

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

May 2008

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In This Issue ...

News

Where Is Your Giraffe?

The Slipping Point

Creative Management Challenge - continued

Quick Links

News



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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the May 2008 edition of Innovation Matters, the second edition of the year. Since the last newsletter there have been even more problems in the World economy and yet more interest rate cutting in the USA.

The businesses that will survive are likely to be led and managed by people who have the ability to think differently from their competitors, spot opportunities and exploit them.

This month we follow on from last month's Creative Management Challenge. In **Where Is Your Giraffe** we look at how easy it is to make assumptions and sweep problems under the carpet. **The Slipping Point** is designed to help you avoid the problem areas when forging ahead with your business strategies.

Finally we have two more Creative Questions for you to think about and some lessons to be learned from them.

Happy reading

Derek Cheshire

Growth - success on a budget and The shape of the innovative organisation.

[Contact us](#) to find out more.

The 'rough and ready' survey of the major barriers to creativity within organisations is still located on my [Home Page](#). If you currently work, or have worked for an organisation then I would appreciate it if you could take the time to click on two buttons.

Where Is Your Giraffe?

You may remember a previous article 'The Creative Management Challenge' which posed some simple questions such as 'How do you get a giraffe into a refrigerator?' There were some novel answers to that particular question, note that there is no correct answer for two reasons. First of all the problem situation was not fully specified, leaving many questions un answered. What size is the refrigerator, where is it, does it have to get in unaided or can force be used? Secondly there was a deliberate intention to introduce ambiguity. There was no mention of the size of the giraffe, whether it was real/stuffed/inflatable or could it be folded/squashed in any way?



In our businesses we tend to have many giraffes, situations that we have not properly understood with solutions that do not take into account all of the relevant factors or which have been constructed as a result of poor decision making. Curiously, unlike the tall animals, these giraffes seem to exist unnoticed. Why is this, how can all of these poor decisions be swept under the carpet. The answer is of course ego. We do not like to admit that we do not have all of the answers, that we are not in control of our business. The irony is that by ignoring or hiding these 'giraffes' we are actually admitting that we are not in control.

So how can we help ourselves?

- Examine all of the boundaries to any problem, test them and do not introduce any that do not have to be there.

- Ask questions, why do things have to be the way they are?
- Look at things in as many different ways as possible, inside out, upside down or from a customer or competitor viewpoint.

And finally, just to stop you wasting time chasing your tail, ask yourself the question, 'What would happen if I ignored this situation altogether?' If the answer is nothing then you have one less thing to worry about and a greater feeling of being in control. You are beginning to understand your giraffe!



The Slipping Point

Most readers will be familiar with, or have heard of Malcolm Gladwell's best selling business book 'The Tipping Point'. The author suggests that there is a point at which you need apply only a small effort to create an effect. This is rather like giving the final push to topple a large boulder or tipping a finely balanced set of scales. If only we could find this point, we could all save ourselves time and effort.

Once the tipping point is found then we, and our businesses will be beating the competition and lining our pockets with untold riches, right? Is there anything to stop us? Well, quite a lot actually. Take the simple case of sitting down on a chair. You see the chair, walk round to the front and then sit down. Did you check that the chair was still there or that it did not have a wobbly leg. Most of the time nothing will happen but what happens in the 1 in 100 or 1 in 1000 cases when a practical joker has removed the chair?

This is a somewhat simplified example but neatly illustrates the point that we must keep our wits about us at all times. Having created a strategy for the future we want it to succeed but how many of us do not keep watch? What is it exactly that we are watching for? This is where we come to The Slipping Point. If you were driving up a slippery slope or along an icy road it would be the place where you lost grip, where your forward momentum slowed, and where things just did not go as planned. What can be done about this?

- Ensure Management are 'Hands Ready' i.e. they are aware of what is going on but are not micro-managing or too eager to take control. This provides space to see the bigger picture.
- Do your employees work in teams? The more they do this, the more support they provide, the more knowledge is shared and the more flexible they are when confronted with challenges.
- Is there a desire to win or are you all there to pick up your pay cheques?
- Even if you have a desire to win, do you know how to win?

- Keep an eye on the external environment, competitors, customers and any other factors that could affect the economic landscape.
- Foster as many external relationships as you can. These provide information and can also be leveraged in times of need.
- Promote the right culture. Transparency and morale are often used but infrequently heeded. Lead by example and gain trust and you will be in good shape.
- Promote the concept of stretch, an environment in which your employees and management alike are challenged and allowed to learn.
- Get the best from your staff. This extends from what management actually 'do' to staff to encourage and motivate them as well as reward systems.

Pay attention to the above and you have a very good chance of executing that carefully crafted strategy and avoiding The Slipping Point.

Creative Management Challenge (continued)

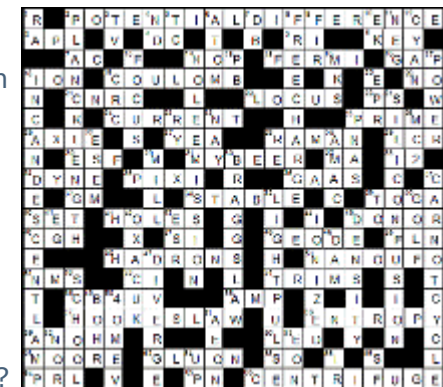
You may remember last month's questions for managers. If you did not manage to take part then you can find the questions on my blog [here](#).

Here is another question for you; How do you get two elephants into a refrigerator? One possible answer is to install a bunk bed and put one elephant in the top bunk and one in the bottom. Can you think of any more solutions? Remember last time we left the refrigerator with just one elephant inside.

And now for that bewildering problem, does the light go out when you close the refrigerator door? How can we find out? Lets ask one of the elephants!!

At this point I shall stop before I get accused of getting childish. Both of these new questions are designed to illustrate a point. We should be aware of existing knowledge (we can get elephants into a refrigerator) and be wary of existing boundaries (what do we actually know for sure). We also learn that instead of saying 'no but', we can say 'yes and' and make more progress by adding to what goes on in the workplace rather than trying to de-rail initiatives.

There is a word of caution though. We may very well get two elephants into a refrigerator depending on the boundary conditions,



but it is highly unlikely that we can actually talk to one of them. Once we make an assumption it is all too easy to get carried away and blindly carry on believing in our own stories and strategies. But we can also use the concept of stories to test our strategies for the future. Some call it scenario planning, we simply call it storytelling.

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