

# CIME

## Creativity & Innovation Toolkit

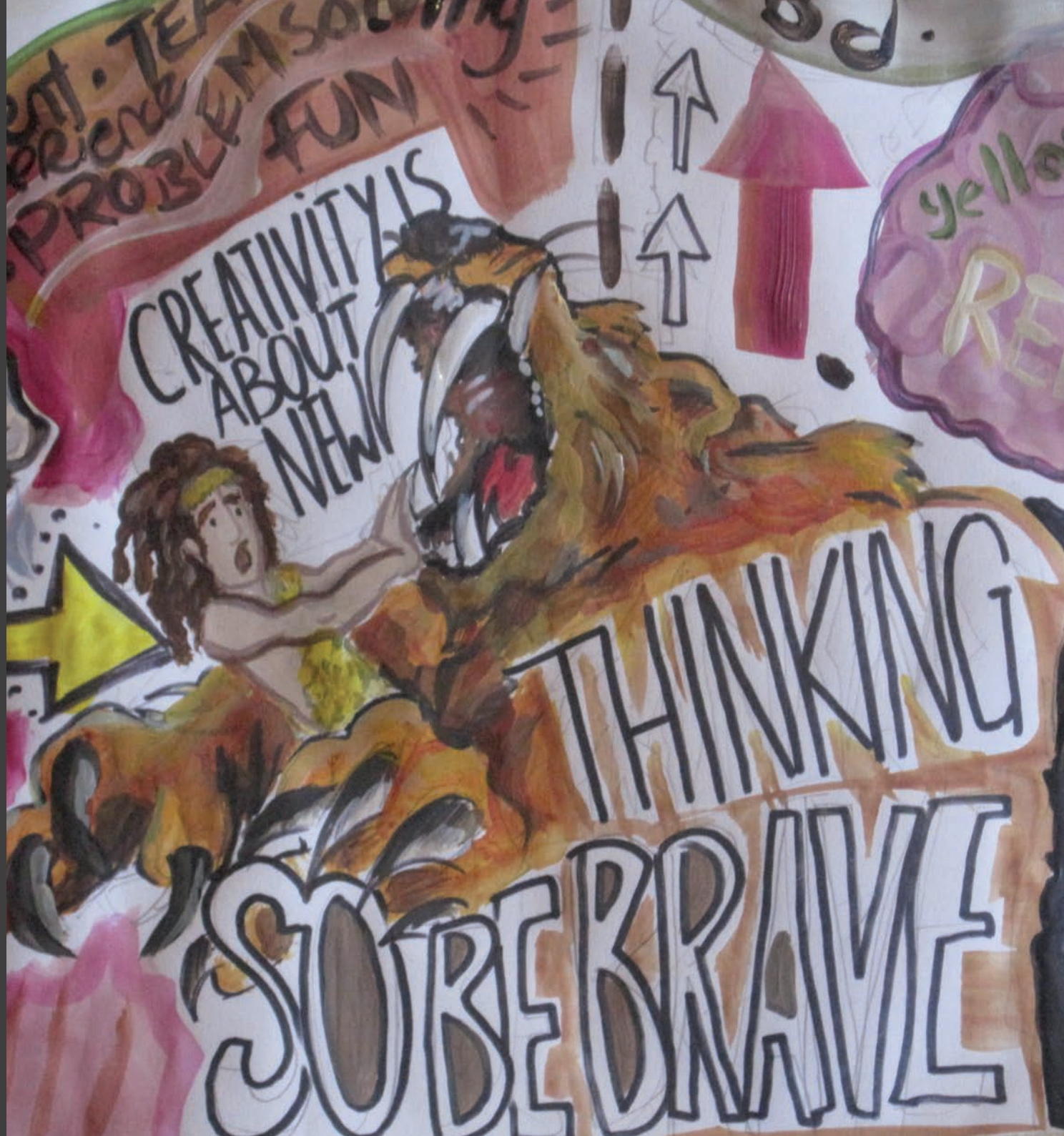
Package 1:  
An Introduction - 12 Rules  
for Creative Thinking!

Harness the power of creativity and alternative thinking to solve problems, generate ideas, and make sound decisions for your business!



creativity and innovation  
in micro-enterprises

creadigrwydd ac arloesedd  
mewn micro-fentrau



## Published by

CIME (Creativity and Innovation in Micro-Enterprises)  
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SERA (South-East Regional Authority)  
KCEB (Kilkenny County Enterprise Board)

### Wales

Swansea Metropolitan University  
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

## The CIME Project Team would like to thank the following:

Derek Cheshire, Creative4business  
Simon Goss, SIGGA Design - [www.sigga.net](http://www.sigga.net)  
'Visual Minute Takers' – Carl Mountford & Dave Long

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**The CIME project is part funded by the  
European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)  
through the Ireland Wales Programme (INTERREG 4A)**





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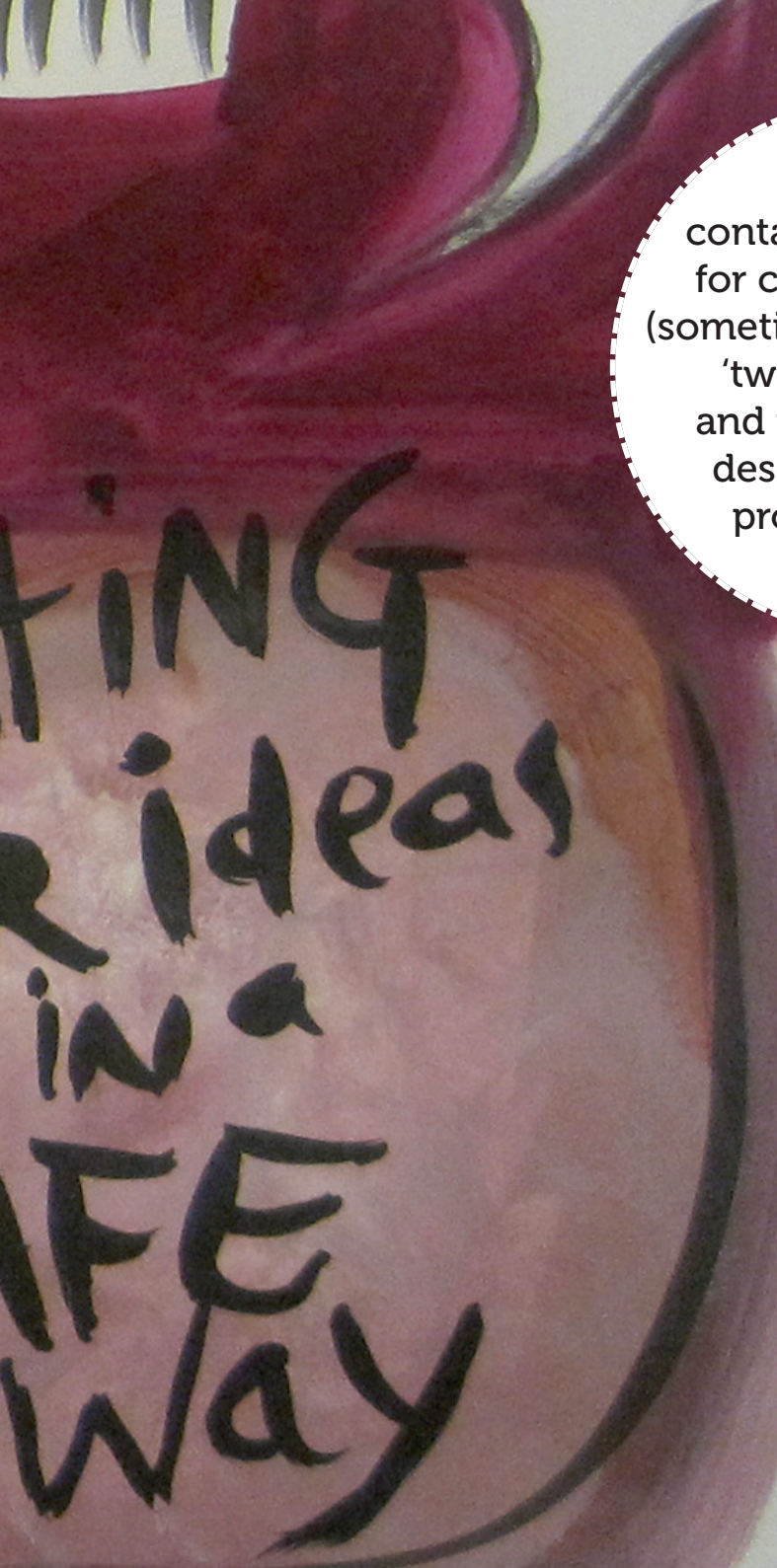
WARNING  
TESTING  
AREA



Test  
your  
SA

Introduction





This book contains twelve rules for creative thinking (sometimes known as the 'twelve precepts') and then goes on to describe a generic problem solving process.

This book is the first of a series of integrated modules that are targeted at assisting Small and Micro Enterprises by harnessing the power of Creativity and Alternative Thinking. Readers will be introduced to a range of ideas that fall under the umbrella of Creativity but which can help with real business issues. The topics covered will help you solve problems, generate ideas, make decisions, formulate business strategy and engage the stakeholders of your business.

Readers who have previously studied creative techniques will be familiar with such ideas as brainstorming, nominal groups and guided imagery; however no prior knowledge is assumed and the material can be used by almost anybody that has the time to spare to read the materials provided. All you need is the time it takes to drink a cup of coffee and you can get started.

The approach used here is one of facilitation not lecturing so whilst the methods we outline are tested and do work, you may wish to adapt them to your own circumstances. We will not get upset! Each idea is a starting point rather than a solution to a particular problem.



This is part of a learning exercise and possibly a journey into the unknown for some. The techniques may work better for some than for others so please feel free to modify or combine them as you see fit, and of course record the changes for when you next use them.

The word 'creative' may confuse some people. Some techniques described might seem a little weird but the word 'creative' is intended to convey the fact that we are using different techniques, to gain an alternative perspective on a problem or situation, that would not be handled effectively by more traditional methods. In fact, there may be a time when traditional methods are the best. Just keep them all in your creative toolbox and pick the most appropriate one for your needs. There is no need to throw away anything that you already know.

One phrase that you will frequently hear is 'problem solving'. By this we do not necessarily mean that you have a problem that needs to be solved just that there is a situation that requires exploration, clarification or perhaps reframing with creative (or alternative) techniques. For example, this could be a genuine business problem such as how to grow your business, a way of taking a difficult decision, a potential opportunity that you

may wish to explore or an alternative way of looking at your business. Sometimes looking at a situation in a different way highlights problems or opportunities of which we were not previously aware.

All materials are intended to be reference materials that can be referred to when necessary, it is not mandatory to read them from cover to cover although the more you read, the greater the benefit to you and your business.

In the true spirit of creativity, we hope that you will in turn share your experiences with others in order that the business community as a whole may benefit.

This book contains twelve rules for creative thinking (sometimes known as the 'twelve precepts') and then goes on to describe a generic problem solving process. Readers may be puzzled to see a creative process have both divergent and convergent phases, but all of the techniques are creative and of course we do have to gain a tangible benefit from using these techniques.

Finally there are some suggestions as to how you might get started with using creativity in your business.







Welcome everyone

OUR MISSION  
innovative & THINKING  
positive



challenge

INTRO

I'm SMU Manager Jenny



Good to ideas separately  
more important  
NEW IDEAS

Hey I'm Cath

Riche



ANY QUESTIONS??

multimedia company

OPEN

Collaboration

Global



TV Project  
Visualisation  
Editing Footage

Analogy  
By James

have a whole tree

ecosystem

BUSINESS

ACROSS WALES

MICRO BUSINESS

Hey I'm James



Regular Meetings

SMALL BUSINESS

Hey I'm Jules



like a bag of popcorn but ideas

IDEAS

Everyone Write down  
Your IDEAS



Visualisation

YOU NEED PEOPLE IN IDEAS

Values  
WHAT ARE YOURS?

