

creativity

A creative approach is a very handy thing. Not simply to have more fun (although that's a nice thing to do) nor to be gratuitously different. But to be more likely to be effective, for example in social marketing projects. There's a popular misconception with creativity that you've either got it or you haven't. There are of course some people who do seem to be effortlessly, spontaneously, consistently creative. But for the rest of us who aren't casually churning out bestsellers or life-saving inventions, there are lots and lots and lots of different techniques to enable us to think and produce creatively.

There are some excellent books out there, including the ones listed in the resources list at the end, and these include the many techniques. This website feature simply provides a taster of some of the issues and an example of one particularly useful technique for generating alternative ideas.

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1. creativity: what the experts advise

- take it seriously and practice it
- use 'lateral thinking' and other creativity techniques
- disrupt routines
- take risks
- seek stimulation
- allow time
- get relaxed - or manic
- make connections
- learn photography
- start with the comfortable and familiar
- break down the task – use categories to come up with more specific examples:
 - of people, places, times
 - or use government departments as prompts – health, education, transport etc
- keep ideas' files
- reward creativity
- have a role model
- use joke-writing (and cartoon ideas) techniques:
 - juxtaposition of the incongruous
 - observation and exaggeration
 - reversal of common situations

2. when to and when not to bother

use creative approaches when:

- established practices aren't working
- there's small risk and high potential gain - eg life-threatening condition and no currently available options
- it's an inherent part of that world or process eg:
 - arts
 - invention
 - technology
 - planning
 - ideas' consultants

don't bother when:

- it's excessively risky, eg:
 - life-threatening situation and there's a safe, proven option
- it makes things worse
- it can't work and wastes time, resources etc in the process
- unnecessary because established ideas are working well and further exploration would be a luxury
- it's excessively:
 - expensive
 - time-consuming
 - energy or focus diverting
 - threatening
 - frustrating - eg little chance of implementing ideas
- they're routine tasks being successfully achieved

3. assumptions

Having assumptions about the issue, problem or 'thing' are often the main barrier to being able to adopt a fresh perspective. But precisely because they are underlying assumptions and seem inherent, they are generally invisible to us and therefore tricky to identify and challenge.

A few ways of unearthing assumptions about the issue or thing are:

- imagine describing it to a 6 year old, or to an alien, or to a 6 year old alien
- still with the kiddies.... Use their *why, why, why* technique. Take one apparently essential aspect of it and ask *why?* Why is it x? Why does it have y? etc. Then challenge the answer with another *Why?* And another. And, yes – another and another.
- write the essential features that would need to be included in a drawing of it
- imagine it is something that a wartime enemy is desperate to get their hands on. Write down the top 5 features that could be taken away from it in order to disguise it
- imagine you're an opponent of it or of its use. What arguments would you use against it? Some of these may identify underlying assumptions
- if you were commissioning someone to create the classic version of it, what features would you tell them it had to include?

4. scamper

This technique combines many of the key concepts of ‘lateral thinking’ and ideas generation, with a handy mnemonic. Here’s one we prepared earlier, using fines as a ‘worked example’. (As with much lateral thinking, these are of course not recommendations and most of them would, if implemented, be profoundly unhelpful. But all of these could lead to ideas which could lead to improvements. It’s a process.) This is followed on the next page by a blank ‘scamper planner’ which can be used for triggering alternative ideas in virtually any situation.

| Triggers | Idea spurring question | Ideas |
|---|--|---|
| S ubstitute | Swap Change Replace Alternate | Re: person – fine the host or pub landlord of the drunk driver; penalty – time fine |
| C ombine | Mix Blend Associate Merge | features of fine - eg £ + victim, eg all fines go to Victim Support rather than to Treasury |
| A dapt | Copy Harmonise Fit Fashion | change place in current sentencing hierarchy |
| M inify M odify M agnify | Smaller, fewer Change one part Larger More frequent | restrict to certain offences or offenders; all fines accompanied by £ management classes; make the standard, default penalty, to be used with all other sentences |
| P ut to other uses | Make it do something it usually does not | % of fines to be paid to a ‘community chest’ – eg for youth workers in school to prevent school exclusion |
| E liminate | Remove a: * part * characteristic * function | abolish fines |
| R earrange | Reorder Reverse Vice versa Invert | courts pay offenders – eg when crime arises from poverty related crime |

scamper

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|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
|-----------------|-------------------------------|--------------|

