7

People as Creative Problem Solvers

Imagination is the secret reservoir of the riches of the human race.

—Maude L. Frandsen

The purposes of this chapter are to help you understand the importance of personal characteristics and factors in Planning Your Approach to Creative Problem Solving (CPS) and the role of diversity, ownership, and task expertise in the Appraising Tasks stage. As a result of your reading and study of this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the importance of understanding personal characteristics and style preferences when Planning Your Approach to CPS for individuals, teams, or organizations.

2. Identify several cognitive and personality characteristics related to creativity and explain their implications for preparing for CPS and for applying CPS effectively (individually or with teams, groups, or organizations).

3. Identify and explain the important elements of diversity, ownership, and task expertise, and describe their significance and use in any CPS component or stage.

4. Describe at least three ways of applying your knowledge of people to the opportunities and challenges on which you work in your own setting.

Agroup of managers and technical people in the advertising industry wanted to be trained in the use of creative-thinking and problem-solving tools. We were a bit hesitant at first, thinking, "Here we are—being asked to train people in an advertising agency, reputed to be a highly creative profession, in the use of creative-thinking and problem-solving skills!"

We addressed the issues of creativity and diversity during a 1-day workshop. We also practiced some of the creative-thinking tools on a task that was real to the agency. It involved helping the organization become more nimble. Although they were already very successful, they wanted to improve their ability to respond to needs, act more quickly on customer requests, and turn the organization around quickly and efficiently to pursue new opportunities.

During our day together, we learned much about people in advertising. As in many other organizations, there were some very strong boundaries between people in different functions. However, one boundary was particularly interesting in this organization. They call those people who deal with the design and art side of the business the "creatives." They create the actual advertisements for customers. The people who deal with the client relationship side of the business (e.g., finances, client management) are called the "suits." The "suits" often perceive the "creatives" as an uncontrollable group of flaky people, while the "creatives" perceive the "suits" as non-creative drones. For all intents and purposes, they often see each other as a necessary evil. Needless to say, there was quite a bit of tension between the two groups, and it was having a negative impact on the agency's capacity to be nimble.

We tell this story to demonstrate how your personal characteristics can have a sizable impact on your creative problem-solving behavior, whether you are working alone or with others in teams or groups. Without doubt, you have had experiences in which new projects leaped forward when certain people initiated and promoted them. Those people probably demonstrated a knack for explaining a new idea in ways that got everyone else excited. They had boundless energy or dogged persistence for moving their projects forward. They dreamed about the future and drew others into their vision, knowing exactly what to do to guide an idea through all the channels and over all the hurdles.

On the other hand, you have probably also had the opposite experience. You might have been working alone or as part of a group with an important goal or purpose in mind and some methods and tools to use in working toward that goal—only to discover that "things just didn't turn out right." Perhaps, you found that some people were stubborn or resistant, unwilling to look at the task in an open-minded way or determined to do things differently or to give greater priority to other tasks. Perhaps you were frustrated by poor communication, lack of communication, lack of support, or others' failure to follow up on their commitments and decisions. Perhaps some key people had not been consulted or brought on board, and as a result, they let the task die on their desks (or killed it before it even got started).

These experiences point out the importance of understanding the *people* with whom you will be working whenever you are dealing with change and innovation (translating creative ideas into new products, processes, or services). Using CPS

cannot guarantee or ensure success; effective, powerful results will always be influenced by the people working on the tasks. In this chapter, we will discuss a number of personal characteristics and behaviors that can be observed when creativity is put into action by any person or group. We will examine the importance of people's ownership when you are planning or applying any CPS components, stages, or tools. *Ownership* refers to the responsibility, power, or authority that people have for any task. Ownership was defined in Chapter 3. Their ownership might arise in different ways, and varying degrees, from their knowledge, experience, professional or personal expertise, formal authority, or status in relation to the task.

This chapter will examine some of the unique personal characteristics and preferences people bring to any task. We will refer to this variety as *diversity*—the many and varied differences among people (in their characteristics, consistent patterns of behavior, styles, and preferences) that make it possible for creativity to be expressed in so many different ways and forms. Diversity also deals with your conscious and deliberate efforts to be aware of the potential impact of those differences on the effectiveness of CPS and therefore your commitment to recognize, respect, and respond to them. Understanding and responding to diversity also involves knowing how individuals bring their own creativity to bear on personal or group tasks, and how people interact and work creatively in groups.

