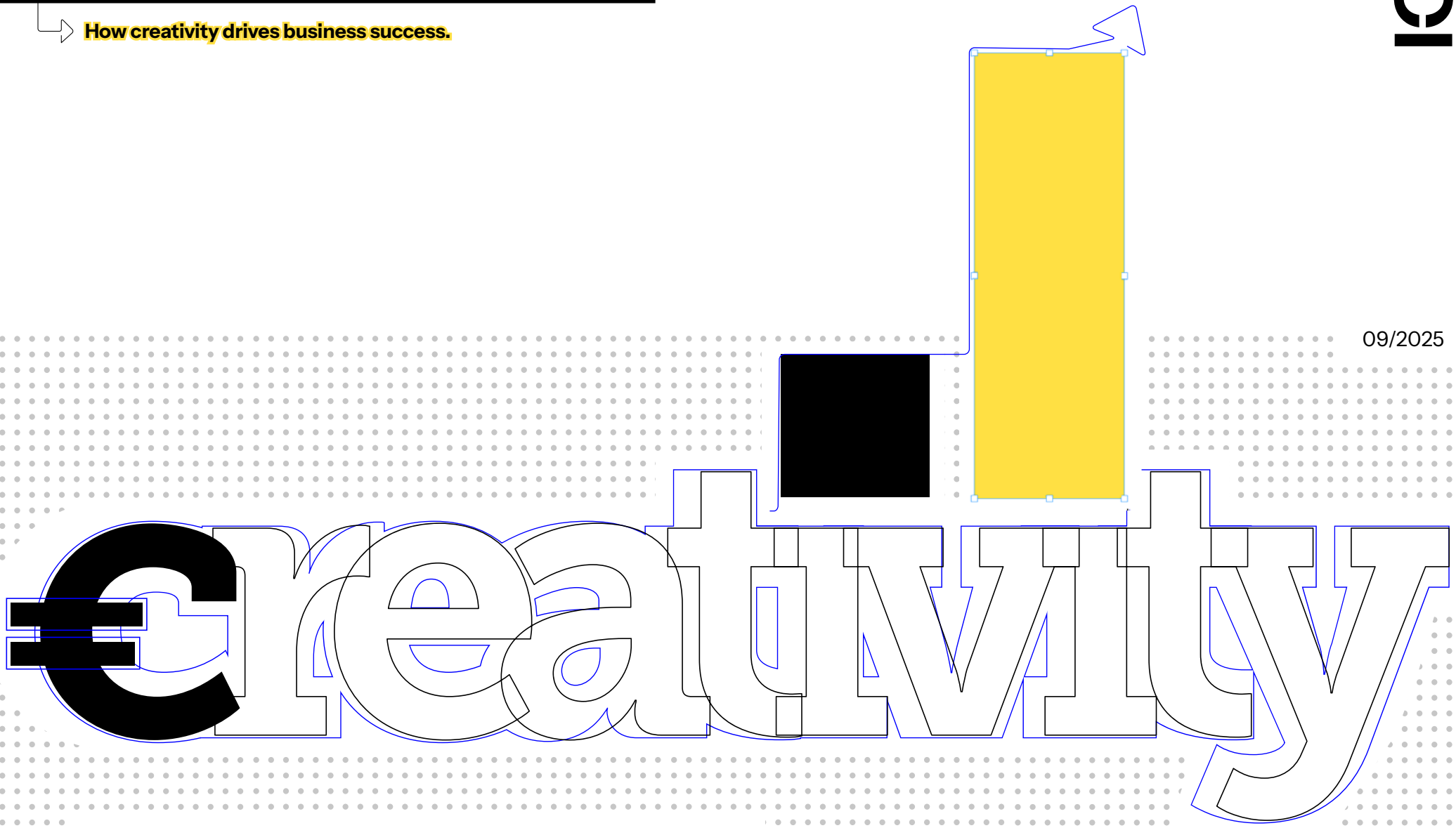
Study

the creative dividend 2025

How creativity drives business success.

IQudo®

09/2025



Research project at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT EnTechnon).

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The Creative Dividend 2025.

Study on Creativity and Business Success.

Conducted at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology.

Supervised by IQudo.

Disclaimer: This study was conducted at the Chair of Entrepreneurship and Technology Management at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT EnTechnon) in collaboration with IQudo. KIT EnTechnon and IQudo assume no responsibility or liability for the accuracy, completeness, or consequences of the results.