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5. Turnaround Techniques

Turnaround Techniques

If you come up with the Perfect Idea swiftly and first time round, you'll never, ever need this bunch of ideas. But if you're more normal, you'll need to work very hard to generate dozens of ideas in order to come up with a few really strong ones. And the best hard work is generally achieved out and about in the loveliest of settings, not sitting in the dullest of offices. Most of the environments and triggers for stimulating fresh thinking are based on **doing things that contrast**. This may be by reversing your immediate environment or your expectations.

These ideas are inspired from various expert sources, ranging from websites written by people who are in extreme mental distress, to books on creative thinking for entrepreneurs. The principle is always similar: how to shift from one fixed set of views or feelings in order to come up with fresh perspectives and improved solutions.

1. Thinking

Always available: playing with thoughts, games and fantasies can be a great way of changing places while staying put.

- Do that Parisian boulevard, sitting outside a café, thing - people watching. Watch them wherever you happen to be – at a bus stop, walking down the high street, sitting in a PTA meeting Think about what they're wearing (is it like so last season?), how they're walking (not surprising with shoes/jeans/a dog like that), what their job might be (tattoo artist? croupier? embalmer?)
- Choose an object in the room. Examine it carefully and then write as detailed a description of it as you can, as if you were describing it to a blind person. Include everything: size, weight, texture, shape, colour, possible uses, feel, how light falls on it etc.
- Pick an object, like a glass or a tube of toothpaste, and try to list 20 different uses for it.
- Escape! Wherever you want to go, it's only a second away when it's in your imagination – the Costa Rican rainforest, a Zen retreat, anywhere at all in Las Vegas, a Jamaican beach. Or escape upwards by paragliding, curling up in a treehouse, hot air ballooning...

Websites

www.puzzles.com

www.momsminivan.com

www.treehouse-company.com

www.miniclip.com/fowlwords.htm

www.virtourist.com

One of the next best things to exotic travel – essential and, particularly fabulously, inessential travel gear

www.magellans.co.uk

2. Sensing

Touchy feely, smelly, yummy, noisy or pretty – all stimulating experiences.

- For a totally sensational work-out, and a handy way to add a few inches to your and others' waistlines, cook something quin-sensory. How about making chocolate pastry? You'll obviously get the joys of touch, sight and smell, plus sound (OK, a bit of a stretch this one, but imagine the sound of pastry ricocheting off the sides of the bowl) and of course taste.
- Go into your food cupboard or fridge and smell lots of different foods. Things like vanilla, chocolate, coffee, herbs, and lemon are particularly fab.
- Rummage through your clothes, or clothes in a shop, with your hands rather than your eyes, feeling the difference between cotton, wool, silk, leather....
- Instead of window-shopping, go nasal shopping in these sorts of stores:
 - Asian, Greek, Chinese and other great-smelling food shops
 - body pampering stores (Body Shop etc)
 - pet stores (possibly a more mixed olfactory experience, especially if you get too close to some of the reptiles. Or hamsters.)
- If it's hard to shake off the smell of iguana, try buying a delicious bunch of mimosa and (unlike Bill Clinton) inhale
- Take a hot bath – and ratchet the sensory experience up to all 5 senses if you nibble while you soak
- Really notice everything you can see around you, as if you were going to draw it. (Even better, whip out a pencil and paper and draw it!) Describe in your mind, or on paper, features like colour, the effect of light and dark, textures, shapes, contrast, people's interesting physical characteristics etc

Websites

Surround yourself with sounds natural and less so –

www.naturesongs.com

Although this is a site about textures, it's also a great sight site:

www.3dcafe.com

3. Reading and writing

We're not talking about ploughing through Sartre or attempting to write a blockbuster novel, but mellow dipping into some reading treats and scribbling down whatever pops into your head.