This chapter will also examine *task expertise*, which addresses the specific background, information, experience, and preparation of the people involved in using CPS. Any task can be understood, defined, developed or constructed, structured, and accepted or rejected in different ways, by many people, at different times, and for varied reasons. Often, there is no single, "absolute," correct or best way to proceed, and so communication and decision making can be important issues to address for any task.

Ownership

Ownership is an essential aspect of the importance of *people* in planning your CPS approach or applying any creative approach to problem solving. *Ownership* involves the nature or extent, and the location, of personal involvement or investment in a task and the ability to promote or inhibit implementation or action. In more informal terms, ownership involves the power and inclination to make things happen. When you have clarity about ownership, whether you are working independently or in a group, you will know how to stimulate, support, nurture, or encourage positive steps. You (and others) understand why you are working on the task, and you feel confident and enthusiastic because you know there is likely to be follow-up and that the results of your work will be put to use. When ownership is missing, you (and others) will wonder why you are working on the task, why you should invest any time or effort in it, and you may easily come to feel frustrated, discouraged, uninvolved, or even cynical about the work.

Three main factors contribute to ownership (see Figure 7.1). They are *influence* (the ability to take action), *interest* (caring about the task, wanting to deal with it), and *imagination* (the need for and openness to novel or new possibilities or directions).

Figure 7.1 Three Main Factors That Constitute Ownership

Interest

Do you really *want* to work on this challenge?

Influence

Do you feel you have enough clout or leverage to *effect* the change?

Imagination

Do you need or wish to consider something *new*?

Influence

You have influence when you (individually, or with others in a group) actually have the authority or responsibility for implementing the results or outcomes of your work. It is clear that your proposed ideas or actions "really will go somewhere" as a result of your applications of CPS. In group settings, we often distinguish between two influential roles, the *client* (a person or people with immediate or direct responsibility or authority for action) and the *sponsor* (a person or group with ultimate authority or control over the task). Locating and verifying influence helps you plan and prepare effectively to apply CPS. Being clear about influence helps you define and respect decision-making responsibilities when you are applying CPS.

Interest

The second important factor we consider in establishing ownership is interest. It involves the extent to which you can assess and verify your commitment and willingness to engage in working on a task and your degree of emotional investment in the task. When you care about what you're working on, or have a high level of interest in and energy for the task, you will have a higher level of ownership, and it is more likely that in such a scenario you will engage willingly and with some enthusiasm in applying CPS.

It takes energy to be creative. If you are indifferent or negative about the task, you may respond in an offhand or superficial way, investing little personal energy or thought in the task or the process. The same issues and questions apply to other people when you are working as part of a group on any task. When you are applying CPS, a high or low level of interest will usually become readily apparent!

Imagination

This factor involves your need for novelty, or for new directions, ideas, solutions, or actions. The most appropriate applications of CPS involve a need for and interest in new perspectives that will also be useful. When it is clear that this need is present, you (and other people, if you're working in a group) will be eager to engage in applying CPS and will move forward as a result. Imagination implies an attitude of openness

to newness. This indicates a high level of ownership. If the task does not call for new perspectives, you will be more likely to minimize your effort and commitment, and you will simply focus on "getting it wrapped up and out of the way."

Some Key Questions About Ownership

When you are considering ownership while Appraising Tasks, some questions to ask include the following:

1. What is the level of ownership and who has it?

2. To what extent does someone (or do some people) have the authority and responsibility for taking action?

3. To what extent do people actually care about, and have enthusiasm or passion for, the task?

4. To what extent does the task call for new perspectives or directions?

5. What is the nature of the clientship and who has it? Who is the sponsor, and what level of support will she or he provide?
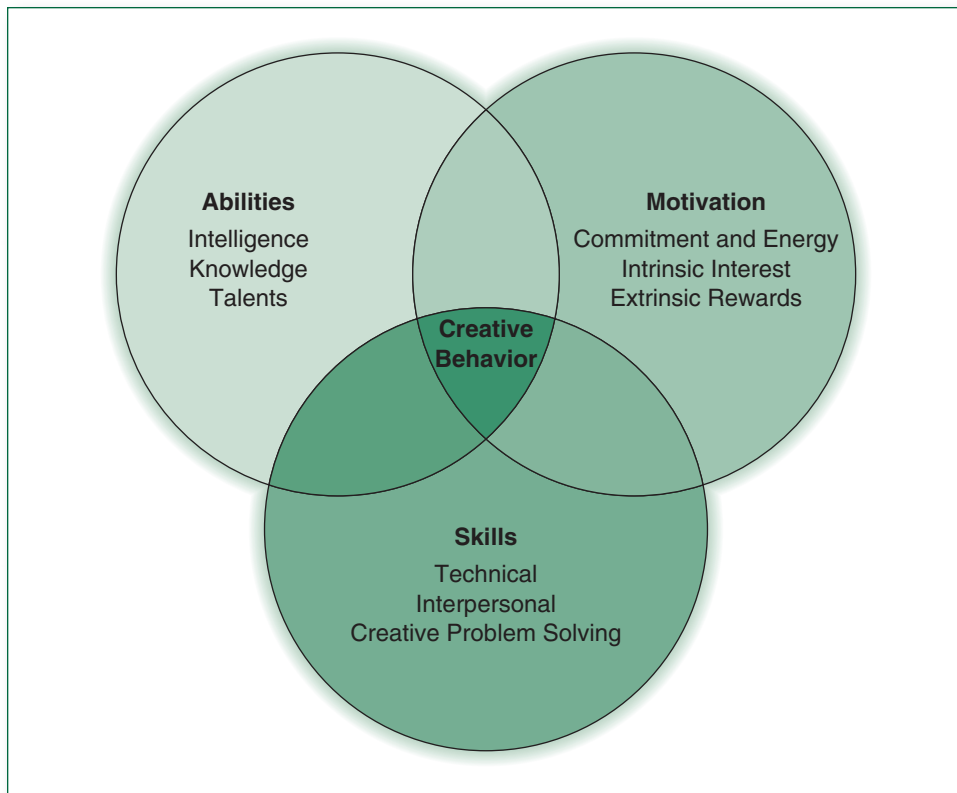
Diversity

We consider it important to look at many variables that are constantly at work to influence any person's thoughts, feelings, and actions. These factors are what make you unique, and in turn they will have a powerful impact on your approach to CPS. In addition to helping you understand your own creativity, knowing about characteristics and preferences will also improve your appreciation of how other people prefer to handle similar situations in very different ways. For many tasks requiring a creative approach, there is value in considering and including a variety of points of view. The aim should be to include and involve the widest spectrum of diversity that you can manage effectively. When Appraising Tasks, thinking about the ways in which people differ leads us to ask, "Who are the key players, and how do they work together?" A partial list of the important ways people differ might include the following:

1. How competent or skillful you are with specific creativity-related methods and tools

2. Your motivation to work on certain challenges

3. The social and cultural setting in which you grew up and now live

4. The people who guided and inspired you throughout your life

5. Your age, gender, and interests

6. Your preferred styles of creativity, decision making, and problem solving

Torrance (1979) described creativity as the synthesis of abilities, skills, and motivation. These three categories, which are illustrated in Figure 7.2, might be used to organize or synthesize a much larger list of specific personal characteristics.

Figure 7.2 Torrance's Model for Predicting Creative Behavior

Abilities
Intelligence
Knowledge
Talents

Motivation
Commitment and Energy
Intrinsic Interest
Extrinsic Rewards

Creative Behavior

Skills
Technical
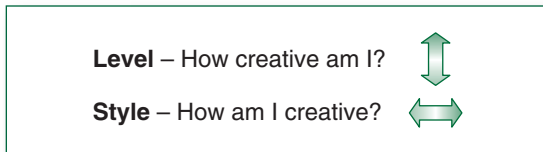Interpersonal
Creative Problem Solving

Creative abilities, or natural capacities and strengths, are present to some degree in all people. But creative behavior also draws on skills, or applications of tools and procedures that people have learned and practiced, and requires motivation, or the engagement and passion to accomplish a task or meet a goal.

Research on personality dynamics and dimensions related to creativity in the individual has been important since it contributed to our understanding of many personal factors that can make a difference in applying CPS. However, a newer approach has emerged, focusing on one's *style* of creativity. This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding differences in how each of us prefers to use our creativity or in how our creativity is best expressed.

As we began to look beyond describing people by referring to their level of creativity (e.g., highly creative, moderately creative, or uncreative), we began to consider another important question: "How are you creative?" Dealing with this question helped us view the role of the person in CPS in several new ways that extend our understanding of creativity and CPS in ways that would not have been possible had we examined only the issues of "level" of creativity.

