

CIME

Creativity & Innovation Toolkit

Package 3: Addressing those common business issues

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



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CIME (Creativity and Innovation in Micro-Enterprises)
c/o Dynevor Centre for Art, Design & Media
Faculty of Art & Design
Swansea Metropolitan University
De La Beche Street
Swansea
SA1 3EU

Tel: 01792 481112

www.cimeproject.com

For all queries relating to this e book please e mail
jenny.vobe@smu.ac.uk

CIME Project Partners:

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SERA (South-East Regional Authority)
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Swansea Metropolitan University
University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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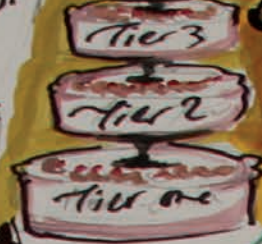


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Welcome
and Introductions
Everyone has a coffee and
gets to know what time is
all about!



WHAT CAN
YOU DO WITH
A COACHANGER

Short exercise to get
your brain working

WHAT
to get
bang

IMAGINATION
engineering
Framework



YOUR TURN
exercise FOR
THE GROUP
- New
Product
For
Bank or
Building
Society.
- get
started!

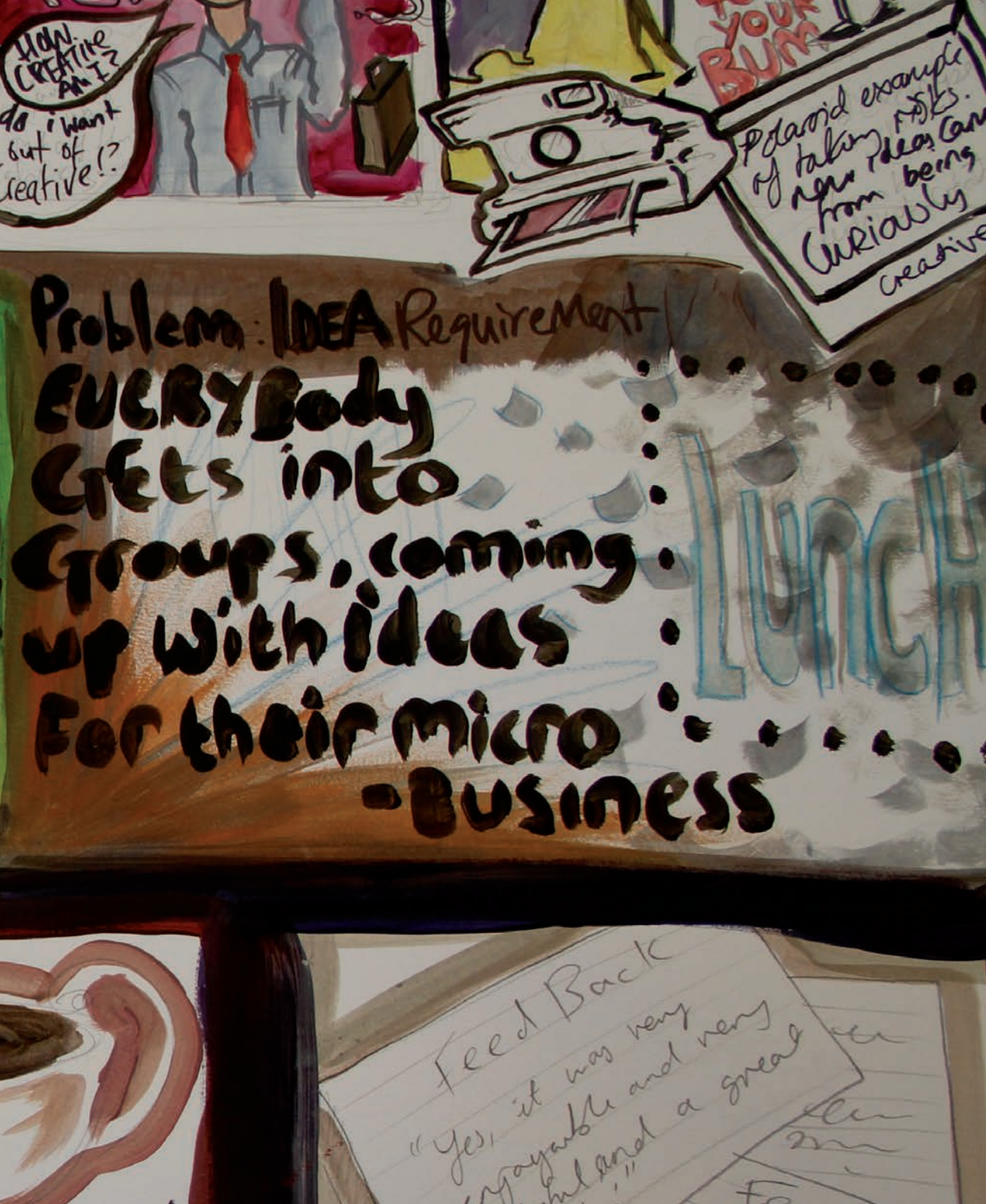


CON PESSING
GONS



Introduction

imagine you
were taken OVER
tomorrow by... Mc Donalds!



This is the third in the series of integrated modules that are targeted at assisting Small and Micro Enterprises by harnessing the power of Creativity and Alternative Thinking. In this module we take a look at some common business issues and the creative techniques that can be used to deal with them. Readers will also be able to revisit the techniques that they have already encountered in Modules 1 and 2 and find out the type of business issues that they can be used to deal with..

There are only a finite number of issues that can be dealt with in this unit, but by following the advice given it will be possible for readers to address virtually any aspect of their business.

Tackling Business Issues

So how can we fulfill the promise of being able to help you tackle virtually all of your business issues with a small set of creative techniques? First of all we have introduced you to a reasonable number, which can be used in a number of different ways such as generating ideas or making decisions.

We have also introduced you to a generic framework composed of alternating divergent and convergent phases which combine a number of these techniques. In this module we will go one step further and cross reference a number of business issues with creative techniques.

The final step is for the reader since we cannot address all issues. Readers will have to use one further technique, Metaphor. By thinking about their business issue as being like or similar to one described in this module, readers can identify a set of techniques for their own situation.

For example, if a reader wishes to make a decision regarding the best course of action from a number of possible options, this is very much like selecting one idea from a large number generated as part of an idea generation exercise. Readers should borrow and adapt as necessary.







Techniques And Their Uses

The techniques referenced in this section are all defined in Module 2. Please refer to this module in order to get a detailed description of each technique. Here we simply list their name and keywords associated with them as well as potential uses.

3.1 Why?

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Defining, Convergent

Sometimes it is 'obvious' what our problem is and so the answer is obvious too. This may very well be the case, but just in case it is not or perhaps to uncover a better solution we might need to uncover the real reason for something going wrong. Also problems and issues tend to be multi layered and we have to scratch below the surface to work out what is really happening. Be careful when using it as continuously asking someone else 'Why?' may make them defensive.

Imagine the simple scenario 'sales are falling'. One possible assumption might be that our sales people are no good at their jobs so we might replace them or retrain them.

First, let us ask 'Why?'

Why are sales falling?

Because customers don't like our products

Why don't they like our products?

Because they are outdated, not as cool as this year's model

Why are our products outdated?

Because we have not developed any new ones for 5 years

Why have we not done this before?

Because the boss has not allowed us

Why has the boss behaved in this way?

Because they have no spare time to spend

In this simple example our initial assumption of having a poor sales force is incorrect, the underlying issue is that the boss (possibly you!) has no time either because of high workload or poor time management. We can also see that the issue has multiple layers and unless the issues at lower layers are resolved then our initial problem is unlikely to be properly resolved.

You could thus use this for:

- Identifying the need for a new product or service
 - Determining why your competitors are more attractive to customers
 - Asking why your costs are higher than they should be
- ...and many more.