- Buy a gorgeous journal, like the ones Paperchase sells, hand-made in Nepal and put in things like:
 - Jokes
 - Quotes
 - Anecdotes
 - Wild ideas
 - Dull ideas
 - Fascinating people, places, products
- Read about something you know nothing about. Browsing magazines in a newsagents can reveal whole new worlds, from body-building to train-spotting.
- Open the dictionary in random places and learn new words.
- Spend a few hours gazing through catalogues of your favourite retail fantasy. Ours include stationery (little more satisfying in life than a slow browse through the Viking catalogue) and cabin baggage.

- Dip into really easy, funny, quirky books which look at life from a very different perspective. We'd recommend:
 - *The Puffin Book of Nonsense Verse* edited by Quentin Blake
 - *101 Unuseless Japanese Inventions* – Kenji Kawakami
 - *Really Important Stuff My Kids Have Taught Me* – Cynthia Copeland Lewis

Websites

www.amazon.co.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/learning/coursesearch/bigread/

And when you want to do some writing warm-ups, check out:

<http://members.shaw.ca/creativewriting/index.html>

4. Playing

Playing is arguably the most effective, as well as enjoyable, stimulus to creativity . There's a bit of an overlap with *Thinking*, but getting into play mode can also involve a trip to Woolworths, the back of the kids' toy cupboards or (best of all), a leisurely spree on the websites of Hawkins Bazaar and its sister company Tobar. Equip yourself with:

- word game books
- hand-held puzzles like Rubik's cube and that little plastic thing where one tile is missing and you shuffle the others around to spell out the first line of *Hard Times* or to reconfigure a nuclear power station
- ridiculous desk games like:
 - micro-croquet
 - tiddlywinks
 - 10 pin bowling
- a ball to bounce – or 3 to juggle
- a dart board – perhaps one of those nice safe magnetic or Velcro ones if there are kids, pets or colleagues at risk from rogue throws

Websites

www.hawkin.com

www.tobar.co.uk

www.puzzles.com/PuzzlePlayground/WelcomeToPuzzlePlayground.htm

5. Computing

This deserves a website, a gallery, a city all of its own. But in the meantime, here are some obvious and a few slightly more obscure ideas.

- Fun websites – ones that are funny, surprising, and especially those that are interactive – i.e. visitors have to get actively involved with them, eg because there are games, quizzes etc.
- Computer games, including handheld computer games – latest Gameboy etc
- Really surf - wander aimlessly from site to site using links, links from links, links from links from etc etc
- Or wander slightly less aimlessly by specific topics, perhaps inspired by things on your desk - wood, files, pictures, half-chewed bars of chocolate...

Websites

Undoubtedly the best website of all time. Featuring Must Haves such as a Lick-O-Meter keychain which counts how many licks you've had on the inserted lollipop.

<http://www.stupid.com/index.html>

Great games inc. online jigsaws, word games and strange videos if you have high-powered fancy software stuff www.shockwave.com

Exquisitely satisfying – bursting bubble-wrap on-line, complete with authentic popping noises

www.virtual-bubblewrap.com/popnow.shtml

6. Eating

Gaze at it, feel it, buy it, draw it, photograph it, talk about it, write about it. Oh, and eat it. No big surprises in this list:

- Recipe books
- Cooking
- Shops:
 - cooking equipment
 - supermarkets, bakers etc
- Foody mags

Websites

Work up a stonking appetite and feed your conscience:

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources_recipes.htm

Or just drool over the pictures in:

www.waitrose.com/wfi/

7. Creating

There are so many lovely things that we can fiddle with, sculpt, draw, paint and generally make a mess with. And making things is of course inherently creative. How about:

- Getting stuck into kids' things like Wikkitix (sticky pipecleaner type things), Play-doh or even better, the edible version – sugar paste
- activities you might normally dismiss as too naff but which can be deeply engrossing:
 - sewing
 - knitting
 - origami
 - painting, drawing – even colouring in
- playing some kind of musical instrument. Even if you don't really know how to play, picking out tunes is a way to shift into a different set of thoughts and feelings
- taking photographs. Absolutely don't worry about the end result, and play around with taking photos of:
 - small parts of objects (eg of street furniture, flowers, clothes, luggage....)
 - light and shade
 - splashes of colour
 - the shapes that groups of people make
- and then... sorting photos, into albums, shoe boxes, sides of sofas etc
- and if that's too daunting, dust off the old albums and have a nostalgic hour or two with them

Websites

This is a surprise and a lot of simple fun!

