

News on Creativity and Innovation related topics

May 2009

creative4business

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News

Watch out for a new book that is in the pipeline. The working title is '**There Is A giraffe In My Shed**' and it is being co-written with colleague [Roger Croft](#). More details will follow soon.

Coming soon, **Creative Leadership**. This will be endorsed as an **ILM Leadership**

Dear Reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Innovation Matters for 2009. Since the last edition we have been promised some 'green shoots' of economic recovery and been cursed with an epidemic of so called 'swine flu'. If you have been affected by the latter I hope you recover fully. My thoughts are currently with all my friends and colleagues in **Mexico**.

During the last month I have been to **Malawi** to work with the **British Council**. Their Management Express programme should be a model for all. The sights and sounds of Malawi are interesting to say the least. Click on the image to the right to listen to the **Black Missionaries**, Malawi's hottest (reggae) band right now.



This month there are two articles, **Thoughts from under African skies** which were inspired by my visit to **Malawi** and **There's a head in my shed** which is a simple look at the starting point for many of our creative processes.

Development Award.

Are you on Twitter? If so you can [follow Derek Cheshire](#) (only if you want to of course!)

Workshop and programme details can be downloaded from our [downloads](#) page.

My survey of the major barriers to creativity within organisations has been given a facelift. It is located on my [Home Page](#).

Please look to your left and see what the latest news is. Don't forget that you can also revisit past editions of Innovation Matters in our [newsletter archive](#).

Happy reading,

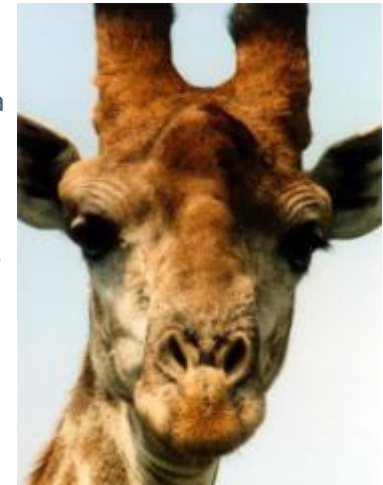
Derek Cheshire

Thoughts from under African skies

During my recent visit to **Malawi** I had the pleasure of speaking at seminars and workshops to a large number of charming and very interesting people. My aim was to try and provide some of the latest thinking on **Creativity and Innovation** in an organisational context and to try and encourage the people I met to use alternative modes of thinking.

Keen readers will remember the 'How do you get a giraffe into a fridge' test that I used last year (click on the giraffe to the right to revisit it). I used this on my audiences and was pleasantly surprised to find that answers were richer and more numerous than elsewhere. It is not right to say that Managers get the answers wrong but their responses are generally poorer than young children. My African friends did very well indeed so I began to wonder why this was. Was it a coincidence?

One of the central themes of Creativity is play, and education systems are designed to help us pass exams and be less creative. We then have to undergo a degree of 'unlearning' to be playful in the workplace. Keen followers of TED (see www.TED.com) may be familiar with the thoughts of Sir Ken Robinson. [Click here](#) to view his moving



and entertaining talk, but only if you have 20 minutes to spare!

In our so called developed countries we have extensive educational systems, whilst in developing countries the systems are often constrained to keeping young people in school and teaching basic skills well. Yet there has been an explosion in many developing nations within Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. In Cuba, trade embargoes have meant that motor engineers have created substitute brake fluid from shampoo and sugar whilst I have seen young boys in Africa change tractor tyres with only a few levers, a hand pump and some soapy water (no mean feat).

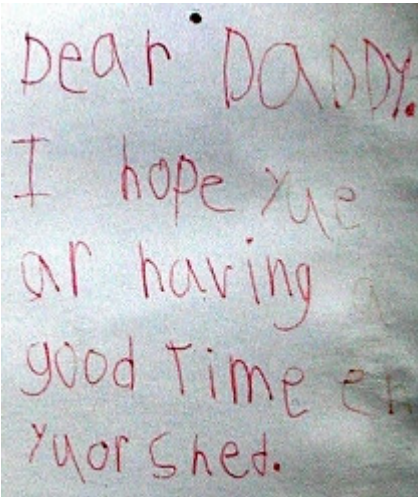
This natural creativity is present in us all when we are born but seems to remain only in countries where there are 'light touch' education systems. You may be thinking 'what about the effect of culture?' This is where things get a little complicated. In young people the two main drivers of Creativity are:

1. An education system that does not stifle or judge
2. A culture that allows play and lets 'children be children'

As we grow up, different factors come into play which are mainly cultural. This often means that:

1. In developed countries we are keen to be creative and innovative but we have lost the tools to work this way - our solution is to undertake even more training
2. In developing countries, people have the natural tools but social pressures sometimes inhibit the ability to be critical or express radical thoughts openly - some people are just too polite. The solution may just be to overcome these personal barriers.

In my view, the developing countries could have the edge but it will be a close run thing. The situation is obviously more complicated but these points should give us all food for thought. Any feedback is always welcome!



There's a head in my shed - starting out from scratch

Many fledgling businesses do actually start out from a shed at the bottom of the garden. Hewlett Packard started this way and many other technological breakthroughs too (remember Marconi?). The shed is, however, just a metaphor for that inappropriate and often cluttered place that we find ourselves in with our good ideas. We are simply a **'head in a shed'**!

It does not matter whether you are a lone inventor who really does have a shed at the bottom of their garden or you work for a large organisation and your 'shed' is your office or laboratory. You have the same problems either way.

Take a look at this [news article](#). The student in question is obviously talented but **so what?** She has very neatly illustrated our problem but in reverse. We are so familiar with the appearance of our shed, its contents and immediate surroundings that we see nothing else. We need a fresh perspective, new glasses (ditch the rose tinted ones) and a new mode of thinking. To go back to the first article in this newsletter and the concept of putting animals in places where they are not supposed to go - we have an elephant in our shed with us. It is an idea that has barged in and seems too big and well formed to be moved. We must replace it with a giraffe, something more suited to the marketplace, but how? And why a giraffe?

To continue using metaphors for a moment, the elephant is the easy option. Our minds often conjure up ideas that our egos build up into great and unbeatable business opportunities. These then take over our lives and we try to turn them into reality at all costs. These have barged into our lives like a stampeding elephant into our shed. In the world of inventors, elephants are ten a penny and we find them difficult to shake off. The giraffe is altogether more elegant and not so common, but how do we replace one by the other?

Here is a list of questions that we might ask ourselves:

1. Do I really want to do this or am I just running away from something else?

2. Is my idea well formed?
3. Is this really different, does it solve a problem, has it been done before?
4. Do I know what I am talking about, do others get it when I tell them about my idea(s)?
5. Do I really understand the target environment/marketplace?
6. Do I wish to retain ownership, am I willing to share?
7. Have I sought views/opinions from others?
8. How will I put this into practice/production?
9. Have I got the right skills?
10. Have I/we got the right environment?

Unlike the case of the disappearing car in the news article, you should now be more aware of what you are trying to do. Your grey elephant should have turned into something more elegant and more well formed. Why not take a look at some [past newsletters](#) and use some creative techniques to help investigate your new ideas in case you have missed something?

Good luck with your transformation!

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