
Leading Creative Teams: Design Thinking and Innovation Culture Course

19 – 23 April 2027
Amsterdam





Leading Creative Teams: Design Thinking and Innovation Culture Course

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Programme Summary

Leading creative teams is a five-day training course for directors and heads of function at strategic level, culminating in a team creativity plan that sets out how their own unit will generate, test and deliver new ideas. Many senior leaders ask for new thinking yet run teams where ideas are filtered out early, experiments are punished and pressure crowds out reflection. The approach combines design thinking, structured ideation and deliberate culture building with the habits that keep team performance high. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this programme in leading creative teams, design thinking and innovation culture.

The Business Case

Organisations rarely lack talent; they lack leaders who draw ideas out, choose between them and move the strongest into practice. When creativity depends on a few individuals, improvement stalls. Leaders who shape the conditions for creative work raise the flow of usable ideas while keeping delivery on track.

- **Idea Pipeline Throughput:** Increases the number of proposals that reach testing because ideation and selection follow a clear routine.
- **Time From Concept to Pilot:** Shortens when prototypes and quick tests replace long approval cycles for early ideas.
- **Engagement and Retention of Strong Performers:** Improves where people see their ideas heard, tested and credited.

Principles and Evidence Base

- **Componential Theory of Creativity Amabile:** Frames expertise, creative-thinking skills, intrinsic motivation and the work environment as the levers diagnosed in Session 1.
- **Design Thinking Five Stages:** Structures the empathise, define, ideate, prototype and test cycle practised in Sessions 2 and 3.
- **Double Diamond Design Process:** Guides the shift between divergent and convergent thinking when teams frame problems and select solutions in Session 3.
- **Psychological Safety Edmondson:** Informs the climate, feedback and failure-handling practices built in Session 4.



Intended Participants

- Executives who expect their units to produce new products, services or ways of working.
- Senior leaders responsible for teams whose ideas currently stall before reaching implementation.
- Heads of function who chair problem-solving and improvement forums.
- Leaders building cross-functional groups that must combine specialist knowledge into new solutions.

The programme serves strategy, operations, customer service and product development functions in banking, telecommunications, healthcare and government.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to diagnose the creative climate of their team using the componential model of creativity.
2. Participants will be able to frame a business challenge as a user-centred problem statement ready for ideation.
3. Participants will be able to facilitate structured ideation sessions that produce and filter a wide range of options.
4. Participants will be able to construct low-cost prototypes and tests that generate evidence before full investment.
5. Participants will be able to establish team norms that sustain psychological safety, learning from failure and peak performance.
6. Participants will be able to justify a team creativity plan to sponsors and peers.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Creative Leadership and Team Climate

What conditions allow a team to produce and develop original ideas?

- Creativity, Innovation and Improvement Distinguished
- Amabile Componential Model of Creativity
- Intrinsic Motivation and the Leader's Influence
- Common Idea Killers in Senior Teams
- Team Creative Climate Diagnostic

Day 2: Design Thinking and Problem Framing

How is a vague challenge turned into a problem worth solving?

- Design Thinking Five Stages in Practice
- Empathy Interviews and User Observation
- Journey Mapping and Pain Point Analysis
- Point-of-View Statements and How-Might-We Questions
- Problem Reframing Techniques



Day 3: Structured Ideation and Idea Selection

How do leaders draw out many ideas and choose the right ones?

- Divergent and Convergent Thinking in the Double Diamond
- SCAMPER and Analogy-Based Idea Generation
- Brainwriting to Reduce Groupthink and Hierarchy Effects
- Impact and Effort Prioritisation Grids
- Rapid Prototyping With Sketches and Storyboards

Day 4: Building an Innovation Culture and Sustaining Performance

How does a leader keep a team experimenting while results stay on track?

- Psychological Safety and Candid Feedback Norms
- Intelligent Failure and After-Action Reviews
- Recognition and Credit for Team Ideas
- Energy, Focus and Peak Team Performance Routines
- Experiment Design and Learning Metrics

Day 5: Applying Creative Team Leadership

How are climate, method and culture combined into one plan for a participant's team?

- Applying the Climate Diagnostic to a Participant Team
- Framing a Live Challenge for Team Ideation
- Selecting Ideas and Setting Tests for the First Cycle
- Peer Challenge of Team Norms and Rituals
- Team Creativity Plan Presentation

Methodology

The programme relies on structured exercises in which participants apply each method to a real challenge from their own organisation. Small groups work through framing, ideation and prototyping in short cycles, and peers review each plan in Session 5.

- Suggested activity: Mapping the journey of a hospital patient or bank customer.
- Suggested activity: Brainwriting on a telecommunications service problem.
- Suggested activity: Building a paper prototype of a new public service and testing it with peers.



Capstone Output

Each participant completes a team creativity plan for the unit they lead. It contains a climate diagnosis, a framed priority challenge, an ideation and selection routine, first experiments with learning measures and the team norms the leader will model.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is the leading creative teams programme suitable for senior leaders without a design background?

Yes. It is designed for directors and heads of function at strategic level. It assumes experience of leading a team but no prior training in design or creativity methods.

Which models does the leading creative teams programme rest on?

It draws on Amabile's componential theory of creativity, the five stages of design thinking, the Double Diamond design process and Edmondson's work on psychological safety.

How is the leading creative teams capstone plan used at work?

You return with a team creativity plan covering climate, a priority challenge, ideation routines, first experiments and team norms. It can be launched with your team and reviewed with your sponsor.