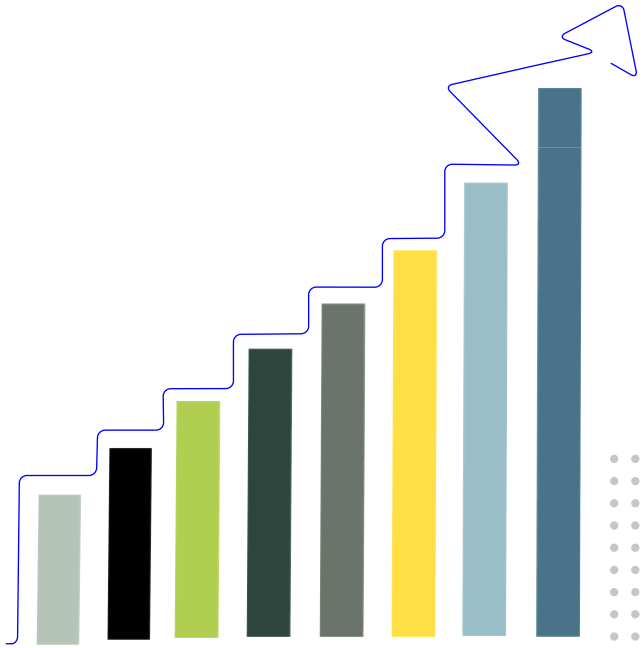
Gender Note: All personal designations apply equally to all genders.

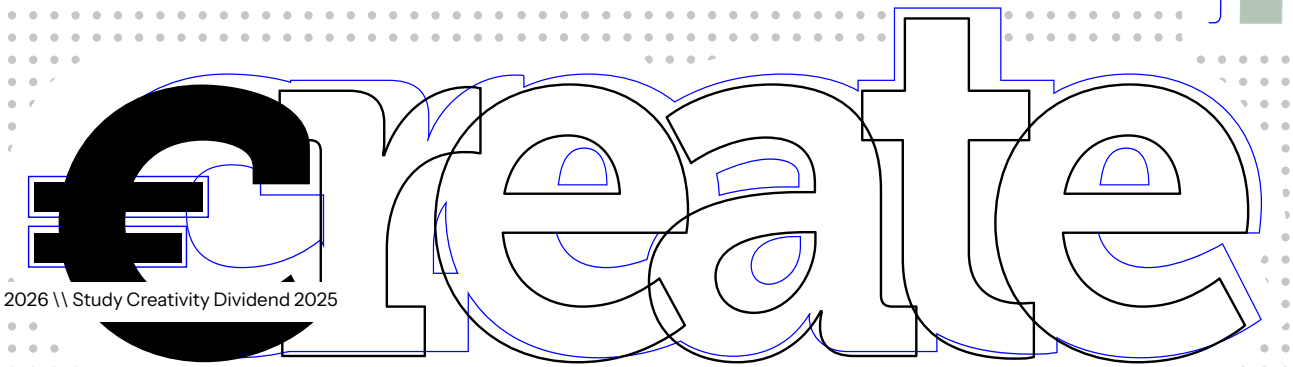
For more information, visit IQudo.com

from optional to essential

With technological advances shaking up entire industries and AI challenging traditional processes, companies are under a lot of pressure to innovate. Many even have to reinvent themselves to stay afloat. Creativity is therefore no longer a nice-to-have, but a strategic necessity and the key to growth and tomorrow's talents.

The IQudo "Creativity Dividend 2025" study shows that **creativity is significantly correlated with revenue growth and employer attractiveness.**





creativity pays off — measurably

Creative companies achieve revenue growth more often and are significantly more attractive as employers.

From August to September 2024, we surveyed 102 employees from German companies about their level of creativity and their organization's revenue growth, market share, and employer attractiveness. The results show that higher creativity is associated with stronger revenue growth and greater employer attractiveness.

According to the study conducted at the *Karlsruhe Institute of Technology* (KIT), creative companies are **3.1 times more likely to report revenue growth above 10 percent and 4.5 times more likely to exceed 20 percent**. They also r**eceive employer-attractiveness awards 2.9 times more frequently.**

Participants represented various industries and hierarchical levels. Most respondents came from IT and technology (24.5%), manufacturing (19.6%), and healthcare and pharma (7.8%). The remaining participants represented construction and real estate (5.9%), the automotive sector (4.9%), and financial services (4.9%).

creative companies are **3.1** times more likely to achieve revenue growth of more than **10%**

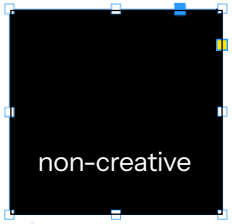


Fig. 1: Frequency of revenue growth

not useful, but effective

How Creativity and Innovation are Different

Creativity and innovation are related concepts, but they mean different things.