VITALS



# Business Boundaries

**The answer is simple and lies elsewhere in this guide, it all depends on where you draw the boundary of your business. This may seem like fudging the issue but think carefully for a minute. What exactly is your business?**

Many small business owners think of their business in terms of what they do on a daily basis e.g. farmers milk cows, printers print brochures and jewellers make jewellery.

A better way of thinking about your business is to ask the question 'what is it (of value) that I create and who helps me to do this?' Any other person or business that helps you in terms of creating value, and hence money for your pocket, is in fact an extension of your business.

This may have implications when you try to introduce a new product or service or perhaps change the structure of your business if you run a mature business.

If anyone external to your office or workshop provides any content to your finished product or service, then they must be considered as part of your business as must any suppliers of anything unique.

For instance, a supplier of power tools is not part of your business unless they are the sole suppliers of a vital piece of equipment used in production of one of your products.

**TIP: Draw the boundaries of your business to include all aspects of your business (such as key suppliers) not just those contained within the walls of your business premises.**

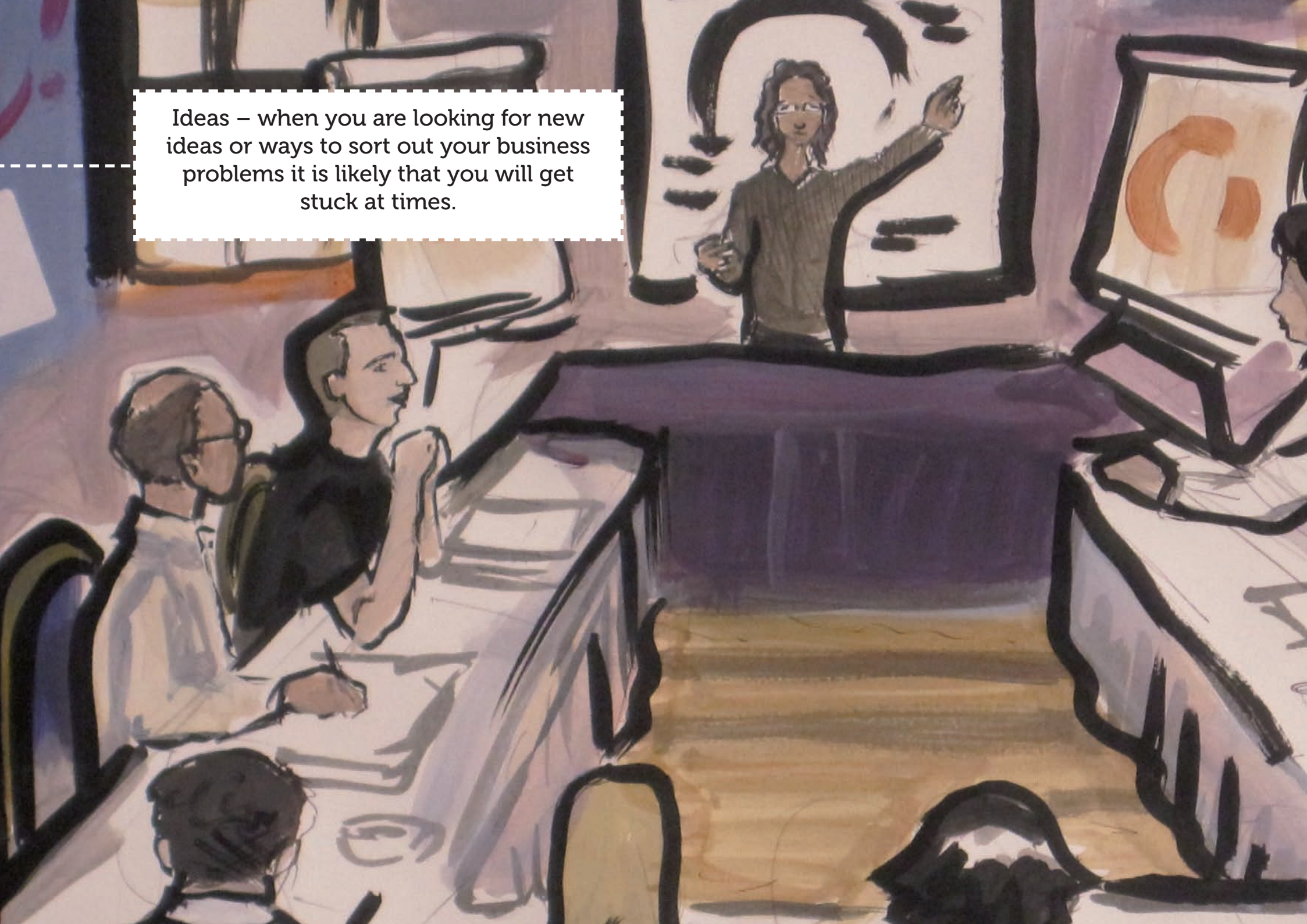




Achieve greater success by sharing



Ideas – when you are looking for new ideas or ways to sort out your business problems it is likely that you will get stuck at times.







So why is it important to redraw the boundary of your business? Is it just so that you can use a whole bunch of creative techniques and impress your friends? In short no, you will be able to attempt the following more effectively:

**Planning** – you will be able to plan your activities more carefully if you are aware of what your partners are doing. If you are a graphic designer and you are working to complete a job so that you can get some brochures printed for a client, then you might be upset if you gave the printer your artwork, and were told that you might have to wait a week for the finished brochures.

Including your printer in your thinking should have made you aware of their schedules and commitments. Similarly, you might wish to know about new processes or paper. Many of you will say 'we already do that', so good for you, but how many people have grown their business and forgotten (or do not have time) as they have focussed on other things?

**Ideas** – when you are looking for new ideas or ways to sort out your business problems, it is likely that you will get stuck at times. Your 'extended business' will have knowledge of your



core business and will be able to provide fresh thinking whilst still having some knowledge of what your business actually does. This can often be more useful than the advice given out by business advisers or your bank.

**Finance** – you are obviously not going to be asking your friends for money unless you know them very well, however business relationships are simply pipelines for money. As with all pipes there can be bottlenecks, so take a look at the credit terms that you give to your customers as well as the terms extended to you by your suppliers. As a rule of thumb always try to give your customers less credit (in terms of days) than that extended to you by your suppliers. Also look carefully at the flow of cash with whom you transact the greatest amount of business in cash terms.

**Risk** – many small business people, especially those who are starting a business for the first time, think of risk purely in terms of the consequences of taking, or not taking, a particular course of action. Risk is really all about the probability of an event occurring that has undesirable consequences.

Think of this a little like placing a bet at your local







dog track. You would like to win but the risk is all about minimising the risk that you do not win and hence lose your money.

So how is this done? As with placing a bet, the answer for our businesses is to find out as much information as one can. A good business example is to reduce the risk of doing business with a company by looking at their credit rating.

Further risk reduction would take place if we then contacted their suppliers and asked for references. So the more we know, the less risk we are exposed to. The problem is that we cannot know everything, but having someone else out there and soaking up their knowledge can help.

These are just a few ideas of where having more people around you can help, and there may be more.

The main point is that you should think carefully about the boundary of your business, and ask yourself whether it helps or hinders you in your quest for profitability if you leave it where it is. If you decide to incorporate others into your 'extended business' these relationships must be carefully managed and given the time that they deserve.

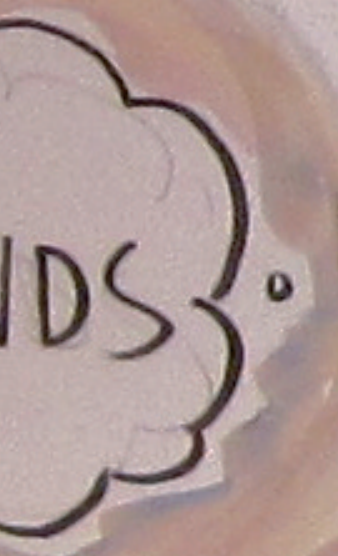




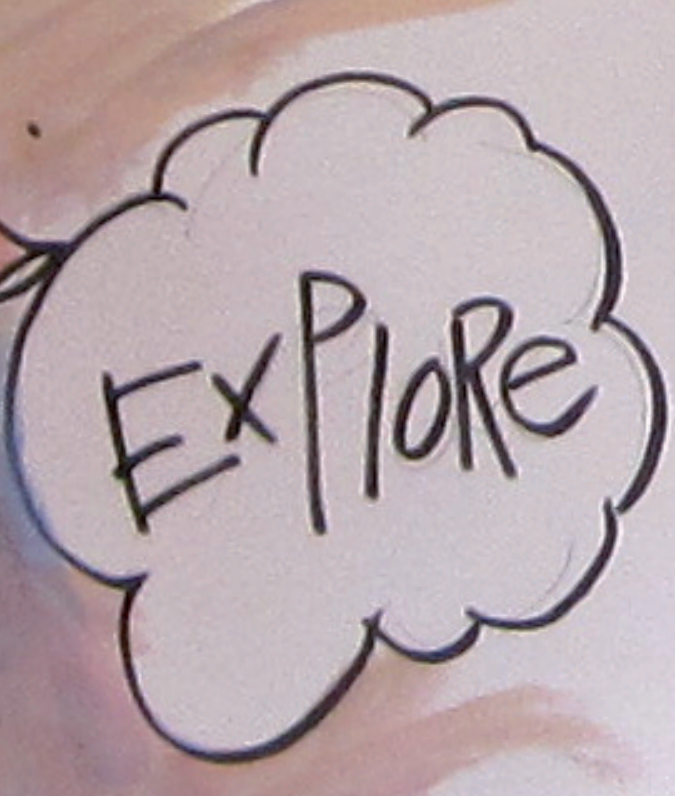
The Role of Creativity and Innovation in Your Business







**TIP:** Creativity can help you see things from a different perspective. Do you remember those house details you got from the Estate Agent? The photos were all of the same thing but very different. Apply this concept to your business.



The reaction of many people is that they either do not see that they are currently innovating or that there is no way that Creativity and Innovation can play any part in their business.

There are a number of issues here:

- Many small business owners see issues not directly relating to delivering a product as irrelevant.
- Innovation is often seen in terms of electronic gadgets or shiny stainless steel.
- Many people are in fact already embracing Creativity and Innovation, they simply do not call them by those names.

So where does it all fit in? First of all we need a simple definition of innovation that works for any business, of any size, in any sector. There are two things that we need to define:

**Innovation output** – the output of innovation can be a completely new product, process or service (radical innovation) OR an existing product, process or service that has been improved (incremental innovation). This is 'an innovation'; to actually innovate we have to go through a process of 'innovation'.

**Note the output is more than mere invention.**

We must have got it to the stage of being able to make money or add value, to be delivered to the marketplace. If your brainchild remains in the garden shed then it is just an invention.



WELCOME

IDEAS GENERATION

Creative Strategy

Organic Shakers

15 minute break

WARNING TESTING AREA

12:00

EVERYBODY THINKS about their personal values TOWARDS their business & create lists of them to share.

[illegible]

-



**NOTES:**  
Think about any problems or business issues that you have been struggling with and note them here. Refer to them later on when you have been introduced to some creative techniques.

**Define your problem or reason for doing this** – this will be apparent as you will have encountered a real issue such as falling sales or increased costs, or perhaps have identified a new product that should be developed for your existing market.

