



# Creative councils for creative communities

*The Marrickville creativity project*

DISCUSSION PAPER



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## Executive summary

This report by Marrickville Council and the Centre for Local Government, University of Technology Sydney (UTS:CLG) contributes to understanding of the role of creativity as a prerequisite to innovation in local government, particularly during a time of change and reform to the local government sector.

The study demonstrates that a local council can fruitfully draw on a key characteristic of the community in which it is located and thereby supplement its approach to working in and for that community. In the case of Marrickville Council and the Marrickville Creativity Project, it represented an opportunity to more explicitly add creativity to council functioning so as to better serve a community that is well recognised for its creative industries and cultures.

It also documents an approach that could be drawn upon by other local governments wishing to operate in a more creative and innovative way.

The report discusses relevant literature and contextualises the project within current thinking on creativity in communities, organisations and the public sector. Details of the Marrickville Creativity Project are presented along with project outcomes and learnings and suggestions for future work.

In conceptualising this project, Marrickville Council was cognisant that it had entered into a period of significant change within the New South Wales (NSW) local government sector and within the broader local government industry. The Marrickville Creativity Project provided the organisation with an opportunity to explore new ways of working with creativity, innovation and collaboration to assist it through a period of change that was undefined and emerging.

A series of creativity workshops conducted with managers – organised as Creativity Labs – provided participants with a range of tools and ways of thinking that have fostered workplace creativity and influenced organisational culture. In the period since these workshops were held, the organisation successfully embedded aspects of creativity into its organisational culture, strategic planning and day-to-day working operations.

Providing the Council's leadership with an opportunity to explore multiple aspects of creativity (individual, team, leadership, organisational and community) was found to have contributed to cultural shifts within the organisation: shifts in cultural norms, such as a greater tolerance for mistakes, risk and uncertainty, support for change, and collaboration with diverse and effective teams, have been identified by participants. The Council's organisational commitment to creativity continues with the Marrickville Creativity Group that meets monthly and regularly gains attendance of 15 to 20 staff from all Council departments, including executive team members, managers, coordinators and officers.

There is some evidence that the Creativity Labs also produced innovations benefiting the community, such as the Connecting Marrickville Program. This program is aimed at establishing a new collaborative working process that draws on diverse team membership, with openness to new ways of trialling and delivering outcomes. It is a process that is informed by a deeper knowledge of community and place, and has had a particular impact on infrastructure work. The Council has also identified other opportunities to further embed creativity in the organisation.

The outcomes of the Marrickville Creativity Project have a number of potential implications for the local government sector:

- > Councils can improve their performance through incorporating creativity into the culture and operations of their organisation for the benefit of their communities.
- > Creativity can assist individuals, teams and organisations to develop innovative, appropriate and effective solutions, in recognition of broader changes impacting the sector and the need to develop organisational capacity to meet these challenges.
- > The management of organisational culture to facilitate creativity can contribute to innovation and change processes. This project provides a synthesis of key literature that can serve as a resource and inspiration for other local governments wishing to explore the links between creativity, innovation and improved local governance.
- > Creativity can be incorporated as a specific area of staff learning and development, for example through the development of Creativity Labs as a program and toolkit.
- > Consideration of time, and how it can be managed to accommodate creativity processes individually, within teams and within the organisation as a whole, requires further investigation. In addition to time, other barriers to participation of managers in creativity-enhancing initiatives include prior understanding of the subject and attitudes toward the subject. These barriers need to be better understood and addressed.
- > At a broader level, this project suggests that there is value in all local governments drawing on distinctive characteristics of their local communities and adapting their programs and ways of working while being informed and guided by those community strengths.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Links to ACELG's strategic aims

This collaborative project between the Centre for Local Government at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS:CLG) and Marrickville Council is congruent with several of the strategic aims of the Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government (ACELG) (ACELG 2013 p. 7):

- > A focus on 'world-class local government to meet the emerging challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century Australia', which is ACELG's vision
- > Provision of research and development capacity to support policy formulation, drive innovation and help address the challenges facing local government, including a focus on local government research-practitioners and research partnerships
- > Inputs into capacity building programs across the local government sector, in this case through a series of in-service workshops, involving collaboration with UTS:CLG
- > Leadership development programs for both senior and emerging leaders
- > Serving as a clearinghouse for the exchange of information and ideas through identifying, showcasing and promoting innovation and best practice in local government.

In terms of innovation and best practice, ACELG has aimed to identify achievements and best practice across all key areas of local government activity and 'focus on developing a clearer understanding of the practices, strategies, attributes and behaviours that characterise innovative local governments' (ACELG 2013 p. 19).

The 'Marrickville creativity project', described in this Discussion Paper, builds on innovation initiatives in Australian local government reported upon in earlier ACELG publications (Howard 2012; Evans, Aulich, Howard, Peterson and Reid 2012) and shows how a program of creativity workshops with senior managers can lead to innovations that are carried through into council operations. In particular, the project highlights that local government organisations can benefit from drawing on the distinctive characteristics of their local communities and adapting their programs and ways of working while being informed and guided by those community strengths. In this case, it is Marrickville's creative community.

## 1.2 Background and rationale

The Marrickville local government area has long been recognised as a hub of creativity that services and supports the wider Sydney region. Over the past fifteen years, Marrickville Council has supported its communities through a comprehensive range of programs. It has also sought to build on Marrickville's reputation as a leading centre for creativity, balancing its regulatory, corporate and community service functions with serving the needs of the independent arts community.

Internally, the council has maintained a culture of ongoing engagement and continuous improvement of services and programs to ensure that community needs are understood and met. It was through this practice of continuous improvement that the project emerged. In recognition of broader changes impacting the sector and the need to develop organisational capacity to meet these challenges, the project was initiated by Marrickville Council's Manager of Culture and Recreation to address the critical success factor 'A Culture of Creativity and Innovation and Collaboration' as part of the organisational performance plan, the 2012–2013 'Marrickville Council Balanced Scorecard'.

The Marrickville Creativity Project focused on building leadership capability in creative thinking and collaboration. Specifically, the project sought to understand the role of creativity as a prerequisite to innovation processes in local government, and how Marrickville Council might respond to the creativity of its community to deliver better outcomes, in new ways, for the benefit of residents.

While literature on organisational creativity within the corporate sphere was available, information that specifically considered the role of organisational creativity in an Australian local government context was more difficult to find. In response to this lack of readily available information, Council's Culture and Recreation Section prepared a research project brief and engaged UTS:CLG to undertake research into current thinking on creativity and its role in the workplace, particularly as applicable to local government. The brief required that a literature review that identifies success factors and case studies for creativity and innovation in the workplace be undertaken to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of a 'creativity challenge' for Marrickville Council's executive and management teams.

### 1.3 Objectives

The key objectives of the Marrickville Creativity Project were to gain a better understanding of the role of creativity as a prerequisite to innovation in local government, and insight into how that understanding could contribute to Marrickville Council delivering better outcomes for its widely acknowledged 'creative community'.

As an exploratory research project, the Marrickville Creativity Project was guided by three questions:

1. Could Council better understand and benefit its creative community by adopting programs and ways of working informed by the same creative processes that characterise the Marrickville community?
2. Could Council's local governance processes and outcomes be improved by building the organisation's capacity for creativity?
3. What is the current thinking on creativity and its role in the workplace, particularly as applicable to local government?



## 2 Marrickville: A creative community

### 2.1 Marrickville Local Government Area (LGA)

Within Greater Sydney's total area of 12,138 square kilometres, the Marrickville LGA occupies 17 square kilometres of inner metropolitan space and lies between four and ten kilometres from the city centre. Marrickville is home to approximately 83,350 of Sydney's 4,605,992 residents. Its typically older, inner-city suburbs – Dulwich Hill, Lewisham, Petersham, Marrickville, Stanmore, St Peters, Sydenham, Tempe, Enmore and parts of Newtown and Camperdown – are densely populated, highly urbanised and well connected by public transport. Marrickville's light industrial zones near Sydney International Airport mean that some degree of housing affordability and large warehouse space has been retained in the local area, and these also house a diverse range of creative industries.

The Cadigal-Wangal people of the Eora nation are the traditional custodians of the area and over the past 200 years, waves of immigration have flowed through Marrickville, which has been considered home to traditionally industrial and working-class residents (Marrickville Council 2013). More recently, gentrification has significantly influenced the demographics and character of the area, with declining diversity evident. Marrickville has a substantial student population, high numbers of tertiary educated and professionally employed residents, and a higher percentage of same-sex couples than Greater Sydney (NIEIR 2013).

### 2.2 Creativity in the community

Hospers (2003) identifies the importance of the urban hustle and bustle and other liveability factors in creating a framework of conditions conducive enabling the creativity of cities to emerge. This is evident in the Marrickville LGA, where a vibrant street life and 'community feel' have long contributed to its reputation as a hub of independent arts and community values. Marrickville has strong artistic communities, enduring cultural venues, a wealth of galleries, studios and festivals, and a diversity of arts education facilities and services (Conroy 2008).

Statistically, one of Marrickville's notable characteristics is its high arts activity, with the geographically compact area containing one of the highest percentages of artists, cultural workers and arts industries of any LGA in Australia. If the proportion of the workforce in a local government area who are employed in the creative arts provides a measure of the direct importance of arts to local economies, Marrickville is the outstanding area in NSW, with the highest arts employment in the state (1.7%) (NIEIR 2013, p.61). According to the 2011 Australian Census, 8.2% of the residents of Marrickville who are in the workforce are employed as arts and cultural workers, compared to an average of 5.5% in Greater Sydney.

The predominant creative industries include printing, film and video, music and sound recording, design, photography and creative and performing arts and architecture. The proportion of the workforce in Marrickville that is made up of creative artists, musicians, writers and performers (1.2%) is significantly higher than in Greater Sydney (0.3%). The Australian Business Register, produced by the Australian Government, lists 5,969 creative businesses registered within the Marrickville LGA in March 2015. Marrickville was identified as the second-highest LGA in Australia in terms of the proportion of residents with post-school qualifications in society, culture and the creative arts (NIEIR 2013).

A 2008 cultural mapping of Marrickville (Conroy 2008) recorded 796 entries of creative industries and over 3,000 people living in the LGA who were employed in a cultural occupation. It also pointed to a 106.4% increase between 1986 and 2006 in employment in cultural occupations. The Conroy report highlights the quirky and often eccentric nature of

creative expression in Marrickville. This independent and experimental aspect of local creativity is supported by Council policy, which includes support for the arts that fall outside of traditional art forms or notions of arts and culture. These forms of expression are considered essential to the area's reputation as a hub for independent and emerging art and artists.

The Marrickville area features a number of secondary and tertiary creative education institutions, including the Newtown High School of Performing Arts, Dulwich Hill High School of Visual Arts and Design and the TAFE Design Centre in Enmore that specialises in industrial, jewellery, graphic, interior, event and entertainment design, 3D animation, concept art and illustration. The visual arts are also strongly represented in local galleries, studios spaces and artist-run initiatives. Marrickville Council's Open Marrickville Studio Trail event featured 56 art spaces, each of which hosted around 140 visitors over two-day event.

The Marrickville Community Survey (2014) shows that residents place increasing value on the provision of arts and cultural facilities and community festivals, events, performances and exhibitions. Approximately 90% of residents feel that there are enough opportunities to participate in arts and cultural activities in the local area. The results also show that approximately 29% of residents participate in cultural or artistic activities at least once a month, with English-only speakers and females more likely to participate.

In 2014, Artshub identified that Marrickville was home to 359 creative and performing arts activities and 26 arts services, making the area one of the busiest for arts and culture in inner Sydney (Nankervis 2014). The Marrickville area is one the Sydney Fringe Festival's five cultural villages. Marrickville Council supported the establishment of the Sydney Fringe Festival in 2009 to provide independent artists with a platform to build audiences and to provide events and exhibitions within the local government area.

## 2.3 Marrickville's creative evolution

The Marrickville LGA has long been defined by its cultural diversity. Community values and an acceptance of difference have been embedded in Marrickville's identity over many decades. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, pre-eminent Australian poet Henry Lawson lived in Dulwich Hill, while his mother, Louisa Lawson, lived in Marrickville and was a noted social reformer, feminist and writer at the forefront of the women's rights movement. The banks of the Cooks River were a common subject for artists, including the Symbolist-inspired works of Sydney Long who painted his works *Pan* and *By Tranquil Waters* on the riverside.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area was home to notable artists including composer Nigel Butterley, and poet and journalist, Dame Mary Gilmore. The current Enmore Theatre, which opened to the public as a photo-play theatre in 1908, holds a unique position as the longest operating live music venue in NSW. The nearby Hub Theatre opened in 1913 as the Bridge Theatre and was known as a venue for vaudeville, while the Newtown School of Arts, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century recreation club, now hosts contemporary arts and the Sydney Fringe Festival. The development of Marrickville's community activism continued in the 1930s with the area being home to Australia's first female mayor, Lillian Fowler, who led the old Newtown Council between 1937 and 1939 and built a political career campaigning for better housing, day nurseries, baby clinics and reduced taxes.

