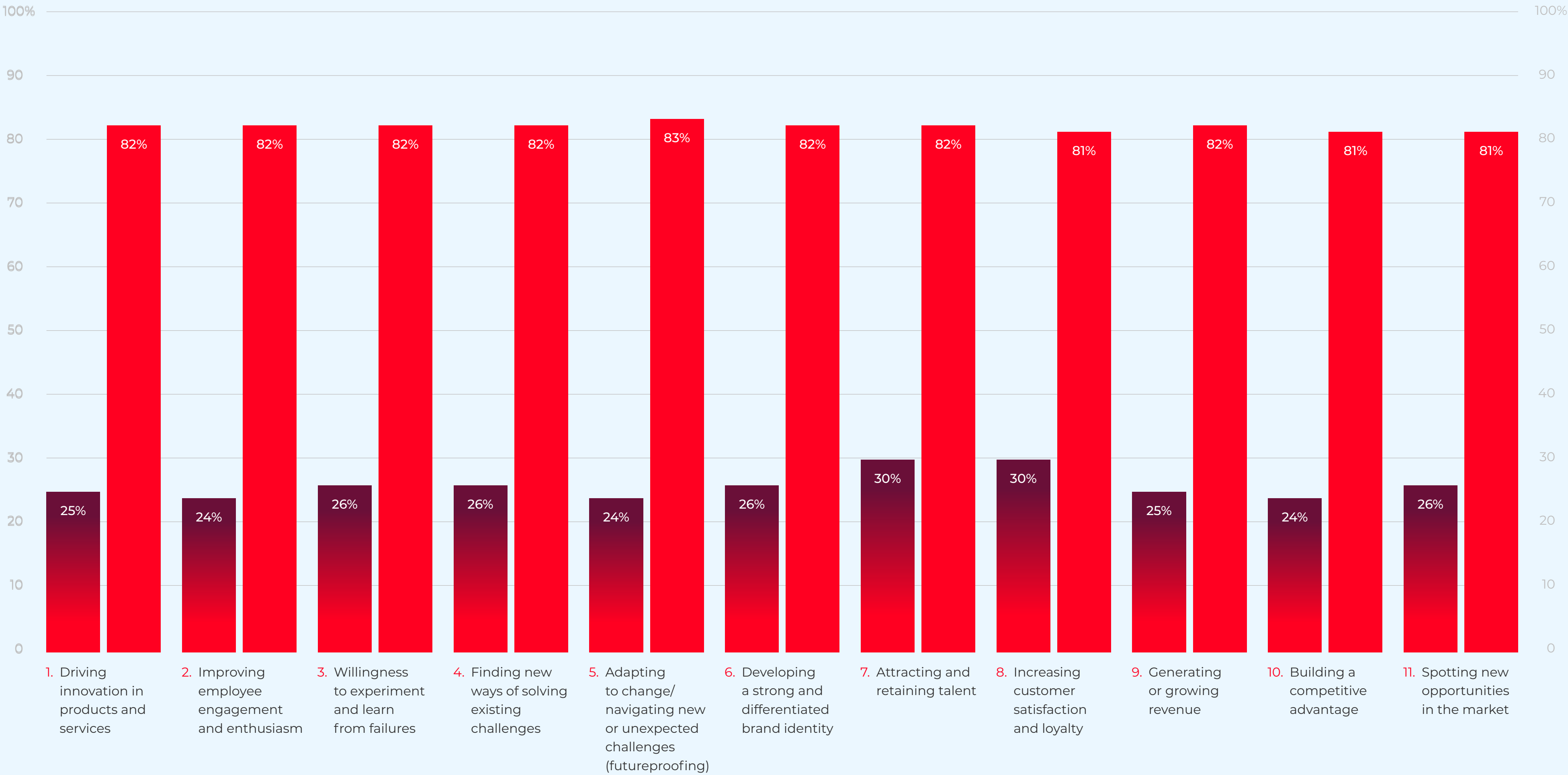


The Business of Creativity

Q: Indicate how important you believe creativity is for a business to successfully achieve the following outcomes.

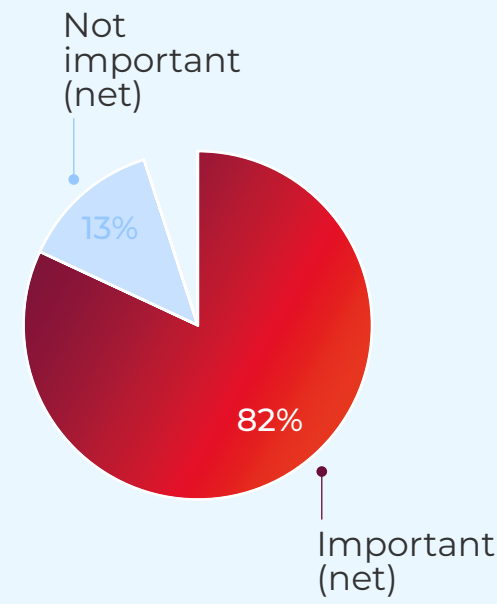
A:  Extremely important. Essential.

A:  Important. (net)

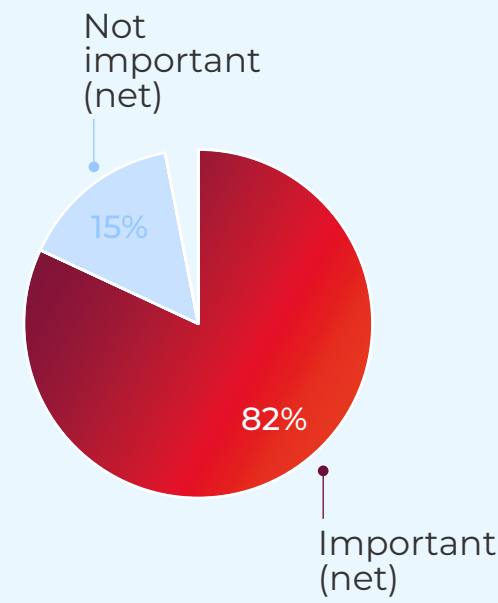


How important is creativity for a business to successfully:

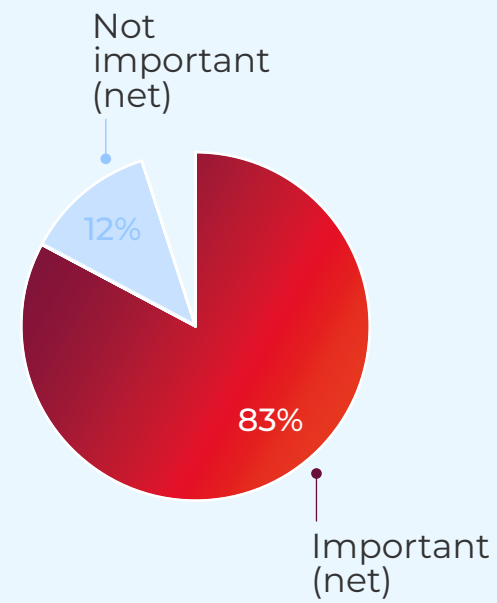
(i) attract and retain talent



(ii) develop a strong and differentiated brand identity



(iii) adapt to change; navigate new, unexpected challenges; futureproof



The Business of Creativity

> Rather than a vague ‘nice-to-have’, respondents view creativity as imperative. It is mission-orientated, and can effect change in all manner of business activities. Those looking for a positive result in any initiative should try to find their creative edge. As the graph above shows, a high proportion of business leaders think that creativity is important to successfully achieve 11 specific outcomes. Some responses confirm what many would already suspect. For instance, **82% said creativity is important for driving innovation** in products and services – so the core of a company’s offering is based on creativity: we agree. Then **81% thought the same of spotting new opportunities** in the market – so vision and imagining the

82%

“Creativity is important for improving employee engagement and enthusiasm.”

future for your company and community is creative: tick. And **82% said it was important for generating or growing revenue** – reassuring that such a high proportion of business leaders agree with the over-arching hypothesis of this report. Creativity means growth.

