

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

creative4business

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Tip: Allow yourself to think weird thoughts. Strange combinations of ideas can often lead to something useful.

Solar powered torches and wind up radios are not immediately obvious as exciting new products and neither are cardboard tents, edible clothing or even phones not connected to a fixed telephone line (older readers only!).

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the November edition of **Innovation Matters**. This month the emphasis has shifted slightly in favour of **Business Creativity** rather than **Innovation**. I hope that you will enjoy the read just as much.

In the first article I pose the question, 'do you really get creativity?'. Do you sing its praises because it is fashionable or do you really understand it and the benefits it could bring? This article poses some searching questions for you.

Article two explains why using creativity is not (and can not) be an efficient process if we want to get the maximum benefits in terms of ideas. Efficiency can reduce idea flow and also create unwanted barriers. See what you can do to avoid this.

If you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can find them all at www.creative4business.co.uk/archives.html.

Happy reading,

Derek Cheshire



Creativity - Do You Really Get It?

You like creative ideas, do you not? After all you are reading this newsletter. I expect if you were to ask friends and colleagues, you would discover that they like creative ideas too. At least that is what they would say as it is expected of us in this day and age. Most people say that they like creative ideas and then convince themselves that it is true.

The problem is that despite what they say, many people do not like creative ideas. When put under pressure in the workplace their feelings become more pronounced. It seems that the ambiguity and uncertainty cause people to feel unsafe and hence creative ideas are banished.



This has implications for innovation and in particular idea generation processes. When directed to generate creative ideas, participants may subconsciously reject them in favour of safer and more seemingly practical ideas. This could lead to incremental rather than radical improvements despite our best intentions.

So how come people have such negative feelings about creative ideas? When promoting or sponsoring a new idea, people can experience failure, visions of risk, rejection or humiliation when presenting the idea to others, and uncertainty about when their idea will ever become reality. Uncertainty is something that many of us will strive strongly to reduce. Hence, people can have negative associations with novelty and hence creative ideas.

Failure, risk and rejection are strong emotions but in a recession when people are worried about their jobs, stressed over long hours or wondering how they will manage their social lives, it is not surprising that any action that could lead to failure, risk and rejection would be considered synonymous with "pain"!

If uncertainty makes creative ideas seem less acceptable then in times of uncertainty you will encounter increased anti creative feelings which is exactly the opposite of what our organisations need right now. This will severely hinder any innovation process. Another undesirable side effect is the way in which these negative feelings impact on self censorship. Before anyone suggests an idea in a brainstorming session, submits it to an idea management system or proposes it to their manager, they need to make a decision in their own mind whether to voice the idea or keep it to themselves. The logical assumption from our discussion so far is that people will censor their ideas even more. So how do we get the great ideas that help us through the recession?

The big question is how can we make creative ideas (or the thought of them) more attractive in the eyes of our colleagues and bosses? One way we can do this is to remove anxiety over rejection. To do this we can ensure people that we are generating multiple ideas, all of which will have merits, and one or more may be implemented. This prevents people from holding back on the basis that their idea is not good enough to be 'the one'. Also building techniques may help here so that rather than a group continuously generating multiple ideas, they can help to build one really good and well formed idea.

In addition, reducing the fear of creativity requires that you reduce the perceived risk of failure and rejection. It is no coincidence that firms like Apple and Google, where the leaders are truly enthusiastic about creative idea, have the most success with creativity. Likewise, innovative start-ups, led by creative founders, often boast highly creative teams in their early years. In other words, if your CEO does not

simply espouse the importance of innovation, but goes out on a limb themselves with creative ideas, it will doubtless make people below them feel less frightened of creative ideas.

Creating an environment where having your idea rejected is a positive thing would doubtless be great. But this is more easily said than done. Other actions associated with a culture of innovation are likewise likely to make people more comfortable with creative ideas.

Distancing people from a problem can result in a higher level of creativity since this is reducing the amount of censorship. This could be via abstraction, making a problem less concrete, or taking people physically away from the problem. One such way of achieving this is to change perspective by pretending to be outside your organisation, perhaps a competitor. For instance, "what could your competitor do that would keep you awake at night with worry?" or "What is the most threatening new product idea your competitors might put on the market?".

If people have difficulty gaining acceptance for creative ideas especially when more practical and unoriginal options are at hand, we may need to shift our efforts from identifying how to generate more creative ideas to identifying how to help innovative institutions recognise and accept creativity.



Creativity - Why It Pays To Be Inefficient

This seems an odd thing to be calling for, especially when trying to sell the idea of creativity to businesses. Generating ideas for a purpose consists of divergent and convergent phases but our brains cannot handle divergence and convergence simultaneously without exploding!!

Have you ever tried sitting in a group brainstorming to solve just one problem. It probably failed, partly because you selected the wrong technique but also because you were trying to do 2 things at once. Separating these phases will help but will introduce inefficiency. You will

generate many more ideas (good) but you may have to spend more time sorting them out (not so good).

We also tend to build a framework around our idea generation sessions, partly because we wish them to be focused. But these restrictions on the problem/process will also have an effect on ideas and solutions generated. If you lead people down a particular path, do not be surprised if their ideas only reflect the scenery observed from the path! People must be allowed to wander off piste a little.

There is also pressure to jump from the normal state of creating relatively practical ideas to creating wacky ideas. If this is what you need to do then you will need to build up to it. People need a little practice in the techniques that they use and also some time to realise that they have permission to leave normality behind. For this reason I find that a 2 day session is better than 1, the most useful being day 2, and day 1 almost being a warm up.

To obtain maximum inefficiency:

- Allow time for distinct divergent and convergent phases
- Ensure suitably provocative stimuli
- Create an appropriate idea management system
- Use an experienced facilitator

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