<http://www.imaginationatwork.com/Imagine>

All things crafty:

www.johnsoncrafts.co.uk

Colouring-in books for grown-ups:

www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/search-handle-form/026-7712927-3632400

Make a pelican or publican out of Origami.

www.paperfolding.com

8. Connecting

If you're old enough to remember the TV series Thirtysomething, you may still have vivid memories of those brainstorming sessions the ads lads had together to stimulate new concepts. When being creative by yourself isn't working for you, or you feel like it would be even more inspiring being with others, get connecting – by email, phone or even that good old method of being with others.

Websites

<http://www.brainstorming.org/book/p1.shtml>

A book from the interesting charity The Relationships Foundation:

<http://www.relationshipsfoundation.org/books/Index.html>

9. Switching on

So much choice, so little time!

- Listen to your favourite music
- Watch your favourite video
- Conversely, watch a TV programme, or channel, that you would put last, or second to last, on your list of favourites
- Flick through TV channels (mainly if you've got non-terrestrial, else you'll be a bit unsatisfied after a mere 4 flicks!)

Websites

www.radiotimes.com

www.digitalspy.co.uk/tv/listings

10. Switching off

Whether to stimulate or get a breather from creativity, chilling out has shifted from being the monopoly of mountain-dwelling gurus to being as mainstream as the Simpsons. Even Homer might have tried one of these:

- Day dreaming
- Visualising
- Deep breathing
- Meditating
- Yoga

Websites

www.calmcentre.com

www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/nakedscience/stress/coping.asp

www.yogauk.com

11. Moving

Personally I've found that little beats stretching out with a few select pralines and a *Will and Grace* video. But the official line is that it's highly physically, emotionally and creatively beneficial to try exercising. With so many options, it's hard to find creative excuses not to do one of these:

- aerobics
- badminton
- basketball
- cricket
- cycling
- dance
- fencing
- football
- hockey
- martial arts
- netball
- running
- squash
- swimming
- table tennis
- tennis
- volleyball
- walking
- yoga

Websites

www.bbc.co.uk/health/fitness

www.menshealth.co.uk

www.visitbritain.com/world/home4.asp

12. Laughing

Five A Day applies not only to fruit and veg but to the absolute requirement of 5 lots of convulsive laughter a day. Any of the following ideas should help, although a good schmooze with friends will generally do the trick.

- Anything by Nick Page – his website (www.nickpage.co.uk), his books (In Search of the Worlds' Worst Writers; The Tabloid Bible; The Tabloid Shakespeare) – and if you're particularly lucky, his emails, contributions to meetings, leaflets, radio scripts.....
- Going to a comedy club, funny film, funny play, funny musical
- Lovely potentially everyday funny experiences – sit coms, favourite videos, cartoon strips in the newspaper
- Funny books – not just Nick's but other joyously hilarious treats, such as those by Sheila Heyman, Tony Hawks, Danny Wallace and those magnificently off-beat cartoons by Gary Larson

Websites

www.nickpage.co.uk

www.dilbert.com/

<http://www.join-me.co.uk/>

www.pythonline.com

6. creativity resources

books

Aha! - Jordan Ayan

The Creative Manager's Pocketbook – John Townsend and Jacques Favier

Almost anything by Edward de Bono, but the classic *Lateral Thinking* is a pretty essential starting point

internet

<http://creatingminds.org/> A comprehensive, and generous, website which includes many of the key techniques and other resources.

There's a great monthlyish Brainstorm Creativity E-bulletin produced by Jurgen Wolff. To subscribe to it, e-mail BstormUK@aol.com. And there's a snappy Creativity Thought Of The Week from Think Inc, receivable by e-mailing peterfreedman@think-inc.co.uk

software

Ideafisher is a cross between a thesaurus and a brainstorming trigger tool, with a handy, built-in notepad facility. Available from www.ideafisher.com

MindManager is also useful for brainstorming, but rather than being prose based, it has adaptable templates for creating your own mind maps (or 'spider diagrams'). Available from www.mindjet.co.uk

consultants

Think Inc is a very imaginative consultancy, generating extraordinary ideas, especially for PR campaigns.

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