**Generate ideas** – you can use any of the techniques within this material if you have the time to formalise an idea generation session, or you can make it easy for yourself or employees to suggest ideas. The old fashioned suggestion box does actually work, but make sure that all ideas are acknowledged and that contributors are made aware of what is happening. Also the coffee machine and water cooler tend to be where ideas are made public. Consider keeping flip charts or note pads near these. Use any method that works for you and your business.

**Filter your ideas** – this is where some Know How can be useful, but fresh minds such as an apprentice or people within the 'extended business' that was discussed earlier may also help. Let people know why they are doing this or else they will filter according to their own preference.

**Select the right idea(s)** – define some sensible criteria such as feasibility, cost, timescale, risk, potential rewards and come to a rational decision.

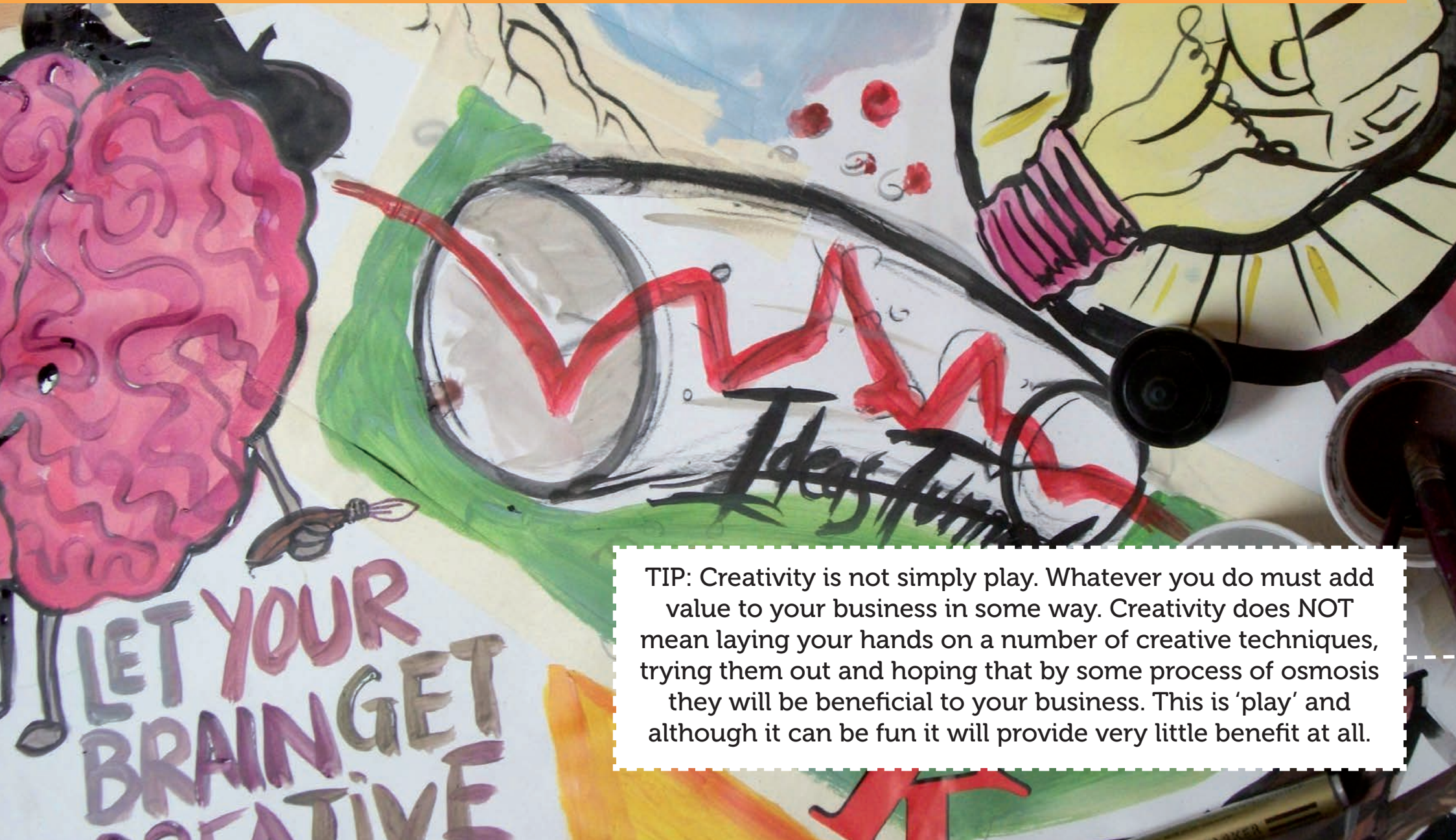
**Create prototypes or experiment and test** – in essence try out your idea. Test it out in your local market or even on the street, in fact anywhere that will give you some sensible feedback.

**Fine tune your new product, process or service** – given the output from the previous step you should be making some modifications and making your idea better. Be careful not to proceed simply because it is your pet idea. The name of the game is to make money! This step and the previous step form a loop which you might need to go around several times.

**Place your new creation into the marketplace** – when you are sure that you have the right product, service or process and that you have incorporated feedback and hence reduced your risk, then take it out into the big wide world. The job does not end here though. You should be collecting information (Know How) ready for the next innovation cycle. Note that Know How is not simply product knowledge, it is knowledge about the marketplace, your competitors and the economic climate.



# How Creativity Can Help Your Business Succeed



TIP: Creativity is not simply play. Whatever you do must add value to your business in some way. Creativity does NOT mean laying your hands on a number of creative techniques, trying them out and hoping that by some process of osmosis they will be beneficial to your business. This is 'play' and although it can be fun it will provide very little benefit at all.





So far we have taken a look at the part that **Creativity can play in your business, but what exactly can you use it for to ensure the success of your business? First of all let us reiterate exactly what Creativity is (or is not).**

Creativity means:

- Using tools and techniques that you may not currently be using or even have heard of before.
- Ensuring that 'the whole is greater than the sum of the parts', i.e. that you do not just use the skills of your colleagues and employees but derive benefit from skills used outside of the workplace and from interactions that take place between them.
- Obtaining a different perspective on the issues affecting your business making it easier to manage and allowing you to spot new business opportunities.
- Being able to make better decisions.
- Increasing intrinsic motivation of employees.
- Giving yourself time and space.
- Working towards your business goals.

Later on we will demonstrate exactly which techniques you can use and in what circumstances but for now here are some examples of techniques and their potential uses:

**Storyboard/Storyboard** – use for business planning and strategy. Easily understood by all stakeholders, can be created in a few hours and will not be wasted unlike the traditional documents, that we provide to bank managers and investors. Such plans make contributions from employees and other stakeholders more likely and easier to incorporate.

**Idea generation** – there are a number of effective ways of doing this, not just relying on ideas coming into your head or a half-hearted attempt at brainstorming. It can also help you calibrate your methods of idea generation, so that you can match the amount of time spent on this activity, with the actual requirements of your business.

**Decision making/idea selection** – one simple technique, a 2 x 2 matrix often known as 'bullet proofing' can help with a number of things such as which business challenges should be tackled first, selecting the best ideas from (potentially) hundreds generated and generally reducing risk.



**Visualisation** – this covers a number of areas including guided imagery in which you are encouraged to seek solutions using your imagination, and modelling/exploration where you seek to build a picture of the future rather than simply describe your objectives in plain English.

**Predicting the future** – this is something that we would all like to do. By matching our business with the economic environment of the future we can beat our competitors. Creative techniques are exceedingly effective at picking out 'weak signals' and searching for patterns, thus we can plan for the future with a greater degree of certainty.

If you embrace the idea of creativity then as an employer you will get something else entirely for free – increased intrinsic motivation. If you create the right conditions for yourself and others to be creative (at the appropriate time of course), and put in place the mechanisms to allow such behaviour, then employees and colleagues will automatically be given a greater degree of freedom and trust which in turn will be rewarded by increased effort or output. Now you have a better business and employees who will 'go the extra mile' for you without being coerced!





Creative  
+  
Innovative  
Management

PIRACY

Hmmm...

Defer  
all  
Judgement

adapt  
modify

then...

S.C.A.M.P.E.R

Substitute

Combine

eliminate  
and  
replace!

The best  
way to get  
good  
ideas is  
to have lots  
of them!

Lets  
put  
your ideas  
to the

ing  
d  
enting





# Guidelines for Creative Business Thinking

**The twelve principles described here are not hard and fast rules that must be rigidly adhered to in order for Creativity to flourish and benefit your business. They are really guidelines, but the more you embrace them, the more successful the outcome. With experience you will be able to determine which works best for you and adapt them accordingly. The main thing is to get stuck in and try things out.**

Almost all 'one person' techniques for using creativity in a business context can be used, suitably adjusted, in group settings, but the main thing that the group working offers for breaking mindsets, is the possibility of exploiting differences between group members.

As you can imagine, such group sessions require careful planning if disagreements are to be kept to a minimum. As we said before, get stuck in and try things out!

## #1 Set out to break mindsets

Most, if not all of us have either a fixed way of doing things or a fixed way of thinking about things. These fixed patterns are known as mindsets and they can severely limit our actions in both business and private life.

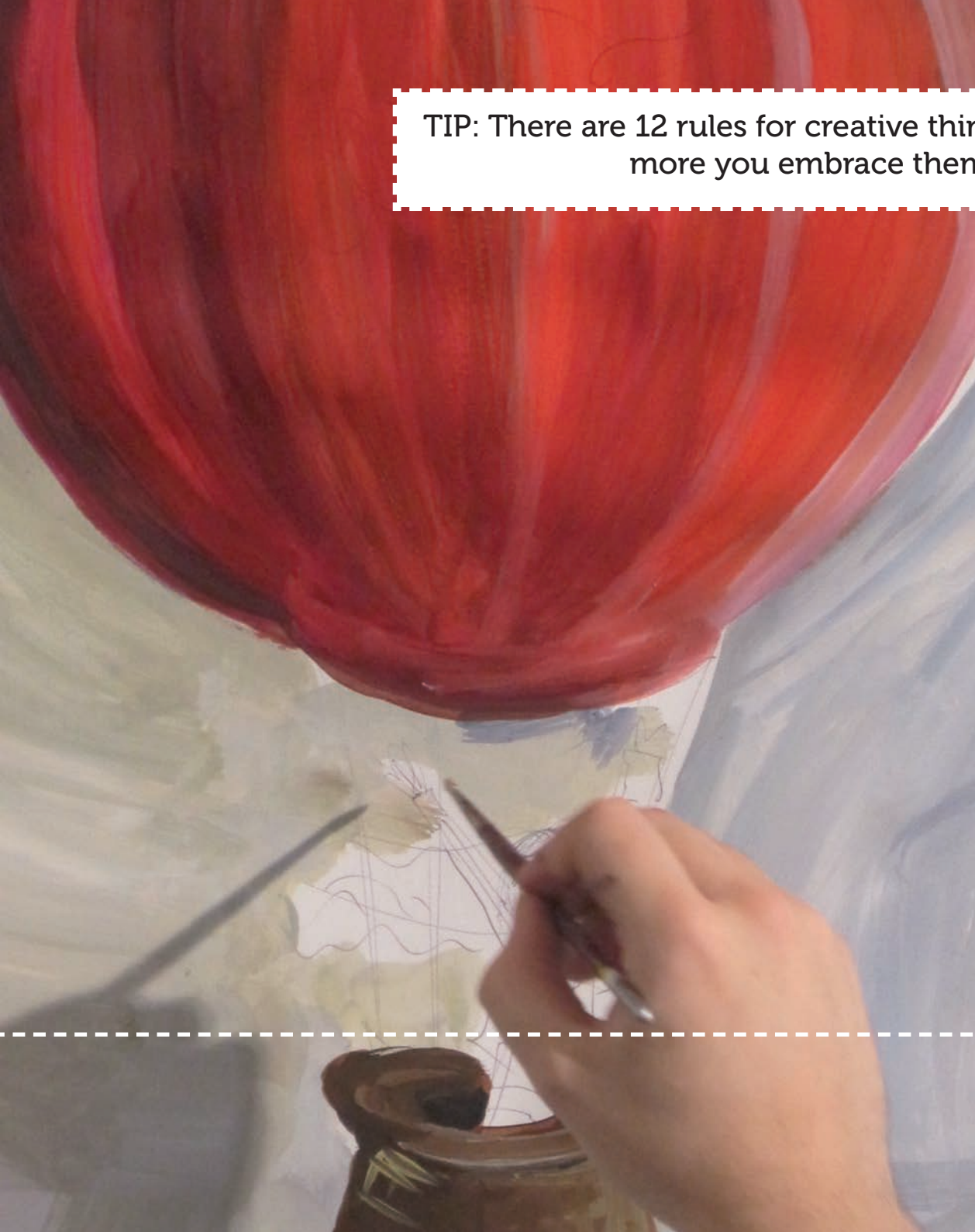
Imagine that you take the same route each day when you walk to your place of work. Each day you buy the same newspaper and the same sandwich for lunch.