Arguably, it was in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the area became synonymous with community activism, independent thinking and strong community values. The eighties and nineties were a formative time in the creative evolution of the area, as artists and students migrated to Newtown for its affordable old terrace housing, and proximity to Sydney University and the city. The area became a hub for experimental arts and some formative works of street art were painted during this time, including the iconic *I Have a Dream* street

art mural, painted by Andrew Aitken and Juilee Pryor in 1991. Arguably, this mural has become the masthead for Marrickville's twenty year-long support of street art. Today, the area is widely recognised for its large collection of street art, outdoor galleries and the council's progressive policy approach toward graffiti and street art programs. The Mays Lane outdoor gallery in St Peters was the subject of a ground-breaking exhibition in 2008 by Bathurst Regional Art Gallery that subsequently toured nine regional Australian galleries from 2010 to 2012, and this demonstrates the national impact of this progressive street art policy.

Community festivals such as the Newtown Festival, and community centres such as the Addison Road Centre (Australia's largest community centre) and the Community Art Network also grew rapidly on the basis of community support and attracting visitors from across Sydney. Local theatre companies, such as Sidetrack Theatre have been nationally acclaimed for producing multilingual, local pieces that reflected Marrickville's migrant stories. The area's strong sense of community is a subject of author Nadia Wheatley's writing. Wheatley has based a number of her books on the Marrickville area. Marrickville's literary self is also evident in Enmore's Black Rose Anarchist Library and Social Centre, Gould's Books, Better Read Than Dead and Gleebooks.

Live music flourished in Marrickville's pubs and venues in the eighties and nineties, with groups such as The Whitlams attaining national popularity. As live music entered a decline in the late nineties due to the growth of poker machines in venues, Marrickville Council established the Live Music Taskforce to support local music and funded a series of local outdoor concerts aimed at providing opportunities for local bands to perform and develop audiences. In comparison with Sydney as a whole, there is a higher than average presence of music and sound recording activities in Marrickville.

## 2.4 Marrickville Council: Part of a creative community

Over the past 20 years, Marrickville Council has solidly invested in community services, arts and culture, heritage and the environment, while celebrating diversity and creating a strong brand around its community. Beyond financial sustainability and efficient infrastructure delivery, the council has embraced its generative role in community, cultural and environmental development, and these have all contributed to creating a place where people want to live.

Marrickville Council has also maintained a proactive role in fostering and supporting local community creativity and activism. In the early 2000s, formative initiatives such as the Marrickville Belonging Project maintained a focus on Marrickville's community values and Council's role in nurturing a sense of community amongst the local residents and businesses. This has been further supported through Council's annual community festivals and events program.

The council has a progressive approach to cultural policy, and a comprehensive arts and cultural development program. It provides grants, studio and exhibition spaces and development programs to local creative people. The council also maintains cultural infrastructure, such as artist residencies, libraries, venues for hire and community meeting rooms. It supports local heritage through a history program, public art and events. In responding to the community value of environmental sustainability, the council has emerged over the past 19 years as a recognised leader in the field of environmental sustainability through community engagement.

Further support is provided to its village shopping precincts, which are recognised as intrinsic to Marrickville's local culture, and its dining and food produce are highly regarded and original products are sold internationally. Marrickville Council has also recognised the role played by creative industries in establishing the area's unique character and is increasing

local employment opportunities through the Marrickville Urban Strategy that includes the aim of supporting creative and innovative industries (Marrickville Council 2007). The council recognised that creative industries, often operating as start-up micro businesses, are highly sensitive to price increases and that renewal of industrial areas posed a threat to the ability of creative industries to operate as land values increased. The council attempted to minimise these impacts by identifying ways in which planning controls could be used to support existing creative industries and encourage new ones as part of the development of the 'Marrickville Local Environmental Plan 2011'.

In NSW, the Standard Instrument for Local Environmental Plans, while providing a definition for 'industry', did not specifically define creative industries. Accordingly, the council developed a definition for creative industries, and identified areas suitable for their operation. Once defined, creative industries were identified as an appropriate land use buffer between traditional heavy industrial areas and residential development, and were identified as being suited to light industrial areas in the Marrickville LGA, which are largely situated adjacent to residential development.

Business development zones were also identified as locations suitable for live-work enterprises and were considered to have the potential to help reduce the costs of creative industries, maintain active street frontages and, in some cases, promote the adaptive reuse of existing buildings. To ensure that the planning controls were effective, the only business and office uses permitted in the Light Industrial and Business Development zones are those that fit Council's definition of creative industries, as follows:

- > audio-visual, media and digital media
- > advertising
- > craft, visual arts and indigenous arts
- > design
- > film and television
- > music
- > publishing
- > performing arts
- > cultural heritage institutions.

### 3 Literature review

It is precisely in a world that is becoming increasingly more integrated that cities must lean more and more heavily on their specific local characteristics. These unique locality-based characteristics, indeed, determine that in which a city excels and in which it can distinguish itself in the competition with other urban areas in the worldwide knowledge economy...Today's fierce inter-city competition for knowledge and innovation requires from those involved that they become 'creative cities'. (Hospers 2003, pp.145-6)

#### 3.1 Creative communities

Hospers (2003, p.144) argues that modern economies are increasingly dependent on knowledge and innovation, and that 'cities are the places par excellence where knowledge, creativity and innovation flourish'. In a world of global markets and high-speed communication, specific localities are becoming more important because competitive advantage lies in 'being distinctive, thinking differently and having different information', all of which enable a community to be creative and innovative (Bradley 2012, p.145).

Krueger and Buckingham (2009, pp. iv-ix) propose that three models of creativity have recently been employed in North American and European cities, namely:

- > harnessing the collective economic power of their artistic communities, leading to creative economic development that can occur organically within cities
- > attempting to attract creative and artistic people to cities in search of their patronage, including establishing what would make the locality desirable, such as a degree of 'bohemianism' and a 'career buzz'
- > rethinking problems based on creative principles such as experimentation, originality, the capacity to rewrite rules, to be unconventional and to look at situations laterally and with flexibility.

Cities develop competitive advantage by attracting and retaining knowledge workers and knowledge-intensive activities. Culture and science flourish in such 'creative cities', which can be birthplaces for new technological developments and which can make use of that creativity to find original solutions to problems such as housing, transport and sustainability (Hospers 2003, pp.146-148).

Based on an analysis of successful creative cities throughout the world, Hospers (2003) proposes that the factors that can increase the chances of urban creativity and contribute to an urban knowledge economy include:

- > **concentration** – the density of interaction of large numbers of people in a certain location
- > **diversity** – diverse knowledge, skills and activities pursued by citizen as well as variations in the image the city projects as far as buildings are concerned
- > **instability** – a level of crisis or confrontation which often provides the impetus for change.

A key issue for several commentators is that creativity should not only fulfil economic objectives – such as revitalising decaying inner-city areas through promoting local arts development – but should also 'engage with social inclusion and environmental sustainability' (Krueger and Buckingham 2009, p. iv). This point is also reflected by Landry (2008, p.14), who notes that while the term 'creativity' may be overused, environmental and

cultural creativity themes are becoming predominant in urban contexts. Florida (2003, p.223) has argued that economic growth is fundamentally linked to the location choices of creative people, and that creative people are drawn to the 'quality of place' (p.231). For Florida, street level culture is a key ingredient the quality of place.

Similarly, drawing on the experiences of small and medium-sized cities throughout the world, the INTELI think-tank (2011) suggests that creative-based strategies are likely to be more sustainable if they capitalise on the distinctive characteristics of places and target the wellbeing of the population: 'people are looking for life satisfaction that is not only linked to the economic dimension, but increasingly to the social, cultural and environmental dimensions of life' (INTELI 2011, p.115). Florida (2003, p.283) makes a similar point in saying that cities need a 'people climate' that supports a broad-based approach to creativity and a general strategy for attracting and retaining people.

Florida (2003) also emphasises the importance of strong communities in promoting social cohesion more than the institutions that exist within them. Cities that emphasise community are likely to attract and keep the most creative people and organisations, and be the most innovative, since such places will be 'multi-culturally diverse, fiercely proud and respectful of the past, have a sustainable ethic and be unique' (Bradley 2012, p.147).

Seen within this framework, creative places can provide an integrated eco-system where all forms of creativity – artistic and cultural, technological and economic – are able to flourish, and where the qualities of a place, which derive from its particular cultural, social and natural environment, are crucial to its economic base (Bradley 2012, p.147).

## 3.2 Workplaces and creativity

### 3.2.1 The contemporary workplace

Workplaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are experiencing 'a paradoxical phenomenon of predictability and unpredictability, rapid technological changes, intensified competitive pressures, unprecedented emphasis on knowledge management, and uncertainty and chaos' (Armson 2008, p.20). Organisational changes require dramatic changes in management style, technology, strategy and working systems, and require an in-depth analysis of the values and behaviour patterns that guide everyday performance (Martins and Martins 2002, p.58).

Successful adaptation to change can promote and intensify an organisation's competitiveness. Creativity and innovation have a role in this change process, and several authors (see e.g. Gahan, Minahan and Glow 2007; Sutton 2001; Jaussi and Dionne 2003; Martins and Martins 2002) point to a growing interest in facilitating creativity in the workplace as an important means of responding to the challenges of the modern era.

### 3.2.2 Role of creativity in the contemporary workplace

Creativity can be understood as 'the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain ... the product or idea cannot be merely different for difference's sake; it must also be appropriate to the goal at hand, correct, valuable or expressive of meaning' (Amabile 1996, p.1).

Writers such as Amabile (1996) and Healy (2004) make strong links between 'creativity' and 'innovation', often viewing creativity by individuals and teams as a starting point for innovation in organisations. In this sense, innovation is the 'successful implementation of creative ideas within an organisation', which is dependent not only on creative ideas that originate within the organisation, but also on ideas that originate elsewhere (Amabile 1996, p.1).



Strand (2011) suggests that there are three longstanding ‘metaphors of creativity’ that continue to be relevant for modern workplaces. These are described in Table 1 below.

Metaphor of creativity	Discussion
<b>Creativity as expression</b>	Creativity can be viewed as collective forms of self-expression that occur in and through everyday work. This metaphor suggests that creativity is the dynamic vitality of all human activity, driving working lives and being at the heart of educational processes, including workplace learning. The limitation of this metaphor is that it does not portray the specific dynamics of creation beyond saying that creation actually happens.
<b>Creativity as production</b>	Creativity is the concrete act of bringing forward something quite new into the world through the object-related activities of human labour. Through individual labour, each individual confirms and realises their communal, social nature. A product of human labour is also a productive society.
<b>Creativity as reconstruction</b>	The creative act is a reconstruction that affects ways of seeing the world, ways of making the world and the ways of the world themselves. The metaphor suggests a radical remaking of people’s common sense, and may help to illustrate how shifts within contemporary working life are closely related to the ways in which the global and the local unavoidably interact. This metaphor helps to portray the creative ways of contemporary professional work and learning.

**Table 1: Metaphors of creativity in the workplace**

Source: based on Strand (2011, pp.344-352)

While all three metaphors help to illustrate what is happening within and beyond working life, ‘creativity as reconstruction opens possibilities for conceptualizing the shifts within contemporary work life as **creative** shifts generated by and parallel to the extraordinary newness of the phase of the global knowledge economy we are now experiencing’ (Strand 2011, p.353; emphasis in original). Creativity can be viewed as a form of ‘emergent learning’ which is supported by strong two-way communications between leaders and staff; willing peer discussions; ready access to training programs; organisational structure and resources; and the individual’s own initiative and motivation (Armson 2008, p.21). The relationship between the processes of creativity, innovation and change is an essential feature of the contemporary organisation (Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.45).

At a more critical level, Gahan et al. (2007) point out that when the concept of creativity is appropriated from the creative arts and applied to the workplace, it may be diluted and devalued, since it ‘underwrites an ethos of individualism and self-direction, and seems to hold out the promise of transforming the mundane nature of work into something exciting and intrinsically valuable’. By contrast, McNuff (2009, pp.12-13) argues that although many people may dismiss the idea of linking creativity and organisational life, the workplace, imbued as it is with a striving for productivity, and perhaps also with a focus on uniformity, hierarchy and control, nevertheless offers common ground for creating with others since ‘it connects us all’.

