

News and Views on Creativity and Innovation

creative4business

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Dear Dave,

Here is an opportunity to air alternative suggestions that might help or even solve some of our issues. Although called 'Dear Dave' because of our Prime Minister you can send your suggestions for your own country.

In the UK our unemployment is climbing and the Big Society is not plugging the gap like you promised. Now we have queues for petrol! I know that petrol purchases have rocketed, netting the government an extra £32 million in duty. It is only a cash flow thing but couldn't you plough that back into UK Plc this financial year to help with good causes or even unemployment?

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the April edition of **Innovation Matters**.

At last the new website is available at www.creative4business.co.uk. It has taken a while but it has been live for a few days now and some people have been testing it for me along with the nemesis that is Googlebot. Hopefully this will provide an opportunity to add even more useful content over time. Please take a look and comment (especially using the neat 'Contact Us' button on the side of the screen!).

Walking The Tightrope is an exciting day long event on issues relating to high performance that is happening in **Cardiff** on **May 16th** at the Park Plaza Hotel. Speakers are drawn from a range of disciplines including international athletes, firearms unit, special forces, sailing and the NHS to name a few. The event is great value at only £80. [Download event and booking details](#).

And now to this month's articles! We know that there are creative techniques that make use of negativity so what could you use them for? **Using Negativity Wisely** looks at how we might do some **risk analysis** whilst our second article illustrates the **Power of Language in Innovation** and how best to use it. Finally there is a slightly speculative article on the **Future of Leadership**. Any feedback is of course appreciated as are suggestions for future articles.

Don't forget that you can also take a look at previous issues of Innovation Matters by visiting our website and navigating to the [archives](#) page.

Happy Reading,

Derek Cheshire

Please send in your suggestions and they will be published in future editions along with any other ideas that we stumble across.



Using Negativity Wisely

There is a lot of it about, negativity. Negativity is often seen as disruptive and something to be banned from organisations. Often we can spend far too much energy fighting it so why don't we make use of it? In a previous article I described the use of Reverse (or Negative) Brainstorming as one of the ways we could do this. This was purely for generating ideas for new products and services but you could use it in many other ways too. Here is just one possibility.



Do you have any ideas about the things that could wreck your business? Market changing new products announced by competitors, new government legislation, flash flooding or severe bouts of food poisoning are all possibilities! Some of these threats are predictable (to some extent) such as flooding but many are not. It is likely that you have the predictable events covered already so let us focus on the unpredictable for now. As well as protecting your business you could actually discover ways to threaten the competition.

As you would expect, we are going to use creative thinking techniques but in a slightly more focused way than normal. Instead of asking "What could destroy our business tomorrow?" questions should be more relevant to the type of business that you have. To start off with try coming up with some ideas about the areas in which your business might be vulnerable. If you manufacture products from raw materials then you might be vulnerable in areas such as production or delivery of raw materials, continuity of energy supply, or distribution of finished products. You might also be threatened by Government legislation or exchange rates if you export.

Now let us get focused. If we have identified that transport and distribution is a potential issue then ask:

- What could stop us obtaining raw material or delivering to customers?
- What would happen if the price of diesel fuel rose dramatically?
- What would happen if our competitors did a deal with road haulage companies?

If you were making consumer products you could also be worried about bad PR if your products were faulty or even killed people! You get the idea?

To get the best ideas you will need to involve as diverse group of people as possible and make the questions relevant to your business or business.

If you do identify serious threats then you can do something to reduce their impact or avoid them altogether. Identifying a ground breaking product that might put you out of business is also good since it provides you with the opportunity to develop such a product and hence outfox your competitors.

Wherever there is a threat there is also opportunity, so get thinking!



The Power of Language in Innovation

We are all aware that innovation has its own language conventions rich in buzz words. At first glance this may seem like a harmless dialect that simply reflects the nature of the work we are undertaking. Innovators, after all, are trying to communicate the promise of something that may not exist yet, and sometimes that requires some (over) optimistic decoration. Innovation, after all is

about extrapolation not interpolation and so we do have to rely on ambiguous statements.