The question of creativity style assumes that you have creativity. The more important concern is how you choose or prefer to demonstrate it. Considering style helps you understand how to become "your creative best." Personally, you can increase your awareness of your own style needs and preferences and attempt to be flexible when necessary about working in other ways. In group settings, knowing your own style and those of other group members will be helpful in reducing friction and in seeing things from other points of view. The goal is a better appreciation and constructive use of personal diversity. Let's examine how this works using one helpful approach to the problem-solving style. The contrasting views of level and style are illustrated in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3   The Contrasting Views of Level and Style

We have been involved in an extensive program of research and development in which we have studied theory, research, and practice to gain a richer, deeper, and more focused understanding of the nature and dynamics of problem-solving style (e.g., Isaksen, 2004; Isaksen & Geuens, 2007; Selby, Treffinger, & Isaksen, 2007a, 2007b; Selby, Treffinger, Isaksen, & Lauer, 2004; Treffinger, Selby, & Isaksen, 2008).
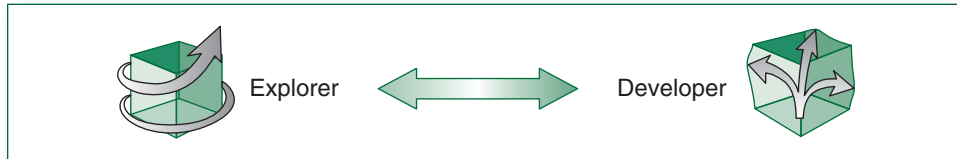
Problem-Solving Style

We define problem-solving styles as consistent individual differences in the ways people prefer to plan and carry out generating and focusing, to gain clarity, produce ideas, or prepare for action when solving problems or managing change (Selby, Treffinger, & Isaksen, 2002). Problem-solving styles are natural and neutral. They reflect the way you prefer to behave when solving problems and, as such, are stable and reflect how you can be your very best. Problem-solving styles are not rigid, fixed, and inflexible or excuses for not doing things well. They do not reflect your ability, expertise, or level of success in solving problems.

When creating, solving problems, and managing change, some people, working alone or in groups, seek to *improve* on ideas, products, processes, or services that already exist—polishing them, "adding new twists," making them better, or extending their applications in new directions. Other people prefer to direct their efforts to breaking totally new ground—"going where no one has gone before." Our recent research and development efforts have now resulted in the publication of a new instrument that will help us gain a richer and deeper understanding of these differences and, in a broader sense, the role that one's personal style preferences play in creativity and innovation. The instrument is VIEW: An Assessment of Problem Solving Style™ (Selby et al., 2007a, 2007b; Treffinger, Selby, Isaksen, & Crumel, 2007). VIEW represents and assesses three dimensions of style preferences that are unique and important in understanding and guiding the efforts of individuals and groups to manage their creative problem-solving or inventive efforts effectively. These are *Orientation to Change, Manner of Processing,* and *Ways of Deciding.*

Orientation to Change

Figure 7.4   Orientation to Change

This VIEW dimension provides an overall indication of the person's perceived preferences in two general styles for managing change and solving problems creatively. Orientation to Change includes two contrasting styles: the *Explorer* and the *Developer* (Figure 7.4). Although it is convenient to characterize each of these preferences using descriptors of people with extreme preferences, most people share some inclinations associated with each style. How a person emphasizes these approaches in her or his typical individual behavior across varying contexts, and over a sustained period of time, and the consistency or clarity of our preferences contribute to the location of the overall preference along the Explorer-Developer continuum.

The Explorer Style. Webster's definition of *explore* includes "to travel over new territory for adventure or discovery." A person with a preference for the Explorer style seeks to break new ground, thrives on venturing in uncharted directions, and follows interesting possibilities wherever they might lead. If developed and refined, however, your efforts to generate many unusual and original options might provide the foundation for productive new directions. You may find structure confining or limiting to your creative problem-solving efforts. You may tend to enjoy risk and uncertainty, plunge into a situation, and improvise your planning as the situation unfolds. You may prefer to follow your own unique pathway ("marching to the beat of your own drummer"), and you may choose not to conform to rules, procedures, or authority that you find arbitrary or that seem to stifle your creativity. You may hold new ideas loosely and let go of them early as attractive new possibilities emerge.

The Developer Style. Webster's definitions of *develop* include "setting forth or making clear by degrees or in detail . . . to move from the original position . . . to one providing more opportunity for effective use, [or] to come into being gradually." A person who prefers the Developer style considers the basic elements, ingredients, or ideas in a task or situation and organizes, synthesizes, refines, and enhances them, forming or shaping them into a more complete, functional, and useful condition or outcome. The term *Developer* indicates an individual who brings tasks to fulfillment. You are comfortable working in well-structured situations and acting with knowledge of and respect for existing expectations, rules, and procedures. You may hold your initial ideas tightly and find it difficult to let them go in favor of new possibilities.