3.2 Working With Aliens

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Divergent

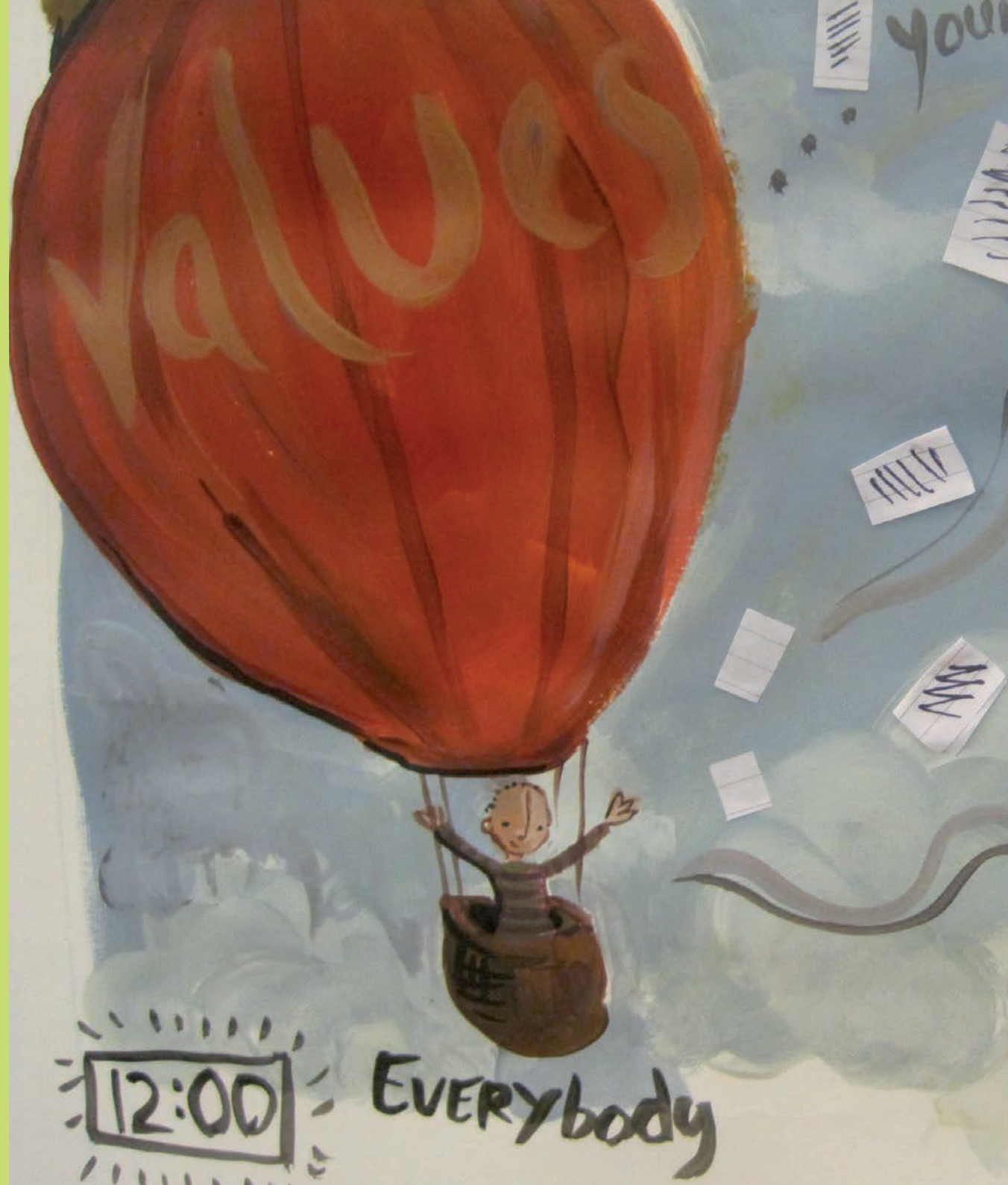
Sometimes we just need a new perspective on things, to see our business and its associated issues with fresh eyes. Who better to ask than beings from another world? To make this work you can try and adopt the viewpoint of an alien or instruct a colleague or close friend. You must be prepared to accept the comments of the aliens though.

Imagine that you are trying to improve team working within your small business. If your friendly aliens dropped in what would they see? They might ask why people talk to each other (or not), why people talk to particular people, do they need to be grouped in this way, should there be more or less people? These questions and associated observations will be free of preconceptions and office politics.

You could use this technique for:

- Investigating team working, communications and structure
- Cost reduction
- Identifying new products/markets and suggesting new combinations
- Scenario planning and testing of your business plan

Do not just stick to this list, use this technique whenever you need a fresh perspective but note that it is divergent and will provide a range of options.



3.3 Boundary Relaxation

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Defining, Divergent

Most, if not all of the things we do are defined by boundaries. One of the most obvious examples of relaxing boundaries is tax avoidance (as opposed to tax evasion).

We are all used to the things that we can do in order to reduce our tax bills. We ask the question, 'can I increase my expenses to reduce my disposable income and hence pay less tax?'

Why do we not practice this in other areas of our business or personal lives?

Imagine the following scenario. You are creating a proposal or quotation to provide goods to a large retail store and are having trouble getting the document together in time. Their original tender document stated 'responses must be received no later than ...'. Maybe you should ask the question 'do I have to get the full quotation in before the deadline or is an expression of interest sufficient?' This might then provide breathing space.

Another example is planning consent. It is usually possible to build garages or outhouses of a certain size with no consent provided that they are no more than a specified distance from the main building.

If this distance was say 1.5m and your plans specified 2.0m then why not reduce the distance and avoid the need for planning consent?

Cynical readers will say that in these examples we are trying to bend the rules. Everything we do is governed by a rule or precedent of some sort, all we are trying to do is work out which ones we must adhere to and which can be relaxed in order to help us achieve our goals more easily.

You could use this technique for:

- Compliance with regulatory issues and employment law, testing boundaries might suggest new courses of action
- Negotiating contracts – if I bought raw materials in grey/plastic/large quantities or had them delivered at night would I get a better price?

3.4 Speed Story Writing

Keywords: Group, Exploring, Generating, Divergent

This is an example of a nominal group technique i.e. where the output is that of a group but where people are working as individuals. It is entirely possible to use this technique in such a way so that individuals have no idea who they are working with.

For most small businesses participants will know one another, however their contributions can still remain confidential. Remember the aim of this technique is to create some sort of narrative from a given starting point using contributions from different people.

This provides fresh perspective, decision making and preferences. Although your story has an ending, it is artificial, you could find ways to continue. A story is a simple way to gather information and is thus divergent.

Use this technique for:

- Investigating difficult situations
- Scenario planning, asking what if?
- Investigating issues with employees, even as serious as bullying or harassment
- Creating promotional literature and presentations

3.5 Movie Screen

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Defining, Convergent

Unlike Speed Story Writing, this technique involves story but it is convergent.

The end point is fixed, as is the start. What is not known is the path between the two and this is what we try to uncover with this visualisation technique.

Use this technique for anything that involves the creation of a plan (and execution of that plan) such as:

- Developing new products or services
- Creating a business plan or strategy
- Reorganising your business (change)
- Creating a sustainable business

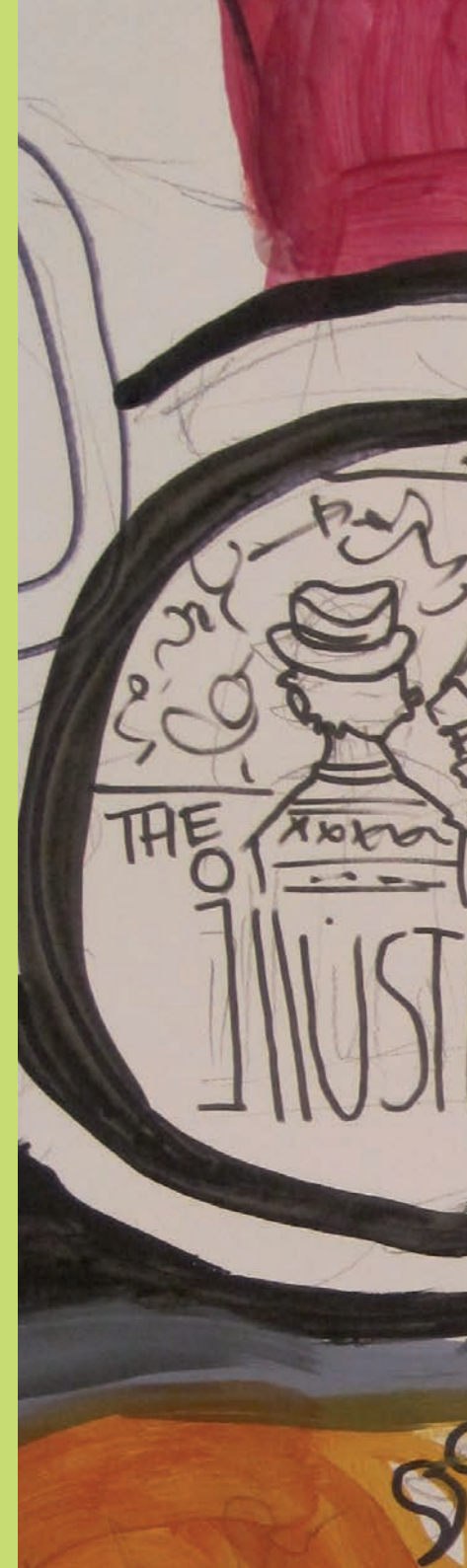
3.6 Add-Subtract-Change

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Generating, Divergent

This technique is an alternative to boundary relaxation but can also be used in different ways.