The word *innovation* comes from the Latin verb *innovare*, meaning "to renew" or "to make new." The concept was shaped by the Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950). He described innovation as the successful introduction of new combinations and made an important distinction: an *invention* is a new idea, while *innovation* is the successful use of that idea in the market.

Creativity, on the other hand, comes from the Latin word *creare*, meaning "to create" or "to bring something new into existence." It refers to the ability to develop new ideas.

How we Define Corporate Creativity

Today, corporate creativity is often described—based on research from Harvard University—as novel and useful.

However, a new type of innovation can achieve economic success even if it lacks practical usefulness. Take a designer shoe as an example. It does not necessarily have to offer a functional improvement over existing models. Even so, it can still be considered creative, because its effectiveness lies not in practical utility but in how it shapes customer perception. We therefore define creativity, following Runco and Jaeger (2012), **as the production of ideas that are both original and effective.**

assessment & classification

Assessment of Corporate Creativity
At the beginning of the study, we asked participants to assess their company's level of creativity. Only 10.8% rated their own company as „very creative" compared to companies known for their creativity. The majority (58.8%) regarded their company as merely mediocre or even lacking in creativity.

>> *Compared to companies known for their creativity, our company is creative.*

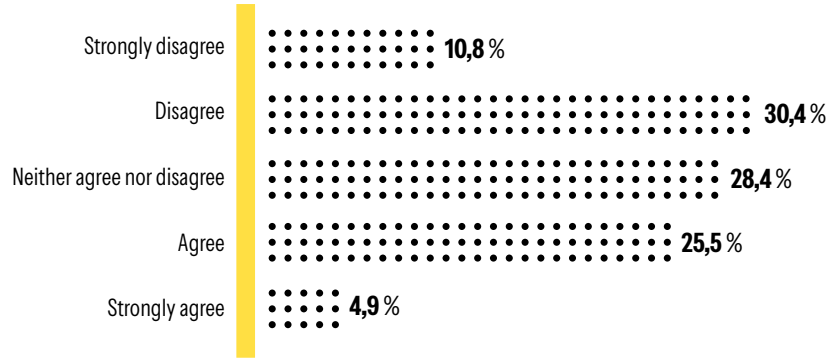


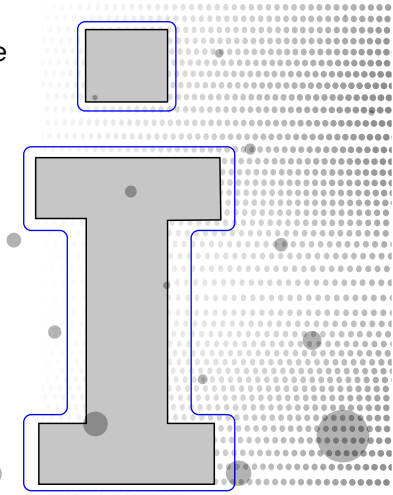
Fig. 2: Sample size n = 102

These self-assessment results suggest that creativity is not systematically promoted or anchored within many organizations.

Classification of Companies
The differentiation between „creative" and „non-creative" companies was based on the mean value of the creativity construct (see Fig. 2 and 3). This was based on items collected in the questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale.

Creative: Companies with a mean value greater than 3 („Partially agree / Partially disagree").

Non-creative: Companies with a mean value smaller than 3.



interpretation of results

We surveyed 102 participants on the following aspects:
a) creative goal setting
b) number of creative ideas
c) financial valuation of creativity
d) idea management

Interpretation of Results

a) 81.4% of creative companies **set goals for achieving creative outcomes almost three times as often** as non-creative companies (28.1%).
b) 81.4% of creative companies generate approximately **2.4 times as many original and effective ideas** as non-creative companies (34.4%).
c) 55.7% of creative companies **value creativity through financial incentives almost six times more frequently** than non-creative companies (9.4%).
d) 68.6% of creative companies **use structured innovation processes 2.4 times more often** than non-creative companies (28.1%).

