

CREATING CREATIVITY

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Creativity, creative problem solving and innovation are fast becoming important competitive weapons in business. Creativity should be a part of everyday life in the personal as well as the corporate environment and not simply a set of management tools. Creativity leads to a pervading sense of optimism. By embracing creativity people learn to welcome stimuli and recognise and pre-empt opportunities. In an environment where information is freely available and resources are becoming homogenous one of the few ways an organisation can truly differentiate is through the intangible wealth produced by its creative talent. This research shows that management can lead employees through creative techniques and be amazed at the innovations they produce.

Key phrases: Creativity, methods of creativity, managing creativity

1 INTRODUCTION

It has been said that nothing is more dangerous than an idea when it is the only one that you have. Thus it is clear that a primary impact of creativity is to create a flow of ideas, thoughts and innovations that invariably lead to differentiation and advantages in the marketplace. According to Beagrie (2006:35), “creativity is the lifeblood of any organisation. It leads to innovation which in turn leads to competitive edge.”

According to Wikipedia (n.d.), “creativity is a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or new associations between existing ideas or concepts. From a scientific point of view, the products of creative thought are usually considered to have both originality and appropriateness. An alternative, more everyday conception of creativity is that it is simply the act of making something new.”

The prime reason for innovation in an organisation is to enhance competitiveness through the creation of efficiencies. Simply put, organisations innovate in order to generate products and services which customers want to buy at price levels that maintain or improve competitive positions (Dodgson, David & Ammon 2005:12). Innovation is not an end in itself, it is a means to an end.

“The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go” – Dr. Seuss

2 SO WHY BOTHER BEING CREATIVE?

In its simplest form, creativity is doing something “new and different that creates benefit”. Without creativity mankind would still be scavenging for food, with no tools to make clothes or to kill animals for meat. Those facilities central to our lives such as air travel, the internet and credit cards would be just distant dreams, as would the most significant advances in health care, education and agriculture, (Berez-Brown 2006:30).

One could also say that without creativity individuals tend to gravitate towards the norms of society, moving through the motions of going to schools, getting jobs, having 2.4 children and starting every year with a resolution that the next year will somehow be different or better. Creativity breaks us out of the norms and enables us to be special in our private and work lives.

Berez-Brown (2006:30) believes that fun has taken a back seat in the workplace, often a result of bad press, as shown by the statement “for some strange reason there is a widely held belief that being professional means being serious.” However, nothing could be further from the truth, as by being playful, you encourage self-expression and open up your creative energy.

3 DO YOU NEED CREATIVITY?

If you answer yes to any of the following questions then you need more creativity!

- Are you stuck, dissatisfied or bored?
- Are you sure that you could be more?
- Are you doing the same things day in and day out?
- Having the same conversations with the same people?
- Do your relationships feel stuck in a rut?
- Do you feel you are not quite being yourself?
- Do you get depressed on Sunday nights at the thought of Monday mornings?
- Do you run away from risk?

Source: Berez-Brown (2006) and Beagrie (2006)

4 SO DO WE ALL HAVE THIS CREATIVITY THING?

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist when he grows up.” – Pablo Picasso

Is creativity inherent or is it something we can all learn and develop over time? According to Williams (2000) creativity is considered an inherent characteristic, more prominent in some than others. In other words, creativity is not something we can learn, and you are either born with it or you're not. Williams (2000) suggests that although it is inherent, everybody has some level of creative energy and it is simply lying dormant within us... it needs to be awakened. Even though Williams (2000) states creativity is inherent, she admits that her train of thought goes against the grain of most modern literature that suggests creativity can be taught and learned.

Berez-Brown (2006:38) states that as a human being we are naturally creative, although these creative instincts tend to become oppressed as we grow older. The key, then, becomes finding ways to unlock these suppressed creative instincts rather than learning how to *be* creative. Each of us has more or less the same ability to create, because we are all born the same natural ability. Very often we need a mental workout to stretch and awaken our creative muscles, (Berez-Brown 2006:38-41).

Beagrie (2006:35) suggests that everyone has the capacity to come up with good ideas, but we must first be prepared to take a step into the unknown. Beagrie (2006:35) then goes on to recommend five steps people can follow to start increasing their creative energy;

- 1 Challenge the normal rules of business
- 2 Look for ideas in both the familiar and unfamiliar.
- 3 Get out of the office more.
- 4 Learn to tell compelling stories to sell your ideas.
- 5 Accept that new ideas will mean change.