Even more intriguing is how creativity adds value in places it is not traditionally associated with. Consider the issue of resilience. Companies that are able to rapidly slim down or pivot during uncertain times are usually thought of as being able to withstand harsh conditions. Yet **83% said that creativity was important in adapting to change**, and navigating new or unexpected challenges (futureproofing).

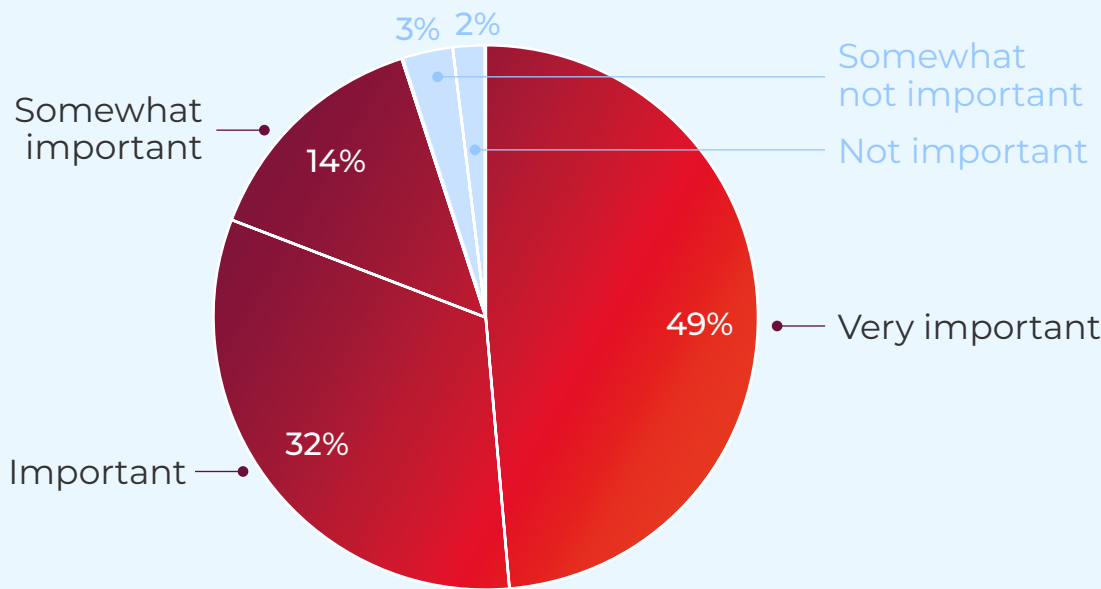
When looking for a positive outcome in an initiative, find the creative edge

Then there’s the question of human capital. Any leader will talk up the importance of luring the best talent. But the greatest teams are maintained by high salaries, bonus schemes, complimentary sushi, and a lenient work-from-home policy, aren’t they? Not according to what we can infer from our study. **When it comes to improving employee engagement and enthusiasm, 82% think creativity is important.** In a world of employee power, where skill is a scarce resource, this is a deeply sophisticated view from the leaders on our panel. >



Q: When evaluating potential hires, or assessing the performance of your teams, how important, if at all, is the ability to demonstrate creativity or innovative thinking?

A: Important. (95%)
Not important. (5%)
(net)



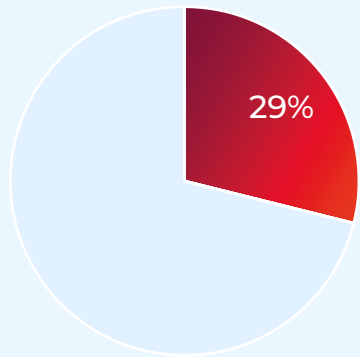
Growth-critical creativity

> The results of our study tell a clear story of how leaders view creativity. They see it as being critical for growth – **82% and 81% see it as important for generating or growing revenue, and building a competitive advantage**, respectively. We can also infer its significance from the lengths business leaders go to cultivate it in their own organisations. Unsurprisingly (but surprisingly) there is strong agreement that they encourage it actively. In fact, **over four-fifths (82%) of senior managers** or above, working in companies with more than 49 employees across the UK, Singapore, and the US, agree that their organisation actively encourages the generation of new and original ideas from all levels of employees. Unsurprisingly

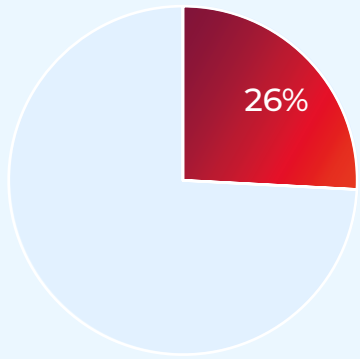
(but surprisingly) companies have run programmes designed to maximise the creative potential of teams, with **93% of respondents saying that in the past two years their organisation had implemented initiatives specifically aimed at improving creativity** in their business. Unsurprisingly (but surprisingly) creativity is top of mind for managers trying to gauge whether a prospective hire would make a worthwhile contribution to the business, and when they are determining how well their team members are performing. Of our panel, **95% said that an ability to demonstrate creativity or innovative thinking is important** when evaluating potential hires, or assessing the performance of teams. >



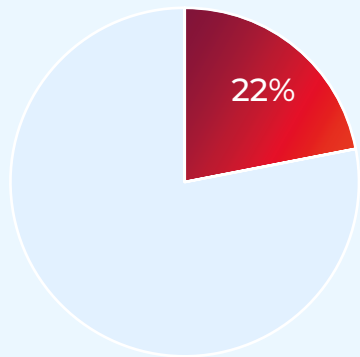
Q: Which business attributes are the strongest indicators of a healthy culture of creativity?



29% “A culture that celebrates idea generation and innovation from all areas of the business.”



26% “High levels of employee engagement and enthusiasm.”



22% “A culture that solicits and values diverse perspectives.”

Feel it in the culture

> This ushers in further questions to do with measurement (a topic introduced at the opening of this report). What are the signs of a truly creative organisation? And how do you take stock and improve upon the creativity that is already happening? The factors people accept as evidence for creativity expose a nuance in how we understand the subject more broadly – it is tied up with the culture of a business, and associated with traits like community and cohesion. It is less tied up with elements that are tangible – or indeed, measurable. Given our panel’s belief in creativity occupying the core of a company, the fact that it is bound to culture itself makes sense.

