

# Unlocking creativity

*David Adams*

## **Purpose**

This strategy consists of the use of poetry to enable team members to open up to themselves and, in the process, to each other. The result is an increase in innovation and, where appropriate, greater ability to indulge in productive conflict and create greater trust.

## **Description**

In five years of leading the process, the writer has never ceased to be amazed at the quality of output from people who claim never to have written a word since their school days. The process can be used in one-to-one coaching but is much more powerful if used in a group setting.

## **Process**

First, the mood needs to be set by the judicious reading of some motivational or emotive poem by the facilitator. Examples might be *Faith* by David Whyte; *Once More unto the Breach, Dear Friends* from Henry V; *Love After Love* by Derek Walcott. This can be a basic 30-minute exercise or taken as part of a 90-minute or three-hour workshop (see also [www.unlocking-creativity.com](http://www.unlocking-creativity.com)).

Group members are then asked to consider a situation or issue that they want/need to change. They make bullet-point notes under a column headed *Present Reality* (see

Figure 8). Having been given a few minutes (*maximum five minutes*), they are then asked to bullet point, not necessarily in parallel, their *Future Reality*, their Ideal Outcome. They are told that at no stage will they be asked to share the contents of these two columns. They are warned that they will, however, be asked to share the contents of a third, middle column.

Once they have completed *Present Reality* and *Future Reality*, the delegates are asked to put one word in a central column – that is, one word only, not one word for each bullet point – and are told that they should write down the first word that comes into their head, not the one that comes in after they discard the first. They must follow their ‘gut’. They are asked to write down the word that is stopping them getting from *Present Reality* to *Future Reality*. (As a precursor to this exercise and subject to the time available, the group can be asked to brainstorm motivational words and then inhibiting words – this has the effect of loosening them up and acts as an ‘inclusion exercise’.)

Once they have discovered their chosen word, each person must write the following at the top of a fresh page: I want

Present Reality	The chosen word here	Future Reality

**Figure 8** Unlocking creativity exercise

to write about \_\_\_\_\_. In the blank space they should insert their chosen word. Words that most often come up are *cash, time, fear*, etc. They are then told to write a poem, of which the first line is: I want to write about [xxxxx]. They are informed that their poem does not need to rhyme, it does not need to scan, it just needs to follow their breathing; they just need to let it flow. They are given no more than *12–15 minutes* to do their poem.

Once written, the poems are shared. The experienced facilitator will judge how to encourage the group members to share even if they have inhibitions. Once everyone has shared their poems, they should be asked to take them away, type or write them up and meditate upon the contents. Alternatively, the members can be split into twos or threes and co-coach each other on the meaning.

### **Pitfalls**

Care needs to be taken to ensure ‘buy-in’ by the participants and an agreement to complete the process all the way through. There also needs to be a willingness to open up to the other group members.