### 3.2.3 Understanding workplace creativity

Dawson and Andriopolous (2014) trace the history of research on creativity and note that different disciplines such as psychology, economics, sociology and organisational and management theory have, using different approaches, produced different definitions of creativity including:

- > creativity as an emotional process, producing feeling

- > creativity as a mental ability
- > creativity as a process, a view gaining widespread acceptance. (Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, pp.60-61)

The contemporary approach to research into creativity assumes that all people are able to produce at least moderately creative work in some domain, some of the time (Chan 2005, p.2), and that the complex interaction of an individual and their social environment can influence the level and the frequency of creative behaviour (Amabile 1996, p.1; Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.231). According to Mumford (2000, pp.314-318), research on workplace creativity highlights three considerations, namely:

- > **knowledge** – the production of useful new ideas or ideas that can be implemented to solve a novel problem
- > **process** – the combination and reorganisation of information and concepts to advance new understandings, and using them to generate potentially useful new ideas
- > **work styles** – including strong achievement motives, self-confidence, the tolerance for ambiguity, an interest in learning, openness, and flexibility.

### Creativity at the level of the individual employee

From an individual point of view, Amabile has proposed a comprehensive theory of creativity that includes three individual or personal components:

- > **domain-relevant skills**, that is, the expertise, technical skill, and innate talent in the relevant domain(s) of endeavour
- > **creativity-relevant processes**, such as a flexible cognitive style, personality traits such as openness to experience, and a persistent work style
- > **intrinsic task motivation** (cited in Amabile and Pillmer 2012, p.9).

These components combine in a multiplicative fashion, and none can be completely absent if some level of creativity is to result (Amabile and Pillmer 2012, p.9). In addition, these internal components interact with, and are influenced by, an external component, namely the **social environment**. While creativity-relevant skills can be affected by training, modelling and the experiences afforded by the social environment, the most immediate and prevalent influence of the environment is exerted on motivation (Amabile and Pillmer 2012, p.9).

The lack of intrinsic task motivation cannot be compensated by the domain-relevant or creativity-relevant skills, implying that a high level of intrinsic motivation is necessary for employee creativity (Grabner 2007, p.4). According to Csíkszentmihályi (1997, p.8), creative people are driven by the opportunity to do the work that they enjoy doing. Research carried out at the Harvard Business School has found that creative people are motivated from within and respond much better to intrinsic rewards than to extrinsic ones (Florida and Goodnight 2005, p.2).

In addition to motivation, Dawson and Andriopolous (2014) describe individual creativity as comprising three other main components, reflective of Amabile's research. They are:

- > cognitive style and abilities, such as the ability to make links between remote connections, suspend judgment, awareness of bias, originality of thinking
- > personality traits that include risk-taking, self-confidence, autonomy, non-conformism, pro-activity, tolerance of ambiguity, need for achievement



- > relevant knowledge, i.e. subject understanding and insight, formal and informal knowledge, and inquisitiveness.

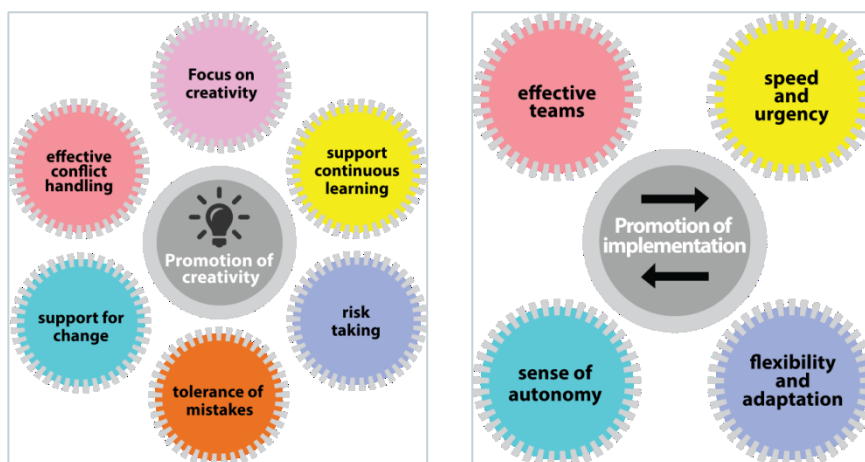
### Creativity at the level of the organisation

Elements of the work environment have a powerful impact on the creativity of individuals (Grabner 2007). The basic orientation of the organisation towards innovation is a key influence. This includes placing value on creativity and innovation in general, an orientation toward risk, sense of pride in the organisation's members, and a proactive approach towards shaping the future. The basic organisation-wide supports for innovation may include open, active communication of information and ideas; rewards and recognition for creative work; and fair evaluation of all work, including work that might be perceived as a failure (Amabile 1996, p.8).

Employees are more likely to act creatively when creativity is recognised as being needed and valued by the organisation (Manske and Davis, cited in Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.234). The role of organisational culture in creativity and innovation is also highlighted by Prather (2010, p.142) who notes that 'to make innovation self-sustaining, it must become one of your company's values, rooted in its beliefs about itself and its business'. Dawson and Andriopolous (2014) and Prather (2010) identify additional important aspects of organisational culture including trust, freedom to act, acceptance of risk, and leadership.

The importance of workplace or organisational culture is highlighted in contemporary research. Dawson and Andriopolous (2014, p.354) contend that culture is learned – individuals entering organisations undergo a socialisation process, taking cues from both formal/explicit and informal/implicit learning situations. Principles that promote creative cultures include a collaborative approach to management, a 'no fear' climate, encouragement of the workforce to stretch beyond their comfort zones, the valuing of individuality and encouragement of uncertainty (Dawson and Andriopolous 2014). Time is an important factor related to organisational culture and creativity, with intrinsically motivated people more likely to devote time and energy to creative tasks and commentators arguing for skills development and making space for the experience of 'task immersion' that can lead to a new focus in daily work practices (Dawson and Andriopolous 2014).

Norms within the organisation that promote creativity and innovation, and norms that support the implementation of creative ideas and innovations are illustrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Promotion of creativity and its implementation**

Source: based on Dawson and Andriopolous (2014, pp.357-362)

Phillips (cited in Hoque and Baer 2014) describes contemporary business as overly focused on a narrow definition of 'efficiency', leading to a distorted perception of time and a shortage of time for introducing proper practices for good innovation. These authors describe the need for organisations to shift their thinking towards operating in an 'innovation economy' rather than an 'efficiency economy'. They write: 'Clearly, we need to be privileging that question-framing process, which has a rhythm of introspection and collaboration, throughout our process' (Hoque and Baer 2014, p.68).

Amabile et al. (2002, p.4, 14) found in a longitudinal study that time pressure is likely to result in 'shallow, narrow, conservative thinking – the opposite of creative thinking' and that 'despite previous research revealing that time-pressured people may work faster, get more done, and do better work on straightforward tasks, our findings suggest that they will be less likely to think creatively on the job.'

### **Teams and leaders**

Creativity as a team process is receiving some attention from authors. Dawson and Andriopolous (2014) highlight the importance of the relational aspects of the workplace in bringing about innovation. Daniel and Dawson (cited in Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.71) found in an Australian study that the uptake and integration of innovations was reliant on micro politics, sense making and stakeholder networks. Hoque and Baer (2014, p.71) argue that it is the quality of interpersonal connections that determine the success of teams. Creativity is fostered when individuals and teams have high levels of autonomy, ownership and control within their daily work practices (Amabile, cited in Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.246).

Leadership is another factor that most authors agree can impact significantly on organisational creativity (Dawson and Andriopolous 2014; Hoque and Baer 2014; McNuff 2009; Amabile 2008; Armson 2008; Bhindi 2003). Teams need to perceive leaders as supporting creativity in order for it not be stifled (Thacker, cited in Dawson and Andriopolous 2014, p.280). Dawson and Andriopolous (2014) distil much of this literature to identify a number of elements required for leaders to positively affect creativity, innovation and organisational change:

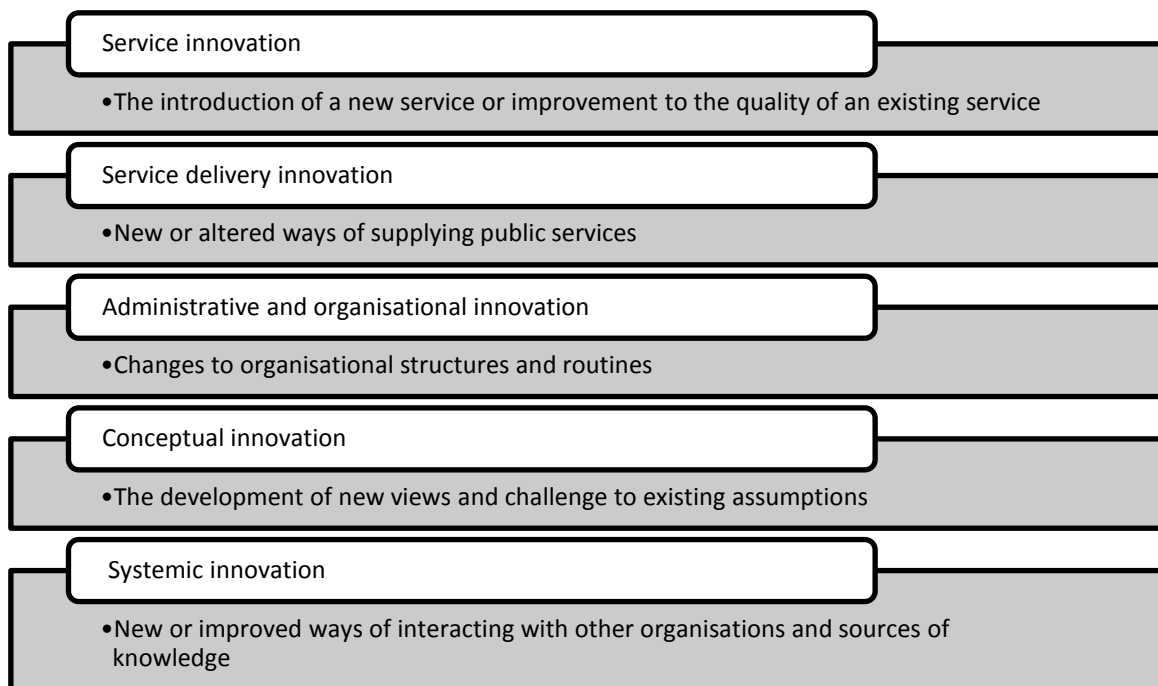
- > expertise and technical skills in creative problem solving
- > creating and articulating vision
- > setting direction
- > persuasive abilities and skills
- > communication and information exchange
- > intellectual stimulation
- > involvement
- > autonomy.

## **3.3 Creativity in local government**

### **3.3.1 Innovation in the public sector as a whole**

According to conventional wisdom, public organisations cannot innovate. Bureaucracies lack the competitive spur that drives businesses to create new products and services (Mulgan 2007, p.4).

While the literature is more likely to refer to innovation rather than creativity in the public sector, as discussed in Section 3.2, creativity can be considered the necessary basis of innovation. Landry (2008, pp.15-17) writes that creativity is the precondition from which innovations develop. Different types of creativity are required to produce public sector innovations, but creativity remains a poorly understood area, and dimensions such as social, cultural and environmental creativity continue to be undervalued. There is evidence, however, that there has been recent growth in academic interest in public sector innovation as a whole. Based on a review of the literature published between 1971 and 2008, Matthews, Lewis and Cook (2009, pp.13-14) found that nearly 70% of the total number of articles that examined public sector innovation had been published since 2003. A suggested taxonomy of public sector innovation comprises:



**Figure 2: Public service innovation**

Source: based on Windrum (cited in Matthews et al 2009, p.22)

Researchers such as Mulgan (2007, pp.6-9) point to a distinguishing characteristic of public sector innovation – it is about novel ideas that work at creating public value. In order to be successful, these ideas need to be supported by the two groups of gatekeepers who control power and money, namely politicians and the bureaucracy. At the same time, the relationship between innovation potential and employee resources is also important in achieving long-lasting change (Patterson, Kerrin and Gatto-Roissard 2009).

Employee resources for innovation include cognitive ability; employees' understandings of the domain-specific requirements of the job role; high levels of motivation, which are significantly influenced by leadership and management style; personality traits (particularly openness to experience); and emotional, behavioural and developmental factors such as mood-induced self-reflection, taking personal initiative and taking advantage of educational opportunities (Patterson et al. 2009, pp.9-15).