If for instance you had an existing product or service and were intending to make changes you could ask:

- What could we add that would make a difference to us/other stakeholders?
- What could we subtract or take away that would make a difference?
- What could we change that would have a significant impact?





As well as asking if there is anything you could do to reduce costs that would not impact on the quality of the product.

Use this technique for:

- Making incremental changes to products or services
- Making small changes to working environment or structure
- Cost reduction
- Improving communications

3.7 Reverse Brainstorming

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Generating, Divergent

This is a very powerful divergent technique that has an almost infinite number of uses.

It is probably best used in small businesses when time is short and rapid generation of possible solutions is required.

Effectiveness is also enhanced if you have a number of negative colleagues whose help can be enlisted. It can also be used solo so anyone can use this whilst drinking a cup of coffee or going for a short break.

This is ideal for:

- Improving team working
- Improving recruitment
- Enhancing a product or service
- Targeting PR/Marketing spend

3.8 List & Twist

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Generating, Divergent

This is another powerful technique for making incremental changes. If you are clever with your 'list' then you can use it for random stimulation in order to make more radical changes.

Try experimenting to see. Before you use this technique you must prepare your list.

You might like to try this for:

- General improvement
- Cost reduction
- Creating new products
- Identifying new markets

3.9 Morphological Matrix

Keywords: Solo, Group, Generating, Divergent

This is an extreme form of random stimulation that can be used to generate a huge number of ideas in a very short space of time. To generate the ideas requires no imagination at all, they can even be generated by computer. It is, however, the resulting ideas that act as stimulation as they are likely to be 'off the wall'.

If you wish to create ideas then you will need to think of a number (4 is a good starting point) of characteristics that define your endpoint. In module 2 we used the idea of creating a new soap opera which could be characterised by cast or location. If you then create a number of different sets of these parameters then using some sort of random number generator will give you 10,000 permutations.

Use this for generating 'off the wall' ideas that can later be refined such as:

- Creating new products for existing markets
- Developing new markets for existing products
- Creating completely new product/market combinations
- Improving communications or team working





3.10 SCAMPER

Keywords: Solo, Group, Generating, Divergent

Once again this is a divergent technique that has a number of uses. The most obvious is for incremental improvement of anything – product, service, communications, team working, sales and marketing materials.

With a little ingenuity it can be used alongside Boundary Relaxation for working out easier or better ways of doing things without degrading service or quality.

Use this technique for:

- Product development
- Quality improvement
- Cost reduction
- Restructuring

3.11 Drawing

Keywords: Solo, Group, Generating, Reframing, Exploring, Divergent

Drawing is an umbrella technique as there are many different ways in which you can draw. Many readers will be familiar with Mind Maps and Fishbone diagrams but ordinary pictures and scribbles will do.

Many people are happy to scribble on a scrap of paper but are unwilling to write you a document so make use of this. You can capture ideas as well as explain problem situations with pictures.

Use drawing to:

- Capture ideas quickly
- Explore complex situations
- Communicate ideas to a wide audience and encourage contributions
- Gather feedback

3.12 Super Heroes

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Divergent

This is a form of random stimulation except that we are assigning attributes to a character that can help us resolve our situation. This could help with setting up project teams or recruitment as well as identifying resource requirements. For instance Batman could help us with security or with providing resources on demand. A worldly or well-travelled figure might help us conduct research.

Use for:

- Resourcing
- Planning
- Team working
- Market Research

3.13 Exaggeration

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Reframing, Generating, Divergent

This is another way of examining boundaries and changing perspective. Use this when you are stuck and also when deciding what is important. For example if you were trying to decide on a course of action and you varied the costs from very low to very high you might discover that quality rather than price was more important to you hence making your decision process less complicated.

Use this for:

- Deciding on a need for new products/services
- Improving team working
- Improving communications
- Cost reduction

3.14 Metaphor

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Reframing, Divergent

This is the ultimate multipurpose technique and once mastered it can be very powerful indeed. Here we use the word 'metaphor' but we are actually talking about both simile and metaphor. When faced with any issue, try to think of it as something else or liken it to something else. For instance we often use the term 'walking through treacle' to imply that something is difficult. We say

it is 'like walking through treacle' or simply 'I am walking through treacle'. In both cases we might start to think how could walking through treacle be made easier – heat it up to make it thinner, use 'treacle shoes' to walk on the surface or perhaps find treacle eating animals. These are not directly helpful but they might lead you to think of helpful ideas.

A real life example of this was treating a redundancy exercise like a treasure hunt. This is an unlikely metaphor but helped with the planning of all of the activities that had to be undertaken.

Use this for:

- Group activities such as improving group performance
- Investigating difficult situations
- Obtaining feedback
- Improving your recruitment and induction process

3.15 Multiple Redefinition

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Reframing, Divergent

This is the technique to use for really intransigent problems. You may have already had several attempts at solving a problem but the real issue is that you have not clearly defined it so that neither you, nor your colleagues can provide any way forward.





This is a multi-stage technique that tries to redefine your issue in multiple ways which will help you break the stalemate. Use this where you believe you have already exhausted all of the options.

Use this technique for:

- Team working
- Team/workforce organisation
- Making your business more attractive than your competitors
- Analysing poor performance (use this as an alternative to Why?)

3.16 Walking With Moccasins

Keywords: Group, Exploring, Reframing

This is a reframing exercise that is focused entirely on people. You need both time and the commitment of employees but it is fun and enlightening.

Use this anywhere that it is important to appreciate the point of view of another person and to see how they might resolve situations in ways that you cannot. Note that the feedback process is just as important as the actual shadowing exercise.

Use this technique for:

- Improving internal communications
- Improving team working
- Improving trust and morale

3.17 Changing Attributes

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Reframing, Generating, Divergent

This technique combines elements of boundary analysis and random stimulation. If you want to examine boundaries to make things easier and also look at alternative ways to achieve the same ends then this is for you. As with the Morphological Matrix it is possible to generate a huge number of wacky ideas so you will need to pair this with an equally powerful technique for whittling down your ideas to a manageable number.

Use this for:

- Making incremental changes to products or services
- Cost reduction.
- Kick starting any initiative that has stalled
- Evaluating options/scenarios

3.18 Homing In

Keywords: *Group, Exploring, Reframing, Defining, Convergent*

This is another convergent technique that is a little like asking "Why?" but it asks many types of questions. It will help you find the reasons behind certain courses of action but also allow you to examine any assumptions made deliberately or accidentally (because of mindsets).

Use this technique for:

- Improving team working
- Investigating interpersonal differences
- Evaluating feedback
- Improving HR procedures such as recruitment and annual reviews

3.19 Bullet Proofing

Keywords: *Solo, Group, Defining, Convergent*

When you have many options before you it can be very time consuming to evaluate them. This process in itself can cause disagreement and conflict so what's better than a technique that you cannot argue with.

Thinking visually for a moment, all you are trying to do is slot your potential solution or course of action into a 2x2 matrix.

This means that you only need two criteria on which to evaluate your options. For example, if you chose cost and speed of implementation these might be divided into cheap/expensive and immediate/next year. All you have to do is work out which of the 4 groups you are interested in. Once that is done you cannot really disagree with option(s) chosen.

Note this need not be an all or nothing exercise, it can also be used for prioritising actions.

