

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

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Derek was in Mexico City from 20th to 27th October. He spoke at the British Chamber of Commerce on

Innovation - your source of competitive advantage in a crisis and

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the ninth edition of Innovation Matters for 2009. As ever the UK Autumn weather has been changeable so it was nice to return once again to **Mexico City**. Whilst in Mexico I always try to look for something odd or amusing. A worker busily tapping away on his keyboard whilst having his shoes shined and Batman cycling along the Paseo de La Reforma both brought a smile to my face.

A big thank you to those who made me welcome and made everything happen - you know who you are.

In this month's edition there are three articles. The first ponders on the **pace of Innovation** in developed and developing countries whilst there is one of my favourite creative techniques for you to try - **Working With Aliens**. The third article provides a simple **checklist** to help you understand why **creativity** may not **flourish** in your workplace.

Once again, if you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can find them in our [newsletter archive](#).

As always, your thoughts and feedback are welcome.

sparked interest from a number of sources.
More to come on this later

Are you on Twitter? If so you can [follow Derek Cheshire](#) (only if you want to of course!).

Workshop and programme details can be downloaded from our [downloads](#) page.

Still not taken our survey of barriers to organisational creativity? [Click here](#).

Happy reading,

Derek Cheshire

Innovation - a human race

I often get asked about the pace of innovation in different countries or their ability to innovate. Many such questions come from people whose awareness of global issues is sadly lacking and who represent so called developed countries. The answer I give to them is the same as the one I give to those in less developed countries who are seeking inspiration and motivation for their efforts.

My own personal definition of Innovation is purely based on Human Capital so I choose a metaphor that involves people. Think of Innovation as a race, but with a difference. Some runners have an advantage in that they start further ahead, perhaps because of a time or resource advantage and some start with varying degrees of disadvantage.

Those initially at the front may be well trained and have the latest sparkly gear but they are running almost as fast as they can - improvements being measured only in small amounts. Our runners at the rear will acquire the trappings of leading athletes such as running gear, coaches etc in due course.



There are still two very important factors to consider. How long is the race and how fast can those at the back run? The race we are in is, I believe, a long one with sustainability and resilience to crises being key. So, the longer race will provide greater opportunity for less developed countries to narrow the gap. If their natural talent is greater than developed countries, the race could be close.

My word of warning to those in the lead currently is never underestimate the opposition and look over your shoulder once in a while. My words of encouragement to those at the rear is to believe in your talent.



Creative technique - Working With Aliens

This technique is one of a series in which random stimuli are used and alternative viewpoints are adopted. It works best with well defined problems or where new products or services are being considered.

To start, define the problem or situation as best you can and brief those who are taking part. A group of half a dozen or so is ideal.

Imagine that an alien spaceship has landed on earth and the aliens are looking at your problem or the object that you have described. Next try to imagine what sort of questions the aliens would be asking, what would they be curious about? Many of the checklist techniques can provide some guidance here. A possible list could be:

- What is the purpose of this?
- How does it work?
- Why does it have to be this way?
- Why do these earthlings use these materials?
- Is it useful to me?
- Can I eat it?
- Why does this matter, and to whom?
- Is it worth any money?
- Is there any other value?
- Could it be used for?

These (and other questions) should be asked with childlike innocence i.e. assume no familiarity with earthly concepts.

The questions may throw up some ideas which indicate that the original starting point was flawed. If this is the case then revisit the problem definition stage of the creative problem solving process. If some common themes emerge then record these and use them as random stimuli for further excursions or use a form of association to group some of themes to see if they suggest further options, choices or ideas.

Can Creativity flourish in your working environment?

Here are some golden rules that you can use as a checklist to see if a) creativity could flourish if you are looking to embrace it or b) to find out why your best efforts at being creative are failing dismally.

Here are some rules for dealing with things on a personal level:

- Mindsets must change, even if the changes are small
- Explore the 'givens', the problem boundaries
- Look at the broad picture AND details
- Value play
- Build up, say 'yes and' not 'yes but'
- Learn to live with ambiguity
- Don't force creativity on people, nurture what is there
- Involve other people
- Be receptive, watch and listen
- Know what your objectives are
- Cycle often, close late - don't just plump for the quickest option
- Manage the process, if you don't it will be a playground

... and here are some things from the wider environment:

- Whatever you do must be fun!



- Manage interpersonal differences, they will come to the fore
- Manage status differences, these will appear too
- Manage expectations, be realistic but have goals
- Inhibition and risk need to be minimised, people need to feel comfortable
- Minimise group and critical pressure, use the first checklist to help here
- Ban distractions, ban laptops and mobile phones for a day if necessary
- Logistics, pay attention to small things such as decor, refreshments etc

Pay attention to the above and you have a good chance of succeeding. Now all you need to know is WHAT to do!

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