Over time you begin to get a little fed up with your choice of sandwich and the newspaper does not seem to engage you as it once did.

If you had turned right at the end of your road instead of left, you would have been introduced 6 months ago to a brand new shop that had a larger stock of newspapers and magazines, and also a more impressive selection of sandwiches, filled rolls, cakes (and salads for the health conscious).

NOTES: Make a note here of any mindsets that you may have that could be holding you back. Then choose one or more of the suggestions and try them out. Make notes about the results and any modifications that you make.





TIP: There are 12 rules for creative thinking. These are not hard and fast rules but the more you embrace them the more value you can create.

Unless a friend or colleague tells you of this new opportunity you will remain blissfully unaware of it. Just think of the new opportunities and new faces if you varied your walk to work on a weekly basis!

So what has this got to do with your business? Well take a long look at yourself and the people that you work with.

Do you advertise in the same way all of the time?

Do you make exactly the same products every day?

Do you try anything different at all to try and improve your business or do you do the same as you have always done?

A simple change of perspective or attitude may be all that is required. Even if your business is successful, you would be interested in new business opportunities, wouldn't you?



Development Environment







The effects of mindsets can be greatly exaggerated when working alone and we all need to make an effort to overcome this. Note that changes you make in your working life will affect your private life and vice versa. Why not try out one of these suggestions?

- Develop a broad range of interests. The richer your experiences, the wider the range of possibilities open to you. If you like chess then try bungee jumping, if you go hang gliding then try model railways. Read books by different authors.
- Become aware of your own blind spots - the things you habitually do not think about and the techniques that you do not use. Then work out ways of challenging them.
- Try out different perspectives, including stepping into the shoes of every important stakeholder your business has no matter how extreme their views. Extreme views can give you useful, if exaggerated, insights. Remember you are not trying to like the person, just view the world through their eyes.

All too often we ignore the views of non-experts who can often help us spot things we might ordinarily miss (a process called Naïve Enquiry. Try this one with children if you can, it can be very enlightening).

- Try different techniques. If you always stick to favourite approaches, gaps will accumulate in your thinking. When you have read most of this material you will find that one or two ideas will catch your eye and become favourites. There is nothing wrong with having something to hand that works but you do need to try an alternative once in a while.
- Try different mental modes: being rational, being intuitive, using drawing etc. Try a visualisation or perhaps a cartoon storyboard to express your thoughts.
- Do you really have to work alone? It is often said that we need people to bounce ideas off and this is very true. Even if you do have to work alone, find yourself a group of 3 or 4 trusted friends who can give you sound advice and act as sounding boards. There is no need to pay them except perhaps for a small gift or a meal at a restaurant, whatever is most appropriate.



## #2 Explore the 'givens'

Whether at home or at work, we tend to focus on things around us that are changing, or that are connected to our own actions, because that is where much of the information that matters to us tends to be located. Life is much simpler if we filter out things that appear to be unchanging or irrelevant.

But when the 'stable, irrelevant background' contains important information, this simplification breaks down. Many 'problems' become 'problematic' because the background contained potentially important information we did not notice until it was too late.

Analysis of background assumptions can be particularly important when making decisions about future actions, because the assumption that earlier background factors will continue unaltered into the future is risky.

Imagine that during the past year you had the opportunity to buy some land on which several houses could be built. You declined the opportunity because land was selling at a premium and when building costs were taken into account there was little, if any, profit.





Fast forward a year and the recession has meant that the owner of the land is willing to sell at a greatly reduced price, and there are many building contractors who will work for you also at a reduced fee. Despite a fall or levelling out in house prices, the project starts to become attractive. You have just challenged the 'given' that this project would never work because the land was too expensive.

In the modern world technology advances rapidly so what is not possible now may be possible in the near future. Also prices of goods and services change frequently so you should scan your environment on a regular basis and challenge some of the 'givens'. Opportunities are just waiting to be discovered.

If you are working on your own, some of the ways of redirecting your attention to the background, or of 'surfacing' assumptions you normally take for granted, include the following:

- Transforming or reframing suggestions often has the effect of making assumptions more visible - e.g. exaggerating a minor problem to think what you would do if it were a national disaster would make you consider options you would otherwise have discounted, and hence highlight assumptions about what is appropriate or possible for a minor issue.

- Try reversing the problem (e.g. 'Lots of ways to make X worse' rather than 'How to make X better') and then re-reverse some of the negatives back again.
- Test the significance of an assumption by asking what would happen if it turned out not to be true. If it would not make much difference, the assumption cannot be too critical!
- Deep questioning - e.g. repeatedly asking your colleagues or partners: 'Why?' and 'Why else?' to uncover the reasons behind the reasons behind the reasons ...
- Put proposals developed by different teams or groups in competition with one another (as in parliamentary debate, for instance).
- Call in outsiders who may find it easy to see what the 'insiders' are blind to.

**NOTES:** Can you think of any 'givens' that might be worth exploring? If so write them down here and then make further notes after you have investigated them.



### #3 Look at the broader picture as well as the detail

Constructive curiosity is more than just an anarchic breaking of mindsets and challenging of assumptions - it has to be served by a wider process of search and enquiry.

One of the key constraints for such a process is that, although our minds can store vast amounts of information, we can only consciously think about a handful of information chunks at a time. You can think either broad and superficially or narrowly and in detail, but not both at once. It is not simply a question of brain capacity; we cannot force our minds to do this.

Since a wider process of search and enquiry implies thinking both broadly and deeply, you have to achieve this by alternating between holistic but superficial images to help you to see how all the bits fit together and detailed but narrow images to show you how individual bits work.

Map and model creation are classic ways to guide such a process, and the best kinds for this purpose are those that allow you to 'zoom out' to see more widely and 'zoom in' for more detail.

Two common examples are given below:

#### **Tree (or branch) diagrams**

Hierarchically organised branching diagrams, such as mind maps provide a classic way to achieve the combination of overview and detail.

You can 'step back' and see just the central topic and the main sub-topics, or you can 'home in' on the details of a particular branch and navigate easily between levels. There are several hierarchically organised tree and cluster diagramming formats that use essentially the same logic.

Mind maps are a well known example of such diagrams and can be used for note taking, recording the proceedings of meetings and sorting ideas. Those interested in the broader picture can simply browse the higher level branches and the details are there to be inspected when necessary.





## Cartoons or caricatures

There are also 'softer' ways of capturing the whole / part relationship, perhaps more appropriate to the early, 'half-formed' stages of problem solving, and the tacit, associative meanings that everyday information invariably carries. For instance, you can use cartoon-like drawings, e.g. 'rich pictures'. You can quite literally 'step back' from the picture to get a sense of the overall topic, or 'move in close' to explore a detail.

There is a lot to be said for the 'back of an envelope' type of sketch to capture initial ideas or to act as a memory jogger later. The theme of pictures can also be used when involving others, as it is often easier to gather contributions to a 'story' rather than a written document.

Pictures are often easier to share and describe and you can use them to jog your memory or stimulate yourself. For instance, many people put pictures of their goals on the fridge or wall in their place of work. This is not too dissimilar to what we are proposing here. What inspires you, a picture or some meeting minutes? Hopefully it is the former.





#### #4 Value Play

As young children we play without thinking about what we are doing. Sticks become spears and swords and cardboard boxes make great castles.

These, and other methods of play allow us to experience the real world but in a non-threatening way. Also we engage our imagination without the presence of the artificial barriers or filters that adults tend to employ.

Then as we go to school we are taught to pass exams and we play less. When we leave school and enter the world of work our employers then try to recapture this lost creativity. Should we have been forced to leave play behind in the first instance?

**TIP:** For children, play is a key learning activity. It acts as a trial-and-error laboratory for trying things out. There are parallels here with what happens in an adult brainstorming session. Try observing children at play and use this philosophy in the workplace.

Those engaged in the study of play have drawn some interesting conclusions:

- For children, play is a key learning activity. It acts as a trial-and-error laboratory for trying things out. There are obvious parallels here with what happens in an adult brainstorming session.
- Play is neither a practical external task nor purely internal imagination. The objects a child plays with have a dual nature. On the one hand, a piece of cardboard is just cardboard. On the other hand, it is also whatever the child dreams it to be - a sword or a magical object. Adult metaphorical thinking is similar.
- Play offers a protected area for illusion. When a child is playing, we do not say 'Don't be silly - that's not a sword - it's only cardboard!'. In the adult world, a brainstorming session is also a setting where it is acceptable to play with bizarre ideas, etc.
- Play is a way of managing strain. Both the child and the adult problem-solver want to do things that they cannot yet do. This gap creates a strain. Play and problem-solving both temporarily reduce this strain by pretending or imagining ways of closing the gap. In some cases this gap can be bridged.







## Being Practical

Here are some things to consider before embracing play as part of your creative toolbox:

- It will help if the setting you choose for playing is perceived by participants as somewhere where it is acceptable to behave in odd ways and express unusual ideas. If you wish to play on your own then this is easier, however you must give yourself permission to play otherwise there will be that nagging voice that keeps reminding you that you have 'sensible stuff' to do.
- People communicate ideas better if they share the same 'illusions', e.g. same culture or religion. However a little 'friction' can also throw up useful ideas.
- Create a climate that gives a sense of emotional security, but is neither boring nor overexcited. Participants need to feel that there is little risk of a) appearing foolish b) coming to any emotional or physical harm.
- Some behaviours (like gentle humour) are usually harmless, but others (e.g. withdrawal, sarcastic humour or defensive/ aggressive responses) tend to undermine group working, and must be managed carefully.
- The intimacy generated by 'sharing inner worlds' means that successful play activities can be useful for building social links in an

organisation (but be aware that sessions that go wrong can have the opposite effect - 'I opened myself up, and look what happened...').

So what sort of 'play' is useful? Well, any really, as long as it is directed at achieving something specific. You might wish to generate ideas, solve a business problem, create a strategy, or plan for your business.

All of these can be tackled using creative techniques and all require some experimentation and a change in the way you think. Later on we will focus on individual techniques and how to use them. But for now we are just looking at some guidelines for you to follow.

We have only touched on emotion here, yet as we know it plays a key part in unlocking creativity. Moreover it also plays a key role in decision-making processes. In reality we go by our gut instincts then try to justify them, we are not entirely rational thinkers however hard we try to be.

"We are not thinking machines that feel, we are feeling machines that think!" (Prof. Antonio Damasio – neuroscience expert)



**TIP: Even the silliest, weirdest or most impractical ideas will contain potentially useful elements or can be used as a stepping stone.**

### #5 Build up, don't knock down

'Building' techniques are extremely powerful, often very portable and can have very positive secondary effects.