Table 7.1 describes some of the unique contributions of the Explorer and Developer styles when applying CPS (drawing on Treffinger et al., 2007; Treffinger et al., 2008).

| **Table 7.1**	Unique Contributions of the Explorer and Developer Styles When Applying CPS
Explorer Style	**Developer Style**
Prefer broad and abstract challenges and problems—highly abstract	Prefer tasks and challenges that are concrete and precisely defined
Readily generate many new and unusual ideas within and outside the existing paradigm	Readily generate a variety of ideas that are practical and useful within the existing paradigm
Prefer high-level approaches to implementation—relying on adapting spontaneously to emerging challenges	Prefer detailed and thorough approaches to implementation—relying on planful responses to challenges
May redefine the task for the client and formulate a process design that allows for improvisation	May dig deep for a detailed understanding of the task and develop a well-structured process design

SOURCE: Adapted by permission from Selby et al. (2007b).

Manner of Processing

The next dimension of VIEW, *Manner of Processing,* describes the person's preference for working *externally* (i.e., with other people throughout the process) or *internally* (i.e., thinking and working alone before sharing ideas with others) when managing change and solving problems (Figure 7.5). This dimension deals with preferences of how and when you use your own inner energy and resources, as well as the energy and resources of others. It includes your inclinations for different ways of handling information and when you prefer to share your thinking during problem solving and managing change.

Figure 7.5 Manner of Processing
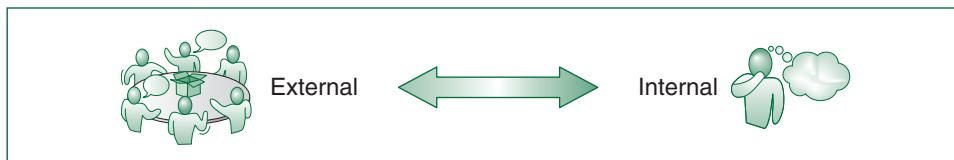
External ⟷ Internal

SOURCE: Selby et al. (2007b). Reprinted with permission.

The External Style. Individuals who exhibit a well-developed preference for an external style draw their energy from interaction with others, discussing possibilities and building from the ideas of others. They prefer physical engagement with the environment. When learning new and difficult material, those with an External style preference clarify their ideas and understandings through discussion. They find the input of authorities helpful as part of their active discussion. They are not bothered by noise in the study area, approach learning in several ways, and often find that physical mobility enhances their learning, thinking, and problem-solving skills. When solving problems, they seek a great deal of input from others before reaching closure. Externals tend to be seen by others as good team members and often appear full of energy. Preferring action to reflection, they may appear to rush into things before others are ready to proceed.

The Internal Style. Those with a well-developed Internal style look first reflectively to their own inner resources and draw energy from their reflection. They prefer to consider ideas on their own before sharing them with others. They embark on action only after giving it careful consideration. People with an Internal preference emphasize quiet reflection and processing of information at their own pace. They tend to become engrossed in inner events, ideas, and concepts. They prefer learning privately, working at least initially without the help of peers or authority figures. They may seem quiet and might be perceived by others as pensive or withdrawn.

Table 7.2 describes some of the unique contributions of the External and Internal styles when applying CPS (drawing on Treffinger et al., 2007; Treffinger et al., 2008).

**Table 7.2** Unique Contributions of the External and Internal Styles When Applying CPS

External Style	Internal Style
Prefer to understand the challenge through direct and active engagement—involving open exchange with many others	Prefer a thoughtful and reflective understanding of the challenge through inward-directed analysis—seeking to think things through on their own
May readily engage in a lively exchange with others and naturally enjoy generating many and unusual ideas	May work at their own pace when generating ideas, enjoying opportunities to work alone through quiet contemplation
Prefer to take action as quickly as possible and involve many others along the way	Prefer to take action following the careful and complete development of a plan
Obtain clarity about the task through open dialogue and prefer a process design that will quickly result in action	Obtain clarity about the task following a dialogue that allows time for individual reflection for deeper understanding and detailed planning of process

SOURCE: Adapted by permission from Selby et al. (2007b).

Ways of Deciding

The final dimension of VIEW, *Ways of Deciding,* deals with your preferences for balancing and emphasizing task concerns (i.e., emphasizing logic, rationality, and appropriateness) and your personal or interpersonal needs (i.e., maintaining harmony and interpersonal relationships) when focusing your thinking and moving toward decisions and actions (Figure 7.6). When making decisions during problem solving, you may prefer the Person or Task style as your first or primary emphasis. Everyone can consider both approaches, but your style preferences describe the approach that you tend to emphasize initially or to which you may give great weight in decision making.