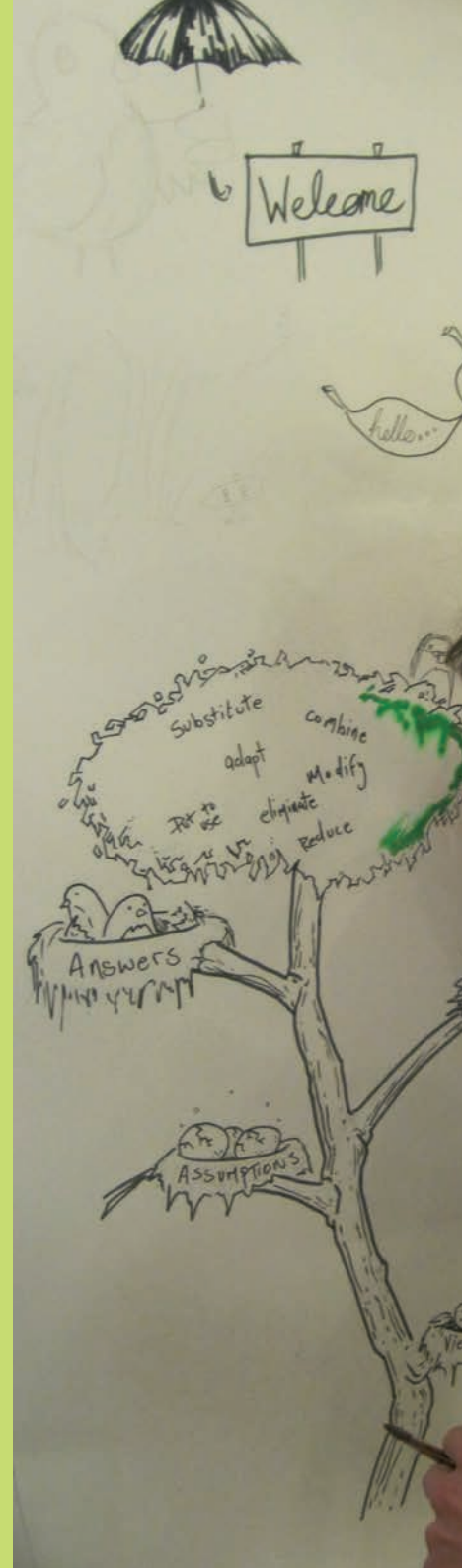
Use this technique for:

- Deciding how to spend a budget
- Evaluating a good idea
- Selecting one course of action from many
- Evaluating courses of action

3.20 Storyboard

Keywords: *Solo, Group, Defining, Convergent*

This technique automatically appeals to people who think of themselves as naturally creative. However, as with drawing techniques, it will appeal to everybody as it is a) shorthand and thus less time consuming b) easy to incorporate different viewpoints and add to c) easily communicated. As with stories, plans will have a beginning and an





end so use this technique for planning.

You might:

- Create a plan to introduce a new product or service
- Create a business plan
- Create a sales presentation
- Investigate scenarios or make predictions about the future

3.21 Force Field Analysis

Keywords: Solo, Group, Defining, Convergent

Force-field analysis appeals to those who like to draw and those who like to create lists of 'pros' and 'cons'. We use it to look at the factors that might help or hinder a course of action. Simply listing factors can help, however if we use drawings we can not only list the factors but also indicate the effect e.g. by drawing a large or a small arrow or using large or small letters.

Another possible use is to examine the drivers for some effect that we are noticing in our business. For example, we might have noticed the cost of raw material increasing and need to examine why in order to take action. We might list fuel, wholesale market prices, labour costs, inflation etc. and any of these could have large or small effects on increasing or decreasing prices.

Determining the major driver will help us decide what to do. If the major driver is labour costs then

this is a different case to inflation.

Use this technique for:

- Evaluating ideas
- Cost reduction
- Selecting one option from many
- Gaining group consensus for a course of action

3.22 Mind Mapping

Keywords: Solo, Group, Exploring, Defining, Convergent

Mind mapping is classified as a convergent tool simply because it is not divergent. It is a tool that should be used for classifying and organising and showing the relationships between objects or ideas.

It is also very useful for taking minutes and capturing data. If you run a brainstorming session then you can capture your thoughts using mind mapping or pictures. One of the pitfalls of using linear lists is that when your piece of paper is full you stop. Mind maps can expand and so you only stop when the idea flow dries up.

Use this technique for:

- Capturing ideas
- Exploring trains of thought (Mind map branches) e.g. team working or communication issues
- Evaluation of options
- Market research

3.23 Help Or Hinder

Keywords: Solo, Group, Defining, Convergent

This technique resembles Bullet Proofing but here actions are already classified as to whether they 'help' or 'hinder'.

This can also be expressed using drawing techniques and perhaps Force Field Analysis.

Use this to eliminate or reinforce certain paths (strategy) or courses of action.

Use this technique for:

- Business Planning
- Evaluating options e.g. team working, cost reduction
- Testing strategy (in conjunction with Storyboard)

3.24 Assumption Testing

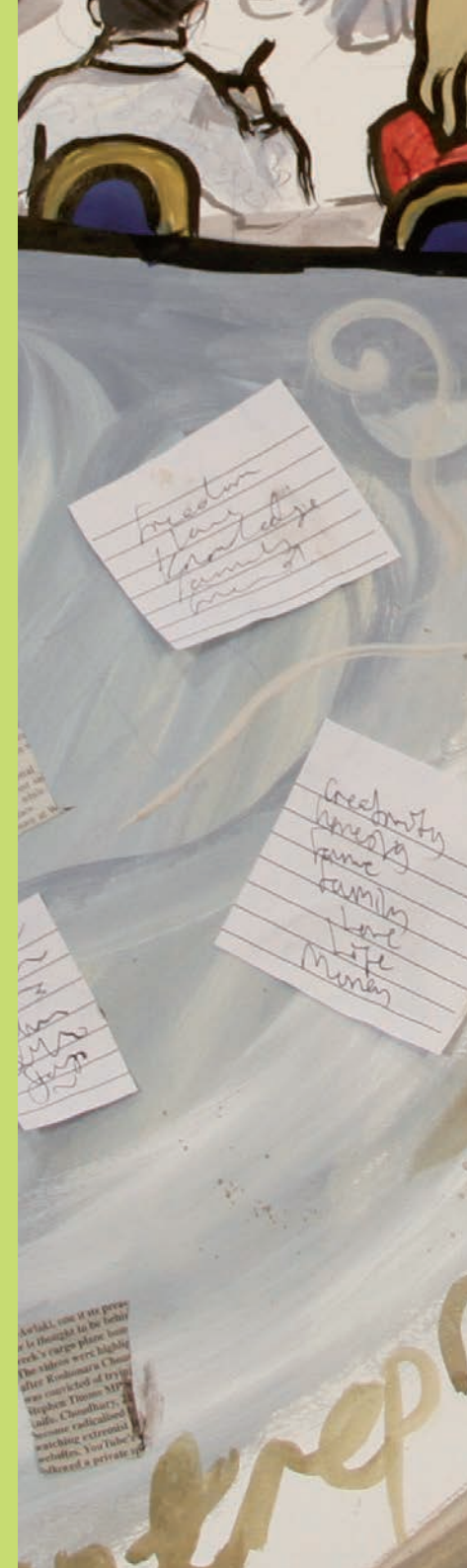
Keywords: Solo, Group, Defining, Convergent

This is yet another technique that is seemingly based on a 2x2 matrix. Here we are dealing with things that are not concrete – assumptions. Whenever we make assumptions they are plugging holes in our knowledge.

If our knowledge were complete we would not need to make assumptions. By classifying our assumptions according to impact and plausibility we are in effect conducting risk analysis by assessing the potential impact of these assumptions.

Use this technique for:

- Conducting market research
- Determining need/benefit for developing new products or services
- The effects of change on your business (perhaps when trying to improve team performance)
- Analysing the benefits of cost reduction





Common Business Issues

In this section we list a number of common issues and suggest a number of creative techniques that you might find useful in resolving them. Please do not forget that you may substitute your favourite techniques if you so wish. Just think about what you are attempting to do (converge, diverge, decide, plan etc.) and use a technique that is appropriate.

For each of the questions below it is entirely possible that you might just have an answer and be tempted to rush and implement your solution right away. But are you sure that your solution is the best one (or even a good one)? Why not give some of these techniques a try and see what happens? You will need to refer to the detailed descriptions of the techniques in Module 2 of the toolkit.