>> To what extent do you agree with the following statements regarding creativity in your company? ("Somewhat agree"; "Strongly agree")

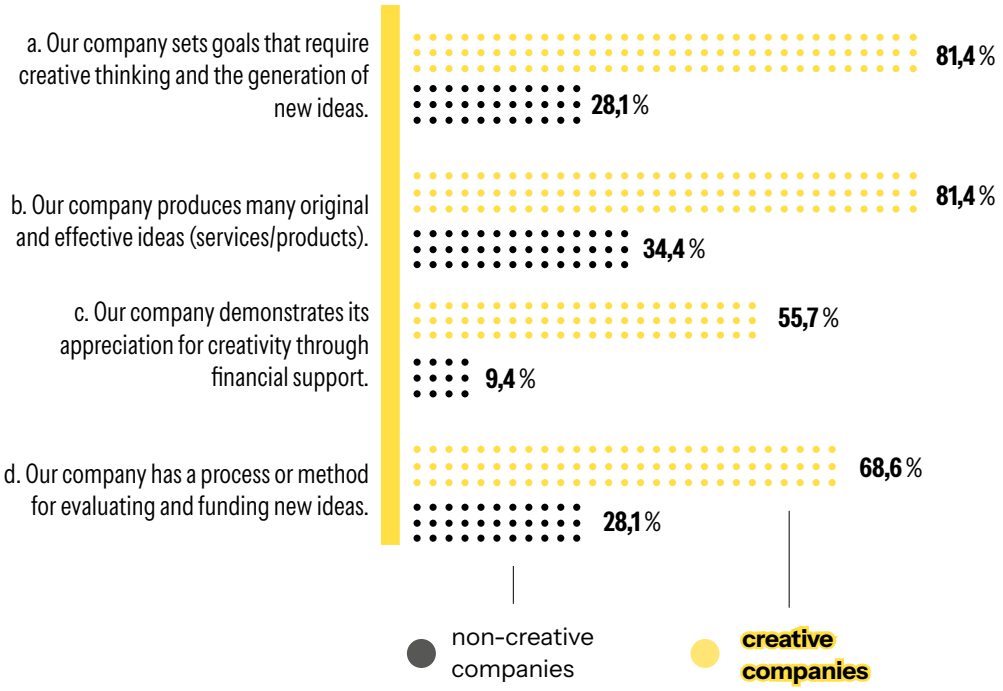


Fig. 3: Sample size n = 102

revenue growth

„We surveyed participants regarding their company's revenue growth in 2023. Result: Companies that actively foster creativity exhibit significantly higher revenue growth.*

Specifically, **creative companies are 3.1 times more likely to achieve revenue growth exceeding 10%, and 4.5 times more likely to see growth of over 20%** compared to non-creative companies.

Only 6.3% of non-creative companies recorded comparable growth of more than 20%. Furthermore, when looking at the group of all companies with revenue growth over 10%, 34 creative companies achieved this result, while only 11 non-creative companies were able to increase their revenue to that extent. This represents a ratio of **3.1 : 1**.

>> *What was your company's revenue growth in 2023 compared to 2022?*

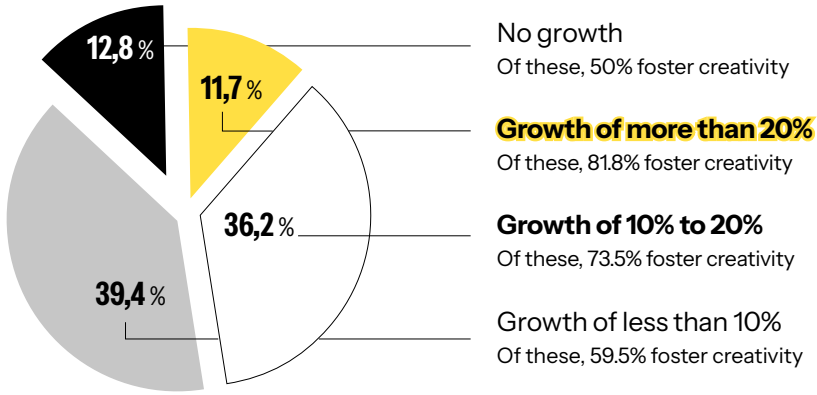


Fig. 4: Sample size n = 94

* The relationship between creativity and revenue growth shows a positive correlation coefficient of 0.246 and was significant at the 1% significance level.

revenue growth

employer attractiveness

Companies that foster creativity show significantly higher employer attractiveness.

The impact of a creative corporate culture is reflected in external recognition, too. According to the study, there is a **significant correlation between a company's creativity and the employer awards** received over the last three years ($r = 0.246$; $p < 0.01$).