Figure 7.6   Ways of Deciding

Person Focus ⟷ Task Focus
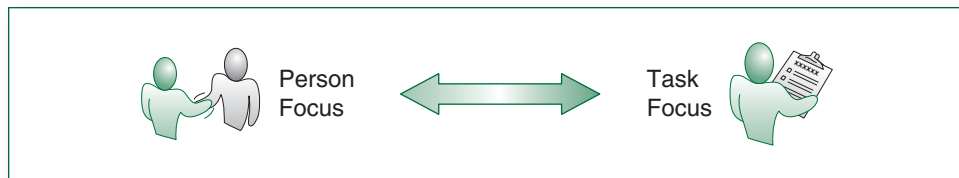
The Person Style. If you prefer the Person style, you first consider the impact of choices and decisions on people's feelings and support and on the need for harmony and positive relationships. You prefer to be emotionally involved when setting priorities. You may often be seen as warm, friendly, and caring. You may be quick to become aware of, and respond to, the needs of others. Person-oriented deciders seek solutions or decisions for which there will be broad acceptance or "buy-in" by all concerned. They tend to emphasize a concern for others affected by the decision.

The Task Style. If you prefer the Task style, you may tend to look first at choices and decisions that are logical and sensible, and that can be justified objectively. You may prefer making judgments that are impersonal, based on well-reasoned conclusions. Individuals with a Task style of decision making seek mastery of content or information to help them arrive at the "best solution" or response or at a solution they can readily defend or justify. They may stress the need for staying cool and free from emotion while seeking clarity, precision, and logical order. Task-oriented deciders are focused primarily on getting results.

Table 7.3 describes some of the unique contributions of the Person and Task styles when applying CPS (drawing on Treffinger et al., 2007; Treffinger et al., 2008).

Table 7.3 Unique Contributions of the Person and Task Styles When Applying CPS

Person Style	Task Style
Prefer to seek an understanding of the challenge everyone can agree with and embrace—taking a caring and human angle	Prefer to seek an understanding of the challenge that will lead to the best results—taking an impersonal and logical angle
When generating ideas, may ensure that everyone is heard and appreciated and offer ideas aimed at meeting human needs and issues	When generating ideas, may focus on offering options they believe are the most promising and realistic aimed at getting high-quality results
Prefer pointing out the positive aspects of alternatives, enthusiastically supporting actions that help people—in a personalized manner	Prefer identifying flaws in potential alternatives and outlining effects and consequences of decisions—in a detached manner
When planning their approach, will seek a desired outcome that fully considers the impact on people and a process design to which everyone can agree	When planning their approach, will ask for a desired outcome based on an objective and rigorous examination and a process approach that proceeds logically toward obtaining results

SOURCE: Adapted by permission from Selby et al. (2007b).

Moderate Preferences

You may have a moderate style if your preferences for any of these dimensions of problem-solving style are unclear or not very strongly differentiated. Moderate style preferences can often place you in between those with stronger or more pronounced inclinations. This may provide the opportunity to act as a bridge—to open up channels of communication and provide improved understanding and use of different points of view.

Those with moderate preferences can often take a problem-solving approach that is more situationally sensitive—as their preference often depends on the demands of a specific context.

Remember that every individual possesses all the qualities we have outlined, although they will not all be developed, expressed, or preferred to the same degree. This leads us to the next section that addresses the challenge of working outside our natural style inclinations.

Working Outside Your Preferences

Many situations will call for us to behave in a manner that is outside our normal range of preferred behavior. These occasions call for us to stretch and learn new ways of

thinking and behaving. Some refer to this as "coping." The ability to match our behavior to differing situational demands may be considered a sign of psychological maturity. Coping for long periods of time may also have its costs. It takes energy and motivation to sustain coping. Without having the needed energy, coping may cause stress and other potentially harmful effects. One alternative is to learn tools and techniques that make it easier to perform these different but desired behaviors. For example, if you have a natural preference for Generating Ideas, but find focusing these options to be challenging, you may benefit from learning and applying focusing tools.

Another alternative is to take advantage of the diverse styles that may be available to you. We call this "coverage." When a specific situation calls for a particular style of behavior that is not your own, you may be able to identify someone else who has that natural inclination. This is one of the key benefits of diversity.

Some Key Questions About Diversity

When you are considering diversity, some of the key questions to ask are as follows:

1. Do you have the right people (and mix of people) for the task on which you will be working?

2. Is there enough variety to ensure that many viewpoints and approaches will be represented?

3. Is there so much variety that it will be challenging to establish and maintain effective communication and collaboration?