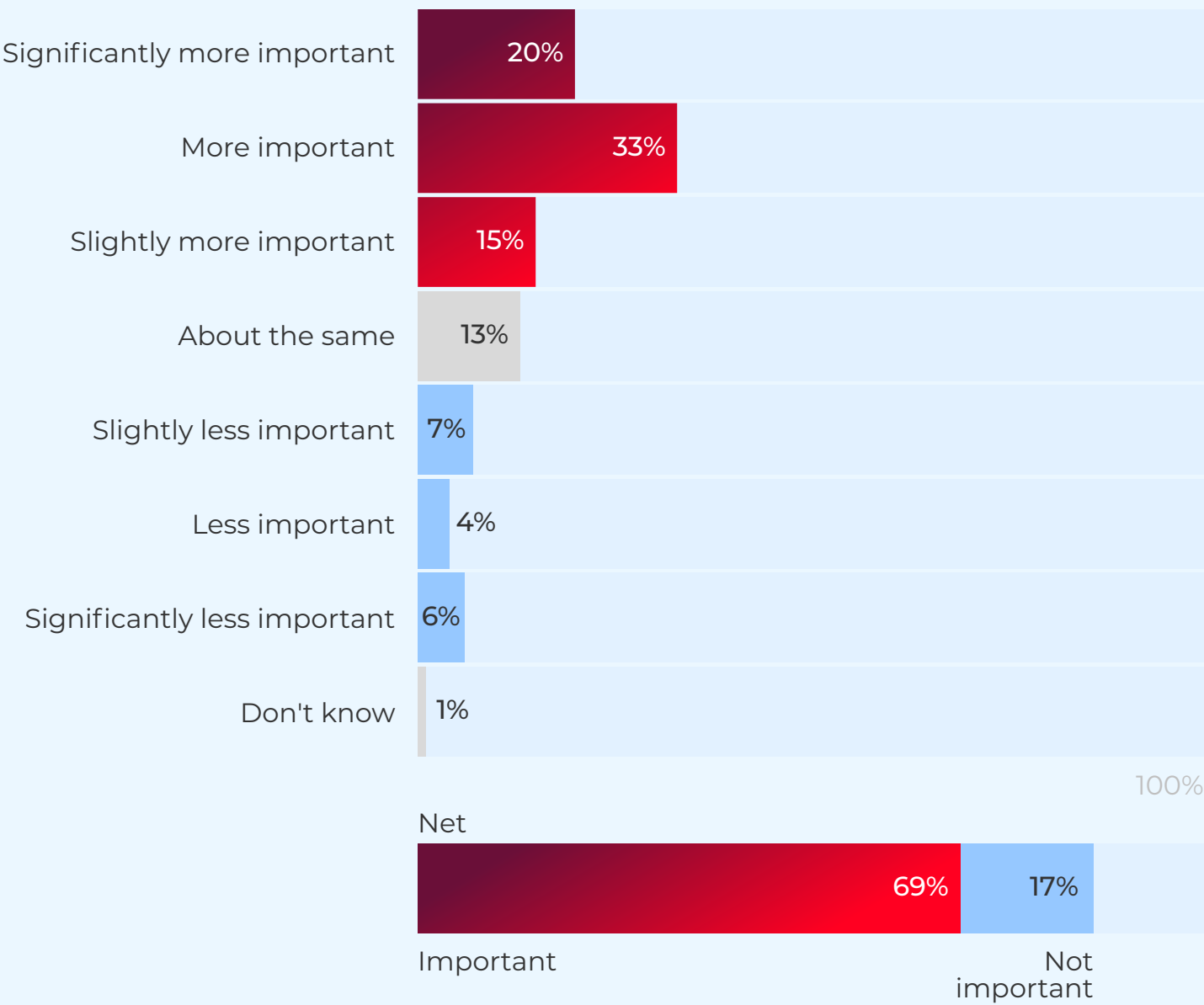
When asked which business attributes are the strongest indicators of a healthy culture

Creativity is tied up with the culture of a business, and associated with traits like community and cohesion

of creativity, the most chosen answer was **“a culture that celebrates idea generation and innovation from all areas of the business” at 29%**. The second highest indicator of a creative culture was **“high levels of employee engagement and enthusiasm” at 26%**. Reassuringly, as DEI initiatives are being mothballed in the face of political pressure (and an array of other factors), the answer **“a culture that solicits and values diverse perspectives” scored highly, with 22% overall** selecting this as the strongest indicator of a healthy culture of creativity. >



Q: Thinking ahead to the next two years, do you believe the rise in artificial intelligence (AI) tools in businesses will make creativity more or less important for business success?



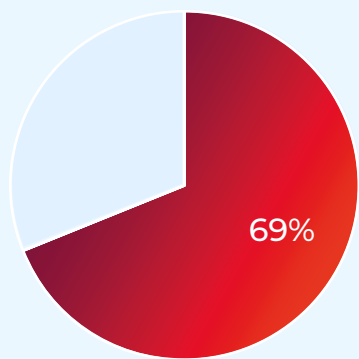
Culture of leadership

> Who is really in charge of creativity? It would be reasonable to think that the buck would stop at the desk of someone who had the word 'creative' in their title. Like a chief creative officer, creative director, or chief innovation officer. This is far from the case. When you consider how integral creativity is to all aspects of an organisation, the next revelation from our study makes all the more sense. The individual most responsible for delivering and fostering creativity across an organisation is the person at the top: the CEO. This position far outstrips other job roles in its duty to cultivate creativity. **Forty percent of all respondents chose the CEO**, while the next highest category, creative director, was a mere 25%.

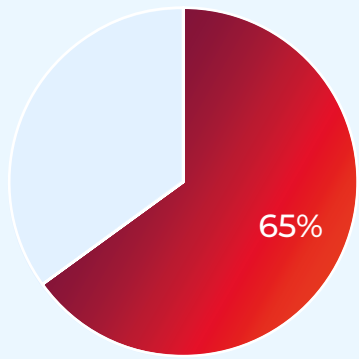
Of course it is the CEO. Creativity is a leadership issue, a tool for those in charge, a core capability. Such a vital component of a business should surely be directed by the boss. And there is one issue causing disquiet in the minds of CEOs more than anything else. Top of the to-do list (and likely written in red) is to manage the complexity associated with the emergence of generative AI. So how does its sudden appearance impact the CEO's quest for innovation? Interestingly, our survey indicates that AI will only intensify businesses' reliance on human creativity. >



AI – replacer or augments?



69% think that the rise in artificial intelligence (AI) tools in businesses will make creativity more important for business success.



65% think AI will eventually replace human creativity.

> Technology, design, and entrepreneurship circles were agog when earlier this year **Sam Altman**, CEO of **OpenAI**, announced a partnership with **Jony Ive**, former chief designer at **Apple**. Amid the fears of **ChatGPT** and other large language models replacing human creativity, Altman’s partnership with Ive – and his public comments on the subject – demonstrate a personal belief in the importance of human ingenuity in the age of AI.

Talking on a panel at Howard University, the OpenAI founder predicted: “I think critical thinking, creativity, the ability to figure out what other people want, the ability to have new ideas – in some sense that will be the most valuable skill of the future. If you think of a world where every one of us has a whole company worth of AI assistants that are doing tasks for us to help us express our vision and make things for other people, and make these new things in the world, the most important thing is the quality of the ideas.”

If Altman is in the augments camp, what about our panel of business leaders? Those who took part in our study believe that human ingenuity will be maximised and increase in importance in concert with the rise of AI tools. Specifically, **69% think that the rise in artificial intelligence (AI) tools in businesses will make creativity more important for business success.** Those in the US are the most likely to think so. Of those who answered “significantly more important”, **American respondents outstrip those in the UK and Singapore, at 25% in comparison with 19% and 17% respectively.** The emergence of AI tools that can supplement, support and – when necessary – challenge human thinking is an encouraging outcome for business and civilisation.

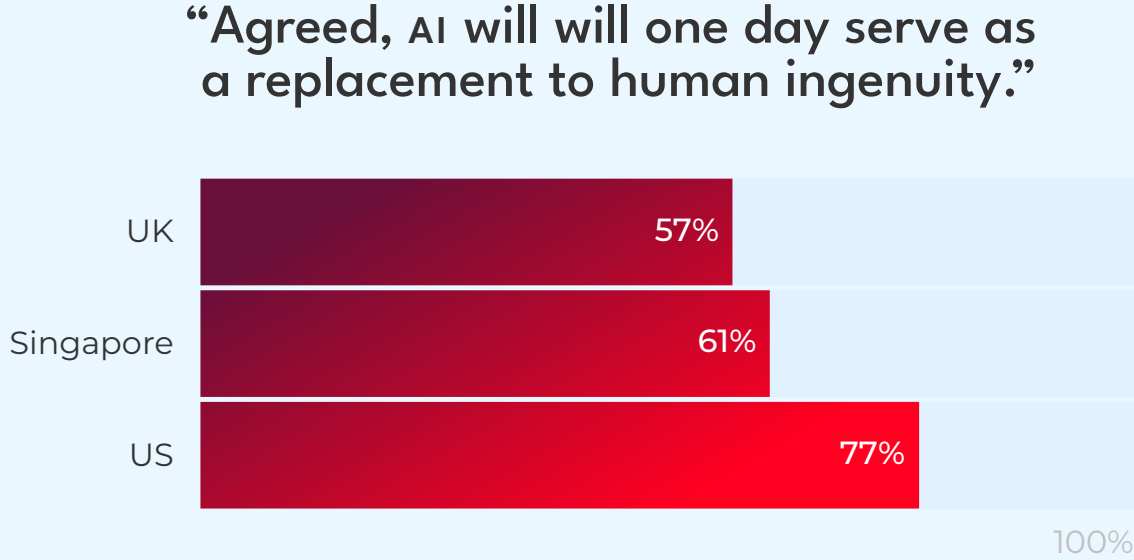
While many believe that AI will support humans’ imaginative efforts, some foresee a future where the technology supersedes it. **A small majority – 65% – expect the technology to eventually replace human creativity.** What is equally startling is how consistent this finding