Among the 54.6% of companies that have received at least one national award, a predominant share (75.9%) are classified as creative. A similar pattern emerges among the 27.3% of companies that hold multiple national awards: 20 creative companies achieved this result, compared to only seven non-creative companies. This represents a ratio of 2.9 : 1.

>> What awards has your company received in the last three years for its work environment? (e.g., Great Place to Work)

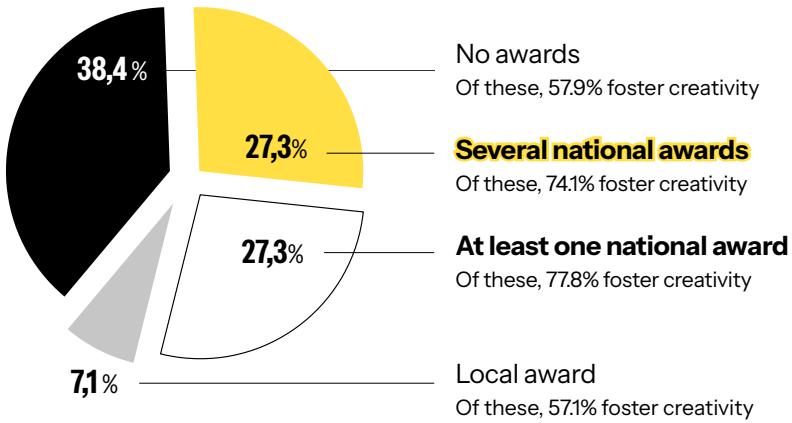


Fig. 5: Sample size n = 99

market share

Creative companies are more likely to hold a market-leading position.

According to participants, their companies‘ market share compared to the competition is as follows: 16.8% identified their company as a market leader. Within this group, a vast majority (76.5%) stated that they foster creativity. In contrast, only 23.5% of less creative companies achieved similar results.

The correlation between a company‘s creativity and its market share is not statistically significant, with a correlation coefficient of r=0.157 (p=0.058). Nevertheless, the positive value of the coefficient indicates a tendency toward a favourable relationship.

>> *Which statement best describes your company‘s market share compared to your closest competitors?*

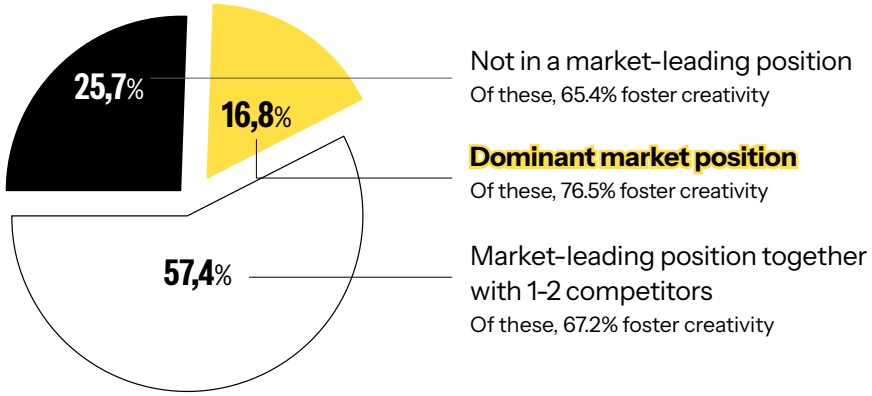


Fig. 6: Sample size n = 101

marketshare

study participants

Online Survey | August–September 2024

Sample Size

To ensure data quality, the questionnaire included an attention-check question to assess whether participants responded attentively. Based on this check, 27 participants were excluded. Originally, 129 participants in **Germany** were surveyed. Thus, 102 valid responses were included in the analysis.

Age	Participants	Percent
21 - 29	17	16,7
30 - 39	38	37,3
40 - 49	15	14,7
50 - 59	25	24,5
≥ 60	7	6,9

Branch	Participants	Percent
IT und Technology	25	24,5
Production	20	19,6
Healthcare and Pharma	8	7,80
Construction and Real Estate	6	5,90
Automotive	5	4,90
Finance	5	4,90
Energy and Utilities	3	2,90
Education and Academia	3	2,90
Retail and E-commerce	3	2,90
Other	25	24,50

Other = Plant and mechanical engineering, consulting, biotechnology, IT services & energy industry, EPC (engineering, procurement and construction), wholesale, food, food industry, mechanical engineering, medical technology, measurement and control technology, professional services, project-based services, secondary raw materials trading, special-purpose machinery, traded commodities/food B2B, advertising agencies.