4. How will you help people understand, appreciate, and make effective use of the diversity among participants?

5. If you are working alone, how will your personal characteristics and style preferences influence your thinking and decision making? How will you ensure that you don't overlook key issues and concerns that people with other preferences might raise?

To learn more about problem-solving style, visit the VIEW Web site at www .ViewStyle.net.

Task Expertise

Finally, when you are Appraising Tasks or applying any of the CPS components or stages, it is also important to consider the question of task expertise. *Task expertise* is the extent to which people bring appropriate knowledge, information, and experience to the job at hand. The expertise to which we're referring is specific to any particular task on which people are working at a certain time and in a specific context. We are not referring to task expertise as a global, generalized, or all-purpose view of ability or natural talent that transcends tasks or settings. Any person might have a high degree of expertise for one task but might be an absolute novice for another task. For example, a manager might bring a very extensive and valuable storehouse of information and personal experience to a task that involves production or technical skills but

might be totally unqualified to deal with a challenge that involves human resources or financial planning.

There are also several "layers" of expertise in or surrounding any task. Some relevant knowledge and information concerns the specific task itself—knowing the task definition and specifications. However, it might also be important to consider a broader level of task expertise, in the form of knowledge about the discipline, domain, or field in which the task is located. Sometimes, it will also be important and valuable to take into account an even broader level of expertise, drawing from other domains that are only indirectly related to the specific task (and sometimes from unrelated domains, which might be the source for highly novel possibilities or connections to be formed). Creative success will involve breadth of knowledge or expertise for some tasks, while depth of expertise may be more important for other tasks.

Task expertise might involve the content of the task on which you are working and the knowledge and skills of the people in relation to their understanding of it. It might also involve applying CPS or a variety of specific talents and transferable skills (e.g., writing, illustration, design, or computer skills) that people bring to a certain task. This task expertise might come from within the group. In other situations, you may need to bring in or hire people with the appropriate and necessary task expertise to get the job done. This is often the approach when people hire consultants. The task expertise might only be needed for a short or determined period of time, and therefore, it may be appropriate to hire it in rather than learn and integrate it within the group or organization.

Finally, task expertise includes the extent to which people are aware of, have skills in, and are willing to carry out leadership practices or behaviors. Expertise in leadership involves credibility and integrity and practices such as creating a powerful future vision, inspiring others to join in holding that vision, enabling others to take action, modeling appropriate action, and celebrating the accomplishments of many team or group members (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Effective leaders have expertise in directing the behavior of others, coaching individuals, participating actively in complex task efforts, and delegating effectively (Blanchard, 1985), or what Gryskiewicz (1999) described as "influencing a community of practice." For additional information on the importance of expertise in relation to creative leadership, consult Isaksen and Tidd (2006).

In many ways, then, the issues of task expertise apply to every member of a group and need to be considered when planning, preparing for, or applying CPS to a group setting. It is important to ensure that people share a common understanding of the key information about the task. Incomplete information, inconsistent understanding of key information among group members, ineffective communication, or the absence of essential skills within the group will hamper effective application of CPS and, more important, effective group performance on the task.

Some Key Questions About Task Expertise

In relation to task expertise, some of the key questions to consider include the following:

1. Do you (and others) have enough knowledge or expertise about the content of the task and about CPS to be able to work effectively on this task?

2. Do you understand the strengths and needs you (and others) will bring to the task?

3. To what extent do you have specific background and experience that will be relevant to the present task? Do you have enough information to deal competently with the task? Do you have so much experience that you might be closed minded or unresponsive to new possibilities or directions?

4. What kinds of information resources and support will be available?

5. What additional information might be important and helpful to obtain or access?

Using Information About People When Appraising Tasks

As you can see, *ownership, diversity,* and *task expertise* are interrelated in several ways when you are considering the "people" dimension of Appraising Tasks in the Planning Your Approach component and when you are applying any CPS component or stage. These questions and issues will have significant effects on your decision to apply CPS, or not to do so (in Appraising Tasks). They are also important for your planning and preparation (in the Designing Process stage) and for your choices and actions in any other component or stage.