Critical thinking, creativity, the ability to have new ideas, will be the most valuable skills of the future

is across different corners of the study. There is little deviation regarding this sentiment across gender, age groups, and B2B and B2C groups. However, **those in the US are the most bullish on the sentiment, with 77% agreeing.** In comparison, **57% of those in the UK and 61% of those in Singapore believe that AI will one day serve as a replacement for human ingenuity.** It is clear that a battle of ideas is under way. >



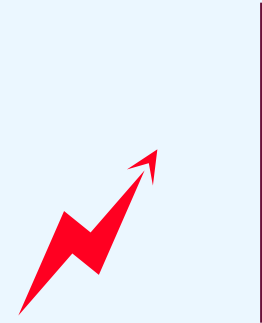
The business leaders in our survey are clear about their expectations of how AI will impact human creativity: a large majority expect the technology to eventually replace it.



Tussle at the top

> Who will be the CEO’s lieutenant in cultural or creative leadership? The answer is clear when considering what we have just learned about the adoption of AI. Meanwhile, in a digitised world, a business’s embracing of technology, not to mention its capacity to turn out and sell its own digital products and systems, is a key marker of how innovative and future-facing it is. This fact was emphasised when exploring the data from the **60% of respondents who did not pick the CEO as top dog for creativity**, and in particular, **the 55 who chose “any other chief officer/senior leader”**. What did this group think about who should be in charge of a company’s imaginative power? In a sign of the times – specifically, technology’s role in all corners of commerce – **chief technology officer (CTO) was picked by 22** and **chief information officer (CIO)/head of IT or security by 12** – so 40% and 22% of the sample respectively.

What about the chief marketing officer? The CMO is often considered the most creative of the C-suite, responsible for commanding attention, capturing imagination, and altering the behaviour of audiences. Given marketing’s prominence as a creative discipline, **a surprisingly low number of respondents (9 in total, or 16%) said that the CMO or head of marketing should be most responsible for creativity**. Does this signify a drop in the creative capacity of marketing departments? In an era of performance marketing and salesmanship eclipsing showmanship in the world of brands, we worry that this is the case. The invitation is open to those responsible for projecting the image and culture of brands to the outside world – time to step it up and assume the position of torchbearer for creative culture. We might assume that the tussle for creative supremacy will be fought by CTOs on one side and CMOs on the other, the former lobbying for measurement, automation, and displacement, and the latter championing imagination, intuition, and instinct. The fate of how many companies co-exist with AI will depend on how these power dynamics unfold. >





> **Creativity gaps**

The previous section highlights the predominant story the data tells us. But there is a string of further facts to be gleaned from examining the findings closer up. Particularly when looking at breaks by sample: by company size, sector, geography, and age of respondent. We pulled out three creativity gaps for readers to be aware of.

Want to take a peek at the numbers behind the story? **Then write to us using the details on the final page of this report.** We'll send you a complete download of our findings.

> **Global gap**

Across all the questions there is a consistent 'creative gap' between geography. Consider the US. Our panelists in this market seem most zealous about cultivating creativity, and have the most faith in its impact. For example, nearly half (44%) strongly agree that their company encourages creativity. While 59% of US respondents agree creativity is critical to evaluating and assessing the performance of their teams. Meanwhile in Singapore, we observe a different story. Looking at the same questions, the percentages from business leaders in the Southeast Asian city state are just 30% and 37%, respectively. Then there's the question of innovation. In the US, 31% of leaders see creativity as critical to innovation, while only 15% of Singaporean leaders do. The US seems to have the greatest confidence in the thinking of different strata in organisations too. Of respondents in that market, 95% say that their organisation actively encourages the generation of new and original ideas from all levels of employees.

> **Generation gap**

Our survey revealed a split by age cohort when it comes to creativity. Specifically, between current and future leaders. Older and more senior leaders (CEOs/chairs/founders) tend to be more reticent and unenthusiastic towards championing the power of creativity in their businesses. More wary of over-promising? More knowing of the challenges? More cynical? Or maybe just behind the times? Most people (29%) think that "a culture that celebrates idea generation and innovation from all areas of the business" is the strongest indicator of a healthy culture of creativity. Who are the least likely to think so? The oldest of our respondents. Of 18-34-year-olds 31% do, of 35 -54-year-olds it's 28%, but just 25% of those over 55 agree.*

* The cohort of those over 55 had a small base size (36 individuals) in our study.

> **Attitudinal gap**

Many of the results to do with how people value creativity were encouraging. We discovered that imagination, intuition and innovation are prized competencies across organisations. But an attitudinal gap exists between those who are devotees of creativity, and those who view it less fervently. For instance, 86% of people agree that creativity is an essential skill in the workplace of today. And 87% agree that creativity is as critical for core business functions as factors like efficiency and cost control. And yet 71% of business leaders in our survey say that the emphasis on creativity in business is often overblown and does not always translate to tangible results. Also, that obsessing over creativity can cause companies to lose focus – 69% say that too much airtime for creativity can distract businesses from more practical and immediate concerns. What could be more urgent than innovating? We don't have a good answer.

“I think critical thinking, creativity, the ability to figure out what other people want, the ability to have new ideas – in some sense that will be the most valuable skill of the future.”

“If you think of a world where every one of us has a whole company worth of AI assistants that are doing tasks for us to help us express our vision and make things for other people, and make these new things in the world, the most important thing is the quality of the ideas.”

SAM ALTMAN, CEO, OPENAI



SECTION THREE

What is human creativity?

You might well ask. We assembled 20 luminaries to offer their perspectives on creativity and the ideas that move them. The result is a mosaic of thoughts associated with the question: [What is Human Creativity?](#) >

“Creating is a profoundly human act. That means it is mystifying, messy, and magical. At any given moment in your life, you can be one great idea away from something that changes everything.”

IMMY GROOME, COO, THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY





Common threads among the contributors

As we explored in the above sections, creativity is hard to define, difficult to measure, but essential for businesses to flourish. The below pages are an attempt to unpick the nuances of human ingenuity – in an era when our tools are becoming rapidly (and disconcertingly) smarter. Here are three common threads from our contributors.

Creativity is a way of thinking, not a job title.

- > From architects to marketers, founders to technologists, every luminary emphasised that creativity transcends disciplines. It's a mindset: curious, brave, iterative. Not a department.

Play and tension must coexist.

- > Creativity thrives in the paradox of space and constraint. Many of the experts below echoed the same principle: allow for exploration and joy, but inject urgency, ambition, and deadlines to deliver.

Discomfort is part of the process.

- > Creativity is not about passively waiting for inspiration to arrive. The individuals in this section are clear: great ideas don't happen without intense mental effort. If your innovation is making you uncomfortable, it's a sign you're doing it right.



Creativity moves culture. And culture moves markets.



by **Greg Hoffman**

There was something unusual going on with the cars at the Miami Grand Prix this year. During a pre-race ritual, they cruised around the track at a fraction of their normal speed. Each race car had space for both team drivers (not the usual single seat), and from a distance, they looked somehow pixelated. On closer inspection, there was a reason for all this. The cars were made completely from **LEGO**, the famous toy brick company.