An abstract artwork on the left side of the page. It features a large, textured red shape that resembles a stylized letter 'O' or a face. Below it, there are green, wavy, vertical shapes. The background is a mix of light and dark grey.

4.1 How do I create a plan for developing a new product or service?

Here we start with the assumption that we have already established that we do need a new product or service but we do not have a plan and have few ideas as to how to create one.

First of all we need to establish some facts about this product or service. What will it look like, feel like and act like? How can it be characterised? What will our business be like with this new product or service? Next we need to take stock of exactly where we are now and then work backwards from our desired end point.

A good way to do this is to use the Movie Screen technique to actually imagine our ideal future state and then work backwards to the present. Each time we rewind the film a frame we are creating a step in our plan. You can make this as detailed as you like. After completing this exercise a good way to record your thoughts is to create a Storyboard.

If you have not got well defined start and end points for your plan you might wish to explore these using divergent techniques such as Metaphor or perhaps Drawing to gain extra input from friends or colleagues.

4.2 How do I know if I have a good idea?

To get to this point you must have generated and then evaluated some ideas and then be left with just this one, your pride and joy! Before proceeding to implement it, we need to check that it will do what we want and not harm our business amongst other things. This can be done in a number of ways.

Working With Aliens could be used to see if there are any unforeseen outcomes of our idea, fresh pairs of eyes may spot things that we have not. A technique such as Why? Can also be used to check that our idea is aligned with our objectives since the end point of asking a series of Why questions should be a definition of our original problem. Homing In can also be used for this purpose.

A more rigid technique such as Bullet Proofing will not work as well as it works with a small number of criteria so an alternative but slightly more subjective solution is to use Force Field Analysis to evaluate all aspects of your idea if you can split them roughly into 'for' and 'against'.

4.3 How can I research the market?

Before resolving this we need to ask a few questions such as 'what questions do I need answers for, and why?' and 'who do I need answers from?'

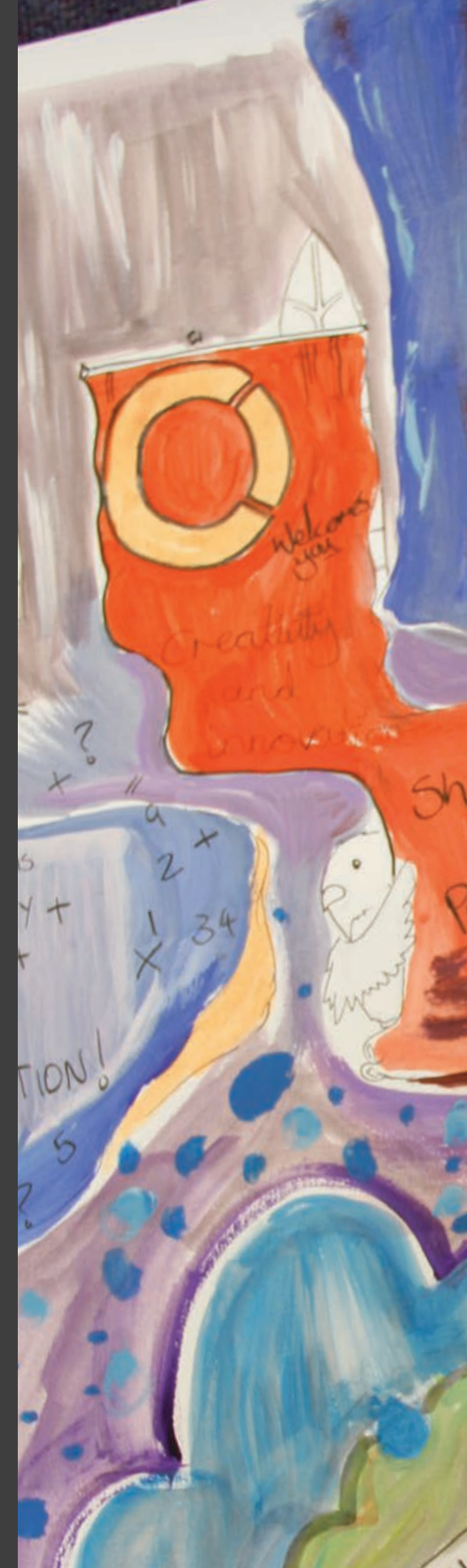
The answer to the first question is actually quite general, we want to create an impact on our chosen market place and want to know where to strike! This could be because of a new product or service, because sales are declining or many other reasons. In any case we have something to sell whether it is real (current) or virtual (proposed). So we could use Reverse Brainstorming to create a number of ways in which we could arrange for our product NOT to sell. These could include unattractive pricing, poor packaging or service, unattractive colours to name a few.

Next take each of these and repeat the process, so for instance 'poor packaging' could be investigated and we could have options such as paper vs. cardboard, recycled vs. non recycled etc. These are now starting to provide us with the basis for questions for our Market Research (is packaging important, how important is recycling?). Once you have looked at the reasons for NOT creating an impact on the market and then investigated these, you should have a reasonably complete set of questions that you need answers to.

If you were feeling really creative you could arrange to leave your questions in a negative format rather than turning them on their head again. For example you could ask your customers 'how could we make our service really bad?' and then take action to do the opposite, rather than simply ask 'how can we improve our service?'. Now who do you ask these questions of?

Assuming that the questions are simple, this should be obvious. Ask potential purchasers about packaging, cost, smell, taste, colour, value for money etc. Other people who can help are suppliers, manufacturers and of course our friendly Aliens (Working With).

There is no need to spend huge amounts of time on a creative stakeholder list when these people can easily be categorised. You can also obtain data regarding demographics and financial information from commercial databases. All of this could result in some confusion so be prepared with a method of sorting your findings. A simple solution might be to use Bullet Proofing (high vs. low cost options, high vs. low impact options).





4.4 Do I need to develop a new product or service?

On the face of it, this is a question that could generate subjective and possibly meaningless answers depending on who you ask. A friend could give a very different answer from a well known business guru but the only person that matters is YOU. Most small business owners are an expert in their chosen field of operations although they might not know everything. So it is you who should be asking the question of yourself. We might start by asking Why? Why do we need (or think you need to do this)? Then ask follow up questions accordingly. After several iterations you might come up with one fundamental question/answer combination that will help you answer either yes or no to your original questions.

It is however likely that you might uncover lots of reasons 'why' and these need to be evaluated. If they are of the form of 'pros' and 'cons' then a technique such as Force Field Analysis will suffice. Your original question could have been framed in a different way and what you really want to know is should you proceed with the development? In this case simply create evaluation criteria and use Bullet Proofing, Help or Hinder or a similar convergent technique which will help you be more objective in quantifying your reasons for or against your proposed course of action.

4.5 How can we improve internal communications?

There are two simple but effective ways of treating such an issue as this. The first is to use Reverse Brainstorming solo (as a business owner) or as a group of people who are communicating (badly) and ask the question 'How can we make communications as poor as possible?' and then reverse the answers. This does make the assumption that everything that you suggest or try will work! You could try and evaluate the suggestions with a convergent technique but once again this might just be your own personal opinion.

The second way of looking at this issue is to try to examine the actual state of internal communications and then target the issues. How can we do this? Getting people to talk about personal issues can be difficult so two possible options are to use Speed Story Writing (use as described in Module 2 or in modified form) or Metaphor (ask for suggestions as to what your situation is like, and use that to elicit comments on the current state and what remedies might work). Detaching people from the situation encourages them to talk. Do you remember the man who goes to the Doctor and says 'I have a friend who has...' when discussing a personal or embarrassing issue?

4.6 Where should I spend my PR/Marketing budget?

This is a series of nested questions which is led by one major question. What is the size of your budget? Next we could ask what PR/Marketing activities can be carried out within this budget (each item, not total) using an idea generation technique such as Reverse Brainstorming or the Morphological Matrix. This application definitely leads itself to the use of Bullet Proofing, using High/Low Impact and High/Low Cost as measures to work out the most and least cost effective options as well as the ones that must be done (regardless of cost) and those that should not be done (little or no impact).

