

Introduction

New ideas are essential for industry, they are the lifeblood of successful organisations. Creative and innovative thinking, the means by which ideas are born and nurtured, are not products of clearly defined steps, they can be encouraged in various ways.

We all have new ideas but really good, creative new ideas vary in quality and frequency. A good idea can be classed as one that a critical mass of people consider to be both useful and original. Those people who have a high rate of excellent ideas are the true creative thinkers. Most creative thinkers can be placed on a scale relative to their quality and quantity of ideas.

High	A High productivity and few quality ideas	C Many quality ideas in high quality
	B Not very productive and not producing many 'pearls'	D Many quality ideas with low productivity
	Low	High

QUALITY OF IDEAS

Really good managers (and all successful businesses have them) are capable of having, or recognising, good ideas and using them to make things happen in a new way: of translating ideas into useful, practicable and commercial products, services or systems.

Innovation (to bring in or introduce something new – a new idea, method or device) draws together new ideas *and* their implementation, whereas creativity is the having of new ideas which, in an organisation, are generated or spotted by individuals or teams.

It is important for all managers and leaders to:

- understand creativity and the creative processes
- eliminate impediments to creativity and creative thinking
- widen their field of view as well as that of their staff
- build on ideas and not merely criticise them
- tolerate doubts and uncertainties
- adopt a creative attitude in listening, observing and reading
- be confident in your own creative skills
- make time to think
- participate creatively as a leader, manager or member of a team
- use teams to innovate effectively
- manage innovation in your business.

How far you develop your and your teams' creative abilities is largely up to you. Your motivation to succeed will dictate how far you exert yourself to learn all you can about the art of being creative and innovative. Personal experience is a

great way to learn once you understand the basic principles and thought processes.

Use the principles set out in this book to build your mind and encourage the right mind set to become more creative and innovative. The benefits this book can bring to you include:

- Developing your understanding of the creative process
- Overcoming the barriers to having new ideas and creative thoughts
- Enlarging your parameters of vision and information
- Building on your ideas as well as criticising them when relevant
- Increasing your tolerance for uncertainty and doubt
- Reading, listening and absorbing information around you with a creative mind
- Making you aware of having time to think
- Giving you confidence in yourself to be creative
- Encouraging you to be a more effective manager or leader to build creative teams
- Managing innovation within your organisation for the most successful outcomes.

Remember, the future of our civilisation depends on the creative flair and innovative genius of people like you.

This book is divided into two parts: **Part one: creative thinking** looks at obstacles to creativity and ways to improve it personally and organisationally; and **Part two: innovation** details how best to manage creativity and encourage innovation successfully in business.

**PART
ONE**

Creative thinking

The creative process

Obstacles which inhibit creativity

Developing creativity

Decision-making and the creative thinker

**Key elements of creative thinking and
decision-making**

**Other useful approaches to creative
thinking and decision-making**

**Using creative thinking to evaluate
the options**

Part one: Creative thinking

The creative process

Creativity can be improved by remembering that the creative process has four main stages and each needs to be properly 'worked':

- 1 **Preparation:** information gathering, analysis and solution exploration.
- 2 **Incubation:** letting the mind work to continue the process sub-consciously.
- 3 **Illumination:** inspiration – which can come when the individual is not necessarily thinking about the problem but is in a relaxed frame of mind.
- 4 **Verification:** testing ideas, solution, hunches, insights for applicability.

Obstacles which inhibit creativity

- 1 **Negativity in individuals and in teams:** focusing on the negative aspects of a problem as opposed to using your energy to seek opportunities for a solution.
- 2 **Fear of failure:** a fear of appearing foolish in front of colleagues.
- 3 **Lack of quality thinking time and experiences to draw from:** being over-stressed can make it difficult to think objectively and inhibits the natural thinking process.

- 4 **Over-conformance with rules and regulations, a lack of freedom to develop:** too many rules can encourage mental laziness.
- 5 **Making assumptions that are not necessarily true:** failing to identify the assumptions you are making will inhibit the process of developing new ideas.
- 6 **Applying too much logic and not listening to the depth mind:** too much logic excludes imagination, intuition and synthesis from your thought process.
- 7 **Thinking you are not creative:** the biggest barrier of all!

The non-creative person

These obstacles can be seen in the profile of the non-creative person; someone who is:

- not able to think positively about problems (and does not see them as opportunities)
- too busy or stressed to think objectively or at all
- very self-critical
- timid in putting forward a new idea (fearing ridicule)
- viewed as a conformist by friends/colleagues
- prone to apply logic as a first and last resort
- sceptical that many people are capable of being creative
- unable to think laterally
- uninspired even when confronted with a new idea.

On the other hand, creativity can be encouraged in people (including oneself) by exploring some of the qualities and characteristics of creative thinkers and the activities and steps that can be undertaken to improve the processes involved.