A challenge for public sector managers is how to implement innovation that results in useful performance improvements. Changing existing systems and moving into often unknown territory is by its very nature risky and uncertain (Matthews 2009), but well-managed innovation programs can achieve new ways of working that are genuine improvements on

existing systems (Mazzarol 2011, p.6). Landry (2008, pp.14-15) argues that in order for the public sector creativity to be of benefit, the symbiotic relationship between the organisation and the individual must be recognised. Creative processes should not be confined to the idea-generation phase of projects; instead they should be present throughout the entire project if creative and innovation outcomes are to be delivered.

Drawing on the work of Borins, Mazzarol (2011, pp.6-7) identifies five key building blocks of innovation within government:

- > the use of systematic analysis of problems and the coordination of organisational units to achieve outcomes
- > the use of information and communications technologies
- > continuous monitoring of how innovation programs are performing against desired benchmarks
- > opening up to the private and non-profit sectors in the delivery of services in order to inject greater competition into service delivery
- > empowering local communities and employees in order to engage them in the design of new programs.

Some aspects of public sector innovation are comparable with, or even identical to, aspects of private sector innovation, including those dealing with information and communication technologies. Other aspects of public sector innovation, especially those associated with policy innovation, can appear cumbersome, risk averse and time consuming in comparison with those occurring in the private sector (ANAO 2009, p.3).

Governments need to deal with uncertainties and risks that may lead to unintended consequences 'that are far too severe to rely on the market to correct problems, as in the private sector' (Matthews 2009, p.62). This makes it incumbent on them to draw heavily on external and internal expertise to weigh up complex risks, which generally requires the use of large amounts of evidence (Matthews 2009, p.61).

### **3.3.2 Creativity and innovation in local government**

In recent years, several factors have been prompting local governments to reconsider the ways in which they organise themselves, manage service delivery and hold themselves accountable to citizens and other stakeholders. These include:

- > unexpected successes, failures or events, with local government innovations that have quite often emerged in response to emergencies
- > demographic changes, such as a growing proportion of people aged 65 years or over, and increases in the numbers of unemployed youth
- > community expectations regarding local public services, with an increasing focus on public value or social return on investment
- > community attitudes towards local government, including citizen engagement in policy and delivery, and significant changes in community perceptions and moods linked to factors such as access to services
- > central government expectations of local government, including recognition that each region and community has unique characteristics, opportunities and challenges, requiring tailored policy responses. (Howard 2012; Evans et al. 2012)

Healy (2004, p.17) points out that the processes and cultures of local governance cannot easily be changed by formulas – such as 'modernising' agendas – rather, they need to be

developed on the basis of a 'rich understanding of the specific dynamics and history of a city region's institutions of governance'. The success of public sector innovation strategies requires a redefinition of urban problems and that this is best achieved at the grassroots level through diverse local participation (Landry 2008, p.19). On this basis, the factors that may help to enhance creativity include:

- > understanding how innovatory episodes interact and struggle with other discourses and practices that are active in the locality at the same time
- > mobilising like-minded key actors who can drive forward new discourses and act as carriers of ideas that may later diffuse more widely
- > having a locally relevant and long-term training program for all 'street level' and 'front end' staff to make sure that new ideas translate into different practices
- > focusing on the interaction of internal and external forces and their impact on governance processes
- > focusing on the relations between elected and non-elected officials, which may involve repairing them, breaking them up or working outside of them (Healy 2004, pp.17-18).

Martin (2000) suggests that the way local governments innovate and change has a strong impact on local economic and community development. Councils do not have to have invented a new product or service in order to be considered innovative. Instead, innovation often lies in recognising the application of an improvement that leads to sustained economic and community benefit, and implementing it in the organisation. As discussed above, cities that are part of the global information-based economy are marked by the convergence of knowledge, creativity and innovation, and local governments have a role to play in creating and reinforcing conditions favourable to knowledge economies such as concentration, diversity, instability and reputation (Hospers 2003).

Drawing on Martin (2000, pp.5-13), innovation strategies that are suited to local government are described in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Innovation strategies suited to local government**

Writing of the situation in Australia, Brecknock (2000) suggests that local government is the most significant player in a community's cultural life. Decisions made by councils may have 'far reaching consequences on the quality of life and cultural development at a local level', and these are in respect not only of 'big ticket' items such as the funding of new art galleries, but also decisions that affect a local park, plaza or shopping strip (Brecknock 2000).

Healy (2004) explores the relationship between creativity and innovation, and the forms and practices of governance. This author focuses on the potential of governance to foster creativity at the local socio-economic level and argues that there is no simple equation between the characteristics of a 'creative city' and a 'creative' mode of urban governance. Instead, qualities of governance activity can be identified that have the potential to encourage creativity and innovation (Healy 2004, pp.11-12). These include:

- > **governance culture** – an appreciation of diversity and an emphasis on performance, not conformance; negotiation of values and ethics; encouragement of open-minded tolerance and sensitivity; and self-regulative and distributive approaches
- > **governance processes** – open-minded, inclusive and inventive discourses; facilitative and experimental practices which support self-regulating processes; and laws, benchmarks and principles which value local initiative and encourage experimentation
- > **specific episodes** – stimulating, welcoming, respectful and knowledgeable episodes involving a diverse range of actors and open and diverse arenas (Healy 2004, p.17).

## 3.4 Good practice examples

### 3.4.1 Examples from Australia

Based on an analysis of local governments in Australia, including a review of the *National Local Awards*, Howard (2012) puts forward recommendations for the adoption of new ideas in local governments, together with recent examples, summarised in the table below.

Functional area	Innovation	Example
<b>Public asset management</b>	Using the geographic information system (GIS), global positioning system (GPS) and other digital technologies to manage asset portfolios	Moonee Valley City Council (Victoria) has developed a handheld, GIS-based road inspection system that uses GPS technology to electronically capture road and footpath hazards with a high spatial accuracy. Information collected in the field is automatically uploaded to a corporate work order system and sent to Council's road and footpath works contractors for action.
<b>Water, sewerage and drainage</b>	Broadening the approach to meeting a local environmental issue in order to encompass a regional perspective	Clarence City Council (Tasmania) decommissioned four old sewage treatment plants and consolidated treatment into one modern technology plant delivering high quality irrigation water to an entire region that encompasses Tasmania's principal oyster growing areas and allows 100% reuse in a region suffering ongoing water shortages.

Functional area	Innovation	Example
<b>Waste management</b>	Using radio frequency identification (RFID) technologies to improve the accuracy and cost-effectiveness of waste management collections	The City of Ryde (NSW) tags each of the 90,000 waste bins in the local council. The tags are automatically read as bins are emptied and information is transferred via a wireless link to base. This enables fast and accurate bin reading, the assessment of recycling trends in specific areas, and the identification of suburbs to target in education campaigns.
<b>Economic development</b>	Innovative approaches to support local economic development, including active solicitation of investment, business incubation and provision of information	<p>The Sutherland Shire Council (NSW) invested in a 'business incubator', namely a purpose-built space with 20 offices with a sophisticated IT platform that delivers tenants superior networked technology services.</p> <p>Four local councils in south east Melbourne collaborated with local research institutions (including Monash University and the CSIRO) to form an innovation precinct that is a hub of manufacturing, science services, advanced materials, engineering and medical knowledge-intensive industries. Businesses are provided with access to cutting edge research and opportunities to build collaborative business-researcher relationships.</p>
<b>Community sports, recreation and the arts</b>	Innovation outcomes in the provision of community facilities and services	'Face to Face', a three-year community arts project managed by the City of Greater Dandenong (Victoria) and ten community agencies, captures everyday life in a highly diverse urban community by providing a window into the lives, opinions and passions of the community through a range of creative outlets. The project brings different cultural groups together to expose and move them towards resolving issues of intolerance and discrimination through building trust, pride, respect and understanding.

**Table 2: Innovation ideas for local government in Australia**

Source: Howard (2012, pp.68-88)

### 3.4.2 'Creative Councils' (United Kingdom)

In the wake of cuts to local government finance, public services in the United Kingdom (UK) are facing increasingly complex demands with fewer funds to tackle them. 'Creative Councils' was launched as a program in 2011 to support local authorities in England and Wales to develop and implement ideas that address long-term challenges in their areas and highlight the role that innovation can play in solving them (Local Government Association 2012; NESTA 2013).

While over one-third of all the local authorities in England and Wales applied to receive support through the Creative Councils program to put their innovative ideas into practice,



only 17 were chosen to take part in the program. These local authorities received support from the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA) a non-government organisation focusing on innovation, and from the Local Government Association to develop, implement and spread transformational new approaches to meeting challenges facing communities and local services.

The second phase aimed to build on ideas that would have the potential to spread to other councils, by providing up to £150,000 in follow-on funding as well as non-financial support such as legal advice and support with community engagement. Six councils were chosen to receive this more intensive level of support in the second phase of the Creative Councils program. The creative programs of these councils include:

- > an internal training program which seeks to introduce council employees to the concept of innovation and what it means for service delivery
- > a council-backed social enterprise that works with the teachers of students aged 4-19 to engage them and their schools in the development of an enterprise-based curriculum
- > a technology platform and open innovation approach which makes it easier for local communities to put forward creative ideas
- > pushing the boundaries of energy regulation and localism by moving towards local ownership of energy supply and reimagining the role of the council as a strategic broker of resources.

### **3.4.3 The 311 phone service**

The 311 phone service was started in Baltimore as a means of improving complaint and inquiry services, and soon spread to other cities in the USA and dozens of other cities around the world (Matthews et al. 2009, p.46). The service offers an immediate response via a software system which directs the issue to the appropriate agency and then logs, tracks and monitors the inquiry to the end. The inquirer speaks to a live person within seconds of placing the call, is given an email acknowledgment of the call, and is provided with a tracking number to go online anytime to see if the issue has been fixed and who is working on the complaint.

The process facilitates citizens' reporting of quality-of-life issues and helps to improve services. For example, since the program was launched, New York City has had a 94% increase in 'excessive noise inspections', rodent exterminations increased by more than a third, and the waiting time for the building review process with an inspector improved from more than a month to less than a week (Matthews et al. 2009, p.46).

### **3.4.4 Cultural activities development project in the cities of Finland**

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities launched a project in 2007 to help towns and cities in Finland to better manage their cultural policy activities (Alasuutari 2013). Altogether 23 towns and cities participated by using a management tool through which to observe the costs and effects of cultural activities, and to compare them with the same figures in other towns and cities.

Drawing on the ways in which the project was discussed in the media, Alasuutari (2013, p.103) found that competition amongst the cities was highlighted in media reports, and that local actors capitalised on the comparison for their political goals and power plays. This strengthened a local orientation towards the whole process by drawing on residents' identification with their local domicile and the idea that local governments and their citizens are members of a team that has to do well in global competition.



### 3.5 Summary

Cities derive competitive advantage by attracting and retaining knowledge workers and knowledge-intensive activities. Creativity is a resource that can be used to: enhance local economic development; rethink problems based on principles such as experimentation, and originality; reframe problems based on the capacity to reconsider unworkable rules, to be unconventional and to look at situations laterally and with flexibility; and to better engage with social inclusion, culture and environmental sustainability.

At the organisational level, authors make strong links between ‘creativity’ and ‘innovation’, often viewing the creativity of individuals and teams as a starting point for innovation in organisations. Innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organisation, which is dependent not only on ideas that originate within the organisation, but also on ideas that originate elsewhere. A focus on workplace creativity can include: collective forms of self-expression that occur in and through everyday work; concrete acts of bringing forward something new into the world; and new approaches to viewing the ways of the world.

Individual or personal components of creativity include intrinsic task motivation, creativity-relevant processes and domain-relevant skills. An organisation’s capacity to manage the interrelationship of individual and organisational creativity, and the impact of organisational culture, particularly in regard to values, systems, processes and time, is likely to affect its success in supporting creativity and innovation.

The literature is more likely to refer to innovation (rather than creativity) in the public sector, although creativity is regarded by many commentators as the necessary basis of innovation. Creativity refers to the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain, where the product is appropriate to the goal at hand, correct, valuable or expressive of meaning. Public sector innovation can occur in the areas of service delivery, administrative and organisational, conceptual, policy and systemic innovation.

In recent years, several drivers have been prompting local governments to reconsider the ways in which they organise themselves, manage service delivery and hold themselves accountable to citizens and other stakeholders. The ways in which local governments innovate and change have a strong impact on local economic and community development. Councils do not have to have invented a new product or service in order to be considered innovative; instead, their innovations can lie in recognising the application of an improvement that leads to sustained economic and community benefits, and implementing it in the organisation.

Commentators also suggest that local government is the most significant player in a community’s cultural life and that decisions made by councils may have far-reaching consequences for quality of life and cultural development at a local level.