Let's break it down. Step one: creativity

All teams were accounted for, and each car was recreated in graphic detail, from the team colours and the sponsor logos to the design of the cars themselves. The activation was a masterclass in how to attract attention and create a memorable moment. It was the opposite of traditional (place logo here) sponsorship marketing – instead it

was surreal, playful, and deeply imaginative. It was technically audacious, too. Each car used 400,000 individual bricks, and had to be strong enough to last a 3.3-mile lap of the Miami International Autodrome.

We are used to hearing about how creativity drives distinction and moves people. But it also acts as an invitation for new audiences to enter the world of your brand. When executives sit around and wonder how to increase the bottom line, they should remember the formula that we can infer from the **LEGO** example: creativity moves culture. And culture moves markets.

Let's break it down. Step one: creativity. Putting together life-sized replicas of **F1** cars in toy bricks is one-of-a-kind, whimsical, unexpected. Step two: culture. The activation captured the attention, (and captivated the imagination) of drivers, teams and the 2.17 million viewers who tuned in. Then step three: markets. The stunt created



a wide ripple effect that fed into **LEGO's** tie-up with **Formula One**. It's not only about the people on the ground witnessing this in real life, but also the viral effect across social media. The impact that creativity has in creating a moment in culture has a long commercial tail.

We have never had more access to tools that allow us to move an idea from our minds and into the physical (or digital) world... at high speeds. In this scenario, imagination is the greatest differentiator and the most effective way to keep your brand in pole position.

***Greg Hoffman** is the founder of **Modern Arena**, former **NIKE** chief marketing officer, and author of the best selling book **Emotion by Design**: Creative Leadership Lessons from a Life at Nike.*



In praise of space and tension.

by **Anne Stilling**

Creativity is vital to the survival of business. But people in charge of companies can't have all the good ideas themselves, so it's crucial for them to provide the conditions for new thinking to happen throughout their organisations. How do you leverage the imaginative talent of the people around you? It takes two things. And this yin and yang of innovation is composed of space and tension.

Firstly, let's think about space. The greatest leaders are those who (figuratively) provide a canvas for teams to paint on. Innovative brands always insist on an environment where people can

be creative, and pursue their own curiosity – whether that's devising a new product, or deciding how to bring a new piece of advertising communication out into the world.

This is to do with gathering together a multitude of views, too, and allowing people to express their thoughts in a supportive setting where they feel comfortable. One thing to emphasise here: creativity isn't just for the 'creative' team. Finance, HR, legal – there isn't a single role that can't benefit from looking at a problem from a fresh angle. Most importantly, leaders need to allow themselves their own space. When you have a multitude of

direct reports, it's easy to fall into manager-mode. Space, time, and freedom liberate imagination.

But space isn't enough on its own. And if you have too much of it, there is a real danger that nothing useful will happen. This is why you need tension as well. There must be jeopardy, energy, and ambition in creativity. Applying some pressure to the scenario sharpens minds and encourages better analysis of ideas. As well as this, a deadline is imperative too. To apply creativity is to embrace – and live with – discomfort. Space gives life to ideas, but tension is responsible for their outcomes.

***Anne Stilling** is global marketing, brand, and customer director at **Vodafone**. She is passionate about keeping not only the mind but also the body moving (hyrox competitions).*



Creativity comes together in the last 5%.

by **Anant Sharma**

I speak publicly a lot. And the journey to get to a final presentation is messy. It's painful. One would hope over two decades there would be a natural amelioration of process; there isn't. It's often the liberty of a blank canvas, an open brief, that serves the tightest shackle.

The least enjoyable part of the Keynote rigmarole is the practice run. I never plan my talks verbatim, it's always something of a journey that's kept on course by the order of the slides – and some support from adrenalin. I used to believe these run-

throughs killed my mojo because they tend to go terribly. Until my partner encouraged me to take a different view.

“Just allow the practice to be a car crash,” she said. “But know that in the back of your mind, things are processing.” As is often sensible, I took her advice. While my run-throughs are never smooth, I've yet to dry up on stage during the actual bit. I think this same principle applies to creativity. You have to trust that ideas are taking shape in the background. This is why drawing things out over an extended period of time (deadline permitting) often leads to the best work. And rather than spending hours in concentration it's about allowing things to sit, then trusting that the process is taking place somewhere in the recesses of your brain.

The ideal course of action has to do with stimulus. That is, exposing yourself to the things that inspire, as well as inform, the process. This is something that you mustn't leave too late. While the output that matters might come together in the last 5% of the weeks or months you allow yourself, the other 95% is pure exposure, interest, curiosity, criticism. You survey the things that exist in the world around the problem you're trying to solve. Then – out of the miasma – comes magic.

***Anant Sharma** is CEO at **Matter Of Form**, a brand and experience design consultancy. He is also a DJ, producer, and proud father of three (if you include the dachshund).*



4

Q&A
Richard Huntington

On George Orwell,
and why the best thinking
is feral.

THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY When did you discover your creative potential or the power associated with your ability to imagine new things?

RICHARD HUNTINGTON The operative word is ‘imagination’. I believe that is at the heart of creativity. And it’s the main response we have at our disposal to meet the conditions we find ourselves in. As an industry, as a global economy. High-quality imaginative answers to these questions are in short supply, creating an almost infinite market for human imagination.

TBOC What about the practice of being creative itself? How do you get your imagination to start turning out great ideas?

RH I think an ability to be unorthodox is important. I’m a planner by trade and planners that are good tend to be a bit weird. It’s a discipline that is about hearing and seeing the same thing as everyone else, but something occurs in your mind that results in a different output or response.

TBOC Is that what your book *Feral Strategy* is about?

Rather than pursuing what’s correct, we should be far more concerned with what’s ‘interesting’

RH Yes, it’s about how we throw off the constraints of orthodoxy, dogma, and best practice. These things hold back imagination and result in thinking that is tame, domesticated, unchallenging. These are far less useful (or interesting) than ideas that are wild, unruly, unorthodox.

TBOC Sounds revolutionary!

RH Well, I’m a big fan of George Orwell. He famously said, “Orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness.” That means orthodoxy is tantamount to death, in my opinion. You fall in line, take opinions off the shelf.

TBOC Does avoiding orthodoxy help brands stay relevant for audiences too?

RH I think there’s an obsession with the ‘right’ thing in business. Rather than pursuing what’s correct, we should be far more concerned with what’s ‘interesting’. When you set your sights on the most intriguing response to a question, especially a commercial one, it’s harder to fail.

Richard Huntington is chair and cso at **Saatchi & Saatchi**. His book **Feral Strategy** offers an approach to brand strategy honed over 35 years advising some of the world’s greatest brands.

5

Being a
good sport.

by Louise Johnson

The global sports industry is going great guns. According to one projection, from Research and Markets, the sponsorship segment specifically is expected to reach \$189.54 billion by 2030. The take-out is clear: at a time when audiences are fickle and media is fragmented, sport gives you the audience. But where brand-building is concerned, creativity is what makes people care, remember, and act.

Louise Johnson is the global CEO of sport and entertainment agency **Fuse**.

6

Creativity is
the only way to
ensure longevity.

by Antonia Wade

When you fix one problem, you often inadvertently create another. This was a principle I learned while studying architecture. It’s true of buildings, it’s true of cities, it’s true of technology. And it’s true of marketing. This truth tells us something about how creativity must be viewed – as a constant enquiry. It is a mindset rather than an outcome or a practice. Any creative leap, no matter how inventive or audacious, will inevitably usher in new issues to solve. The question to ask yourself is whether these issues are worth solving in pursuit of doing something distinctive, dramatic, or moving. This must be faced with boldness, pragmatism, and endurance. And most of all, with the understanding that a strong creative idea will provide a multitude of ways of being relevant and interesting over a longer period of time. Any single creative stunt is easy to pull off. Coming up with a creative platform that endures and drives continual innovation is harder, but significantly more rewarding both intellectually and commercially.

Antonia Wade is the global CMO of **PwC**.