You might discover that you need a different "mix" of people, in relation to style preferences and various elements of task expertise, to deal successfully with the various tasks. Some tasks may call for depth of knowledge and richness of expertise, others for very specialized expertise and skills. Considerable style diversity might be important and valuable when there is substantial commonality of expertise and experience to sustain a spirit of openness and exploration within the group (although the members of the group must also know how to manage style diversity comfortably). Other, more interdisciplinary (or cross-functional) tasks may require a group that is very diverse in expertise and background, to enable the group to share and value different perspectives as they work together on a task that affects many people, teams, or units (or an entire organization). It is also important to be very clear about ownership to help people work collaboratively. You will seek to help everyone understand that their expertise in an area does not necessarily make them the client for the task. In other settings, where diversity is high and the group's expertise is widely varied, you will seek to identify the client so the group knows that there is one!

Considering diversity, ownership, and task expertise helps you consider whether or not to apply CPS, and if you do proceed, it gives you valuable information to use in the Designing Process and in your CPS activities. As a result of your efforts to understand the people who will be involved as problem solvers, four broad options will be available for you when you are Appraising Tasks. These are:

Apply CPS

If you can define and clarify specific ownership for the task, if the "makeup and mix" of style preferences seems appropriate, and if you can verify that the task expertise among participants is appropriate, you have evidence that supports a decision to proceed in applying CPS.

Modify the Task

You might decide that you have an appropriate group with whom to work, in relation to ownership, diversity, and expertise, but you may have concerns about the nature or definition of the task. In this case, before proceeding to apply CPS, it may be important to review the task with the client or sponsor and to restructure or redefine the task to enable the group to work on it more effectively.

Find the Right People

You might decide that the task is appropriate and adequately defined but that there are concerns about the ownership, diversity, or expertise of the group membership. In this case, the best course of action will be to seek to restructure the group membership so that the people will be able to work effectively on the task.

Wait or Withdraw

If you determine that there are serious, or potentially serious, concerns about any (or several) of the three key factors, your wisest course of action might be to decide not to apply CPS under the present circumstances. You might consider ways to postpone working on the task until you can modify the group makeup, locate a sponsor, and clarify ownership or modify the definition of the task. There can also be times when you will be wise to consider other possible methods or even to decline working on the task. An important lesson, often difficult to learn, is that sometimes the wisest decision is not to proceed.

The Rest of the Story

Our hesitancy about working with the managers and technical people from the advertising agency wore off shortly after meeting the group. We worked together to understand diversity issues related to their natural preferences for using creativity, making decisions, and solving problems, and their implications for working alone or with others. The workshop helped them develop an appreciation for the contributions that people from different functions could make to solving problems in creative ways.

Of all the issues the group could have worked on during the workshop, they chose to address the division created among people and between functions as a result of using the terms *suits* and *creatives*. From being initially hesitant to talk about the issue openly, they eventually chose it as the core issue to address for helping make the organization more nimble. They realized that the language they were using sent the message that creativity belonged to one function and not the other. The group wanted to find a way to remove the use of the terms that promoted isolation, defensiveness, or strife, so as to improve their agency's capacity to be nimble.

It demonstrated to us the importance of diversity in helping people learn to work together in productive and constructive ways. When we provide people with information that will help them understand the value of diversity, and offer them the methods and tools that will help them get the best from that diversity, they discover and apply ways to recognize, use, and celebrate the contributions of others.

Putting This Chapter to Work

Our goals in this chapter were to help you understand the importance of people—individual characteristics and interpersonal relationships—when you are Planning Your Approach to CPS. We highlighted three important factors (diversity, ownership, and task expertise) that influence your effectiveness in planning for and applying CPS.

Activities to Guide Reflection and Action

Work on one or more of the following activities to review your understanding of the material in this chapter and to practice applying the content in real situations. If you are using this book as part of a course or study group, you may wish to work individually and then compare your responses or work collaboratively as a team.

1. Think about two actual groups of which you have been a participant or leader: one that was very exciting, effective, and productive, and the other, a group that was frustrating, constantly struggling, and eventually unproductive. Consider the elements of diversity, ownership, and task expertise discussed in this chapter. Identify the factors that you believe were most significant in distinguishing one group from the other.

2. As you reflect on your experiences in the two groups in #1, what factors might you have been able to change or handle differently so that the ineffective, dissatisfying group might have become more productive and rewarding?

3. For each of VIEW's three dimensions, describe how you might differentiate the instruction or training for participants with each style preference. (For example, how might you guide or instruct participants with an Explorer style preference differently from the way you would work with those who have a Developer style preference?)

4. Think about a situation in which you are responsible for managing or directing an individual or a team (e.g., a project group, a committee or task force on a particular topic or problem, a performance review or evaluation conference). Create a plan for taking diversity, ownership, and task expertise into account constructively in your planning for that responsibility.