

SERIOUS CREATIVITY

Using the Power of Lateral Thinking to Create New Ideas

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MAIN IDEA

As competition intensifies, creativity is increasingly becoming the key for any company to generate added value out of its existing resources and assets.

Many people assume creativity is a mystical talent, that you have to be a bit strange to be truly creative or that you are either creative or you're not. In reality, however, lateral thinking is a creative thinking style that can be learned and practiced by anyone. There are systematic processes, tools and techniques of creative thinking that can be incorporated into any person's normal way of approaching any situation.

Serious creativity is a rational and logical approach to creative thinking. The basic lateral thinking tools and techniques can be applied to generate new ideas. The successful individuals and companies of the future will need to think differently from their competition. Serious creative thinking can and does generate a sustainable competitive advantage.

CREATIVE THINKING TOOLS & TECHNIQUES

1. THE SIX THINKING HATS

A different style of thinking is used for each hat colour.

White conveys information, red expresses feelings, black urges caution, yellow is optimistic, green is creative and blue organizes.

2. FOCUS

Pick out one specific area everyone just takes as a given and look for a creative idea about improving that area.

3. THE SEARCH FOR CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES

Ask: Is there another way of doing this? What are the available alternatives? What can be done differently in this situation?

4. PROVOCATIONS

A serious effort to think outside the established envelope by using a deliberate provoking operation, that is, a po.

5. THE CONCEPT FAN

The objective is broken down into broad directions, directions are broken down into concepts, concepts are broken down into ideas.

6. THE RANDOM INPUT

A totally random word is introduced. The brain is then left to determine a new link between the random word and the concept.

7. CONCEPTS

Look at the concepts behind an existing successful business and ask whether these same concepts can be applied somewhere else.

8. MOVEMENT

Means suspending judgement about a creative idea and taking that idea to its logical conclusion before making any judgement.

9. THE CREATIVE PAUSE

Interrupt your normal pattern or routine to stop and consider whether there isn't another better way to do the same thing.

10. THE STRATAL

A creativity sensitizing technique. A number of unconnected statements which taken together can encourage creativity.

11. THE CREATIVE CHALLENGE

Ask: Why is this done this way? Does it have to be done this way? Are there any other ways which might be better.

12. THE FILAMENT TECHNIQUE

List five normal requirements, list every possible way to fill each requirement, try to develop a creative idea using a new combination of some of the ways to fill each requirement.

1. THE NEED FOR CREATIVE THINKING

Main Idea

Serious creativity is founded on the basis that lateral or creative thinking is a deliberate systematic technique for developing logical solutions to common business situations which have never been tried before.

Supporting Ideas

Creative thinking is a unique type of information handling. Some people have a preconception that being creative means being totally devoid of structure or social conventions, and that a creative person is out of step with the rest of society in order to generate truly creative concepts.

By contrast, serious creativity proposes that lateral thinking techniques are a valid, systematic approach to business challenges. Creative thinking can exist without the need for a mad scientist or rogue element aspect.

Much of the world can be viewed as a self organizing information system. That is, most people use the same patterns over and over. The logic of creativity is the logic of these patterning systems. The tools of creative thinking are designed to help a person be systematically creative by organizing new patterns of logic.

Lateral thinking (which is another term for creative thinking) offers opportunity, competitive advantage and benefits.

Creativity uses the concept of a hypothesis - an initial guess or speculation which must then be evaluated against available data to determine its usefulness and applicability. A hypothesis opens up possibilities, but must not be taken as the only correct pattern or the hypothesis limits other creative possibilities.

Sources of creativity include:

1. Innocence
If someone doesn't know the standard approach, they may come up with a fresh approach that is much better.
2. Experience
Taking advantage of what is known to work and adding a few extra features. This source of creativity builds on and repeats past successes.
3. Motivation
Generating creative ideas in a field in which everyone is perfectly happy with the status quo, can be a source of unexpected creativity.
4. Tuned Judgement
A person with tuned judgement recognizes the potential of a project at a very early stage and becomes involved, adding whatever is needed to extract the maximum possible benefit from that project.
5. Chance, Accident Or By Mistake
These events take us outside the boundaries in which we normally work, and can result in an entirely new (and often better) line of reasoning.
6. Lateral Thinking
Using the systematic techniques and tools of lateral thinking, a logical and consistent source of new creative ideas can be tapped into.

Lateral thinking is based on cutting across established patterns in a self organizing information system. Normal lines of thought focus on what is right or wrong, whereas lateral thinking is concerned with all possibilities and potential solutions.

The practical uses of creative thinking are:

1. Improvement
Creative thinking can be applied to existing systems with the hope of making an improvement or finding a better, more efficient way to achieve anything.
2. Problem Solving
Creative thinking can be used to provide a solution in any area in which conventional thinking fails. Or to provide an alternative solution offering enhanced benefits over the traditional approach.
3. Adding Or Creating New Value
Business success is heavily dependant on using core assets to add or create new business value. Efficiency provides the baseline. Additional value can then only be created by adding new products or services, or by utilizing unused assets. Creative thinking can play a part in the development of these new products and services.
4. The Future
Creative thinking can be used to forecast future business scenarios, and to generate alternative courses of action which may produce improved results. Creative thinking leads to new business structure designs which can then be analyzed with available information and logic to determine viability.
5. Motivation
Creativity is a strong business motivator because it generates tremendous enthusiasm and energy. High levels of synergy can be created when people are optimistic about the future benefits of any new business initiative.

Key Thoughts

"The simplest way to describe lateral thinking is to say: You cannot dig a hole in a different place by digging the same hole deeper. Lateral thinking is about searching for different approaches and different ways of looking at things."

— Edward de Bono

"Over the last ten years business has been involved in three major games. There was the restructuring game, which included acquisitions, leveraged buy-outs, de-mergers and so on. Bankers prospered, as did a few of the new structures.

Then there was cost-cutting, a game that is still running. If you could cut costs, then your balance sheet looked much better. Cutting costs is something into which you can get your teeth. You can see targets and measure achievement. Profits improve. But there comes a time when all the fat is gone and further cuts remove the muscle.

The latest game has been quality (and customer service). This is a highly commendable game that should have a great need for creative thinking.

But what happens if you have a lean and competent organization? What is this lean and competent organization going to do? What happens if your competitors are just as lean and competent as you and your cost effectiveness is no longer a unique advantage? The more able senior executives know that creativity is now the main hope. Even the economies of Japan and Germany, which have rightly placed so much emphasis on quality and excellence, are now beginning to show great interest in creativity."

— Edward de Bono

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