4.7 How can I create a Sales presentation?

Let us assume that your sales presentation is a pitch to a retailer and you are hoping that they will stock your product in their shop/supermarket. First of all you must work out what it is that they need to know in order to buy from you. You can create a list straight away (price, quality, delivery options, lead time ...) and double check this over a cup of coffee perhaps using Reverse Brainstorming but there is no need to spend too much time on this. Use the Movie Screen technique to run through your pitch from start to finish, paying particular attention to the satisfied client AND their commitment to purchase as well as the steps you took along the way.

After completing this exercise commit your ideas to paper in the form of a Storyboard and then use this to prepare your presentation using your preferred medium (glossy brochure, PowerPoint, formal proposal/quotation). Your story and the visualisation exercise should match so that you can rerun the Movie Screen as preparation for a formal sales pitch if you are required to make one.

4.8 How can I get feedback on communications?

Like many business issues this falls into two parts, obtaining and then evaluating. To gain feedback you can a) ask those you are communicating with (will they give you frank and useful feedback) b) get an impartial viewpoint from an outsider. In the first case you can try a direct approach or an indirect approach (Speed Storywriting, Metaphor etc.). To get an outsider's viewpoint you can ask a friend or employ a consultant or take the creative option and use Working With Aliens to ask the question 'what do you think is happening?' You must be prepared to take the answers at face value and not try to massage them.

Assuming you have some feedback, it needs to be evaluated to determine if there are any serious issues or perhaps if there is anything that can be done immediately for a 'quick win'. Evaluate your feedback quickly using a method that uses a 2 x 2 matrix (such as Help or Hinder or Bullet Proofing) and filter against simple criteria such as cheap/expensive to fix or high/low impact on organisation.





4.9 How can I improve team working?

'What is wrong with team working?' is the next question that springs to mind. It is possible to get an idea of how to tackle this issue by simply using a technique such as Reverse Brainstorming to find out how things can be improved, although to do this you need to involve not just the people concerned but people who understand that the current situation is less than ideal. If you can arrange this then following this course of action is the quickest and simplest.

If you can't use the above 'quick fix' then you must adopt the approach that you cannot fix anything when you do not know what is broken or to reframe things a little, you must create a picture of how to get from where you are now to your ideal situation. This should provide a clue as to what the next step might be. First of all you must create a vision of what your high performance team 'looks like'. You can express it in any way that is convenient or useful to you as long as it conveys all aspects of your ideal scenario. If there are other people involved in this exercise it might prove useful to use a technique such as Multiple Redefinition to provide a slightly different way of describing your ideal state since not everyone will share the same value as a business owner or manager.

With your endpoint in sight you also need to take a long hard look at where you currently are, especially the things that are causing you issues. A quick way to do this is to ask "Why?". With a view to arriving at the answer to the question "What?" Or use the Changing Attributes technique to change your current state until it closely matches your ideal future state. If you keep a note of the attributes that you change, and you use your starting and end points at each end of a Storyboard then you now have a plan for your proposed changes in shorthand form!

4.10 I have problems with my team members – help!

This is strongly linked to the previous issue but it has one major difference – there needs to be some delicate diagnostics undertaken.

A great way to investigate delicate situations is to employ Speed Story Writing (or a modified version of it). Your team members might be causing you issues of a personal nature but unless they are vandalising equipment or not turning up then it could be that you are part of the problem also!! You therefore have to include yourself in the investigation process.

Do not be alarmed, you are not necessarily doing anything wrong, it is just that along with other individuals you might have to behave in a different manner. There is no right or wrong here, just optimal.

You will need to carefully select your 'scenario' for your story and also think about how to carry out the task (paper or just a 'water cooler' moment). You will find that you obtain more detail and more information than just simply trying to 'tweak' your team and trying things out merely on a whim.



4.11 What is the best way to organise people?

A common but not very useful answer is 'How long is a piece of string?' The answer of course depends on context. The best way to organise people working in a typing pool is not necessarily the same as for a small or medium sized hotel. Those working in particular industries will already have ideas about how to do this but how can you work this out from scratch?

The solution we are proposing here is to start with a structure for your business that you think is appropriate then change and test it. To start with sketch out your ideas either as an old fashioned structure chart or perhaps a Rich Picture (Drawing). This should have some sort of factual basis e.g. you have people grouped by function and then some sort of supervision for these groups.

Next employ the Add Subtract Change technique to see if adding, taking away or substituting staff, supervisors etc. will make things better, worse or stay the same. Add a few 'what if?' steps in the same way as you might use List And Twist. Your suggestions here will be very different, for instance you might think about moving people geographically, removing them completely (via outsourcing) or something equally radical. Note that the aim is not to create the most radical business structure but to stimulate your thinking sufficiently to explore more options and to avoid wasting resources (a feature of Add Subtract Change) whilst still a) remaining in control b) meeting your objectives.

4.12 How can I improve my recruitment process?

We are always wanting to improve some aspect of our businesses but we are very poor at actually defining what it is we actually want – we just state that things must be 'better'. This is the problem with continuous improvement, we never know where the endpoint is or rather when we are at the point where it is no longer fruitful to expend effort.

The first thing then is to define an endpoint for this exercise and as we have previously seen, the Movie Screen is a great way to take a look at the pathway from where we are now to this endpoint.

By combining this with a Storyboard we can create a plan as well. This is all well and good and we now have a generic investigation and planning process but we must still do a little work on the individual steps. Assuming that these steps are of the form 'do this...' We need to work out 'how' and also determine if the actions are actually worth carrying out.

In this case making changes can be accomplished in conjunction with Add Subtract Change to test if changes are worth making (you might wish to modify the technique for your own use) after using a variant of List And Twist (you will need to create a more suitable 'Twist List').

4.13 What is the best way to improve my product or service?

As luck would have it we can employ our generic technique created for improving our recruitment process with one or two differences. First of all, how do we know what our product or service must look like?

There are two possibilities a) we do know because our customers have told us b) we know we have to change but don't know what changes to make. In the first case we can carry on as before using the Movie Screen and Storyboard, stepping backwards from the desired endpoint to the starting point.

If you need help along the way deciding what to change or how to change it then techniques such as List And Twist, Morphological Matrix and SCAMPER may help.

If you are starting from the point of not actually knowing what changes to make then the three techniques listed immediately above will help you. Don't forget that you will need to refine or filter your ideas, as you will not be able to use them all. Once more a technique such as Bullet Proofing or Help or Hinder with carefully chosen evaluation criteria will help.

4.14 How can I make my business more attractive than the competition?

Do you remember the generic process that we have used in the previous 2 sections for improvement? If you do then read on, if not then re-read the section about 'Improving your recruitment process' first.

Before we start we must take a look at our problem. What does it mean? Are we talking red paint, special offers or employee benefits? We recommend using Homing In to ask further questions. Start by asking questions like 'In what way are my competitors more attractive?',

'What do they do better than us?'. If the competition is doing something different maybe you can copy in order to catch up, but then why not ask questions like 'what can we do better than them?' and then work with these ideas also. Remember you do not want to merely imitate the competition, you want to beat them!

It is not possible to implement every idea so you will need to evaluate them in a similar way to before. Use a technique such as Bullet Proofing with criteria such as high/low impact (high impact beats the competition by a mile) and high/low cost or short/long time to implement.





4.15 How can I reduce costs?

Take a look at your entire business, not just the products and services and map it out. A Drawing technique such as Mind Mapping is ideal here. List all of your departments, staff, processes as well as products and services. Pretend that this map is similar to the mapping of the DNA that makes up our bodies. Your picture is a detailed map of your business.

Next use Add Subtract Change to see if costs can be removed by:

- Adding new equipment – perhaps making manufacturing cheaper in the long term
- Subtract – removing people, equipment, components to simplify and reduce cost
- Change – substitute components or ingredients which are cheaper

4.16 How can I create a sustainable business?

Here we assume that sustainable means 'still here for the next generation' rather than heavily supporting recycling. Let us revisit our generic planning process once again. This time when we use the Movie Screen we should try to conjure up a picture of our business at a future point in time noting which bits have survived, which bits are new, who is still there – in fact everything. When we rewind the film we will be looking at the challenges that we have overcome, noting how and when we overcame them.

This is a very simple but powerful method of ensuring survival which is very similar to the types of visualisation exercises that successful individuals often employ to motivate themselves.