Examples from Australia and international jurisdictions of ways in which innovation and creativity have manifested in local governments suggest that creativity can have impacts, not only on areas such as community sports, recreation and the arts, but also on economic development, the management of public assets, energy regulation and more effective means of communicating with citizens and improving customer services.

## 4 Marrickville Creativity Project

The Marrickville Creativity Project was first defined in its project brief as comprising:

- > a literature review, identifying success factors and case studies for creativity and innovation in the workplace, to inform the design, implementation and evaluation of a 'creativity challenge'
- > implementation of a 'creativity challenge' with Council's executive and management teams, who would participate in a series of workshops in order to explore the concept of creativity in the workplace
- > a final project report evaluating the outcomes of the project.

UTS:CLG was selected as Council's project partner and a core project team was established including Sophi Bruce, Program Specialist, and Geraldine O'Connor, Senior Programs Officer, from UTS:CLG; and Josephine Bennett, Manager Culture and Recreation, and Naomi Bower, Arts and Cultural Development Coordinator, from Marrickville Council.

### 4.1 Marrickville Creativity Project literature review

Staff from UTS:CLG undertook the literature review in late 2012 and early 2013, with input from Council staff. The review covered a broad range of literature. Several themes relevant to the proposed creativity challenge emerged, as described in Figure 4 below.



Figure 4: Marrickville Creativity Labs literature review summary

## 4.2 Creativity Labs

In devising the creativity challenge referred to above, the core project team considered the literature and developed its format and content, in the process renaming it as ‘Creativity Labs’ in order to emphasise the exploratory nature of the project. As one participant remarked on ‘the openness and the honesty of the first session, I was surprised the facilitators indicated that they knew no more than us, they were learning along with us. I found that quite refreshing’ (O’Connor and Bruce 2013). The council’s General Manager was briefed and it was agreed to proceed with the implementation of the Creativity Labs with the executive and management teams.

The Creativity Labs were developed around a conceptual framework prepared by UTS:CLG, presented in Figure 5.

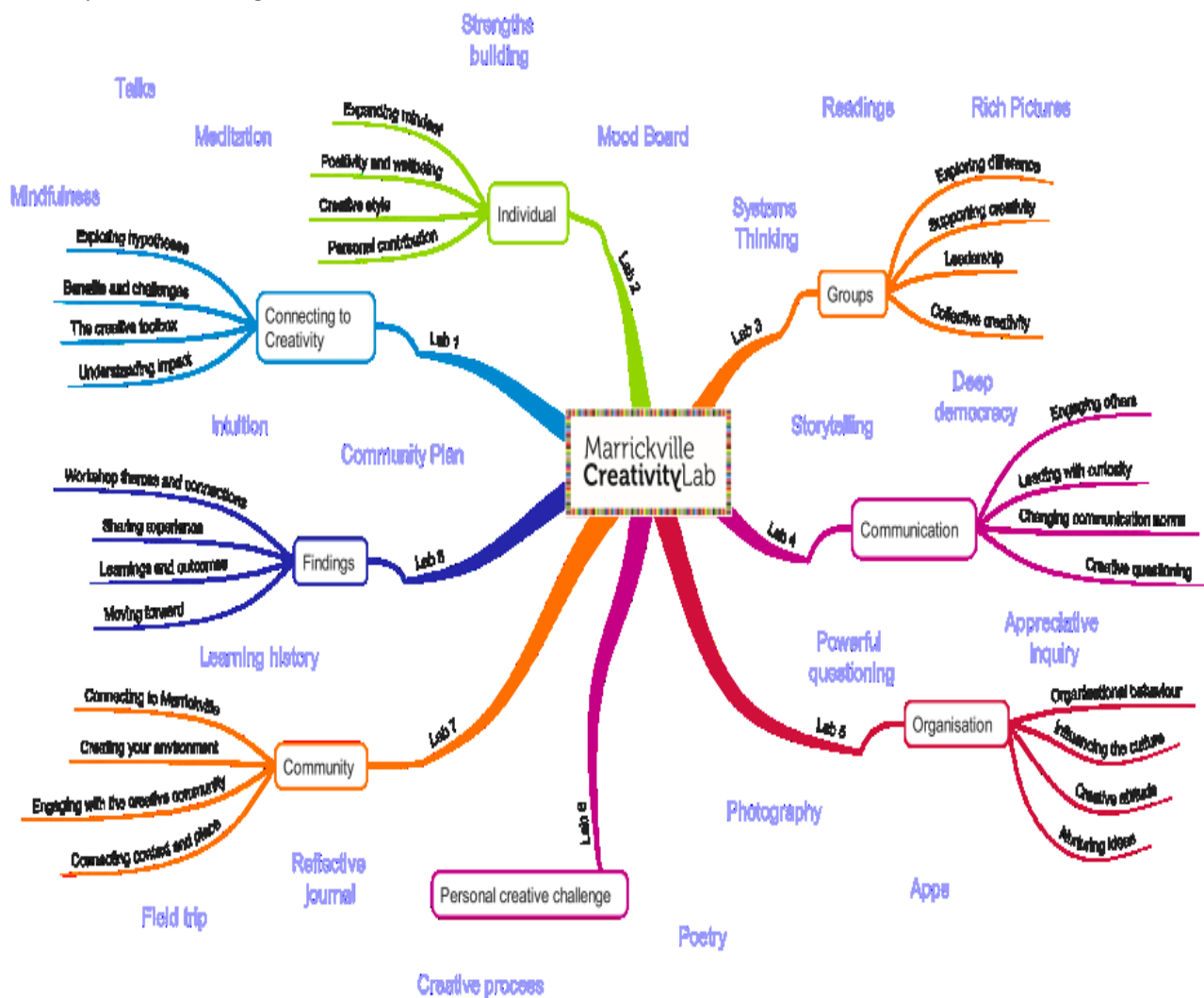


Figure 5: Marrickville Creativity Labs Mind Map (Bruce 2013)

The core project team used the conceptual framework to develop eight workshops, with each workshop focusing on a different aspect of creativity. There was some fluidity in the program, with the content emerging over an eight-week period, and as presenters accepted the invitation to be part of it. The full program of the Labs is presented in Appendix A.

Marrickville Council's executive and senior management teams, comprising 20 staff, were invited to participate in the program. Attendance at the Labs was variable, with key reasons given for non-attendance being timing, conflicting work priorities and planned leave. Four team members had chosen to not participate in the program, with the key reasons being that they didn't see personal value in it, and that they had inflexible schedules due to work commitments. In the two years since the Labs occurred, two participants have died, and four have moved to other employment.

Before each Lab, participants received a Creativity Lab Overview that detailed the content for the upcoming workshop and a Creativity Toolbox, which contained supporting material – relevant articles (largely informed by the literature review) and links to videos, websites and apps that supported each session's topic. Participants' use of the toolbox was at their discretion. At the beginning of each Lab, the participants were also presented with a 'hypothesis' to be considered during the session, as follows:

Lab	Theme	Hypothesis
Lab 1	Connecting to Creativity	We are all creative
Lab 2	Creativity and the Individual	Time must be allocated
Lab 3	Creativity and the Group	Certain tools can support group creativity
Lab 4	Creativity and Communication	Creative techniques can lead to more effective communication
Lab 5	Creativity and the Organisation	Leaders that contribute to work environments that support creativity are more effective
Lab 6	Out of Your Comfort Zone, In Your Comfort Zone	There was no specific hypothesis this session - focus on consideration of place over the Easter break
Lab 7	Creativity and the Community: Connecting to Place and Environment	Connecting to Marrickville as a creative community can assist with work-related problem solving

**Table 3: Creativity Lab hypotheses**

## 4.3 Project evaluation

### 4.3.1 Learning History approach

The Labs placed an emphasis on the council's leadership team exploring what creativity meant for them as individuals, team members and leaders, and what it meant for the organisation as a whole. They were also encouraged to explore how this might relate to the Marrickville community. Participants were encouraged to monitor how focusing on creativity might filter through and impact on their relationships, their work, the community and life generally.

A 'learning history' approach was used to capture the emergent learning throughout the program. At the first Lab, the participants were issued with a blank page diary and were encouraged to make notes of ideas, thoughts and questions, and create 'mood boards' on relevant subject matter. Short interviews were conducted with participants throughout the Labs, either at the end of workshops or between sessions (by phone or in face-to-face meetings) in order to record their perceptions, stories and attitudes to creativity and the format of the Labs.

Participant feedback is provided next.

### **Appreciation of the exploratory nature of the Creativity Labs**

Participants demonstrated understanding that they were engaged in an exploratory project:

“It’s clear that this is a working trial, it’s not something that is a polished product that they are wheeling out to us. It’s very much being developed as it goes. And that was made clear to us at the beginning. And that helps too with understanding what we are trying to get out of it, and what the people who are hosting it are trying to get out of it as well.”

And while participants were willing to explore the potential of creativity in the organisation, some expressed reservations about sharing this with other members of the organisation who had not participated in the project:

“At this point in time, I’m ... it’s a little bit like our Leadership Development Program. Last year I was more set on, OK, well what have we identified as a core issue in the organisation and what are the steps we have taken to make those changes. And I’ve stepped back from that, and from my own personal perspective, I’m gaining something out of this. I’m not quite sure what the end of the journey is on this. But I’m happy to go on the ride. It’s not quite clear what the outcome will be for us as an organisation, particularly as we don’t have full representation in this group. I’ve mentioned this to [colleague], the challenge will be that we will have different conversations within the same organisation. Some will be advocates of these approaches, and some less so. And I don’t know how we are going to get over that as an organisation.”

### **Awareness of individual creativity and links to the workplace**

A number of participants gave personal insights into creativity:

“I’m personally getting a lot out of it. There are some really good techniques that I’m interested in, and have had an interest in prior to this journey. So some of what we are learning is reinforcing things that I was aware of. The positive psychology element was really interesting, I found that really good. Even some of the stuff around the mindfulness techniques I found really interesting ... We just have to synthesise it and look at what potentially could work for you and how you operate. And really explore them a bit deeper.”

Some participants were able to see the links between their personal experiences and how that may link to workplace practices:

“I think – the one on Monday was kind of interesting about just trying to think about things in such a logical, familiar way. For instance for me, from a comms background, you tend to think about things in words, and Monday was interesting because we had to try and step away from that and try and think about things in a different way. Which I thought was interesting. I can see that I can use some of the tools.”

Not everyone was able to link personal experiences to the workplace, especially participants who viewed their roles as particularly operational:

“My greatest benefit is personal reasons rather work related. A lot of the stuff we’re doing I find is more about personal development – finding it difficult to apply in the workplace scenario, particularly in areas like ours – so much dominated by operational, just general day- to-day operational stuff, which gets to me sometimes. But that creative side, I try and do that out of here.”

Other participants saw relevance to their work in managing teams, particularly through the acquisition of new skills and tools:

“And I think the rest of it so far has just been about reinforcing some of the things I already knew. We were asked to do the VIA strengths assessment and actually creativity was my number two strength, so I think it’s not that difficult for me, but having some tools to apply in the workplace with my team, that’s been useful, so yeah we are starting to get a few tools, a few ideas that I will use. I just need to make myself some time to really think, to reflect on what we’ve done so far, and some way of sharing that with the team as well.”

### **Acknowledgement of creativity as a component of their work role and, specifically, in local government**

Some participants were able to easily identify the application of creativity in their roles:

“Well I don’t know whether we all have to go off and devote so much time to being creative. I would’ve thought, in most of our jobs, you have to be creative every day. Like mine, because if I’m not creative, and move things around, and think about stuff, I can’t survive. Yeah. I’m not saying that it wouldn’t add value, but ...”

There was appreciation of creativity being used for problem solving in local government:

“I think we all have to be creative working in local government. We always have to find ways to achieve what needs to be done.”

While one participant considered creativity a fundamental attribute of their requisite skill set:

“I thought that was what I was hired for. I thought we canvassed that. I thought if I wasn’t creative I wouldn’t be here. They’re selling a product, and if I was advising them from my point of view, I would say, you’re bad salespeople, it’s not packaged very well ... will that get me into sufficient trouble?”

### **Appreciation of the role of creativity in leadership and teams**

Participants were generally enthusiastic about the potential of creativity to enhance team processes:

“I love the whole idea, and I thought [colleague’s] presentation was fantastic and spot on about how to engage staff and how you engage people to be flourishing, how you get teams to be flourishing, but there’s a fundamental failure in some of our management approaches. You will never get flourishing teams with the people who are there because they don’t get it – that’s me being really honest.”