Gender

Male: 56 = 54,9 %	Female: 46 = 45,1 %	Divers: 0 = 0 %

Position	Participants	Percet
Employee	25	57,8
Lower Management (team leaders)	22	21,6
Middle Management	8	7,8
Top Management	13	12,7

Department

Human Resources	33	32,4
Management	11	10,8
Sales	10	9,8
Research & Development	10	9,8
Marketing	9	8,8
IT	8	7,8
Finance	4	3,9
Engineering	2	2,0
Production	2	2,0
Legal	1	1,0
Other	12	11,8

Other = Consulting, Retail, Employee Assistance, Experience Management, Idea Management, Communication, Operations.

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1-2-3-4: innovation

Structural Conditions for Creativity and Innovation.

“Ideas are easy. Execution is everything!“
– John Doerr, Venture Capitalist

Turning ideas into real innovation takes far more than a wall full of colorful Post-its. Brainstorming sessions and idea workshops can spark a burst of creative energy, but that momentum fades quickly when there’s no time, budget, or backing to turn concepts into action. Without support from colleagues and leaders, even the most promising ideas stall.

For an idea to become a true innovation, the right conditions must be in place across the following four levels:

1 **Individual Level**
2 **Team Level**
3 **Leadership Level**
4 **Organizational Level**

Drawing on the *Systems Model of Creativity* developed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, the levels form a field in which creativity and innovation can emerge. The following pages outline the four levels and show how this field can be shaped.

Fig. 7: Field Engineering for Creativity and Innovation

individual level

Complementary Roles in the Creative Process.

1. Creator and Innovator

Developing ideas and bringing them to life are two sides of the same coin. Yet they require opposing individual skills that are rarely fully present in a single person. We therefore distinguish between **Creators and Innovators**.

Creators are imaginative, experimental, and capable of producing creative solutions even under intense time pressure. **Innovators**, by contrast, are strategic and structured. They can recognize the potential of an idea and inspire others to support it. These implementers excel at allocating resources, pushing through resistance, and building and maintaining strong networks.

Companies need Creators to overcome functional fixedness. Functional fixedness describes the tendency of individuals or teams to approach processes only in their familiar, traditional way, following the mindset of „we have always done it this way."

Creators challenge this mindset by pointing out where change is needed.

Innovators, on the other hand, view the disruptive energy of Creators as an opportunity. They can take an idea that might initially sound radical, analyze it rationally, weigh the risks and benefits, and bring it successfully to market despite opposition.

Understanding whether you are more creative or more innovative can help you recognize your strengths and limitations in driving innovation. Self-reflection often reveals blind spots that can be balanced with the complementary skills of a colleague.

If you want, I can also make a slightly punchier version that reads even more like a magazine feature, with a few hooks and vivid examples to draw the reader in. Do you want me to do that?

blind spot

team level

Combining Different Capabilities Effectively.

2. Interaction and Process

Aristotle's idea that the whole is more than the sum of its parts helps explain innovation in the 21st century. When a software developer, a designer, and a scientist jointly develop a product, solutions can emerge that exceed the capabilities of any individual. Diverse team knowledge can therefore replace a genius, at least in theory. In practice, however, this is far more complex.

A genius already integrates different ways of thinking internally. In teams, this integration does not happen automatically. For participants from different knowledge domains to engage in intellectual "ping-pong," both the **process** and the quality of **interaction** matter.

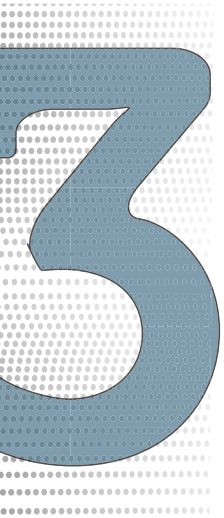
Factors that foster interaction include **synergy**: team members learn from one another and inspire each other.

Another is **creative abrasion**, in which opposing viewpoints are openly discussed and no seemingly inevitable compromise is negotiated. Good **chemistry** among colleagues and **coopetition** are also key to promoting interaction. The latter is a coined term combining cooperation and competition. Healthy coopetition exists when team members compete with one another while simultaneously offering support.

The creative **process** includes pursuing a **shared goal** and incorporating **trends**. Furthermore, **idea development should follow a dual mode of thinking: "What does the user want (User Experience), and what fuels the developer's passion (Employee Experience)?"** We refer to this as **Dual Thinking**. A process-inhibiting factor, by contrast, is dependence on other teams—**heteronomy**.

leadership level

Three Leadership Roles in Innovation Management.