They allow you to take virtually any input - a random piece of news, a misunderstanding or an accidental meeting - and get useful ideas from it.

Any other people involved will also tend to feel encouraged by having their ideas valued, and being helped to build them into realistic and acceptable plans.

This is the kind of experience that people want to try again, from which they learn a lot and which leaves them valuing you and your business.

Some suggestions for techniques to 'build' on an existing idea (sometimes called 'hitch-hiking') are listed below:

- Give priority to the useful aspects ('Yes, that idea would let us...').
- Express problematic aspects in a form that allows them to be tackled ('That idea raises an interesting problem. I wonder how we could...').
- Combine the idea with other ideas (e.g. adding a sponge is interesting but adding an orange sponge would be really useful).
- Transform the idea in various ways (e.g. make it bigger, smaller, upside down, add a smell, change the colour...).
- Express the idea in more abstract or concrete terms ('What is this idea an example of?')
- Represent it in a different medium (draw it, role-play it, sculpt it, etc.).
- Reframe the idea (i.e. see it from someone else's viewpoint, from a different hierarchical level, in different contexts or on different time-scales).

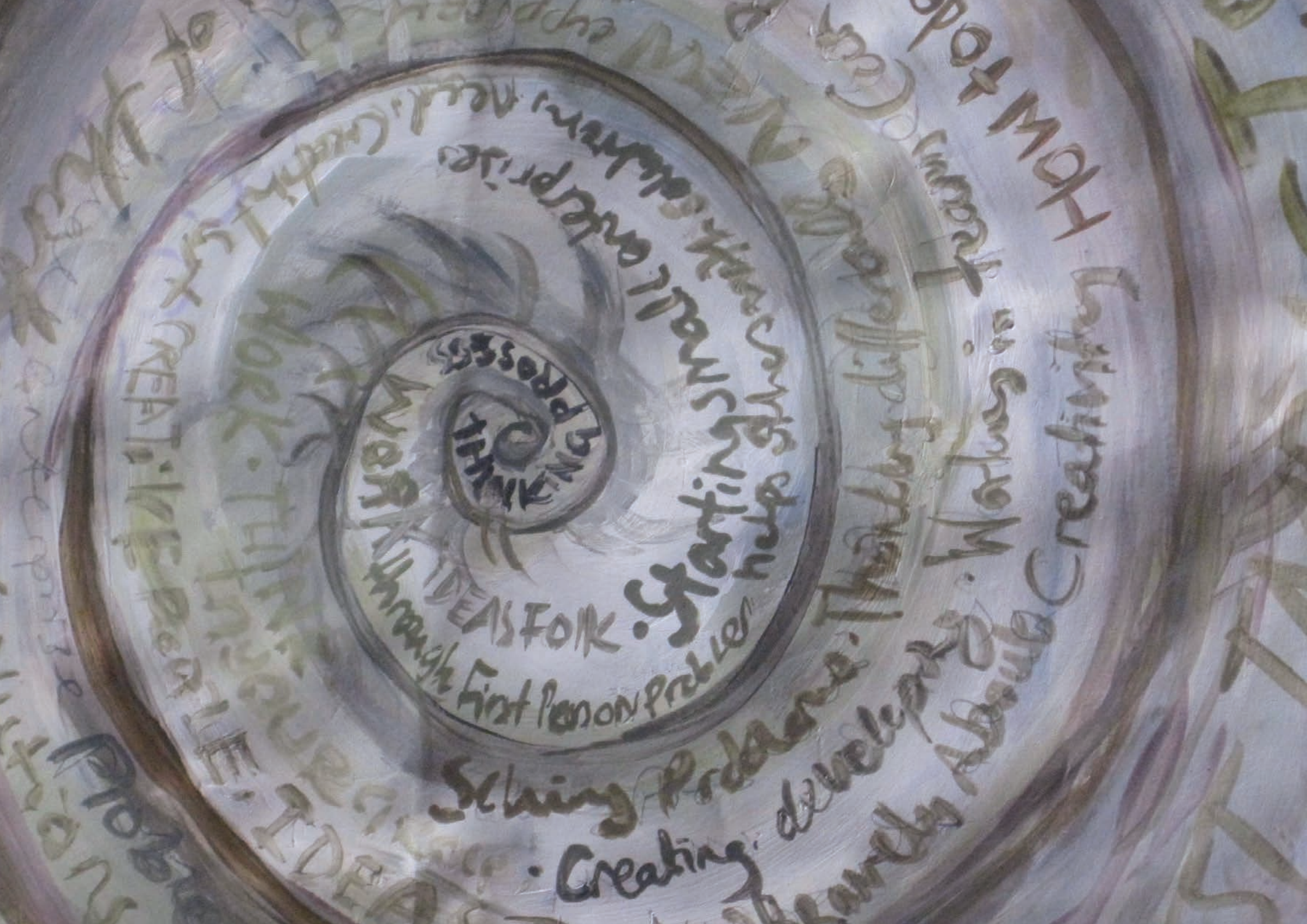
Don't be too precious about your ideas, you are in business to make money. If your original idea gets modified and leads to a good business idea, then that is surely worth it?



THE  
PROCESSES

Starts with  
First Person  
DEALS FOLK  
Work through  
Starts small  
helps give  
outcomes  
need. (Creative)

Solving Problems  
Creating  
Learning  
Developing  
Thinking  
Working  
Creating  
Thinking  
Working  
Learning  
Developing  
Solving Problems





## #6 Live with ambiguity

Although we can manage Creativity in a business context it is not an exact science. The issues that demand the use of Creativity are not tidy (changing environments, innovation etc.).

In order to cope with this you need a mental framework that is 'forgiving' of a necessary degree of confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, contradiction, etc. - providing, of course, that a sufficient core of structure can be extracted from it to allow your activities to proceed and of course succeed.

There are five areas of ambiguity that people find particularly tough to deal with:

- Where the significance and reliability of information is unknown.
- Where it is unclear at what level an issue needs to be tackled.
- Where different value orientations lead to political and emotional clashes among key stakeholders.
- Where contradictions and paradoxes appear.
- Where symbols and metaphors, rather than logical arguments, are used to advance a position.

If several of the above characteristics combine, the problems begin to disrupt normal routines, and

stress levels climb. Situations like these test the limits of analysis, so strictly analytical skills tend to be less relevant. The skills listed below will be useful to you:

**Problem-finding ability.** A combination of judgement, intuition and logic that enables you to identify the right issue to work on and to recognise opportunities.

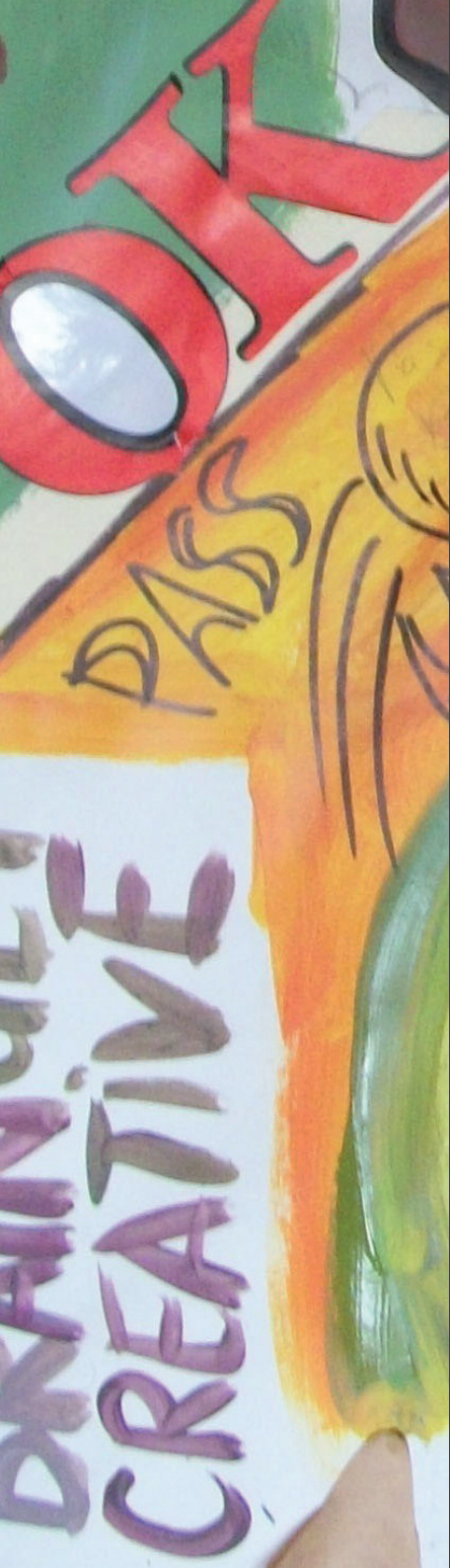
**Mapping ability.** The skill of generating one or more ways of conceptualising a complex situation (refer to the text above regarding broader picture and local detail).

**Janusian thinking.** This refers to thinking that links contradictory beliefs in a constructive way (the Roman god Janus faced in both directions at once) e.g. selling chocolate to someone on a diet! When working with creative techniques it is perfectly valid to hold multiple solutions to a problem in your mind. This helps us to be flexible and adaptable, learning to live with a degree of ambiguity.

**Un-controlling.** Knowing when to let events follow their own course versus knowing when to intervene. This is a particularly useful management skill in a growing business. You need to let go of some of the day to day details in order to focus on growth and opportunities.







**Humour.** Humour helps regulate stress and encourages creative juxtapositions, rather than biting, sarcastic, denigrating humour. Laughter is restorative - releasing tension and encouraging social connections.

**Charisma.** The ability to stir enthusiasm, commitment and confidence. It transforms everyday activities into purposeful pursuit of tough goals, and heightens people's sense of their own power and their willingness to take risks.

The use of a core group together with a network of contacts. In a small or micro business you cannot afford to pay large numbers of advisors or non-executive directors. You can however find a trusted group of friends who will offer advice and perhaps a shoulder to cry on in exchange for the occasional gift or meal in a restaurant.

Be creative about getting what you want! The use of domain and direction planning rather than goal-oriented planning. Knowing who you are and where you want to go is inherently more flexible, and better adapted to the realities of acting under stress than thinking in terms of specific, objective, measurable goals.

It is likely, almost certain, that you will make progress with your business but the exact direction you go in, and the size of the leaps you make may not be as originally planned. Skill and flexibility will keep you moving whilst adherence to rigid goals may leave you disappointed when you are in fact succeeding.

Use ad hoc structures such as task forces and project teams rather than permanent structures such as departments. This is for slightly larger or expanding businesses. Don't create rigid structures if you can help it or they can help to encourage the development of mindsets.

When your business is young most projects are short term anyhow (such as creating your website or developing marketing materials).

**TIP:** Although we can manage creativity in a business context it is not an exact science. The issues that demand the use of creativity are not tidy



## #7 It is there already - nurture it

This is about valuing the creative potential in all of us, and trying to create room for it to flourish. Each of us has the ability to be creative, even if this only exists in small amounts.

Such skills can be enhanced and amplified by employing the relevant tools and techniques. It is up to you, the small business owner to tap into these resources and use them in addition to the resources already at your disposal.

A reasonable degree of creativity is a natural output of mentally and socially healthy people. It is also quite a fragile state, and many things can, and often do, disrupt it, so that it can often be well below its potential level.

This implies that if you want to produce a modest increase in creativity, it is usually much more cost-effective to train people and to remove some of the obstacles, than to try to find Leonardos and Einsteins to build your team from! If you can discover how to release it, creativity will find its own ways to blossom.