In particular, there was an appreciation of the use of creativity tools to enhance participation and engagement in teams:

“And if you do it with your team, it’s a levelling thing, you’re empowering the whole team to get involved in how you do your work, rather than being told, top-down, this is what we are doing, this is how we do it. If you kind of bring in these people, it allows everyone to contribute a little bit more equally and increase engagement. Keeping people interested and engaged is really tough for some of our staff and I think to give tools to make everyone feel like they are contributing something is valuable.”

Similarly, some participants expressed the value of creativity tools in collaborative problem solving with a view to innovation:



“I suppose some of the things round the collaborative approach to problem solving, I just found them very useful, the techniques, to understand and think, ‘OK, how can we deploy that in our environment?’”

### **Awareness of the role of creativity processes in effecting organisational change**

Some participants recognised the potential of creativity to contribute to broader organisation change and development programs:

“Also, the other thing that I found was really useful about it is this sort of work gives you some great foundation work for, if you want to do something, you know like a change management program later on. With concepts like creativity as a tool, it’s really (inaudible) to then use that in another program which I hope to do later on.”

While other participants began incorporating creativity practices in the workplace during the program:

“And yesterday too, we actually started to apply some of the thinking to a workplace issue that we are all grappling with. So we were saying, let’s stop and think about how we might actually use this, so I think it’s going to be quite interesting to see how it rolls out in the rest of the organisation now that a few of us at least are starting to think and talk about using creativity and I think too, value the opportunity.”

Appreciation of how the organisation could adapt to reflect the creativity of the community through adopting creative practices within the organisation was also expressed:

“We serve within the local government area, businesses, community, the diversity of the makeup of our community with different expectations. We have an array of challenges, we deliver so many different services. I don’t think we can’t [be uncreative] in what we do, to be able to do that. What our challenge is, and I think we are starting to see this more and more, is coming away from the officious, ‘We are Council’ approach to, no we are part of the community with you, and working with solutions with the community more. As opposed as ‘we are going to do unto you’. There is still a bit of culture within the organisation of that most definitely, and hiding behind policy.”

Participants were also able to express specific changes arising from the program such as the *Connecting Marrickville* program:

“So all in all, very interesting. It looks like some things are going to come out of it. And some things are perhaps going to come out of it sooner rather than later. Organisationally, I think it was the week before last we had a presenter from UTS come along and spoke about some of things they had done with creativity in their creativity lab. There was a reluctance to leave the room by Council officers until we’d actually spoken about what they’d done and tried to give it some context with our own organisation and what we were going to do. And that seemed to resonate with everybody, and there was some good discussion around specifically an idea the General Manager presented with Connecting Marrickville. That looks like it might be a pilot, that genesised out of the Creativity Lab.”

### **Time as an issue – to attend the Labs, to fully participate in the Labs, and incorporate creativity into work practices – was evident:**

Time as an issue was a strong theme in the feedback:

“We are so strapped for resources and time, that I just, while I would love to be creative and want to get involved, and too many meetings come up and Mayoral, and

and I can't, I can't put that time aside with any surety that I can commit to that, so I just don't have that time."

Creativity was considered something that could encroach on a full schedule, rather than be considered an essential part of the working week:

"Spending an hour and a half every week to go into that creative space...if I did that, that means I would have to take even more work home. I haven't been able to prioritise creativity – I love the idea of it but ... it's not translating at the moment."

Time was seen as a particularly difficult issue for the more operational areas of Council:

"And another example, all this training is telling us to take our time, to give time to critically think about some things. We still get knee-jerk reaction – I'm particularly focused on Infrastructure Services – and they've been to all this training. They've had the same exposure as we've had, and I can't see it translating. I think it's fantastic, and I would love to apply what we are doing to a specific project because it's fantastic. But organisationally we are spending a lot of time and money on this, and I can't see that they are paying any attention."

Some participants found that creativity tools could improve the use of personal time to solve work problems:

"For me, the most valuable thing was after the first session where the John Cleese video talked about needing lots of time to really think creatively. You need to make that sort of time. I was actually grappling with that problem in the middle of the night, as you do sometimes! And instead of just lying there and letting it go around in circles. I actually got up and got my pen and paper and spent about an hour going through the issue and coming up with a framework for a strategy that I've been wanting to do for a while, but hadn't quite got my head around how I would do it. So that's been a really positive outcome for me, having done that if nothing else."

Others touched on the perception of time in the workplace and how creativity could be used to address organisational issues contributing to 'busyness':

"... considering time is required for engendering and incubating creative thought. Busyness is an issue that needs to be addressed. Busyness could be viewed as an anti-creativity factor. A creative look at busyness across the organisation could be a valuable starting point for reviewing systems and identifying where there might be duplication, where there could be more integration and collaboration across departments to streamline reporting and work flows. This is a part of the connecting Marrickville approach."

There was a general theme that the workshop program was too dense and this created time pressures for participants:

"So yeah, it's been good, I like the practical tools. Umm for me that's the most useful stuff. The readings, I haven't had a lot of time to actually do the readings. I think for many of us time... time...time is an issue, in terms of getting the most out of it. So ... I think I could get more out of it really by going back and looking at the readings again, reflecting on what we've done."

The feedback demonstrates that the participants were actively learning about creativity in terms of their personal, team, workplace and community experiences. Ideas around organisational culture, time and 'the process of creativity' were evident, reflecting the literature reviewed on creativity.



### 4.3.2 Emergent learning

Table 4 presents an overview of the emergent learning from each Lab and the final evaluation workshop.

Theme	Emergent Learning
<b>Lab 1: Connecting to Creativity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘everyone is creative’ – individual sense-making of the concept of ‘creativity’, focusing on process, capacity and accessibility</li> <li>• value in a collaborative exploratory project</li> <li>• understanding connections to the workplace.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 2: Creativity and the Individual</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tools can be used to think in a different way</li> <li>• new techniques to ‘have a go’</li> <li>• connecting current work practices to past ways of working</li> <li>• challenging accepted ways of working</li> <li>• personal benefits derived from the workplace.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 3: Creativity and the Group</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>• tools to use in the workplace</li> <li>• shifts in thinking about role of creativity, innovation and collaboration.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 4: Creativity and Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work questions are often commonly too narrowly defined, leading to poor outcomes</li> <li>• appreciation of the role of creativity in teams</li> <li>• thinking differently and the valuing of ‘risky learning’</li> <li>• recognition of the desirability of working more in a more creative way.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 5: Creativity and the Organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shift in thinking about the role of creativity and innovation in supporting organisational change</li> <li>• transformation of service delivery – considered paramount</li> <li>• facilitating a culture where staff are supported to take reasonable risks</li> <li>• standard work processes need to include ideas exploration as a regular activity</li> <li>• understanding the creative needs of self and others,</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 6: Out of Your Comfort Zone, In Your Comfort Zone</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how creative practices can enhance an understanding of place</li> <li>• mindfulness/meditation practices and their value in enhancing the ability to see connections and to solve problems.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 7: Creativity and the Community: Connecting to Place and Environment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• specific case example – exploring a range of ideas to improve the resident experience of Camperdown Park</li> <li>• ideas for how the organisation could work differently</li> <li>• ideas for how the organisation could work differently with the community</li> <li>• understanding the organisation as a part of a creative community</li> <li>• need to maintain momentum and continue the learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 8: Findings and Analysis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being able to grow and test ideas and creativity as a corporate value</li> <li>• commitment to the need for a new service model for capital works improvements</li> <li>• the need to continue developing to create capacity throughout the organisation.</li> </ul>

Table 4: Emergent learning from each of the Creativity Labs

### 4.3.3 Participant evaluation workshop

The final Creativity Lab comprised part of the project evaluation, and participants were encouraged to share their thoughts, observations and learning from the preceding seven Labs. A graphic facilitator was used to record the discussion and the large-scale illustration gave the participants additional support in reflecting on the discussion and themes in real time. This was considered particularly useful in distilling common priorities amongst the



Lab	Theme	Hypothesis	Group Result
5	Creativity and the Organisation	Leaders that contribute to work environments that support creativity are more effective	There was acceptance in the group that leadership was critical to embedding creativity within the organisational culture.
6	Out of Your Comfort Zone, In Your Comfort Zone	There was no specific hypothesis this session – focus on consideration of place over the Easter break	Not applicable
7	Creativity and the Community: Connecting to Place and Environment	Connecting to Marrickville as a creative community can assist with work-related problem solving	There was acceptance in the group that a better understanding of the community assisted with work-related problem solving. It was unclear if this was specifically related to the creative nature of the community itself.

**Table 5: Creativity Lab hypotheses and group results**

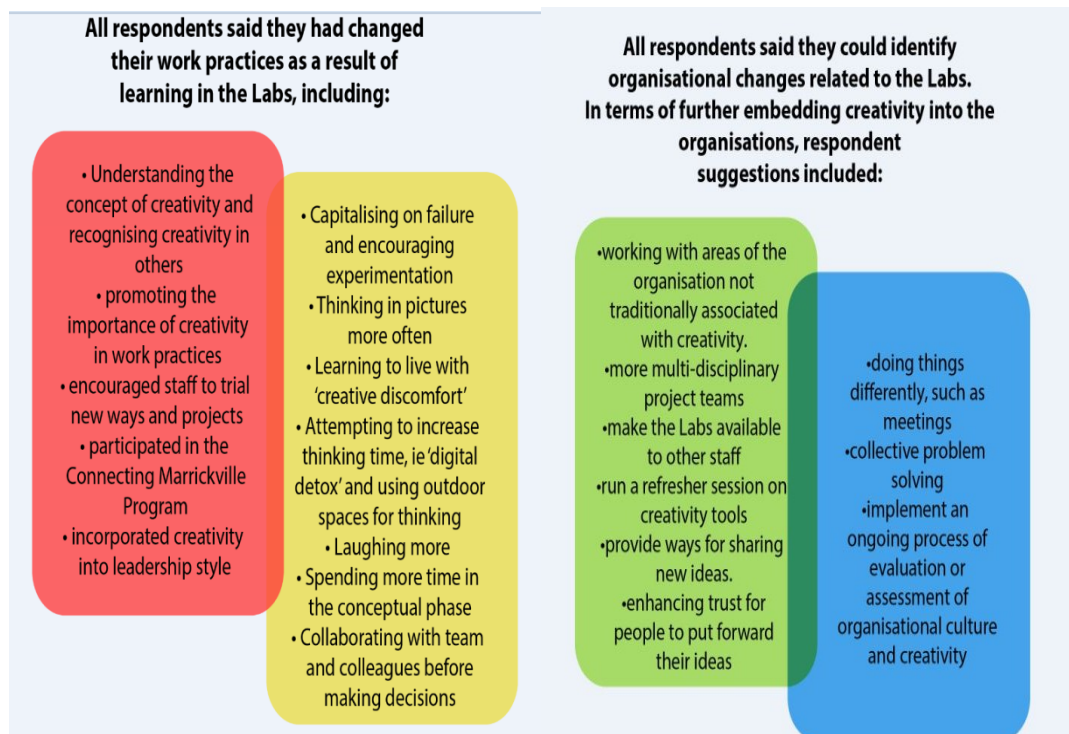
## 4.4 Post-project evaluation

Further project evaluation was undertaken with participants in May 2015 through the distribution of an anonymous online questionnaire (see Appendix B). This provided the Creativity Lab participants with an opportunity to consider the longer-term effects of the project. Nine responses were received, with eight responses from current employees and one response from a former employee. All respondents were able to identify insights that had remained with them from the Creativity Labs as well as personal changes that had occurred for them since that time.

All current employees, i.e. eight out of nine respondents, were able to identify organisational changes that had occurred since the Creativity Labs. The former employee, as evident by written responses, noted that they had experienced difficulty in implementing creativity processes in their new workplace due to its organisational culture.

These results, as presented in Figure 7 below, show congruence with the literature on organisational culture, creativity and innovation (see Section 3 of this report). They point to the value of having organisational norms that support creativity in the workplace, such as tolerance for mistakes, risk and uncertainty, support for change, and collaboration with diverse and effective teams.

Some respondents also said they found it challenging to sustain or apply learning from the Creativity Labs. These included remembering relevant information from the Labs and the lack of a shared understanding of creativity across the organisation. Time was the most common challenge, and was identified by five out of nine respondents, also reflecting findings in the literature that time-pressured people struggle with creativity in the workplace.



**Figure 7: Marrickville Creativity Labs longer-term effects**

## 5 Integration of the learning into Marrickville Council

### 5.1 Impacts

The Marrickville Creativity Project provided the organisation with an opportunity to explore new ways of working with creativity, innovation and collaboration to help it through a period of change that was undefined and emerging. In the final Lab in April 2013, participants reflected on the previous seven Labs and considered ways to maintain momentum and incorporate learning into their work practices. Participant ideas were put forward as a series of “I will...” statements, presented in the figure below. These statements essentially formed an action plan for the leadership team of Marrickville Council.