3. Visionary, Mentor, and Expert

How can a team's creative intelligence be brought together effectively? Leadership styles such as the transformational approach offer valuable orientation, but they fall short. They reduce leadership to ideal-typical patterns and promote a one-size-fits-all logic that overlooks individual capabilities, experiences, and personality traits. Every person is different; imposing a predefined leadership style on an individual therefore makes little sense. In the context of innovation, **we thus understand leadership not as a style, but as the interplay of three roles: visionary, mentor, and expert.**

The **visionary** conveys an inspiring vision that gives meaning to the project and motivates the team to bring this vision to life. Visionaries support bold, unconventional ideas—even when these may cannibalize existing business models—and propose new pathways for solving problems, guided by the principle: "If solution A does not work and solution B does not work either, then we will find solution C."

In the role of the **expert**, the leader convinces through domain expertise. They recognize complex interdependencies, surprise with original solutions, and actively challenge creative thinking. In situations of high uncertainty, the authority acts with confidence and composure.

The **mentor** recognizes the individual strengths of team members and fosters them through constructive, solution-oriented feedback. The mentor is skilled at building and leading high-performing teams and, with empathy, understands what each individual needs in critical situations.

Based on this differentiation, each leader can evaluate their own strengths and identify areas for further development.

organizational level

Organizational Preconditions for Creativity.

4. Culture, Progression, and Resources

Many innovative companies invest heavily in inspiring office design. Yet some of Silicon Valley's most successful start-ups began in simple garages, with no intentional spatial design at all. How can this paradox be explained?

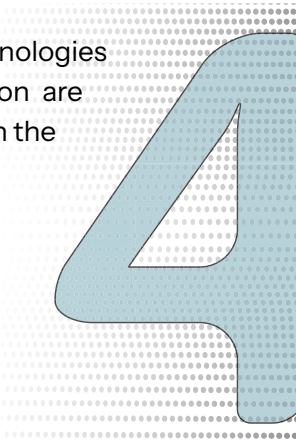
Culture: The IQudo idea-generation studies (2010–2016), involving more than 1,600 respondents in New York, San Francisco, and at Mercedes-Benz in Sindelfingen, show that **what matters less for creativity at work is the design of the space and far more what is allowed while working.** We coined the term **behavioral freedom** to describe this. Working late at night, going for a jog, or taking a power nap are commonplace among start-up founders in Silicon Valley. Moreover, a short midday nap has been shown to foster creative thinking.

Other cultural factors include a positive error culture and a vision that is not only articulated but genuinely lived.

Beyond culture, future orientation (progression) and resources are key contributors to organizational creativity.

Progression: Progressive organizations adapt flexibly to change and rapidly turn ideas into innovations. When hiring new employees, they look for out-of-the-box thinking and strong problem-solving skills. In addition, future-oriented companies enable employees to develop further or to reorient themselves—for example, through transfers between departments.

Resources: To implement ideas, state-of-the-art technologies and sufficient financial resources for experimentation are provided. A network of partners can also be valuable in the development and implementation of ideas.



about the authors

Research: **Karl Maria Walter**
Creatie Direction: **Robert Gerlach**

Karl Maria Walter studied Business Informatics at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT). During his master's thesis, he discovered a strong interest in divergent thinking. Unlike the traditional academic environment, which is often characterized by theory-heavy learning, his thesis repeatedly challenged him to solve real-world problems using creative approaches.

This experience sparked his motivation to engage more deeply with the topic of creativity. Since 2024, he has been working as a freelance collaborator with the creativity consultancy IQudo. Drawing on the findings of his master's thesis, additional analyses, and expert interviews, the study The Creativity Dividend was developed.

Robert Gerlach discovered his creative talent at a New York advertising agency in 1992. Further career milestones of the originally trained butcher included the Apple agency Chiat\Day, BBDO in Paris, and Springer & Jacoby in Hamburg. His work as an Art Director earned him awards in the United States and Germany.

In 2006, he founded the creativity consultancy IQudo® to foster creative thinking. The name IQudo stands for: *IQ + you do*. His clients have included BASF, Microsoft, SAP, Samsung, and Google.

Since 2012, he has supported research projects at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) as a creativity expert. In 2017, his creativity guide Innovator's High was published, followed by the innovation methodology Dual Thinking in 2019.