The metaphors and other language used could signal something more important. Maybe the language is used because of a lack of hard data, or the fact an idea isn't yet properly formed. If we recognised this fact then perhaps we could use these communication tools only when they're effective (or, more importantly, not when they are ineffective). A more effective use of language might allow us to gain get buy-in on important projects.

Research has shown that where people lack hard data/information, they tend to use three types of language to describe innovation concepts.

- **Metaphor** is the substitution of figurative language for literal language.
- **Hyperbole** is exaggerated language used for emphasis or effect.
- **Revisionist rhetoric** is the simplistic, inaccurate, or self-serving characterisation of events to create or support an argument.

The wordle above contains a number of common words or phrases that we tend to use. Click on the image to see a larger image in my blog article. Are you using these in your own communications? Below are some suggestions to anyone interested in communicating the potential of an idea:

Recognize how you are using metaphor. Metaphor can help focus attention or highlight key aspects of an idea in a universal way. Be careful though, a metaphor can also signal to others that you haven't thought through your idea. Some people do find that businesses that consistently use descriptive approaches report a degree of frustration and lack of buy-in for their ideas. Metaphor should be used to supplement, not a substitute, for hard facts.

When you have a potentially good idea but lack evidence, begin with experimentation or prototyping. People are often likely to begin their pitches by putting their energy into speculative communications (using descriptive language rather than hard data), and fail to gain the personal or organisational support that they need to take their idea forwards. It is more likely that people gain support by investing in models or prototypes to demonstrate their ideas and then follow it up with descriptive communications.

Learn when to use metaphor effectively. In many large organisations, people tend to bounce ideas off one another and gain feedback from colleagues. Where there is a lack of data, it is possible for ideas to travel far and wide as metaphor or stories.

Put hyperbole and revisionist rhetoric in their place. When communicating why an idea has potential, it might seem obvious why you should avoid hyperbole or rhetoric. Surprisingly, there are important situations where such language can be constructive. These are informal meetings or briefings where people understand that language is not intended to be taken literally. These are mostly high trust environments where language and ideas are used as springboards for creative thinking.

Language is an important of the management of innovation, but it must be used wisely.

The Future of Leadership

The future of Leadership (and also Management) continues to be debated. It is widely recognised that things cannot remain as they are. We are in a challenging era and we need organisations to be more effective (not necessarily efficient), to be better places to work and to be sustainable. Up until now these have mainly not been attainable apart from in a few organisations. These few do, however, show that what we are all striving for is in fact possible. The question is, how on earth do we get there?



There are professional bodies that see themselves as the custodians of Leadership or Management, however are these the bodies to take things forward? In fact should there be representative bodies at all? The problem is that we are trying to paint a picture of the future which a) obviously does not exist b) which we wish to be different from the present.

This means that if we use the current knowledge and models from any existing sources then we are likely to be interpolating in order to create the future. Even current management thinking tells us to be wary of this. Surely what we desire is a way of extrapolating from what we already know. Fans of Douglas Adams will only be too aware of how the 'Infinite Improbability Drive' was extrapolated from an exceedingly hot steaming cup of coffee in The Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy (please read it if you have not already done so). If Douglas Adams had interpolated then he might have just created a frothy Latte rather than an 'Infinite Improbability Drive'.

So what does this mean for Leadership? In terms of concrete actions, I am not entirely sure. However, to find out I believe that we need to paint a picture of the future which does not have to be complete fantasy but which should not be limited by current thinking. This should maybe focus on organisational structures (or not), behaviours and the ways in which employees communicate as well as the requirements of organisations. Let us consider how we get there.

We should not throw away what we already know but neither should we accept an interpolated future just because there are aspects that we are unclear about. If there are no Leadership and Management models then let us invent them, if we do not like the language used then let us create new language. Even if we cannot do that, let us experiment and create a prototype of the future which others can borrow or add to.

The danger is that this will be seen as too high a price to pay for creating a brighter future. What price are you and your organisation prepared to pay?

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Creative Business Solutions | Brookside Cottage | Mill Lane | Corston | Malmesbury | SN16 0HH | United Kingdom