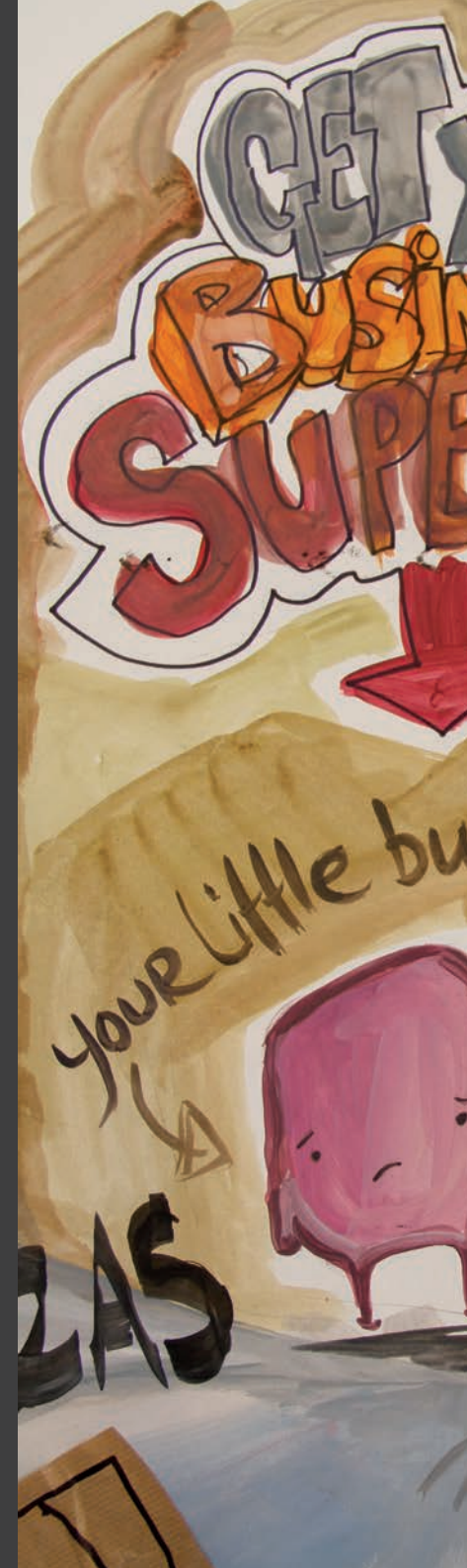
There is one note of caution though. Using this technique makes one very large assumption that the future will not be too dissimilar to the past, perhaps with a few random events thrown in. What if this is not the case? Well you could combine it with Speed Story Writing and gather the inputs of others who might be able to add to your knowledge of the future. For a more detailed method of examining the future please read the following section 'How can I predict the future?'

4.17 How can I identify new markets for existing products?

There are two paths that you can follow to identify new markets for existing products depending on how much you know about alternative markets. The first option is simply to treat this as an idea generation exercise to generate a list of alternative markets and then test or classify them to determine if they are viable.

This is easily accomplished by using divergent techniques such as Reverse Brainstorming, List And Twist and the Morphological Matrix to generate possibilities and then perhaps a less rigid convergent technique such as Force Field Analysis to look at the 'pros' and 'cons' of each option. This will still leave a significant amount of research to be done before you can take action.

The second option is to first increase your knowledge of possible new markets either by researching yourself or by including others who have such knowledge. It is then possible to treat your markets as a 'product' and use techniques such as Changing Attributes, List And Twist and Metaphor to generate options. For instance, if your business manufactured pillows the above techniques might suggest Healthcare (by Changing Attributes of the pillow), Beauty Therapy (adding a smell, massage





pillow – using List And Twist) or Camping and Caravanning (perhaps using Metaphor). These are of course in addition to the obvious choices of new geographical markets. Once again your ideas will need to be evaluated but given that you have already used some market knowledge in your idea generation process, a simpler evaluation method such as Bullet Proofing should suffice.

4.18 How can I identify new products for existing markets?

This activity can be carried out in exactly the same way as for identifying new markets for existing products, simply substitute product for market in your thinking! We realise that this is easier said than done, but remember you are simply following a process that is forcing you to think in different ways.

We have two variables here, Market and Product. One variable is constant whilst the other is changing and all we are doing is using the same tool to make changes to each variable in turn to see what new outputs are created. Try it and see! In the previous section we used the example of manufacturing pillows. We are not going to enter a foreign market or try and become attractive to caravan owners, we simply wish to create new

products for the domestic market that we currently sell pillows in.

Once more, an idea generation exercise will create a large number of options for you and might be a good path to follow if your marketplace is saturated. If you did indeed manufacture pillows then you might be thinking of other products in bedding or furnishings so anything new needs to stand out. Wacky might be good in this case although it does make evaluating the likelihood of success more difficult!

But how about our second path, the one we used before when we had extra knowledge about our marketplace? If we use the same techniques as before we might generate the following types of product ideas:

- Square or circular pillows (using Changing Attributes)
- Allergy free or adjustable comfort pillows (using List And Twist)
- A range of bedroom wallpapers (using a comfort/cloud/luxury Metaphor)

Again these can be evaluated using much simpler criteria. You could also return to a previous section and examine the market in more detail using our ideas for conducting Market Research.

4.19 How can I identify new products for new markets?

Ask this question of a business adviser and the answer is probably 'don't do it'. However this is exactly what entrepreneurs do, they don't look at the world in terms of markets and products.

They simply judge situations as opportunities or look for needs that can easily be fulfilled. This leads to many successful entrepreneurs having portfolio businesses. So how could you create a list of opportunities worth evaluating?

Yet again there are two possible ways of addressing this issue. Assuming that you have very little knowledge of the world but a huge amount of enthusiasm, your first option is to generate a large number of ideas and then evaluate them. One way to do this would be to use the Morphological Matrix (we showed you how to generate 10,000 potential ideas using this). If you have been inspired by an event or object then build this in.

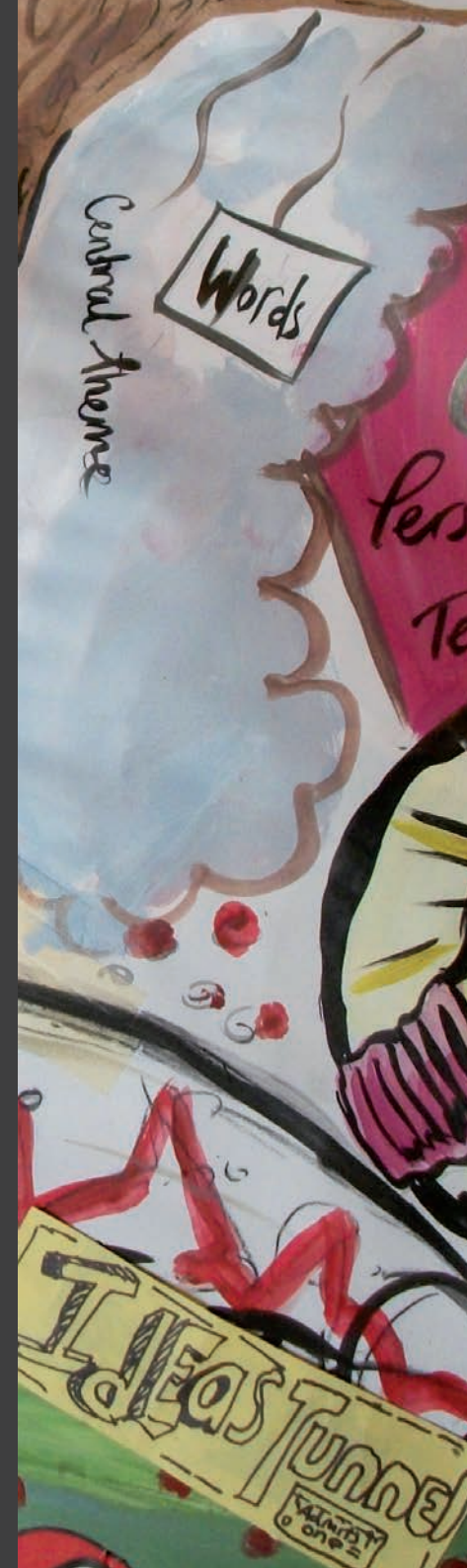
For instance if you thought that there was a lack of Cup Cakes in your local town then your idea generation process could involve Cup Cakes perhaps leading you down the path of baking, distribution or cooking utensils. Remember the golden ratio 10:1.