One of the most basic requirements is that creativity needs 'space' (using 'space' here in a metaphoric rather than literal sense). New

responses to a problem require more mental processing than standard ones. So if you are under severe time pressure, and/ or you are endlessly being interrupted, and/ or your brain is caught up with obsessive routines, or preoccupied with panic or rage (or even passion!), creativity is going to be difficult!

Some of the ways of creating mental space when you are working on your own include the following:

- Schedule real 'quality time' for imaginative thinking. If at all possible, give yourself regular 'down-time' from your main role to allow time for thinking. It does not have to be anything very elaborate - perhaps just a regular walk or a round of golf.
- Time-share your brain. Another alternative is to dedicate thinking capacity instead of time. Leave the problem ticking over at the back of your mind and carry a notebook everywhere to record ideas as they occur to you.
- Make psychological space. Use psychological development, assertiveness training, stress management and related approaches to develop the ability to remain calm, relaxed and fully attentive even under high pressure.

**TIP:** A reasonable degree of creativity is a natural output of mentally and socially healthy people. It is also quite a fragile state, and many things can, and often do, disrupt it.



Methods you can use when working with others include the following:

- Set up a creativity session. This, of course, is the classic solution. Notice that as well as providing a physical place where creativity can be practised, it also provides a symbolic space (see the earlier discussion of play). One of the benefits of holding a problem-solving workshop or training course, is that it 'gives permission' for participants to set aside their normal responsibilities for a while, to concentrate on a particular issue. In a small business such a gesture can be incredibly powerful.
- Develop skills in 'guerrilla' creativity. As many businesses become leaner, the opportunity cost of a session devoted to creativity increases and such sessions become harder to set up. One solution is to interleave a kind of 'distributed creativity' into other activities. For instance, if you cannot manage a formal brainstorming afternoon with a few colleagues, perhaps you can incorporate an element of brainstorming into your next few water cooler conversations or lunches.





EXPLORE

YOUR CUSTOMER

SHAPING

YOUR

BUSINESS

CLAY





## #8 Involve others

Most people can easily think up, say, five or ten ideas and reactions to any given issue, providing you can get them involved, and the conditions are such that they feel happy to share their half-formed thoughts with you.

These may well not be particularly 'creative' or well-informed ideas - just the first few thoughts that occur to them. However, one person's 'ordinary' reactions will tend to be different from the next person's, so the combined list from several people may include many ideas that are not at all 'ordinary' for anyone of them - and these may in turn trigger other ideas.

This means that the most obvious way to get 'new' ideas is to work with other people, using their knowledge as a resource, and also getting stimulation from the differences between them.

This sounds very simple, but the trouble is that participants in any discussion influence one another.

In an ordinary conversation, people will attempt to generate consensus but when we embrace creativity this is what we do not want. Friction and tension is what helps to create ideas and solutions.

We wish to maximise, rather than minimise, diversity. We must, however, ensure that these tensions are managed correctly - hence the many techniques that have been developed to make it possible.

When working with others it is useful to work with as wide a variety of individuals as possible. You may not value the knowledge held by these people but it is not their knowledge that we wish to tap into - it is their thinking.

Think of this exercise as harnessing the computing power of a number of networked laptops rather than simply examining the contents of their hard drives. Remember, the views of non-experts should be as welcome as those of experts.

**TIP: When working with others it is useful to work with as wide a variety of individuals as possible. You may not value the knowledge held by these people, but it is not their knowledge that you wish to tap into - it is their thinking.**



## #9 Be receptive

How open are you to triggers and stimuli from your environment? Many creative techniques offer you a stimulus as an idea-trigger – often known as a 'wild card'. Sometimes the stimulus is problem-related - perhaps explicitly as in a metaphor or an analogy, or a phrase that is associated in some way with the problem statement.

The relationship may be more subjective –so perhaps you can go for a walk and find some object that strikes you as relevant. In other methods, the stimulus may be completely unrelated to the problem - perhaps a favourite picture, or a randomly picked object in the room or word from a dictionary. In any case, the first step is to try to link it to your situation in such a way as to suggest possible actions.

In the case of a close analogy, the 'linking' is a very familiar process - e.g. 'This is a bit like the situation we had last year. At that time we handled it like this...'

Suggestions from this kind of close parallel are highly likely to be predictable and can be useful. However when you are looking to steal a march on your competitors then you need something a little less predictable to stimulate your thinking.

If the stimulus is more remote (or not very well connected), you may either get no useful ideas at all (in which case you discard it and try another) or you get new and surprising ones.

To illustrate this, if your problem was, say, 'How to reorganise my department', 'remote' might mean something like 'space travel' or (if I take something at random in my field of view as I sit typing) 'my keyboard'.

There are basically three ways to use such a remote stimulus.

**Like any other analogy.** 'How is reorganising my department like space travel?' Space travel takes a long time, it has a remote destination, you remain in contact with a ground control centre. How might the idea of a ground control centre help your departmental reorganisation?

**As an 'excursion'.** Having earlier spent some time thinking about the problem situation, you are already very familiar with it, you temporarily set that aside, and now spend some time exploring the stimulus ('OK -let's write down things we know about computer keyboards').







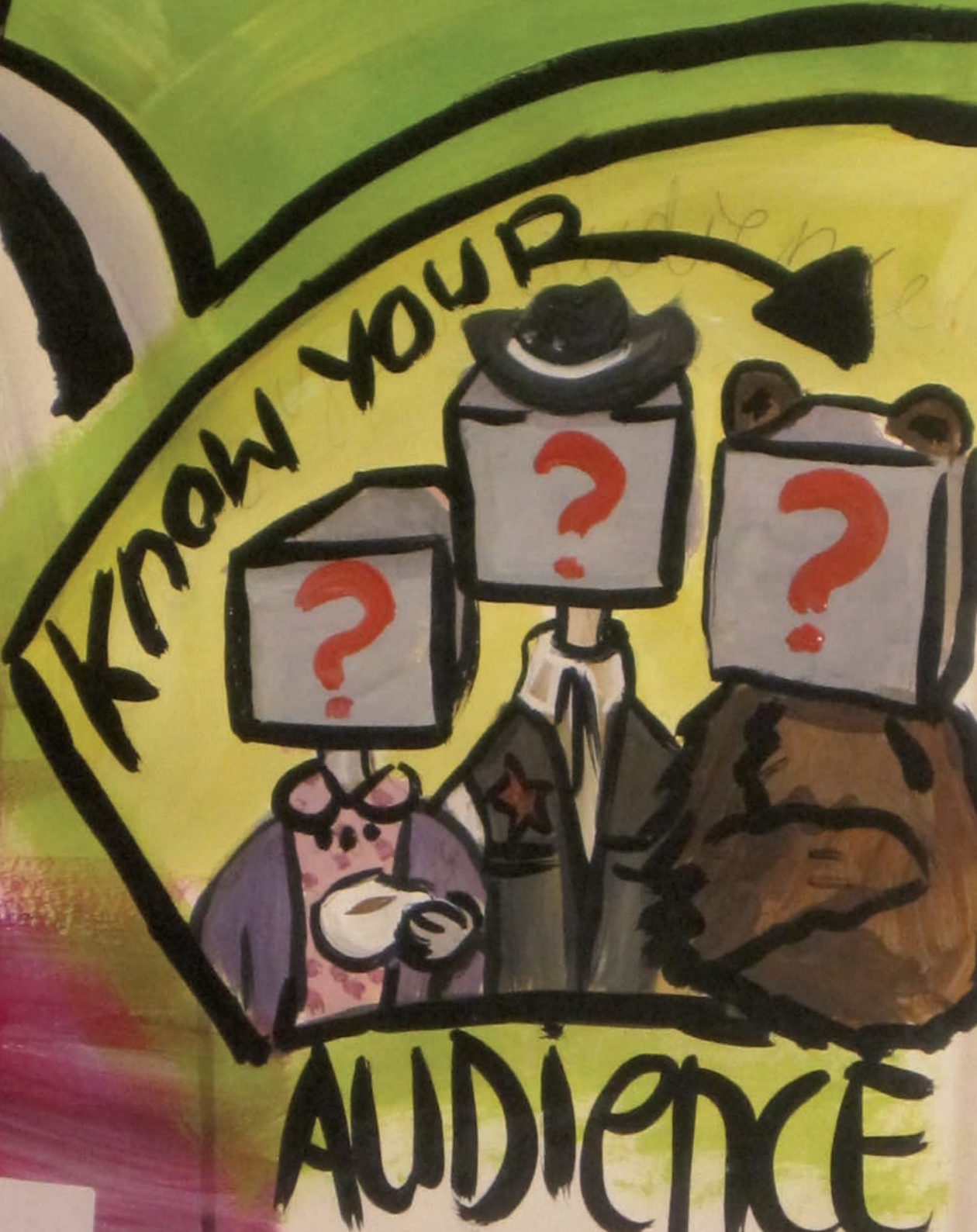
You then try to 'force-fit' aspects of the stimulus back on to the problem. In this case we use items from our list (logical organisation, reliability, familiar...) and see what happens when we apply them to our idea of departmental reorganisation.

**By free association.** Follow the sequence of words and images that pop up in your mind as you think of the stimulus (e.g. space travel, rocket, early train, Stephenson, name of old school teacher, chalk, powder...).

Whilst thinking of these images you might also be thinking if your new product could be turned into a powder or how it could be made non-stick! The simple act of doing this, exercises your brain in ways that are often ignored.

Creativity can depend heavily on sheer luck, although 'blind chance' is often, of course, unfair - virtue is frequently unrewarded! This rule is therefore partly about 'the management of luck'.





## #10 Know what you want

There are two separate aspects you will need to consider:

- Clarity of motivation - the clear commitment of energy and resources in pursuit of your goals.
- Clarity of content - the clear articulation of a particular goal so that everyone knows what they are aiming for. If you work alone then this group will include any close confidantes or advisers as well as valued customers.

### Clarity of motivation

One well known definition of intention is a combination of:

- A strong desire for a particular outcome.
- A powerful belief that it is possible to achieve this outcome.
- A clear willingness to actually accept the goal when you achieve it - you must be clear that it really is the goal, not the pursuit of the goal, that you want.

Outstanding creative achievement is almost invariably the result of very high levels of commitment and the associated hard work.

### Clarity of content

Clarity of content means that you should have an accurate and realistic sense of what you are trying





to achieve. Express the goal positively, as something you want rather than something you do not want. 'What would I rather have?' 'What do I really want?'

Express your goal in terms of possibilities that fall within your own control. 'What can I do?' Imagine the goal as specifically as you can. Ask 'Who, where, when, what and how, specifically?' Where, when, and with whom do you want this goal? Identify exactly what you would need to see, hear, feel, etc. to know that you had achieved your outcome. 'How will you know that you have achieved it?'

Next, identify the resources you would need for this - both your own internal resources, and any external resources you need, particularly those that you do not yet have and would need to gain access to, or control over.

Check the scale of the challenge facing you. If it seems overwhelmingly large, turn it into smaller problems (often known as 'chunking') by asking 'What obstacles may prevent me from getting this?'. If your goal seems too small to really motivate you, get a clear sense of how it relates to other goals that do motivate you. Ask 'If I got this outcome, what would it do for me?'

You should also check the impact of your goal in a

wider context. How will this goal affect other workmates, friends, family, etc.? How would it affect other activities? What would you, your workmates or your family have to give up or take on to achieve it? Would there be any undesirable side-effects?

Finally, check out any lingering doubts. Does it feel right? Ask yourself questions such as: 'If this was made available to me now, would I take it?'; 'What would happen if I got it?' As we said previously, emotion plays a huge part in creativity and decision making. Just as numbers can help with financial decisions so 'gut feeling' can help us too. Intuition is simply just a decision made using knowledge that we are unable to express externally. This is not the same as gambling by tossing a coin or holding a wetted finger in the air.