Neethling and Rutherford (2005:9) state that if we were to take a moment to watch small children play you will notice their curiosity and seek for knowledge and new possibilities in the simplest of things. It seems we are all born with the natural ability

to be creative, but it has taken many centuries to be discovered and its significance to be understood.

5 CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

To get any business value out of creativity, ideas need to be centred around creating and enhancing opportunity. Opportunities typically stem from two areas, namely: from within you; or from the universe. According to Timmons & Spinelli (2004:87) creative thinking plays an important role in recognising opportunities. It is imperative to develop a heightened sense of awareness of oneself and of the universe, such that opportunities, often unnoticed, will become clear and noticed. In essence, it is crucial to become receptive to all opportunities the universe puts your way.

Like any other business tool, the most effective route to developing creativity and innovation in the workplace is to apply a systematic process of development. Whilst creativity naturally implies a disregard for systems, it is through a process that an individual's creativity is enhanced.

6 THE CREATIVITY PROCESS

There are many different creative processes, however the end result is usually relatively similar. A simplistic, yet effective process is that devised by ?What If! – one of the world's largest independent innovation company (Berez-Brown 2006). This process has three interlinked components, namely: Insight; Ideas; and Impact. It is also important to note that this process can be applied to almost any situation and/or opportunity.

Insight means first becoming clear about what your opportunities may be. Ideas means thinking about how to make these opportunities work for you. Impact is the action phase and involves doing something about your ideas.

Simply put: insight + ideas + impact = shiny prospects

6.1 Insight

In becoming clear about what your opportunities may be, there are two starting points. Either the opportunity is well defined, or it may require further exploration and problem definition. A word of caution, however, is to always invest time in exploring an opportunity, no matter how clear or well defined it may appear. The simple reason

for this is that things are not always as they seem. Often people invent fabulous solutions to the wrong problem.

By better understanding the opportunity, it is evident that you increase the chances of successfully capitalising on the said opportunity.

6.2 Ideas

There is typically confusion regarding the difference between thoughts and ideas. Simply, thoughts are abstract concepts of a desired situation, whereas ideas are the tangible and the achievable. Thus the key difference between thoughts and ideas is that you can do an idea.

A thought: "The sea is great for relaxation"

An idea: "On Saturday we'll rent a car, drive to Ballito and play in the surf!"

The ?What If! Method for converting thoughts into tangible, achievable ideas is to ask questions along the lines of:

- What can I do with that?
- So what could that look like?
- So how might that work?

Thus, by asking these kinds of questions, your thoughts on the opportunity can be converted into actionable ideas that could lead to competitive advantage. Robinson & Schroeder (2006:48) believe small ideas are often the best sources of big ideas. Even the biggest ideas often begin as a sequence of relatively small ones.

6.3 Impact

You have identified your opportunities, and played with some ideas to make the most of it. It is now time to take action. There are two stages that ?What If! recommends, namely;

- 1 Decide which factor has the highest potential for success – i.e. excitement, passion, and magic.
- 2 Make it happen.

A common mistake is that many people avoid implementing their decisions because of the fear of failure. A major selling point in implementing creativity in the workplace

is that there is no right or wrong. Since creativity is by definition the creation of something new there will naturally be a risk involved as it is impossible to predict precisely what will happen.

Nobody can predict the future accurately every time; otherwise we would all be living at the horse races. However, intuition can at times give us useful information, which relates back to being aware of yourself and your state.

The entire creative process is very much a personal and reflective journey, emphasising the need to be consciously aware of the effect of your subconscious on your decision-making abilities. When people describe intuition and how it manifests they are describing changes in state. Your state is how you are at any given moment.

7 EVALUATE YOUR STATE OF MIND

It's no secret that our brains have an incredible capacity to store information. This capacity is split into the conscious and subconscious, with both operating simultaneously. Our conscious brain represents thinking we are aware of and makes up a small portion of our total brain. Our subconscious, on the other hand, is beneath our conscious understanding and processes complex information and arrives at conclusions without you even knowing it.

For example, the human brain has the potential to remember every car number plate seen by the eyes, even those you have driven past in one's life.

Unfortunately we cannot understand the information our subconscious processes, but it often manifests through intuition, gut feelings and changes in our state. Your state of being is how you are at any given moment. Examples of states are;

- It just felt right.
- I went with my gut feeling.
- My hair stood on end.