7

Embrace the dip.

by Anya Hindmarch

We didn’t want to do another fashion show. Back in 2018 we felt an urge to contribute a different sort of project. One that was more civic-minded, inclusive, and created less waste. Wouldn’t it be amazing, I thought, if on Valentine’s Day, we suspended a huge heart-shaped helium balloon from every bridge in the city? They’d look particularly striking viewed from the air: a love letter to London.

When we set about making it happen, we ran into a few issues. Some bridges are jointly managed by two authorities, and the prevailing wind that rushes along the Thames would cause problems for the balloons. We were crestfallen for a moment. Then resolved to make the plan – Chubby Hearts – work, nonetheless. We would turn it into a Where’s Wally-style approach and position them at random throughout the city – over landmarks like Battersea Power Station and squished in the gap between Wellington Arch.

Chubby Hearts became a moment in London. It worked because we overcame a stage in the creative process that I refer to as ‘the dip’. There is a phase in the life of every great idea that follows shortly after the initial euphoria that signals its arrival. It is when you are confronted with the obstacles, realities, and setbacks that might prevent it from happening. You start running out of time, options, and mental capacity. That’s the dip – and it happens every time.

Dame Anya Hindmarch CBE is the founder of global luxury brand **Anya Hindmarch** and an award-winning British fashion accessories designer known for her playful concepts and fearless innovation.



Fortunately, there’s a way out (or rather, through). And that’s the process of working into an idea. This is a very real thing where you pursue an idea, but persevere with it. You push, you adapt, you expand, you grow, and you sit with it until the concept fits into place. Great ideas are often painful, but it’s important to get used to the discomfort.

A phase in the life of every great idea that follows shortly after the initial euphoria

Last year, Hong Kong Design Centre requested that we stage Chubby Hearts there. Further confirmation that working into an idea won’t just save your plan – it could help it soar.





Creativity is the multiplier.

by Rafael Rizuto

Hellmann's was the number one mayonnaise in Brazil back in 2012. While it was beating the competition, the brand couldn't produce more sales either. We decided to find out why, and without too much trouble we learned that it was because



most families were using the condiment for hotdogs, burgers, and sandwiches only. The mission became clear – encourage people to have it in other recipes. But how?

First, we recruited chefs to create recipes for mayo, from roast chicken to chocolate brownies (really). Then came the genius part. We introduced a software to cashiers in one of the country's

The power of creativity is to unlock growth that nobody really expected to be there

biggest supermarket chains. If you bought Hellmann's and an array of other ingredients, it would give you a recipe for whatever you'd bought, printed on the receipt. They rolled out the idea to 90 markets. Sales surged right away.

To this day, people within Unilever still talk about that idea. It's the best example of the power of creativity to unlock growth that nobody really expected to be there.

It was also about using technology in an intentional way, with clear purpose behind it. This is why I love our business – one idea can change everything.

Rafael Rizuto is a Brazilian-born international creative with over 18 years of experience across multiple disciplines. Today he is chief creative officer for North America at **Ogilvy**.



Four thoughts on creativity.

by Karen Martin

i. On whether your mum would like it

My mother loves advertising. Wherever I have lived in the world, she has regularly called me up to offer a detailed crit of all the campaigns running in Ireland (where I grew up). What's funny. What's boring. What's obvious: I've heard creative directors be less analytical in their appraisal of work. But lately, mum has started to feel disappointed. "It's all so bloody serious," she complains. "Advertising used to make us laugh."

ii. On finding a new angle

Any CEO who is struggling to unpick a problem is often absorbed with complexity – operations, people, supply chains – and can't find a new angle on an issue. The bit that unlocks their advantage, uniqueness, or difference is a creative idea, or their brand. If you put them in a room with a creative person, then magic happens.

iii. On marrying Nick Kamen

I saw BBH's famous Levi's launderette ad when I was 11 or 12. After that, I always hoped that I would either marry Nick Kamen (the model in the ad) or work in the industry. Thankfully, I've gotten to do the latter. That's why I think we need to make work that inspires the next generation. Where they see it and go: "What the fuck is that?"

vi. On great, hard work

Great work doesn't happen easily. Real creativity isn't just about inspiration, it's about having the grit to make the idea show up in the world with the greatest impact and execution you can muster. At the end of any year, you're usually sure of two things. The first is: the work was brilliant. And the second: you are very tired. If you don't have at least one thing you're supremely proud of – at least one banger on the reel – it's time to ask: "Why not?"

Karen Martin is CEO of **BBH**. She's extremely Irish, can never leave a party and knows where all the best pints of Guinness in London are.

Q&A Stephania Silveira



On satisfying the toughest target audience: kids.

THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY

Can you describe your own creative philosophy?

STEPHANIA SILVEIRA My creative philosophy is to run from boredom as fast and as far as I can. Boring work is almost as hard to make as great work. You spend the same amount of money, sit through the same number of meetings, and allocate the same resources. Isn't it a waste to do that for something no one cares about?

TBOC It is indeed. How do you avoid boredom?

SS Entertainment and fun are a basic human need, and sticking to the expected often leaves the audience unfulfilled. Humans are wired for play – we crave stimulation, excitement, and

discovery. I learned this during maternity leave – my baby girl would cry for hours, and it wasn't because she was hungry or needed a nappy change. She was bored. I'd take her for a walk, she'd see the world in all its glory, and she'd instantly smile.

TBOC How does creativity form a vital part of your work with the LEGO Group?

SS I feel incredibly fortunate to work at a company where creativity and fun aren't treated as extras – they are core values. They're not just encouraged; they're embedded right in the brand vision. At the LEGO Group, creativity is described as an essential 21st-century skill.

TBOC What about your role specifically?

SS As a creative director, I need to constantly find new ways to engage and entertain the world's most discerning and demanding audience: kids. If you hang around

with them, you know they're a tough crowd to please: you don't want to be the boring adult – metaphorically or literally – when you're trying to connect with them. It might be through channelling their absurd sense of humour, exploring new entertainment formats, or tapping into their latest passions – but creativity remains the best way to keep up and wow them.

Creativity is what makes you irreplaceable

TBOC What is the greatest outcome associated with creativity?

SS There isn't really a more valuable reward than the genuine attention and appreciation of the audience you're trying to reach. People have so many things they could be spending their time on – when people connect with

something that you've created it should still be seen as a real compliment, because it is.

TBOC What are the consequences of deprioritising it?

SS You turn into a business Dementor: draining the soul from your product, your people, and your workplace. Eventually, you'll start worrying that AI will replace you – because in this case, it will.

TBOC And so AI replacement becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy?

SS Creativity is what makes you irreplaceable. The ability to come up with ideas that are new, surprising, and valuable should be taught in school. It's no longer just for designers or artists, it's a business-critical skill, a competitive edge. It is the one thing others can't fully copy. And if they try, you'll have the tools to reinvent yourself and have fresh ideas.

Stephania Silveira is creative director at the **LEGO Group**.



11

A big fish story: or, how *calamities* create *good work*.

by **Brian Collins**

The fish was definitely broken. In the spring of 1974, Steven Spielberg’s thriller *Jaws* was on the verge of becoming a maritime disaster. Although the script was undergoing constant revisions as shooting began, that wasn’t the worst of his problems. The huge animatronic shark he had commissioned to play the monster had corroded in the saltwater where they were filming off the coast of Massachusetts. For a movie that was all about a giant killer fish, there would be no scenes featuring a giant killer fish.

It pays to operate
in a state of planned
spontaneity

At least until it got fixed. And that was weeks away.

Spielberg needed a plan B. Fortunately, the young director was a devoted student of film history, especially British auteur Alfred Hitchcock, who pioneered cinematic techniques like showing the audience impending danger when the character is unaware of it – leaning on the audience’s imagination of a threat more than special effects or expensive props. After all, what lurks in the shadows of our minds is far more terrifying than whatever can be shown on a screen. As a result, the most frightening shark scenes in *Jaws* are not those where we get to see the shark.