A word of caution here. You cannot have a neat, unambiguous problem statement, and hence a clearly defined goal, unless your situation really is neat and unambiguous. In a complex situation, the 'well-formed outcome' may not be very practicable. This is because the real difficulty is not working out how to do something, it is finding out what it is you are supposed to be doing in the first place! This is often a headache for the busy small business person so when friends or family tell you to take 'time out', you really should listen.



### #11 Cycle often and close late

This reflects two very important aspects of any decision making processes, allowing time to iterate, avoiding premature closure and possibly jumping to conclusions. In any such process, a balance has to be struck between the cost (time and /or money) of the decision process itself and the added benefits (in terms of the quality of decision) of a better decision being made.

Messy or complex problems are unpleasant, stressful and often quite disruptive; and detailed decision processes with lots of consultation, brainstorming, discussion, iteration, etc. are costly. Not surprisingly, there is pressure to make a snap decision. This makes sense if the consequences of the decision are minor, and can easily be reversed - the outcome will probably be acceptable and the consequences of an occasional error are not likely to be significant.

But what happens if the consequences of a poor decision could be costly, could affect many people, and are probably not easily reversed? The potential impact of getting it wrong could be many times greater than the cost and discomfort of a more elaborate decision process.

### Allow time to iterate

There are two types of iteration, successive approximation and cyclic search. An example of successive approximation is a carpenter making a piece of furniture to fit exactly against an uneven wall, by repeatedly 'offering it up' to the wall as the wood is trimmed, to make closer and closer approximations to the profile of the wall.

All aspects using creative techniques tend to be like this. We refine our definition of the situation we are in, then move towards a viable set of options, the development of an action plan, or even the repetition of the entire process as the underlying grasp of what is needed, begins to evolve through successive attempts.

**TIP: Messy or complex problems are unpleasant, stressful and often quite disruptive, and detailed decision processes with lots of consultation, brainstorming, discussion, iteration, etc. are costly. But what happens if the consequences of a snap decision can be damaging and irreversible?**





Cyclic search is illustrated by the expand-contract cycle that is described later on in this material. To use a fishing metaphor, the net is repeatedly thrown out as widely as possible, and then drawn in to see what you have caught.

Extensive use of iteration of either type has two implications:

- 'Keeping moving' is usually more important than 'Getting it right'. It is usually more helpful to take a quick, crude, pass right through the whole method than to spend ages on any particular stage. You can always go round the loop again!
- The best indicator of how long a session will take is usually your feel for the amount of iteration that is likely to be needed. Conversely, if you have a limited total time available, but nevertheless want to have a certain number of iterations, you will have to control your schedule very carefully to achieve this.

### Avoiding premature closure

There will, of course, come a point where a decision has to be made, because any further delay will begin to create practical difficulties for you. But until that point is reached, there is no need to finalise any decision. A premature decision may be a relief at the time, but:

- It gives you less time for thinking, discussing, networking, iterating, discovering new options, or just being open to serendipitous events.
- It increases the risk that you will have failed to take into account last minute information and developments.

So by all means do a lot of work towards your decision as early as you wish, but do not finalise it until it becomes necessary. Just ask yourself how many times after a conversation you have thought, 'now why didn't I think of that / say that before?' The same rule applies; give yourself the best chance by leaving space for your brain to digest things properly.



## #12 Manage the process

Embracing Creativity or running a creative thinking session is not unlike running a theatrical performance - it needs both stage management and direction.

Such activities can of course vary widely in scale. You may be working on your own; you may be chatting informally with one or two others; you may be running a classic small-group brainstorming session or even working with large groups. In all cases you must pay attention to the following components:

People - the 'cast' of the drama.

If you have the luxury of choosing people to work with, then this may present a dilemma. On the one hand, you want as much diversity as possible, because that is where new insights and connections will come from.

On the other hand, they must work well together, because creative work requires a high level of personal openness and risk taking, and a lot of interaction.

If possible you should:

- Choose people who have the skills to manage high levels of difference comfortably.
- Design sessions so that they are less sensitive to the adverse effects of large interpersonal differences.
- Facilitate the session in such a way that you 'manage' adverse effects as (or before) they emerge.
- Choose people who can tolerate wide levels of difference.
- Choose people who are compatible temperamentally, but differ widely in their area of expertise.

People are less likely to be 'thrown' by minor interpersonal clashes if they have a reasonably solid personality, a degree of self-awareness, and a good sense of humour. Avoid big status differences, unless it is very clear that there are excellent, pre-existing, levels of trust between the people involved.

Have fun! Laughter and a light touch can defuse many tensions and manage the expectations of participants so that they know this will be a somewhat 'special' event, with unusual people.





CONTENT  
CREATION

aeroplane

MARKET

BRAND

MARKETING  
the PACKAGE

"dis iz a  
gurd ideer  
ay film  
all about  
Meh"  
(French  
accent)

audience Modelling  
Enhance  
RePlace  
Revive  
BACK LASH



HOW <sup>will</sup>  
YOU  
PITCH





HOW WE CAN WORK TOGETHER

THE

X

TIER

APPROX



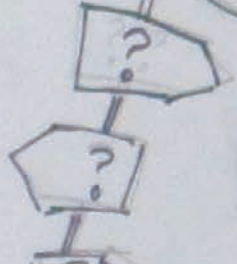
"We need innovation"

"That's why I'm here"

ercome

CK AGES

WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

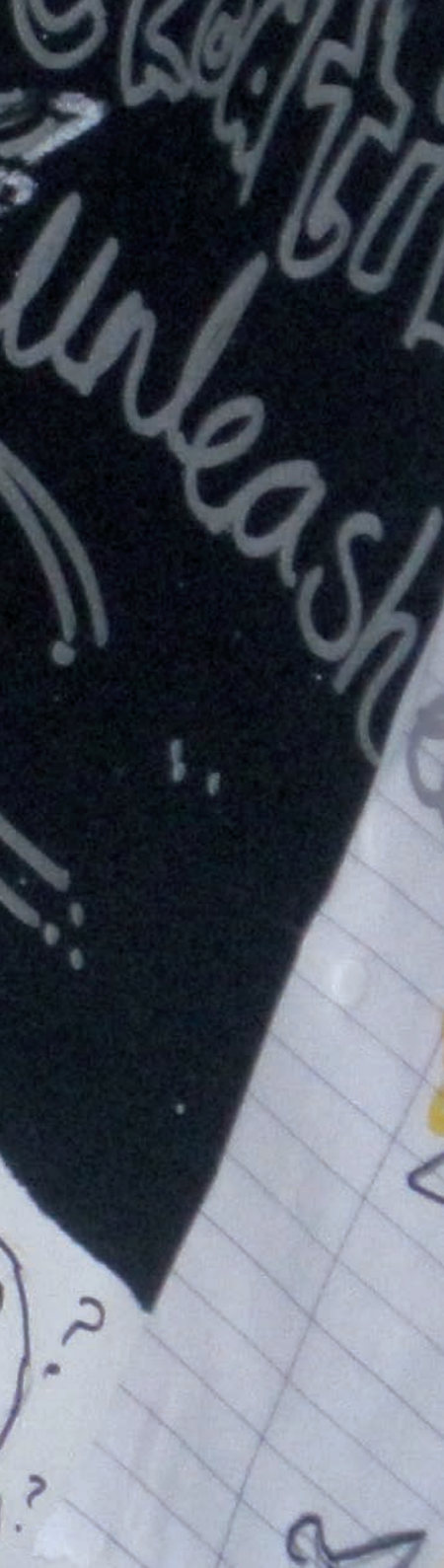


Improvement

ORIGINALITY

So, WHY Bother? ?





Remember, it is usually easier for people to feel uninhibited and take risks with a group they will not see again.

For the best effect try separating the components of your sessions completely. For example, one person (or team if you have more people) undertakes the expansive brainstorming phase, and another undertakes evaluation and selection.

All of the previous information is designed to be relevant to your business, although it can be applied to a single person working alone, or groups of unlimited size.

The remainder of this section contains useful reading but is relevant to slightly larger businesses – which is of course you when your business grows!



## **Looking after people as your business grows**

### **What YOU should do**

Adopt working practices that encourage contribution from everyone while at the same time minimising critical and group pressure. Act as a role model yourself, deliberately involve everyone, value everybody's contributions equally, prevent or stop current or pending 'yes and ' comments.

### **Physical space**

The room you use (office, warehouse, workshop etc.) and the facilities you offer are important at two levels. They have a symbolic role in helping to mark a creativity session as being 'different' from normal work if you are holding a specific meeting perhaps for idea generation. They have a practical role in supporting the activities involved, but they can also reinforce the fact that alternative thinking and initiative are positively encouraged.

### **Symbolism**

Anything that you do can, and will, be interpreted by workmates, customers or others as having some meaning. If there is any suspicion of your actions then the hidden meanings will multiply and have a life of their own. So take great care when undertaking any new initiative so that your intentions are communicated and interpreted as you wish.



For instance, holding a meeting off-site can mark it as an event where 'things will be done differently'. Banning telephones, e-mail, mobile phones etc. does prevent interruptions but it also signals the fact that something is even more important, and that the participants have permission to fully engage with what you are trying to achieve.

A sense of safety can be helped both by the physical separation from the work setting and, if appropriate, by getting a clear agreement that people will not report back to the workplace in a personal way on events during the session. For a smaller business you may have to be content with a change of location e.g. a different part of the office, factory or workshop.

It is tempting to explain why you are trying to do things differently at each stage but it is wise not to. Your workmates and employees should be fully engaged with being creative, generating ideas and solving business issues, not asking questions about the process. This does not of course prevent them from making suggestions about the process.

### **Practical aspects of group working**

This applies to training workshops and if you are perhaps just trying to run a meeting in a different style. A typical room layout for a small group

session for brainstorming or similar activities can be arranged as follows:

- Whole group activities such as introduction or providing instructions can be conducted using a horseshoe arrangement of chairs.
- Group working might call for the whole group to be seated round a large table area or perhaps smaller tables. Many people forget to factor in the extra space needed for tables.
- Sub-groups of two or three working either in clusters of chairs or around tables or flip-charts. The more groups you have, the more shuffling of chairs you will encounter. Once again factor in space. A good rule of thumb is to allocate twice as much space as you think you need.
- Post-It note clustering requires a suitable wall area or white board (this could be a portable easel-like item).
- Solo work on activities such as drawing will need tables or floor space big enough for working on full-size flip-chart sheets. People are surprisingly keen to work on the floor so ensure that through routes are available and doorways clear to avoid interruption.
- If you want to use guided visualisation exercises, it is good to have enough carpeted floor space for people to be able to lie down without crowding one another if they so choose.







- An active group of half a dozen can easily generate 30-40 A1 flip-chart sheets in a day, so be prepared for a demand on display space and afterwards the results either need recording separately or storing safely. If not then you will find a large pile of paper stuffed under your desk or on top of a filing cabinet!

Other things that you should try to take into account are:

Recording ideas, encouraging listening, managing the timing, keeping the pace going, respecting silence, stopping when appropriate, overcoming interpersonal pressures, not letting the logistics get in the way, environmental factors (heating, lighting, food...), choosing the right methods and techniques.

Some of these may seem trivial but events such as missing lunch can seriously affect people's motivation.

### **Managing In A Creative Environment**

This is where things can start to get a little confusing for some people. Let us begin with the word 'manage'. If you run a business either as the Managing Director of a small to medium sized



business or as a sole trader running a market stall, then you are a manager, or you should be. If you have not received any advice about what management of your business entails, then take a break from this book and consult a business adviser. Management means that you will have a working knowledge of how a business is run, what procedures are required by law and which will help you get along more easily. It is, however, not necessary to know all of these things in detail; just know where to lay your hands on advice or reference material.