Berez-Brown (2006:68) recommends developing an awareness of your current state such that you become aware of what your subconscious is attempting to convey. Your state is considered to be made up of the following categories;

7.1 Physical

Your physical state relates to the way your body feels, such as energetic, stressed or comfortable. The way you feel can be considered a good indication of what your subconscious is trying to communicate.

7.2 Mental

This represents your collection of thoughts. It is typically when your mind is clear that you are receptive to new ideas as opposed to viewing a solution in one particular way.

7.3 Emotional

Emotion relates to how you feel. Emotions and your subconscious are closely linked and very often emotions have physical manifestations. For example, crying when you are sad.

7.4 Spiritual

A common misconception is that spirituality implies religion, when in fact it relates to your connection to yourself, others and the universe. Though open to debate, Berez-Brown (2006:70) postulates that when an individual with high spirituality usually finds himself “in a much more positive, creative state, open to possibility and opportunity, and sensitive to stimuli”.

It is clear that the categories of state are interdependent. Our state is constantly changing due to both the dynamic environment as well as your perception of this environment. By becoming aware of what state you find yourself in you are more able to notice when your conscious and/or subconscious has discovered something interesting.

8 THE POWER WITHIN

“Processes do not create energy, people do” – Berez-Brown (2006:76).

The aforementioned process is just that... a process. It is merely a tool to enhance your creative thinking. Energy is required for change, and no process can provide this energy, it must come from you. An excellent way to tap into your creative energy is to be a little playful. Most children are creative and playful for the simple reason that they have no “life is serious” barriers. If you observe a child playing you will

notice that they are totally absorbed in what they are doing, they have no concept of time and forget everything else. As adults we can have the same experience if we are playful, as Berez-Brown (2006:86) suggests, “It’s almost impossible to make judgements when you’re being playful – as by definition it’s a spontaneous activity”. Be curious, be playful and be a child, it’s when you are most creative.

Children need to be creative and stay that way. The people with the strongest influence are often the parents or care-givers. Making sure this wonderful gift is encouraged, nurtured and grown is one of the most important tasks of these care-givers (Neethling and Rutherford 2005:87).

Coetzee (2005:33) states that thinking creatively creates a chain reaction in your brain, regardless of how small it may be. This reaction connects other thoughts and compounds to create grander and bigger ideas. Again, even small ideas are important and very often lead to bigger things if we let them.

“We keep moving forward, opening new doors, and doing new things, because we are curious and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths.” – Walt Disney

9 TECHNIQUES TO ENHANCE CREATIVITY

9.1 A ‘n’ Q

A ‘n’ Q is a technique to recognise dormant ideas. This is done by creating ideas we can react to. This technique is particularly useful when an opportunity is vague. By raising consciousness about the opportunity and relating it to tangible solutions we then have something to work with. A ‘n’ Q can be used for personal development and growth as well as generating new business ideas.

The essence of the A ‘n’ Q technique is as follows;

- You develop loads of ideas rather than just thoughts (it is similar to brainstorming in this regard). Write each idea on a Post-it.
- Draw a circle on a large piece of paper and place each idea in relation to the circle, with the centre of the circle representing ideas that are feasible and productive. Ideas on the edge have potential but require further exploration, while those outside the circle are impractical and redundant, but still worth noting.
- Assess why you put each Post-it where it is and write each reason on the Post-it. This provides information about constraints, rules and visions of success.

Like brainstorming, it is important to push the boundaries of what is acceptable, and avoid judging ideas before they are discussed. This is because an idea, no matter how wild, often spawns other, more practical solutions. Every time someone asks “why?” you learn more about the idea and its value.

9.2 Go visual

This technique is one which allows you to capture opportunities and issues without using words. Drawings, paintings, collages and other visuals are acceptable. Creating visuals allows you to articulate ideas in a very different manner to the literary ways we are used to. Thinking visually rather than literally provides us with more creative space to interpret the issue and develop solutions. Words have specific and shared meanings, whilst visuals will be interpreted by everybody in a different way. When used in a group situation visualising solutions can enrich the perceptions and creative ability of everyone in the group.

How do you do it?

- Get a big piece of paper and let your mind go free. Remember it's not about being artistic, but rather about having fun and expressing your thoughts.
- You can make sense of it at the end. Again, nobody should be judgmental so you have a licence to create.
- Ask yourself these questions after you have finished with your visuals. What ideas does it give you? How else can you interpret it? If you turn it upside down is it still relevant? What does it make you think?

