

## News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

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**Dear Reader,**

Welcome to the February edition of **Innovation Matters**, the first of the year. I hope that all readers have had a bright start to 2011.

This month we have another in our series of top tips, just jump to the left hand side of this page to find this month's.

We also revisit some older but valuable ideas in our 3 articles. The first takes a look at why we should **share knowledge** both from an organisational and a personal point of view.

Our second article will give you some ideas regarding the challenges involved with **innovation** and **growth** as well as a simple test for you to use in your own organisation to see how ready you are to grow and innovate.

Finally our third articles is an old favourite back by popular demand. It is a great way of **generating ideas** for yourself as well as making **use** of the **negative people** around you.



**Big picture, local detail.** Learn to see the overall strategy as well as low level tactics.

Many of us tend to concentrate on one or the other. Too much of the big picture and we lose contact with what is really happening, too much detail and we lose our sense of direction.

If we try to see both all of the time then our heads would explode! We must learn to do a little of each and try to get the balance right. Imagine that you are going up and down in a helicopter, you get the overall view by going up high and the detail by flying low.

Regular readers will remember that I was lucky enough to visit Iran in November 2010. Whilst the majority of people I met were charming and very hospitable it is a shame that I must issue the following warning to all members of the speaking community including event organisers and agents.

Hossein and Mostafa Taheri trade as International Consultation Services (ICS) here in the UK and as 128 Media Services in Iran. They have proved unable or unwilling to meet their contractual obligations to myself and other speakers. I advise that you avoid dealing with these people if at all possible.

If you have missed previous editions of Innovation Matters you can find them all at [www.creative4business.co.uk/archives.html](http://www.creative4business.co.uk/archives.html).

Happy reading,  
Derek Cheshire



## Why sharing ideas is good

*"If you have an apple and I have an apple and if we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas"*

**George Bernard Shaw**



What has this to do with Innovation you may ask? Well the crux of the matter is the word **have**. Does it mean 'own' or does it mean 'have access to' and who actually does the 'having'?

George Bernard Shaw was correct about ideas, knowledge is the only resource that does not lose value when you share it. If you are the initial source of knowledge then you will gain kudos and perhaps receive some financial gain which leads many people to decide to become gurus and ration their knowledge, using it as a source of power.

Because people are resourceful you will soon find that your guru status evaporates and what knowledge you have is worth little as those around you will create their own knowledge or find a new guru.

Back to apples and innovation. In a truly innovative organisation or society we need to create a culture which would prove George Bernard Shaw wrong. If each of us has an apple and exchanges it then we each must have two apples - it is our concept of sharing, building upon ideas and skills, and saying 'yes and' that needs to be addressed. It is our interpretation of 'have' that needs some work so that it refers not to ownership but to shared access and potential.

One thing that George did not say was that if we kept the seeds from the fruit then planted them and cared for them we could create many more apples in the future. This may be a cultural shift and a metaphor too far for many businesses.

But how do we actually share, and what is the best way? We can share simply by making knowledge or ideas available to others. It is not very proactive and only works if someone else is actually looking. We can also 'throw' ideas at one another and hope that they 'stick'. This is a better way but still not ideal.

What if you became a carrier of ideas or knowledge, a bit like bees carrying around pollen? If you carried around ideas

and became aware of what others were doing and what problems they were having (either colleagues or customers) then you could also be in a very good position to help them. So all those power hungry gurus who tried to keep their knowledge to themselves can still retain their self esteem as connectors and suppliers of solutions. It also happens to be an exceedingly good way of advancing your career!



### Puzzled by growth?

Constant innovation is a characteristic of many successful growing companies. Staying ahead of the competition requires inventiveness at individual, group, and company levels. As companies grow, market demands and competition can force them to maintain a culture of continuous innovation.

Growth, however, also creates a need for structure and control, which can make a culture of innovation difficult to sustain.

#### **Erosion of flexibility**

Sustainable growth requires increased operational scale, but companies cannot scale their operations effectively without implementing formal structures and processes. Growth can strain the entrepreneurial philosophy that has fuelled a company's success. More importantly, it can erode corporate flexibility. As management layers increase, they create islands of data, knowledge, and intelligence that can complicate a company's decision-making processes.