So we have assumed that you know a little about management as a topic and now you are being encouraged to adopt some slightly different working practices that may make yourself, colleagues and employees (if you have any) behave in different ways. This will mean that you and everyone else involved may have to make some allowances and make some unusual choices or decisions.

Embracing creativity will force you to think about the type of business that you run and the values associated with it. Just because you might be a farmer, it does not mean that everything you do is with your 'farming hat' on. Similarly do your beliefs and values as a business influence your

#### NOTES:

After reading this section take time to think about your own management style and preferences. Are there any aspects that cause you to take particular courses of action? Please make a note of them.

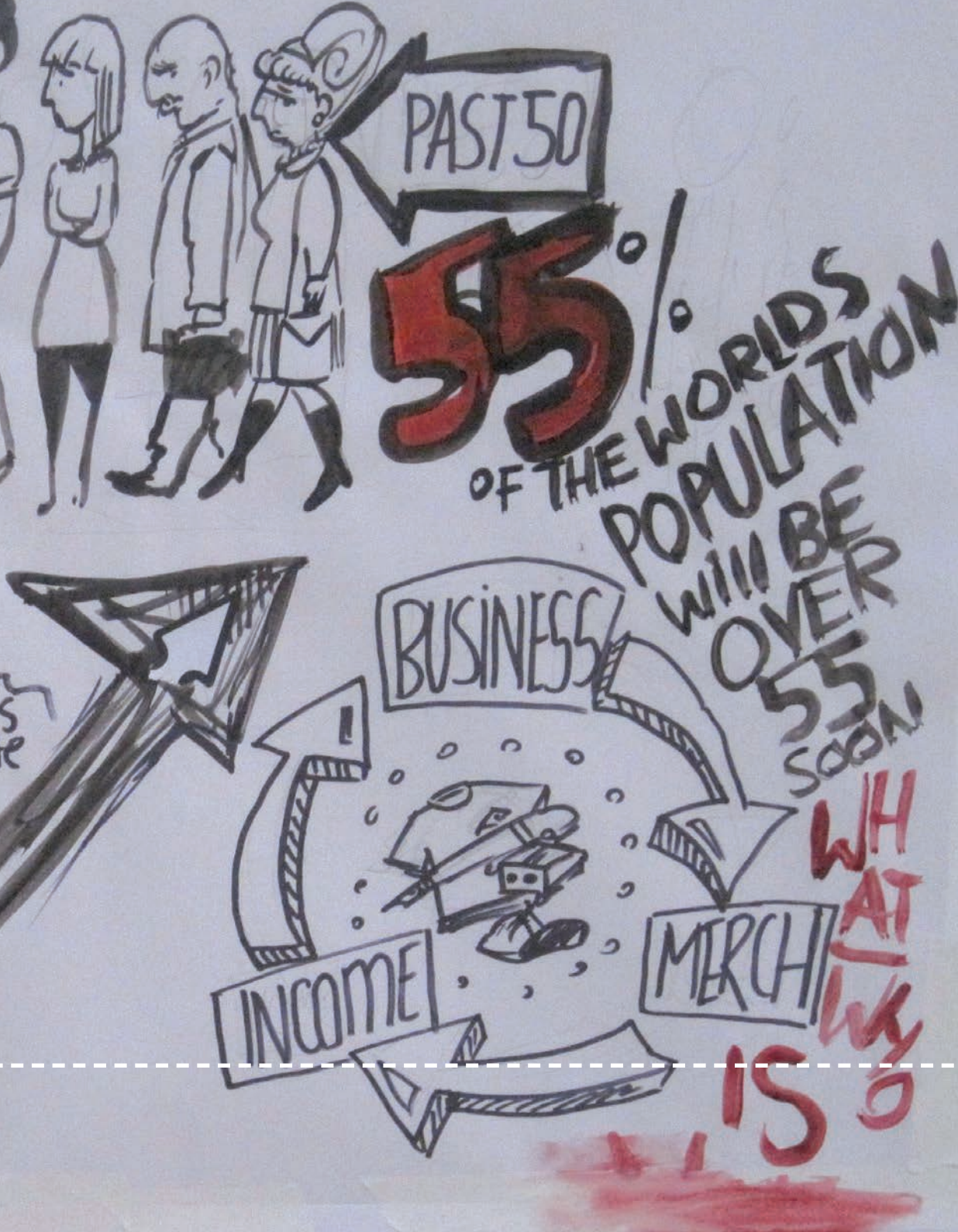
IT RESEARCH

Direction

NEW  
Idea  
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Better  
Business

creative





business decisions regarding such processes as procurement or recruitment? You should also take a look at your own personal capabilities and preferences. Do these stop you personally taking a particular course of action or do you project your personal preferences onto your business?

Are there any aspects of the 9 areas mentioned below that are not as they should be within your business? Make a note of them and any actions that you feel you should take.

### Teamworking

If you have a business which employs a significant number of people, do they work in teams? This should not just be a couple of people working under the control of a foreman or team leader. These people should be working together and pooling knowledge and experiences. At the very least this will get the most out of your staff, and prevent your business grinding to a halt if key people leave or become ill.

When such teams are working at or near their full potential they can become almost autonomous, requiring very little management effort and freeing you to do more important things. This method of working relies on you communicating clearly and both sides trusting one another.



## Management Style

How would you describe your management style? Are you hands on or off, do you take risks or are you risk averse and are you aloof or one of the lads? Take time to think about this and be prepared to modify your behaviour if necessary. Ideally you should:

**Be hands ready** – Letting employees get on with things but being prepared to respond if/when requested.

**Be prepared to take on a certain degree of risk** - Remember that risk can be reduced simply by acquiring knowledge about the situation you are in, or the project that you wish to undertake. Being entirely ignorant is the riskiest strategy of all!

**Be prepared to listen** – To the concerns and ideas of others, both within and outside of your business.

**Be in touch** - With your employees and be transparent in your decision making, but remember that you are the boss and being too close can cause problems sometimes. You will know where the correct place to be is for you.

## Desire To Succeed

Does everyone involved with your business have a desire to succeed? Do they wish to beat the

competition, make money (or add value) and build a sustainable business? Is the desire and commitment really there? This is often a key problem area in family run businesses, where it is simply expected that family members will work in the family business with no real desire or focus.

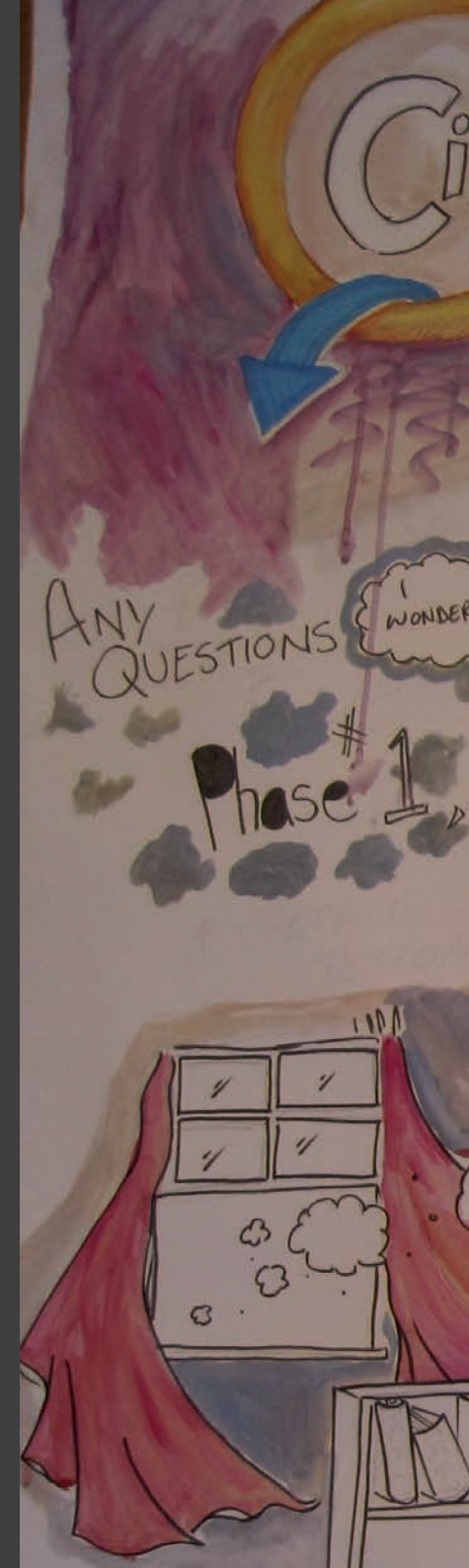
## Knowing How To Succeed

Given you have a desire to succeed, do you actually know what succeeding means? How will you know when you are beating the competition, do you have sufficient management accounting procedures in place to know when your business is doing well, and have you got a strategy for the next few years?

In short, how will you be able to tell when you are actually succeeding? Determining these factors is key in being able to motivate yourself and others as well as playing a large part in obtaining finance.

## Your Business Environment

Small business owners often know an extraordinary amount about how their business functions and what it is supposed to do. Often such people are extremely busy and have no time for gathering information about the external business environment or what actually goes on within their business.











Information can be gathered from a number of sources including trade organisations, trade shows (note you do not need to pay good money for a stand, simply go and spy on others and make contacts!); local chambers of commerce, magazines or even your local market. If you wish to know the answer to a particular question then go and find the people who can answer it and ask them. If you wish to know if your new recipe for strawberry jam will appeal to consumers, then ask shoppers at your local farmers market.

Similarly, find out who the key people in your business are and ask them what is going on, what does the company grapevine say, what is the politics of the organisation? If the business is just you then you can still ask the questions of your extended business. Remember your business is more than just you even if you are a sole trader!

### **Business Relationships**

No matter what size your business is, you will have relationships with other businesses either as a supplier or a customer. Traditionally such relationships are often between someone specialising in purchasing and someone specialising in order processing or sales and is typically a one to one relationship. In order to



help with gathering information and raw material for ideas, it is beneficial if relationships are cultivated at many levels, so in larger businesses the Managing Director/owner might have a relationship with his/her counterpart as well as a salesman and the employee actually dispatching the order. For a smaller business, the owner could also be talking at many levels with a larger business.

For two small businesses it is easy to identify who to talk to but not so easy to guide the conversation to the level you wish. For example, when talking to a sole trader who supplies you, you may wish to discuss their business strategy, how they fulfil your orders or the technical details of products.

### **Culture**

This is often thought of as 'the way we do things around here'. For larger businesses this is influenced by those working within the business and also the local surroundings, but for a small business or sole trader it might be heavily influenced by friends and family. The key question is 'does the current culture help or hinder my business'? Do you get excited about going to work, are there tasks that you dread doing, have you got problem employees or maybe - does the roof leak? All of these factors can help or hinder your business and there is something that can be done about all of them.





## Stretching Your Employees

Fortunately this has nothing at all to do with ancient methods of torture. How does your business encourage employees to use their initiative or 'go the extra mile' for your customers?

How much does working for you, use your employees' skills and cause them to think about what they are doing? Even in a business where employees are not challenged on a daily basis such as meat or vegetable processing, there is scope for doing this.

If your employees are bored stiff then they will simply wish to turn up, do a day's work and collect their pay, nothing more. If you are trying to grow a successful business then you need more than this.

What can you do to encourage this? This could encompass setting challenging targets, creating autonomous teams or reworking the incentives that you provide.

## Getting The Best From Employees

This is slightly different to the previous section in that here we are concerned with what you (and any other senior staff) actually do to employees, to get the best performance from them rather than what the environment encourages them to do.

This can cover the ways in which you directly manage and motivate/praise staff to a system of performance management and appraisals.

The question to ask yourself is how could you get the best from your employees and are you actually doing this at the moment?

If not what is stopping you?









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