Figure 8: Creativity Labs Visual report 'I will...' statements (Lazenby, 2013)

Following the Project, and throughout 2013 and 2014, the organisation implemented several initiatives which emerged from the ideas presented above. These provide evidence of new thinking in the organisation that is partly or wholly attributable to the project. These initiatives are shown in Table 6 below.



Organisational Planning	Positions, Programs and Projects	Changes Identified	Staff Attitudes	Community Attitudes
<b>Organisational commitment to rethink collaborative planning to produce better service outcomes for the community</b>	‘Connecting Marrickville’ was an idea that emerged during Lab 7 as a cross-council initiative. It aimed to create integrated planning for infrastructure delivery through a place management approach in collaboration with the community. The group includes 11 coordinators from across the organisation and it has delivered a range of projects.	8/9 of surveyed project participants could identify organisational changes related to creativity since the Creativity Labs in 2013.  (Source: Marrickville Creativity Labs Participant Survey 2015)	10% increase in staff perception of improvement to the way the organisation operated.  (Source: Marrickville Council Change and Improvement Survey 2014)	Community perception of Council also improved, with an increase in satisfaction from 3.78 in 2012 to 3.86 in 2014 (the NSW benchmark is 3.50).  (Source: Micromex Research 2012 and Micromex Research 2014)
<b>Inclusion of ‘Creative’ as one of four organisation values – ‘Creative’ was selected by staff from across the organisation as one of the top priorities for the organisation in 2014, along with ‘Collaborative’, ‘Respectful’ and ‘Responsive’</b>	Establishment of the Manager Integrated Strategy position – this temporary position was created to oversee the development and implementation of the Connecting Marrickville program. This program is described in greater detail below.	9/9 of surveyed project participants were able to identify changes in personal behaviour directly attributable to project learning.  (Source: Marrickville Creativity Labs Participant Survey 2015)	92% of staff agreed that the council was innovative.  (Source: Marrickville Council Change and Improvement Survey 2014)	Community perception of Council’s image increased from 4.08 in 2012 to 4.26 in 2014.  (Source: Micromex Research 2012 and Micromex Research 2014)
<b>Inclusion of creativity in staff performance plans, ensuring that they consider it as a core working process. This has become directly related to the corporate value of being ‘Creative’</b>	New projects were added to the Arts and Cultural Development portfolio that indicate a higher tolerance for risk and appetite for innovation. These include the Live Music Marrickville program, Perfect Match Public Art Program and the May Lane Curated Walls Program (a street art program).	9/9 of surveyed project participants were able to identify insights or ideas that had remained with them over the past two years.  (Source: Marrickville Creativity Labs Participant Survey 2015)	93% of staff agreed that teams were finding new ways of doing things.  (Source: Marrickville Council Change and Improvement Survey 2014)	There was a slight increase in the perceived quality of community events, celebrations, festivals, performances and exhibitions.  (Source: Micromex Research 2012 and Micromex Research 2014)

Organisational Planning	Positions, Programs and Projects	Changes Identified	Staff Attitudes	Community Attitudes
<b>Increased profile of community creativity in the Community Strategic Plan (published in 2013) – ‘A cultural and creative Marrickville’ included as one of four key results areas.</b>	<p>Previously culture and creativity was a sub-area within other key result areas.</p> <p>The Marrickville Creativity Group was established as an open membership cross-council working group to further explore the concept of creativity in the council.</p>		<p>Staff perception of improved cross-unit cooperation and willingness to collaborate.</p> <p>(Source: Staff Satisfaction Survey 2014)</p>	

**Table 6: Change at the Council since conclusion of the project**

As the data provided in Table 6 demonstrate, a number of internal changes within the organisation were noted by project participants and within the broader group of council staff, with over 90 per cent of staff perceiving change and innovation in the organisation.

## 5.2 Connecting Marrickville Program

The Connecting Marrickville Program was established in mid-2013 following the Creativity Labs. Connecting Marrickville is managed by a standing working group that meets every three weeks to collaborate, track progress, nominate quarterly targets and share learning. Working with a budget of approximately \$150,000 and three key staff, the Program has successfully implemented a range of projects that have developed and trialled new ways of collaboration with a focus on producing innovative outcomes. The goals of the Program have been framed around three key principles:

- > Build better places through cross-council collaboration.
- > People are connected with place, and place with people.
- > Infrastructure is multifunctional.

From the time of its inception, Connecting Marrickville has delivered 18 new footpath projects and a new communications plan for infrastructure works. Of particular note are four demonstration projects that have established a new way of working for Council:

- > Kays Avenue Living Lane Project (see Figure 9 below)
- > Gleeson Avenue
- > Camperdown Park Plan of Management
- > Dulwich Hill integrated place-based planning project.

Across all of the Connecting Marrickville projects, delivery team members noted that the projects had been executed through the use of new ways of working, and that these processes had delivered a range of innovations on the ground, such as reductions in impervious paving areas, planting to increase biodiversity, processes that used engagement, collaboration and creativity, improved project planning, reprioritisation of infrastructure goals, and addressing the need for a better balance between people, cars and bicycles.

## Kays Avenue Living Lane

The Kays Avenue Living Lane Demonstration Project sought to deliver multifunction infrastructure outcomes through cross-organisational collaboration, and community and stakeholder engagement. The multifunctional infrastructure delivered in Kays Avenue includes stormwater treatment, flood mitigation, increased habitat, a bike path as a sustainable transport outcome, seating, and place-making through improvements to visual amenity. The Landscape Plan is illustrated below.

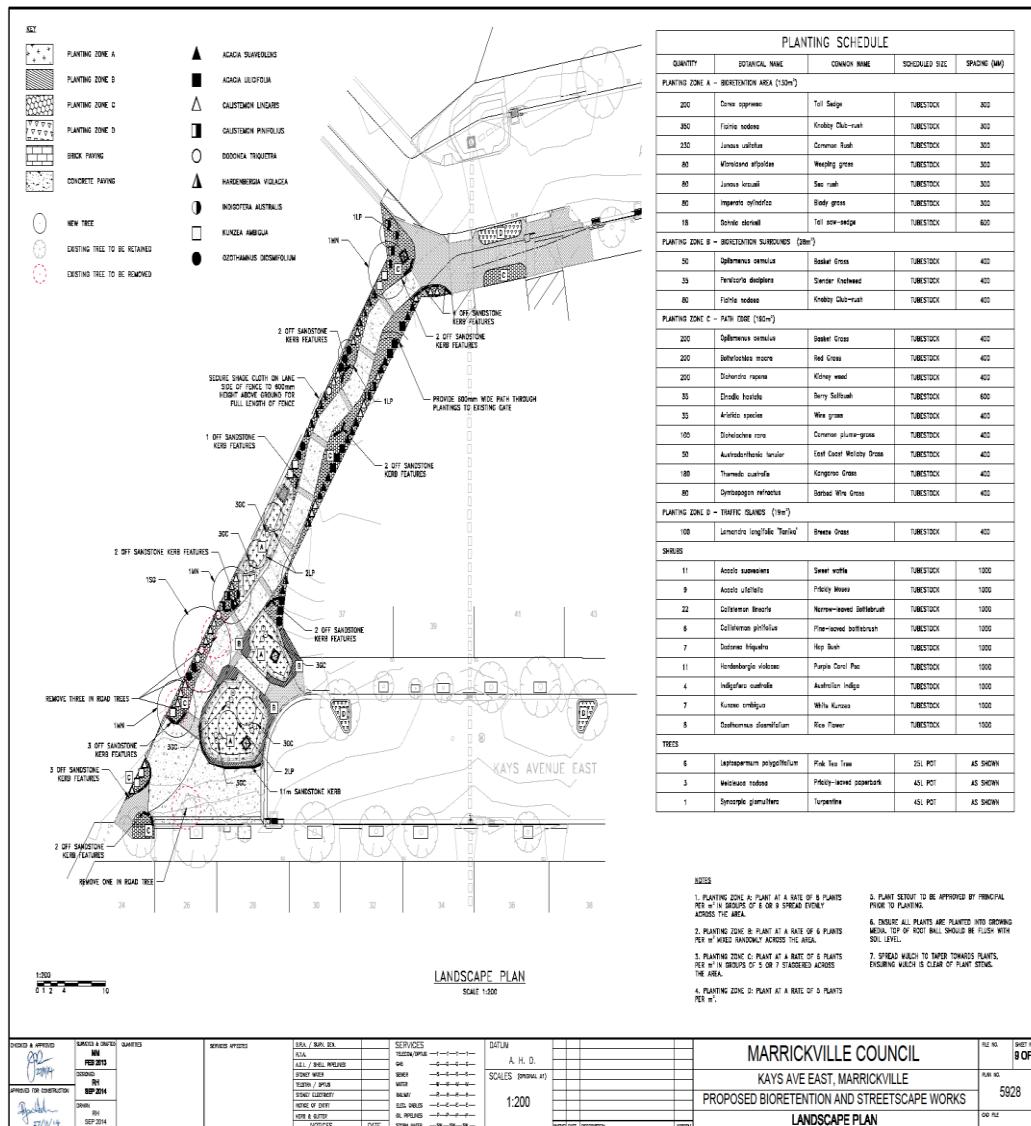


Figure 9: Kays Avenue Living Lane project

The Connecting Marrickville Program was supported by a group that re-formed as the Marrickville Creativity Group in late 2014. The new group is tasked with a broader remit focused on the implementation of the corporate value of creativity through the development of organisational understanding and application of creativity, as well as the application of learning to consider opportunities for the community and local government generally.

## 5.3 Challenges

As a new project for Council, Marrickville Creativity presented a number of challenges for the core project team and the participants. While the project has delivered positive outcomes for



the organisation, there are a number of opportunities to improve the project format, delivery, and content. These challenges can be summarised as barriers to participation in the program, resourcing, program capacity and availability and organisational commitment, and they are detailed below.

### 5.3.1 Barriers to participation in the program

Barriers to participation occur in three main areas, including prior understanding of the subject, attitudes to the subject and timing.

- > Prior understanding of the concept of creativity as it applied organisations – at the beginning of the process, some participants expressed views that indicated anxiety around personal creativity and doubts about the value of the project, with various understandings of creativity evident in the group
- > Attitudes to creativity – some participants expressed reservations about the need to develop organisational capacity for creativity, commenting that it was not a priority for their work, or that they considered themselves to be sufficiently creative
- > Time was the critical factor for the majority of participants. Key learnings included:
  - Participants required more notice of the program in order to accommodate it within their schedules.
  - More time to communicate the Labs to the executive and management teams may have delivered better understanding and participation.
  - Participants would have liked more preparation time in the lead-up to the Labs and more time between Labs so as to reflect upon and integrate new learning.
  - Some participants would have preferred less time for each Lab, for example two-hour sessions as opposed to sessions of three hours or more.
  - Some participants found it difficult to find the time to do the readings and preparation between the Labs.
  - A longer lead time in the development of the program could have assisted in refining elements of the overall project, like establishing broader management support for, and commitment to, the project.
  - Ideally, post-project evaluation would have been conducted at the six and 12 month marks after the Labs in order to monitor changes to creativity in the organisation. This was prevented by a core project team member taking extended leave.

### 5.3.2 Resourcing

The project did not have a dedicated budget and therefore it was delivered within limited existing organisational resources. This limited the ability to deliver the project as effectively in terms of materials, locations and speakers.

The intensity of the calendar for Labs produced some resourcing issues for Council staff in the preparation for the Labs.

There was an opportunity to better use the literature review for staff learning, such as by centrally locating electronic files for easy access.

### 5.3.3 Program capacity and availability

Several participants expressed a desire for the Labs to be made available to their teams, and for there to be opportunities for other staff to participate in future versions of the project.

Suggestions included producing versions of the program that managers could implement within their own teams, and conducting an expression of interest across the organisation for staff to self-nominate to participate in the program.

#### 5.3.4 Organisational commitment and value

While the General Manager was supportive of the project and could see potential organisational benefits, better communication with the executive and management teams to develop their understanding of the project could have contributed to better participation rates. At the same time, team members that participated in the project were positive about its value for themselves, and saw considerable potential benefits for their teams and the organisation.