Developing creativity

To be creative an individual should:

1 Think beyond the invisible frameworks that surround problems and situations.

Think 'outside of the box'. Be open to new observations and thoughts, however ridiculous they may seem at first. We tend to see what we expect to be there but if we opened our minds beyond the 'normal' we would be more observant, objective and creative in our thoughts. Considering a new starting point and perspective when looking for a solution can be very inspiring. Approaching the problem from a different angle can encourage new ideas. Creative thinking should be an adventure into the unknown.

2 Recognise when assumptions are being made and challenge them.

Never assume anything as you are making the supposition that it is correct or true. Preconceptions are the ideas you have before you gain actual knowledge. Assumptions and preconceptions are often unwarranted and misleading, and are great blockers to creative thinking. Challenging assumptions can open up a whole new creative process.

3 Spot blinkered thinking and widen the field of vision (to draw on the experiences of other individuals and businesses).

It is very easy to only ‘think within the box’ when you are faced with a problem but if you widen your parameters the answers may be closer than you think. Technologies and practices in industries other than your own may spark an idea, leading to a solution. Travel can widen your horizons and your span of relevance and open up all sorts of new avenues for thought.

4 Develop and adapt ideas from more than one source.

As humans we cannot make something out of nothing, our minds need something to work on, so we combine ideas and elements which are already in existence, to create new ideas and products. The creative mind can see possibilities, bonds and connections between various elements which others cannot see.

5 Practice serendipity (finding valuable and agreeable things when not particularly seeking them) – having a wide attention span and range of interests is important.

When we’re involved in trying to solve a problem we tend to have a narrow focus but we should always be open and aware of the unexpected. What may seem irrelevant at first could later become significant in creative thinking. It may take a while, perhaps weeks, months or even years, which is why the creative thinker should retain as much information and as many experiences as possible. It’s these experiences that may be the

trigger to a creative thought which might just solve a difficult problem.

6 ‘Transfer technology’ from one field to another.

Keep an open mind when faced with a problem and look outside of your own situation. Often other departments, organisations and industries can give you the inspiration to develop ideas to solve your challenges. The most successful creative thinkers have knowledge about more than one field and often make their names appear in quite a different sphere than they are normally associated with.

7 Be open and prepared to use chance or unpredictable things and events to your advantage.

Have a wide focus of attention and develop your powers of observation to make use of the chance happenings you come across in your life. Use your experience to interpret these things as something useful without having preconceptions. You may have to invest a lot of time exposing yourself to chance experiences but they will give you a good reference base for future creativity.

8 Explore thought processes and the key elements of the mind at work in analysing, valuing and synthesising.

Creative thinking cannot really be broken down into a specific process or system. The very nature of creativity can mean it is a disorderly process. However, we usually begin by analysing the problem in hand and then playing around with restructuring it (synthesising). Next we set about using our imaginations and valuing the thoughts we have in relation to a possible solution. We should be

aware of these thought processes and use them to our advantage, not let them get in the way of being creative.

9 Use his/her 'depth' mind (the unconscious mind) for example by sleeping on a problem to generate creative solutions and ideas.

The value of 'sleeping on a problem' has been long known. Apart from actually dreaming of a solution, the time in bed before you sleep is very relaxing and allows ideas to be generated. Dreams allow you mind a total freedom to make connections you would not normally consider. Although this may not give you the exact answer it could be enough to direct your waking thoughts in the right direction. You should note down your dream thoughts as soon as you wake so they are not lost.

The brain is capable of analysing information that you may not even realise you have absorbed. By switching off your conscious thinking you allow your depth mind to begin analysing, valuing and synthesising your inner most knowledge. You cannot control this type of inspiration but you should stay alert and expectant, so you are aware when it shows itself.

10 Note down thoughts/ideas that apparently drop into the mind unsolicited so that they are not forgotten.

Keeping a notebook is a good way of recording materials for your future use. Make notes of conversations (real or from TV or radio), quotations from articles or books and observations and thoughts. Your instinct will tell you what may be relevant to future problem solving and creative thinking. There is no need to be too systematic as when you look back through your notes you will

make connections between points which you didn't initially see.

11 Use analogy (to improve imaginative thinking) to find 'models' or solutions in 'nature', in existing products, services and/or in other organisations – not always reinventing the wheel.

Nature holds many answers to our problems. We have the challenge of realising them and applying what we discover to our individual situation. Other models can be found in existing products and organisations but we must be aware not to copy them directly as this could lead to more problems. We should keep an open mind and be very observant when looking at our surroundings and use what we see to our advantage.

12 Try to sometimes make the strange familiar and the familiar strange to spark new ideas.

Creative thinking is the search for something new. Sometimes that something new can be found within the familiar. By making the familiar strange you begin to look at it differently and this can lead to many creative thoughts. The reverse is also true. By becoming more familiar with the strange you open your mind to exploring new avenues you may not have realised existed. Both these processes can lead the creative thinker to new ideas.