#### **Reduced tolerance of risk**

Developing new ideas is a risk-intensive process that requires significant resources. As companies grow, their risk profile must become more conservative as shareholders expect them to stabilise operations and manage their business according to financial criteria.

#### **Collision of cultures**

As companies grow, they require people who can guide them through each stage of their organisational development. However, companies also have to evolve to meet changing internal and external priorities. As a result, a company's corporate culture is pulled two ways: established employees who are used to a stable and familiar environment, and newer employees who have a different mindset, a higher tolerance for risk, and place less value on organisational structure. Left unchecked, this dichotomy can cause a company's culture to be dictated by employee self-interest

rather than corporate objectives.

Sustaining an innovative culture requires companies to create environments where creative thinking is central to corporate values, actions, and assumptions. Innovative companies require employees who seek new opportunities, accept risk, collaborate well with others, and commit themselves to the organisation. Innovative companies also require leaders that will work to create those kinds of environments and will guide and promote innovative behaviour.

To see if you are ready there are three main areas that you should consider:

1. **Create the required foundation** companies need to assess the role of innovation within their organisations, make the necessary adjustments to their goals and their corporate culture, and redefine the responsibilities of their leaders.
2. **Enhance operations to foster innovation** by creating an environment that empowers employees, companies will promote the collaboration required to generate and implement new ideas.
3. **Manage the ongoing change** companies must create teams to guide them through periods of change, manage their employees' anxieties, and set small milestones to be used to gauge enthusiasm.

How do you know if you have the right foundation? A comprehensive assessment can be carried out using our own **Innovation Toolkit** (see <http://www.creative4business.co.uk/toolkit.htm>) however you can download a simple test to complete in your own time (see <http://www.creative4business.co.uk/downloads/innovation%20ready.pdf>)? If clicking on the above links does not work you can copy and paste them into your browser address bar.

## How To Generate 20 New Business Ideas Over Coffee

I have included this technique before but it is very popular and people keep on asking me about it. Apart from the fact that you can generate a number of ideas in a short space of time (either on your own or in a group) it is a good way of harnessing negative energy from some of your more pessimistic colleagues as it is also known as reverse or negative brainstorming.

Reverse (or negative) brainstorming is an ideal technique for people in businesses of all sizes, either on their own or with colleagues. It can also be slotted into short periods of time such as coffee breaks, bus or train journeys or whilst waiting for someone. And if your board meeting drags on you can always let your mind wander a little!



To start with, select an issue or topic about which you need to generate ideas. The fact that some of you will be more familiar with the topic than others in a group situation doesn't matter for this exercise. Everybody will get benefit from trying out the technique and swapping notes afterwards.

The topic should have a positive and possibility- focused phrasing, i.e. how can we gain/improve/create/diversify/build etc. Check everybody understands the question or statement.

If in a group, nominate someone to record ideas on a flipchart. If you are on your own then make sure you have a notepad handy.

Then (and only then) take the topic and reverse it. For example if your topic is "How to improve sales in the company?" reverse it to "How could we drive down sales as low as they could possibly go?"

Note down this reverse statement. Brainstorm for as many ideas as you can (about the reverse statement, forget the original topic for now) and record them. This is where human nature takes over, we are more likely to record negative ideas than positive ones.

Note your ideas verbatim. No judging or filtering of ideas to be made during ideas generation. Keep it quick and always include the unlikely, the weird and the apparently impossible.

Next, take those ideas and reverse them again. This can be done:

- *directly* so if one had been, say "everybody stop talking", the reverse might be "everybody talks much more" which might lead to ideas about chat rooms, coffee knowledge sharing hours, skill sharing sessions
- *by extracting a principle or meaning* so "everybody stop talking" - interpreted as a restriction of rights - which reversed could mean ensuring that there is a policy for appropriate communication with ethnic groups within the company

Topics that you might like to investigate are:

- How can I drive down sales?
- How can I make my production line less efficient?
- How can I waste as much time as possible during the day?

Even newcomers to this type of thinking should be able to generate 10-20 good ideas in around 20 minutes. Please let me know how you get on.

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