The failure involving the expensive prop made for a much better, on-the-edge-of-your-seat movie. Spielberg

paid close attention to this lesson. Upsets, setbacks, and sudden twists in the road can often lead to stronger creative outcomes. You are forced to reimagine everything. This is why – whether you are filming a thriller, building a hotel, writing a book, or designing any kind of new product or service – it pays to operate in a state of planned spontaneity, where mistakes can be managed and happy accidents are accepted as part of the process: where serendipity and surprise are never left to chance.

One of the real dangers associated with AI for creative people is that it is engineered to mitigate human errors. It will push you to the safe, the average, the mean, the middle ground – and away from the periphery, where it thinks risk and failure might be

waiting. If this technology had been available when *Jaws* was being made, the crew might have been tempted to simply generate a new oceanic monster using Sora when the robot shark failed. Or perhaps some eager spark would have run the production plan through ChatGPT, and avoided the mishap in the first place. Both cases would have been a shame. Because while the fish might have sunk, the movie rose to become the first blockbuster, breaking box office records around the world.

Which makes *Jaws* my favourite big fish story, ever.

***Brian Collins** is chief creative officer of **COLLINS**, a design company in New York City and San Francisco.*

13

You can’t
think outside
the box.

by **Dan Sherwood**

It’s among the greatest clichés applied to creativity. To imagine your incumbent thinking as a box full of stale ideas, and to come up with something truly fresh, we need to – somehow – think outside of it.

Of course you can’t. Coming up with a truly original idea that has no link to what you’ve considered or dreamed up before is impossible.

| You are the box

What’s more, it ignores the truth of how your mind generates one thing from another. You can’t think outside the box – you are the box. Or more precisely, a sequence of different boxes, formed from your experiences and biases, prejudices, things you’ve seen, the stuff that’s affected the way that you think.



So when we say to think outside the box, we never really achieve it. We just jump between the boxes that are already formed. The only way to achieve it is to get new boxes, and the only way to get new boxes is to speak to people who don’t think like you.

***Dan Sherwood** is marketing director at **Santander UK**. He is also on the ISBA executive committee, and listed in the Marketing Week Top 100 and Campaign Power 100 Hall of Fame. He is on the Children’s Hospital Charity Advisory Board, and is co-founder of **11IRON Indoor Golf**.*

12

The crisis cv.

by **Nick Tran**

“Your job is to make us cool. Just don’t get us sued.” My boss, the CMO at Taco Bell, didn’t realise it, but he’d just given me the red thread that would run through every job I’ve had since. The intention behind it is simple. Make the brand ‘cool’, which means relevant in culture, driving conversation, engaging with communities. But at the same time, not doing anything that will ever damage it.

That clarity has enabled me to progress at an exponential rate. I’ve been helped along by a few crises, too.

Firstly, at Taco Bell. In 2011, the company was alleged to not be using real beef. While the claim was false, the publicity was bad. We responded by evolving the brand to a new approach under the tagline Live Más. Then, at Samsung, I was flung into the problem with Galaxy Note 7 – phones were catching on fire. We pivoted from product marketing to more of a brand-driven company.

In the midst of recalls, we cultivated love for the actual brand. After a couple of years, Samsung was the seventh largest brand, according to Interbrand.

After that, to Hulu for a more existential type of crisis. The brand was acquired by Disney, and we were threatened with being absorbed, unless we could show we were differentiated and distinct from our parent company. I focused my efforts on building edgier campaigns than would typically run at Disney. Even in the midst of the integration and launching

| In the midst of
all these crises,
creativity is the
only recourse

Disney Plus, we ultimately decided that, um, the Hulu brand was so strong in the US that we were going to keep it independent. Then it was to TikTok, to battle the Trump administration’s executive order to ban the platform. And finally in my string of career-forming crises, it was Farfetch. I met the founder, who joked about my record as a jinx. “There’s no crisis on the horizon for us,” he declared. Sadly he was wrong.

In the midst of all these crises, creativity is the only recourse. Driving at being

more progressive and innovative, and thinking how you can leverage that shift in consumer behaviour to your advantage as a marketer. To this day, I’ve still never gotten a brand sued.

***Nick Tran** is the president and CMO of **Lobos 1707** and **Cîroc**, a joint venture between **Diageo** and **Main Street Advisors**. Before that he was global head of marketing at TikTok. He is also an angel investor in consumer disruptor brands.*



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Expose yourself to more art.

by Charlotte Lock

Organisations might spend time thinking about how creativity impacts their business. But individually, we don't think enough about how it enriches our lives, or how it makes us better at our jobs. While we place emphasis on the result of creativity – which involves inventing new products, brand extensions, or marketing campaigns – we don't give enough thought to the inspiration that must take place beforehand. Creativity is an output, but it is also an input. That means an appreciation of the aesthetic world – art, dance, music, literature, design, gardening, architecture – is a vastly underrated advantage in business.

Your range of cultural references dictates the breadth of creativity you're able to bring to the table. And an aesthetic understanding, whether it's

your job to be creative or not, enhances your worldview and the neurological and physical connections you can make. When you show up to work, your mind is ready to forge hitherto unimagined links, to spring forth with original ideas, and to enrich the debates and challenges you engage with. While this is particularly true in museums – as at the v&a, where I work – I've seen it in evidence in the retail and media brands I've spent time at, such as the BBC and the John Lewis Partnership. Creativity in all its forms enhances individual lives as well as building communities and the economy. People who embrace arts and culture – whether through appreciation or practice – contribute different ideas. And these create differentiation and growth. Surely that's what everyone needs in 2025.

Charlotte Lock is director of audiences at the Victoria and Albert Museum. She enjoys art, ceramics, live music, dance and theatre.

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Show your process. It's more interesting than you think.

by Kerris Bright

The BBC produces incredible journalism. In order to keep to the standards that the nation expects, reporters and editors adhere to a strict code: the editorial guidelines. These rules provide reference to teams who must work under intense time pressure, and sometimes in significant danger.

highlighting the editorial guidelines made sense. In an era where trust in institutions is being questioned, we wanted to highlight our rigour and lack of compromise. "If you know how it's made, you can trust what it says – trust is earned" ran the campaign tagline. It's a good reminder that when it comes to telling the story of your brand, often the best approach is simply to reveal what's already there – your extraordinary everyday.

Kerris Bright is BBC chief customer officer and sits on the BBC executive committee.

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Creativity needs measuring.

by Phil Smith

Something was off with the numbers. In 1891, seven advertisers mobilised to protest the dubious newspaper circulation figures that were being touted by British press barons. It was suspected that they were fibbing about how many copies were making it onto newsstands – and purposely confusing the number of issues that were printed with the number of issues that were being read.

The fledgling organisation, which would go on to be called the Advertisers' Protection Society (APS), did its own research, compiling numbers from publishers and estimates, trying to discover how many issues were being sold. When it released the real figures, it was taken to court for libel. Admittedly, the group had gotten the circulation for the *Observer* badly wrong, but the case was dismissed by the judge (no damage had been done). Audited media measurement was born.

Later on, in 1920, the APS got a new name (its current one), the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (ISBA). It has been doing the same job since: making sure that the advertising environment is transparent, accountable, and can be trusted by everyone. Audited circulation numbers came into being in 1931.

But we've had to employ creativity and innovation to keep in step – counting newspaper copies doesn't quite cut it in the digital media landscape. So that's why we've started building Origin, a platform that will give marketers clarity on the reach of their material. It will mean better campaign planning and improved effectiveness. I think the founders would applaud our efforts.

Phil Smith, former ISBA director general, is chair of Origin, an off-shoot cross-media measurement platform.

17

by Sol Rashidi

Have you noticed cognitive decline lately? You find it impossible to navigate to a new location without a smartphone, and worse, you can't retrace your directions because you've all but outsourced your memory and recollection to a GPS app. Or you step into a rental car and find it nearly impossible to parallel park without relying on all the fancy tech features like cameras in the front and back bumpers. Perhaps you spend all day on email and Slack, then in the evening discover your in-person conversation skills aren't up to their usual standard. You feel numb. The cost of outsourcing our human abilities to technology has become greater as devices have advanced and proliferated. And with the acceleration of AI, we're about to notice it a whole lot more.