Fun-Fact: In 2011, Robert was seen in Hollywood as a drug dealer, supervillain, and medieval priest see IMDb-Profil.

about IQudo

IQudo bietet Forschung, Analyse und Trainings zu Kreativität an.

RESEARCH | IQudo® creativity & innovation analysis | IQUDO CREATIVITY TRAINING

Publications

IQudo studies were published, among others, in:

Wirtschafts Woche | Handelsblatt | Harvard Business manager | Organisations Entwicklung | managerSeminare – Das Weiterbildungsmagazin | W&V

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methodology I

The following section describes the methodological steps of the empirical investigation conducted in this study.

The questionnaire was developed with the aim of measuring the constructs of creativity and corporate performance and examining the relationship between them. It is based on the Adobe study “The Creativity Dividend” (2014). The original questionnaire was supplemented with additional questions and shortened in certain areas. It was then published as a standardized online questionnaire using SoSci Survey. Data collection was conducted using single-choice questions, with several items answered on a five-point Likert scale. To ensure data quality, a control question was included to exclude participants who did not complete the questionnaire attentively.

To operationalize the aforementioned constructs and make them measurable, the following questions were used (see Figures 8 and 9).

Creativity: Measured using five items. Scale reliability: Cronbach’s alpha = 0.706.

Quelle	Item (Original)	Item (Fragebogen)
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 5)	We have a specific business process or methodology for rating and funding new ideas.	Unser Unternehmen hat einen Prozess oder eine Methode zur Beurteilung und Finanzierung neuer Ideen.
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 5)	Our leadership demonstrates that it values creativity by funding it.	Unser Unternehmen zeigt seine Wertschätzung für Kreativität durch finanzielle Förderung.
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 5)	We set specific criteria or goals around projects meant to inspire creativity or new ideas.	Unser Unternehmen setzt Ziele, welche kreatives Denken und neue Ideen erfordern.
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 3)	How does your company compare with firms recognized for their creativity?	Verglichen mit Unternehmen, die für ihre Kreativität bekannt sind, ist unser Unternehmen kreativ.
(Lee & Choi, 2003, S. 225)	Our company has produced many novel and useful ideas (services/products).	Unser Unternehmen produziert viele originelle und wirksame Ideen (Produkte/Dienstleistungen).
	Kontrollfrage	Unser Unternehmen setzt keine Ziele, welche kreatives Denken und neue Ideen erfordern.

Fig. 8: Survey items measuring creativity

methodology II

Corporate performance: Three key indicators: revenue growth (2023 vs. 2022), market share, and awards as an employer.

Quelle	Item (Original)	Item (Fragebogen)
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 3)	What was your company's revenue growth in 2013 compared with 2012?	Wie hoch war das Umsatzwachstum Ihres Unternehmens in 2023 im Vergleich zu 2022?
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 3)	Which statement most closely describes your company's market share relative to your closest competitors?	Welche Aussage beschreibt den Marktanteil Ihres Unternehmens im Vergleich zu Ihren engsten Mitbewerbern am besten?
(Adobe & Forrester, 2014, S. 4)	What recognition did you receive for your employee working environment within the past three years?	Welche Auszeichnungen hat Ihr Unternehmen in den letzten drei Jahren für das Arbeitsumfeld der Mitarbeitenden erhalten? (z. B. Great Place To Work)

Fig 9: Survey items measuring corporate performance

To classify the surveyed companies as "creative" or "non-creative," the arithmetic mean of all responses to the creativity construct was calculated. Companies with a value > 3 ("partly agree/partly disagree") were classified as "creative." Companies with a value ≤ 3 were classified as "non-creative."

The survey was conducted from August to September 2024. In total, 102 respondents from various industries and hierarchical levels (57.8% without managerial responsibility, 12.7% top executive level) completed the questionnaire in full. The sample includes companies of different sizes. The data were subsequently analyzed statistically. The methods used comprised descriptive analyses and a Spearman correlation analysis.

Based on a systematic literature review and the study commissioned by Adobe (2014), which indicates a positive relationship between creativity and economic performance, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Hypothesis: Creativity has a positive impact on corporate performance (revenue growth, market share, and employer attractiveness).

The data analysis yielded the following results:

Revenue growth: Creativity correlates positively with revenue growth ($r = 0.246$; $p < 0.01$).

Employer awards: Significant relationship between creativity and awards ($r = 0.295$; $p < 0.01$).

Market share: Creativity correlates positively with market share, but the relationship is not significant ($r = 0.157$; $p = 0.058$).

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