Creating visuals does not necessarily mean drawing with an HB pencil. You can tear out pictures from a magazine, draw big, use finger paints or any other techniques that suite you. A crucial element of this technique is that it allows you to have fun and connect with your inner child. As mentioned above, this will open the floodgates to innovation.

9.3 Bag of tricks

This exercise allows you to apply the concept of random links. Any stimulus can provide impetus for ideas. Random links is concerned with viewing seemingly arbitrary events, objects, places and people as a stimulus for creative thought and letting your mind wander from the starting point of these stimuli. As with the above techniques, this one is only effective if you are playful.

How to do it;

- Ask a friend or colleague to fill a bag with completely random objects, for example binoculars, a rubber duck or an old Michael Jackson record.
- Focus on your issue, pull out an object at random and explore it. Let your mind wander and see what ideas it gives you.
- Repeat the process until either you have enough ideas or you have used every item in the bag.

Bag of tricks is particularly useful when you are short on time to develop ideas, and naturally creates a playful energy. This makes it easier to get more serious people involved in becoming playful and creative. Obviously an ideas generated must be linked to your issue for this technique to really be worth something.

10 GETTING REAL

Many people avoid implementing their ideas for fear of failure or rejection. Sometimes the excuses people make for not implementing an idea are even more creative than the original ideas themselves. Some decisions make people feel uncomfortable whilst others feel natural and necessary. Either way you must experiment with solutions and be in the right state.

Many times logic has its place in decision making, such as writing lists of pros and cons. But, sometimes it is a good idea to take a page out of Takashi Hashiyama's book. As president of Masspro Denkoh Corporation he had a problem deciding which auction house should sell a \$10 million art collection, and opted to turn away from logic. Representatives from Sotheby's and Christie's were invited to duel for the collection by playing rock, paper, scissors. As it turned out Christie's won with scissors over Sotheby's paper. Mr. Hashiyama later told the New York Times, "I sometimes use such methods when I cannot make a decision".

Making things real is vital when developing solutions to a problem. Writing down, or explaining an idea to a friend or colleague only allows them to grasp the idea on an intellectual level, through their own perceptual filters. Bringing an idea to life by drawing it, making a film about it, or explaining it through a visualisation allows the person to engage with it in a complete fashion, as the idea becomes a sensory experience. In this way, you get a much fuller reaction to the idea and its strengths and weaknesses become more evident.

10.1 Mind the gap

Before any idea can be made real the gap between the dream and reality must be filled. It is important to undertake some research which, although not extensive, should provide movement either towards or away from the idea or solution. This research can be as simple as;

- An hour or two on the internet,
- Reading books on the subject,
- Asking for expert advice, or
- Looking to similar situations for information.

10.2 How to get real

- Make the decision – the primary cause of failures is not making any decision at all.
- Visualise the changes that will happen as a result of the decision.
- Take note of how you feel about the decision and what state this leaves you in.
- After 7 days review your decision, lessons learned and whether or not it is still the best course of action. (In business, this time frame will be variable depending on the importance and impact of your decision). If your decision remains the same then take steps towards implementation.
- If your decision changes then repeat the exercise for an alternative option.

You can always rely on the universe. Assign two possibilities to heads or tails of a coin. Let's say you were going to watch a movie and your choice is between Superman and Pirates of the Caribbean. Heads you watch Superman, tails you'll see Pirates of the Caribbean. You flip the coin and it lands on heads – Superman. Your first reaction may be negative. Once the decision has been made real we tend to realise what it is that we really want. In this case you subconsciously wanted to watch Pirates of the Caribbean more, but having been "told" to see Superman made you aware of this fact.

"Think you can, think you can't: either way you're right" – Henry Ford

11 CLOSURE

“Everyone who has taken a shower has had an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off, and does something about it that makes a difference”. – Nolan Bushnell, founder of Atari.

By developing sensitivity and understanding of the discussed concepts, creative problem solving should become a permanent part of your life, not just a set of tools to be used as and when they are needed. When creative life mastery becomes an essential part of what constitutes you as a person, your life will become abundant with stimulus, and opportunities will lie all around you. In short, creativity leads to a pervading sense of optimism, though an optimistic state is essential for creative thinking. Creativity has to put into context otherwise it is aimless. People need a focal point to trigger their imaginations and other creative forces, (Lewis 2005:155).

It must be noted that although there is a process for developing innovation and creative thinking, creativity itself does not start and finish. Creativity is a way of life, it helps us identify and capitalise on opportunities that others might not see and above all... creativity keeps us shiny!

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