

ADAPTATION AND INNOVATION IN CREATIVE THINKING

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Abstract

This study examines how differences in the personality traits of adaptation and innovation influence the development of a creative concept. Marketers who are adaptors seek to modify existing market offerings to meet the changing needs of market segments or to address different usage situations. The creative output of adaptors can consist of improved design features, promotion, distribution, or pricing strategies. Innovators, on the other hand, seek to change the relationship of the user to the product. This study utilizes a scale adapted from the work of psychologist Michael Kirton (1976) to measure the personality characteristics related to creativity of a sample of 67 students enrolled in three marketing courses. The students were also tasked with the development of a new type of chocolate bar. Students' creative concepts were rated as adaptive or innovative based on the degree of innovation.

Our findings indicate that innovative personality traits such as willingness to bend the rules and dislike for the routine are associated with higher levels of innovation in creative output. Too many restrictions in an educational environment can constrain the creative output of innovators (Land & Jarman 1992). The challenge for marketing educators is to allow and even encourage innovation and "blue ocean thinking" (Kim and Mauborgne 2004) without abandoning structure and discipline in the classroom.

Another notable finding is that students classified as adaptors instead of innovators produce significant creative outputs that are focused on improving an existing product as opposed to inventing a new product. In fact, the number of elaborated adaptive creative outputs in our sample was higher than the number of simply adapted (not elaborated) creative outputs. As Kirton's (1976) research indicates, it would be a mistake to focus only on revolutionary innovations. Most new product and services are simply adaptations or enhancements of existing market offerings.

Ideally, marketing educators would want to create a classroom environment where both adaptors and innovators can thrive. Innovators appreciate a classroom environment where their "creative ideas are received with an open mind by the instructor," and "when asked to be creative, (they are) free to make (their) own decisions."