Some people claim that tech is simply taking care of the low-level stuff. The menial things that humans are too intelligent to worry about. AI is a supercharger of our abilities, because it has the capacity to handle tasks that we view as 'mundane'. Outsourcing jobs of a low cognitive load enables us to create space for more intellectually challenging ones. But I think we may be taking this to an extreme. Why? Because some of our 'mundane' and repetitive work is actually what gives us a competitive edge, and keeps our judgement sharp and discernment on alert. For

The purpose of AI is to amplify us.

Not weaken our critical thinking or the strength of our workforce.

example, professional athletes use tools and tech to optimise their performance, but they never outsource their drills because some tasks are meant to be done in order to preserve things like our common sense, reflexes, and attention. It pays to keep these capabilities in good health, but instead I see we are starting to outsource way too much and paying the price of critical thinking, focus, memory, and recollection.

Choose comprehension over convenience, quality over quickness, substance over speed

When we relinquish the journey of thinking, we are in danger of creating a scenario of what I call 'intellectual atrophy'. Our brains are a muscle, and if not used, it will atrophy, and so does our capacity to focus, to analyse, and to discern. This worrying situation will be propelled by our need for convenience. Business rewards pace and profusion, quickness over quality, speed over substance – we are looking for shortcuts everywhere, and all in search of 'more'.

The response from business leaders? Reconsider what AI should be used for. Are you introducing these new tools for (i) replacement and displacement, or



(ii) for human flourishing and workforce strengthening? Your responsibility as a leader is to strengthen your workforce, not diminish it. This means encouraging them to choose comprehension over convenience, quality over quickness, and substance over speed. Endeavours such as the Human Amplification Index (HAI) are in place to do just that – quantitatively measure the strength of your workforce before and after AI and automation to ensure you're amplifying your greatest asset, human capital, and not diminishing it.

The end goal is to elevate what we do, whether that's around ingenuity, creativity, or critical thinking. And not to fall into the trap of using these capabilities as a dependency or a crutch. The decline is not inevitable.

Sol Rashidi is author of Your AI Survival Guide: Scraped Knees, Bruised Elbows and Lessons Learned from Real-World AI Deployments. She is the world's first chief AI officer for enterprise, has 10 patents, and helped IBM launch Watson, its supercomputer, back in 2011.



When considering how to tell the story of how our news programmes were made,

18

Every company was founded on creativity: when did we forget?

by Neil Waller

The sign that greets people entering Meta’s campus at Menlo Park carries a quiet warning. While the front might feature the brand’s M-shaped infinity symbol, the back shows a corroded sign that reads Sun Microsystems. The meaning is apparently this: just because we’re big doesn’t mean we’re invincible. And this is what happens to companies that forget to innovate.

Most great companies were founded at the point where someone discovered a creative solution to a problem. For that reason, creativity within a business drives everything forward. It stirs morale, it pushes product development, and if you can instil a creative culture, then that alone can solve many of the problems that occur in the life cycle of an organisation.

But when companies get to a certain size, they start pursuing something else other than creativity: order. Leaders insist on process and systems, and rely on assumptions that are based on what went before. Too much order discourages innovation, and sets companies on a path to decline – while those that are able to ask questions that begin with the word

‘why’, and propose creative ways of making things happen, are rewarded handsomely.



Neil Waller is the co-founder and co-CEO of Whalar Group, a global creator company.



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Creativity is everywhere.

by Amanda Levette

Some years ago I went to a lecture by the late Peter Rice. He was a brilliant engineer responsible for the Sydney Opera House and the Lloyds building in London. He talked about an essay by WH Auden on Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Auden argued

Great leaps of creativity often take place from a position of naivete

that Iago – the play’s antagonist – was the prototypical scientific man. Rice went on to describe the dangers that architects and engineers face “by being merely pragmatic, using only rational thought, desperate to know whether what we do is right – by being Iagos in other words,

we destroy the very basis upon which the good or noble things exist in life.” To me this perfectly encapsulates a deep misunderstanding of the power of creativity.

I believe we take too narrow a view of what creativity is. Creativity is typically associated with design, art, literature. But imagination, innovation and intuition are part of everything. Creativity is everywhere in politics, science, economics – in every corner of our civilisation. One way to broaden our definition of creativity is to look at where progress happens. Historically, this is often at the intersection of different disciplines, or a breakthrough made by someone coming from one arena into another.

Take the example of Nicolas Appert, a French confectioner who in the late 18th century resolved to invent a better way of preserving food. During a period



of experimentation that lasted 14 years, he discovered that bottling ingredients, then sealing and heating them, enabled contents to stay fresh for months. His innovative method was ignored until he introduced it to the navy, where it drastically increased the health of sailors. His work was the precursor of the canned food of today.

Great leaps of creativity often take place from a position of naivete or a lack of expertise. As architects, when we take on a new commission, we enter a new world that we sometimes know little about, a recent example being a building we designed for nuclear fusion. It was precisely our inexperience in this field that allowed us to challenge the status quo. Our thinking was unbound by incumbent practices, and – unlike Iago – it helped us find a creative balance between imagination and science.

Amanda Levette CBE is a Stirling Prize winner and founder of the AL_A architecture studio.

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Three things I know.

by Toby Horry

- i. The basic principle of creativity hasn’t changed. But the methods and channels that we use to deploy it have. The paintbox you have to colour with is far broader than it used to be. There used to be only a few answers to the question: “What shall we do with our advertising?” A tv ad, a press ad, or a poster. The challenge now is not becoming snow blind to the array of options. You have to place bets. And those are often educated guesses rather than definitive proof.
- ii. Your marketing has to be based on truth. But that truth doesn’t have to be factual. At TUI, our Christmas campaign featured Santa’s elves heading off for a well-deserved break. The thinking? No one works harder during the holidays than the miniature teams that fabricate toys in the workshop.
- iii. So many great ads in history have been dramatised product demos. Our industry has become slightly afraid of putting the product front and centre. Often, demonstrating the product’s appeal in a way that features characters, drama, humour, and truth is still a compelling way to communicate to an audience.

Toby Horry is a global marketing leader, Marketing Academy Fellow 2024, and was listed in Campaign’s Power 100 2024.

SECTION FOUR

Your next creative leap

Creativity requires courage, ambition, and optimism. The right structure and tools will help cultivate these qualities in your team. In this closing section we alight upon three techniques to power your next creative leap. >

“Cultivating ambition is vital. Teams that understand the significance of their work will over-deliver. Great works of art have ambition. Your business should too.”

SIR JOHN HEGARTY, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, THE BUSINESS OF CREATIVITY





ACTION 1

Conduct a
leap audit

Very few companies pose questions to do with their own creative efforts – specifically, the number of great strides being made or the scale of their ambition. Therefore, our first action involves a discussion among senior figures on how many creative leaps are being made (or, at least, attempted) across the organisation. Assemble key figures across the business and set out a raft of audacious, transformative, intimidating leaps for the coming five years.



ACTION 2

Use our
questionnaire

This report was designed to be stolen. While our survey polled the attitudes of 450 business leaders around the world, its methodology applies to smaller panels too. Borrow our survey questions to conduct a poll of how your own company views and cultivates creativity. The road to creative excellence starts with measurement.



ACTION 3

Reconnect to your
founding creative philosophy
and share it

Every company was founded on an idea. Take time to reflect on what that original creative spark was and whether it still drives decision-making today. Then, as a leader, share that story. Cultural change starts with storytelling and creativity thrives when people are reminded what they’re here to build.



Get in touch

We hope you enjoyed this white paper. If you have any questions – or would like to know more about **The Business of Creativity** – write to our coo, Immy Groome at Immy@businessofcreativity.com

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