### 5.4 Next steps

In the coming period, the council intends to continue to develop the Marrickville Creativity Project through:

- > preparing a revised Marrickville Creativity Labs program and toolkit for future implementation as part of organisational learning and development
- > incorporating creativity tools into the council's staff induction program
- > preparing case studies of cross-organisational projects to promote understanding of the role of creativity in collaboration and change
- > undertaking further research on Council's role in the creative ecosystem and on how the interrelated processes of creativity, innovation and collaboration are affected by factors such as organisational culture, leadership and time
- > maintaining the Marrickville Creativity Group as the council's key staff resource exploring creativity in the workplace.

### 5.5 Summary

The Marrickville Creativity Project essentially constituted a leap of faith for the organisation in that it was not a tested concept with measurable outcomes, and hence presented a risk for the organisation in terms of time and energy. It did however manage to produce a series of outcomes and learnings for the organisation that were subsequently embedded and used to produce considerable value for the council in terms of organisational culture, strategic planning and daily operations.

These changes were recognised by the project participants and the broader staff group, and on the ground projects such as Connecting Marrickville provide evidence of impact on the community.

## 6 Conclusions and implications

### 6.1 Project summary

The Marrickville Creativity Project explicitly links a more creative council to its creative community, and it also serves to document an approach that could be drawn upon by other local governments wishing to operate in a more creative and innovative way. It suggests that a focus on creativity can assist councils to ‘do more with more’ – more collective forms of self-expression that occur in and through everyday work; more production of novel and useful ideas that are appropriate to the goals at hand; and more conceptualising of the ways in which the global and the local unavoidably interact, paralleling the global knowledge economy we are now experiencing.

The literature provides examples from Australian and international jurisdictions of ways in which innovation and creativity have manifested in local government. These examples suggest that creativity can have impacts not only on areas such as community sports, recreation and the arts, but also on economic development, the management of public assets, energy regulation and means to better communicate with citizens. Creative-based strategies are likely to be more sustainable if they capitalise on the distinctive characteristics of places, and if they target the wellbeing of the population.

The Marrickville Creativity Project provided an opportunity for Marrickville Council’s senior management team to explore creativity in relation to their work within Council and the Marrickville community, but also within a period of emerging change within the sector. This is in keeping with evidence from the literature, which suggest that several drivers have been prompting local governments in recent years to reconsider the ways in which they organise themselves, manage service delivery and hold themselves accountable to citizens and other stakeholders.

A series of Creativity Labs for Marrickville Council managers exposed participants to a range of tools and ways of thinking applicable to workplace situations that foster creativity. Providing the council’s leadership with an opportunity to explore multiple aspects of creativity – individual, team, leadership, organisational and community – has contributed to noteworthy cultural shifts within the organisation. The development of a range of tools and practices to support creativity at work – including the role of mindfulness, allocating time, appreciating enquiry and systems thinking – continue to provide staff with opportunities to enhance their skills in this area.

In the period since the Marrickville Creativity Project concluded, the organisation has embedded creativity into its organisational culture, its planning, its commitment to its community and its day-to-day working operations. The Marrickville Creativity Group continues to meet monthly and regularly gains attendance of 15 to 20 staff from all Council departments, including a range of staff levels from executive members, managers, coordinators and officers.

### 6.2 Conclusions

In terms of the questions which framed the Marrickville Creativity Project, the project outcomes indicate overall positive responses:

*Could Council better understand and benefit its creative community by adopting programs and ways of working informed by the same creative processes that characterise the Marrickville community?*

While Marrickville Council has a long history of supporting its creative community, the project has assisted in developing a broader awareness of its role as part of the creative ecosystem. The outcomes of the Marrickville Creativity project demonstrate that promotion of creativity has changed ways in which Council, as an organisation, collaborates and delivers services to its community. This is evidenced in particular by the Connecting Marrickville Program. This program is aimed at establishing a new collaborative working process that draws on diverse team membership, with openness to new ways of trialling and delivering outcomes. It is a process that is informed by a deeper knowledge of community and place.

Evaluation of the program showed that lack of time presented a significant challenge to embedding creative ways of thinking and working into the everyday work culture of the organisation.

*Could Council's local governance processes and outcomes be improved by building the organisation's capacity for creativity?*

There is some evidence from the Marrickville Creativity Project that local governance processes have been improved through the development of creativity skills in Council staff and the adaption of the organisational culture to value and support creativity in the workplace. New projects were added to the Arts and Cultural Development portfolio that indicate a higher tolerance for risk and appetite for innovation. The Marrickville Creativity Group was established as an open membership cross-council working group to further explore the concept of creativity in the council. Traditional definitions of creativity as relating to arts practice alone shifted towards a more inclusive definition of it as being a basic human ability.

Creativity was explicitly incorporated into leadership style. The incorporation of creativity as a corporate value, and shifts in organisational culture and work practices to facilitate creativity, brought about changes to the ways in which some services were being delivered to the community. A key example of this is the Connecting Marrickville Program, which aimed to create integrated planning for infrastructure delivery through a place management approach in collaboration with the community. The group includes 11 coordinators from across the organisation and it has delivered a range of projects, with a focus on delivering multifunction infrastructure outcomes.

*What is the current thinking on creativity and its role in the workplace, particularly as applicable to local government?*

This key question was addressed through the literature review which revealed that, while there are several disciplines discussing various aspects of creativity in the workplace, there is a shift towards consideration of creativity as a process in the workplace that is closely linked to innovation and change processes. The associated implication is that processes can be managed and therefore leadership and team processes are also relevant. While the literature on creativity in the public sector, particularly Australian local government, was sparse, much of the corporate literature can be considered relevant to the organisational processes of local government.

In recent years, several drivers have been prompting local governments to reconsider the ways in which they organise themselves, manage service delivery and hold themselves accountable to citizens and other stakeholders. The ways in which local governments innovate and change have a strong impact on local economic and community development. Councils do not have to have invented a new product or service in order to be considered innovative; instead, their innovations can lie in recognising the application of an

improvement that leads to sustained economic and community benefits, and implementing it in the organisation.

Creativity is a resource that can be used to rethink problems based on principles such as experimentation, and originality; to reframe problems based on the capacity to reconsider unworkable rules, to be unconventional and to look at situations laterally and with flexibility; and to better engage with social inclusion, culture and environmental sustainability. The literature suggests that creativity can have impacts on local government functions such as community sports, recreation and the arts, as well as on local economic development, the management of public assets, energy regulation and more effective means of communicating with citizens and improving customer services.

### 6.3 Implications for local government

The outcomes of the Marrickville Creativity Project have a number of potential implications for the local government sector, including:

- > Councils can improve their performance through incorporating creativity into the culture and operations of their organisation for the benefit of their communities.
- > Creativity can assist individuals, teams and organisations to develop innovative, appropriate and effective solutions, in recognition of broader changes impacting the sector and the need to develop organisational capacity to meet these challenges.
- > The management of organisational culture to facilitate creativity can contribute to innovation and change processes. This project provides a synthesis of key literature that can serve as a resource and inspiration for other local governments wishing to explore the links between creativity, innovation and improved local governance.
- > Creativity can be incorporated as a specific area of staff learning and development, for example through the development of Creativity Labs as a program and toolkit.
- > Consideration of time, and how it can be managed to accommodate creativity processes individually, within teams and within the organisation as a whole, requires further investigation. In addition to time, other barriers to participation of managers in creativity-enhancing initiatives include prior understanding of the subject and attitudes toward the subject (i.e. creativity and its role in the workplace). These barriers need to be better understood and addressed.
- > At a broader level, this project suggests that there is value in all local governments drawing on distinctive characteristics of their local communities and adapting their programs and ways of working while being informed and guided by those community strengths.

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## Appendix A. Marrickville creativity labs – description of program

Lab / Date	Theme	Content	Emergent Learning
<b>Lab 1</b> <b>25 Feb 2013</b>	Connecting to Creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring hypothesis: we are all creative</li> <li>• creative toolbox</li> <li>• benefits and challenges</li> <li>• understanding impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• everyone is creative</li> <li>• individual sense making of creativity around process, capacity and accessibility</li> <li>• value in a collaborative exploratory project</li> <li>• understanding connections to the workplace</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 2</b> <b>4 March 2013</b>	Creativity and the Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenter: Clive Leach</li> <li>• Exploring hypothesis: time must be allocated</li> <li>• positive psychology and wellbeing</li> <li>• Creative style Personal contribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• tools can be used to think in a different way</li> <li>• new techniques to 'have a go'</li> <li>• connecting current work practices to past ways of working</li> <li>• challenging accepted ways of working</li> <li>• personal benefits derived from the workplace</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 3</b> <b>11 March 2013</b>	Creativity and the Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypothesis: certain tools can support group creativity</li> <li>• exploring difference</li> <li>• supporting creativity</li> <li>• creativity and leadership</li> <li>• collective creativity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding opportunities for collaboration</li> <li>• tools to use in the workplace</li> <li>• shifts in thinking about role of creativity, innovation and collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 4</b> <b>18 March 2013</b>	Creativity and Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypothesis: creative techniques can lead to more effective communication</li> <li>• creative community workshops - engaging others</li> <li>• leading with curiosity</li> <li>• changing communication norms</li> <li>• creative questioning</li> <li>• presented by Joanna Jacovich, UTS u.lab and Daphne Freeder, UTS Business School</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work questions are often commonly too narrowly defined leading to poor outcomes</li> <li>• appreciation of the role of creativity in teams</li> <li>• thinking differently and value in 'risky learning'</li> <li>• recognition of a need to work more creatively</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 5</b> <b>25 March 2013</b>	Creativity and the Organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypothesis: leaders that contribute to work environments that support creativity are more effective</li> <li>• investigating the creativity behind workplace innovation</li> <li>• creative thinking</li> <li>• organisational behaviour</li> <li>• influencing organisational culture</li> <li>• creative attitude</li> <li>• nurturing ideas</li> <li>• Presented by Heather Whitely Robinson, Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shift in thinking about role of creativity and innovation in change</li> <li>• transformation of service delivery considered paramount</li> <li>• facilitate a culture where staff are supported in risk taking</li> <li>• standard work process needs to include ideas exploration as a standard activity</li> <li>• understanding our and others creative needs</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 6</b> <b>Easter</b>	Out of Your Comfort Zone, In Your Comfort Zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practise mindfulness / meditation</li> <li>• create a photography essay about a place</li> <li>• write a Haiku about place</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how creative practices can enhance your understanding of place</li> <li>• mindfulness / meditation practices can enhance ability to see connections and problem solve</li> </ul>

Lab / Date	Theme	Content	Emergent Learning
<b>Lab 7</b> <b>8 April 2013</b>	Creativity and the Community: Connecting to Place and Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hypothesis:</li> <li>• Connecting to Marrickville as a creative community can assist with work related problem solving</li> <li>• understanding how environment affects creativity and creativity has formed the environment</li> <li>• engaging with the creative community</li> <li>• connecting context and place - site visit Camperdown Park</li> <li>• workshop by Michele Morcos, local visual artist</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• range of ideas to improve resident experience in Camperdown Park</li> <li>• ideas of how the organisation could work differently</li> <li>• ideas of how the organisation could work differently with the community</li> <li>• understanding of the organisation as a part of a creative community</li> <li>• need to maintain momentum and continue the learning</li> </ul>
<b>Lab 8</b> <b>15 April 2013</b>	Findings and Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness of the different approaches to the creative process</li> <li>• deeper understanding of organisational culture</li> <li>• learning and outcomes</li> <li>• moving forward</li> <li>• graphic facilitation by Rebecca Lazenby</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being able to grow and test ideas and creativity as a corporate value</li> <li>• commitment to need for a new service model for capital works improvements</li> <li>• need to continue developing to create capacity throughout the organisation</li> </ul>

**Table 7: Program for the Marrickville Creativity Labs**

## Appendix B. Marrickville Creativity Labs Evaluation Survey Questionnaire

In 2013, Marrickville Council partnered with the UTS ACELG (Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government) to deliver Creativity Labs for Managers at Council. Council is now interested in finding out the impact of these Labs two years down the track in order to assess their value and contribute to future initiatives. As a participant, your feedback is valued and we ask that you fill in this brief evaluation form.

1. Thinking about the topics covered during the Creativity Labs (including personal creativity, creativity in groups and the community), what insights or ideas have remained with you over the past two years?
2. Have you done anything differently since the Labs as a result of what you learnt?  
Yes/No
3. If you answered yes to question 2, please give some information about what you have done differently.
4. What challenges have you had in applying or sustaining the learnings from the Labs?
5. Can you identify any organisational changes related to creativity since the Creativity Labs in 2013?  
Yes/No
6. If you answered yes to question 5, please provide details of these changes.
7. What ideas do you have to further embed creativity in the organisation to improve outcomes?
8. Any other comments on the Labs?





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