For every 10 wacky ideas you generate, only 1 will be worth taking to the next stage of investigation and for every 10 of these only 1 will actually be worth building any sort of business case for. Be prepared to weed out 99 out of every 100 ideas generated, but remember that you only need one!

So you have your 1 idea, what next? Well in previous sections we have shown you how you might test for a good idea and also how to research the market. If your idea comes through this then your next step is to create a business plan for it.

And the second way? Well this is really just a shortcut avoiding having to create 100 ideas in order to get just 1 good idea. Do some research and use this to identify attractive markets. A technique such as Bullet Proofing with criteria like High/Low profit margin and High/Low risk should help you create ideas for target markets.

You can then continue as if you were creating a new product for an existing market. A good example might be identifying Beauty Products/Treatments as a target market leading you to take a look at treatments such as spray tanning, massage etc. Refer to previous sections for guidance on how to do this.





4.20 How can I increase my share of the market?

A technique such as Homing In will help us here. We need to know what you mean by 'increase' i.e. what exactly? How would you judge this (cash value of sales or percentage of goods sold)? What is the market that you are referring to?

Once you have the answers to these questions you have already done most of the hard work. One of the things that you will want to do is simply sell more of what you produce. A straightforward way to do this is to use or 'old friend' Reverse Brainstorming and generate ideas about how to sell less, then reverse these to give you a things to do (or at least consider) list.

You might also turn your thoughts to making more money i.e. profit levels rather than simply increasing sales as well as many other topics we have already covered.

Refer to previous sections within this module to answer questions such as:

- How can I research the market?
- Do I need to develop a new product or service?
- Where should I spend my PR/Marketing budget?
- How can I make my business more attractive than the competition?
- How can I reduce costs?
- How can I identify new products for existing markets?

All of the above will help you to strengthen your position within your existing market.

4.21 How do I create a business plan?

If you have been reading this module from start to finish then you will already have an idea about how to do this. If not then please take a look at the section How do I create a plan for developing a new product or service?

The method we suggest here is exactly the same as you are trying to go from A to B defining the steps that need to be taken. A Storyboard is an ideal vehicle for creating a plan as it is linear and so lends itself to being converted into a document for those that require it (maybe your bank). A Storyboard is also easily modified and shared as well as being a great way to invite contributions from people who share different viewpoints.

We know the format of your plan as well as the actual 'story' but to make this as useful as possible we need to include everything that your stakeholders want. Your bank may have a business plan template so take a look at this and include the relevant financial information. What else do you need to consider? Speed Story Writing could help here. Refer to this technique in Module 2 and then amend it in the following way. Create the scenario that is to be the story for your storyboard, the story of your business following the plan and then work through it yourself or with trusted friends or

perhaps other directors if you have them. At each stage ask the question "Have I got what I need to move to the next step?"

The resources could be information, money, office space, raw materials, staff, stock – in fact anything you need. If you work independently during this exercise you are less likely to omit important information. Once you have everything you need you can then update and annotate your storyboard. If you do this properly you will never have to modify it again unlike traditional plans which do get updated frequently (and are thus meaningless) or get consigned to be a door wedge. If you do need to update your plan, stories are easy to add to, understand and share, unlike documents which can be hard to 'get your head around'.

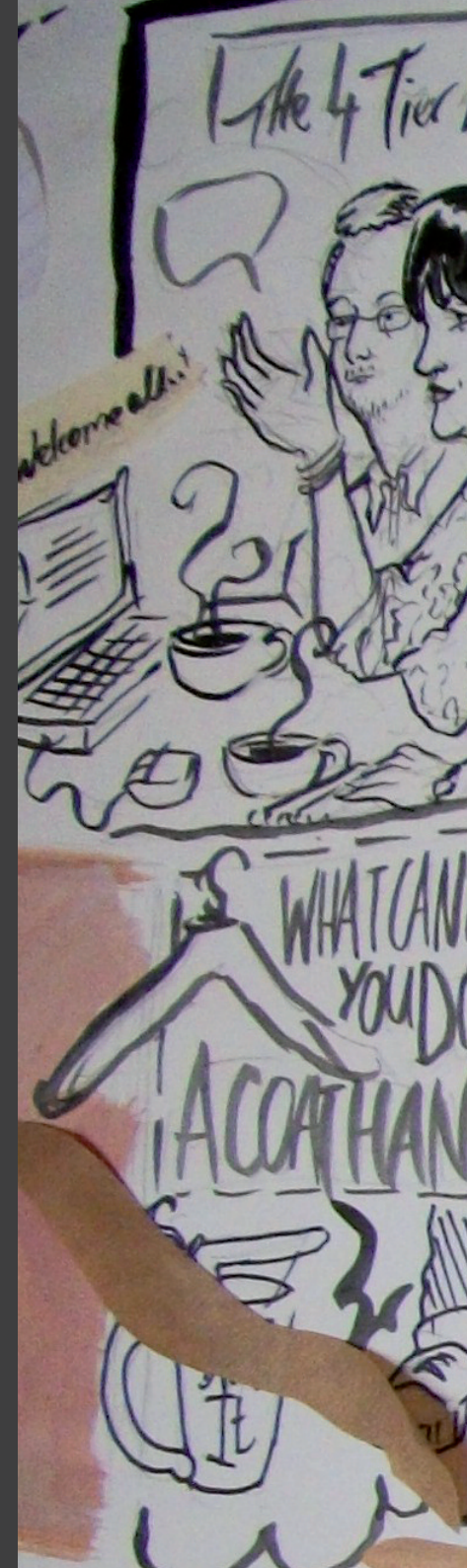
4.22 How can I share and update my business plan?

Please refer to the previous section. If you create your plan as a story and record it (at least in the early stages) as a Storyboard it is much easier for all stakeholders to understand. It is also much easier to obtain contributions without major disagreements. Think for a minute about the particulars of a house obtained from an Estate Agent. You might see the photograph of the kitchen and keep that view in your mind whilst

your spouse or partner might be keener on the games room or the garden. You could argue about this, but the thing to remember is that you are seeing the same object but from a different perspective.

A Storyboard is a way of gathering differing (but still valuable) perspectives in order to get as full a picture as possible. The more information that you have, the less risk you are exposed to. A story is easily changed, along with the corresponding Storyboard whilst a document always requires more time and effort to change and approve. Somehow we can almost visualise the changes to our story but changes to a traditional business plan are not always so clear.

One other useful aspect of a Storyboard is that it is already in a format for communicating with colleagues, employees or other stakeholders. Even if you have a traditional plan and then hand it to a PR or Marketing Communications specialist, the first thing they will do before embarking on any campaign is to turn your ideas into a Storyboard so why not all talk in the same language?





4.23 How can I evaluate different business options?

Hopefully you have a set of options to try this out with! If not why not try reading the previous sections and then return here? There are many (not all of them good) ways of scenario planning, the most often used is simply a variant of 'What if?'

For example 'What if interest rates doubled?' or 'What would happen if the price of diesel increased by 20%?' or 'What if a supermarket was built on the edge of town?' You can see this could be useful but how many scenarios would you need to a) invent b) run through in order to satisfy yourself that your options were worth further consideration?

Those readers who have been reading steadily through this module will know where this is leading. In the previous two sections we have covered the creation and updating of a business plan, in particular including every aspect of your business. If you have taken care over this it will include all of the factors that are key to your business.

For example, if you run a transport business you will have made assumptions about the price of diesel and possible fluctuations so this will be a key variable in your scenario planning. What happens now if diesel increases in price by more than you thought? If one of your options was to buy or lease more vehicles does this now mean that you cannot cope with a large fluctuation in price?

The purpose of this section is not to run through all of the options but to suggest that if you had created a comprehensive (and useful business plan) then evaluating options is easier, as you are aware of the variables affecting your business.

So how do you evaluate options? Let us use another technique – Metaphor. Think of your Storyboard as a map that guides you on your journey and the options that you wish to evaluate as events that might or might not occur during your journey.

Now go on your journey and experience the events. What happens? Do you take a detour but arrive safely, early or in time? Do you go via the shops and spend money that you do not wish to spend, does your car break down, do you get lost or lose members of your family who were in the car with you?

Perhaps you arrive at a place that seems to be more attractive than your original destination!

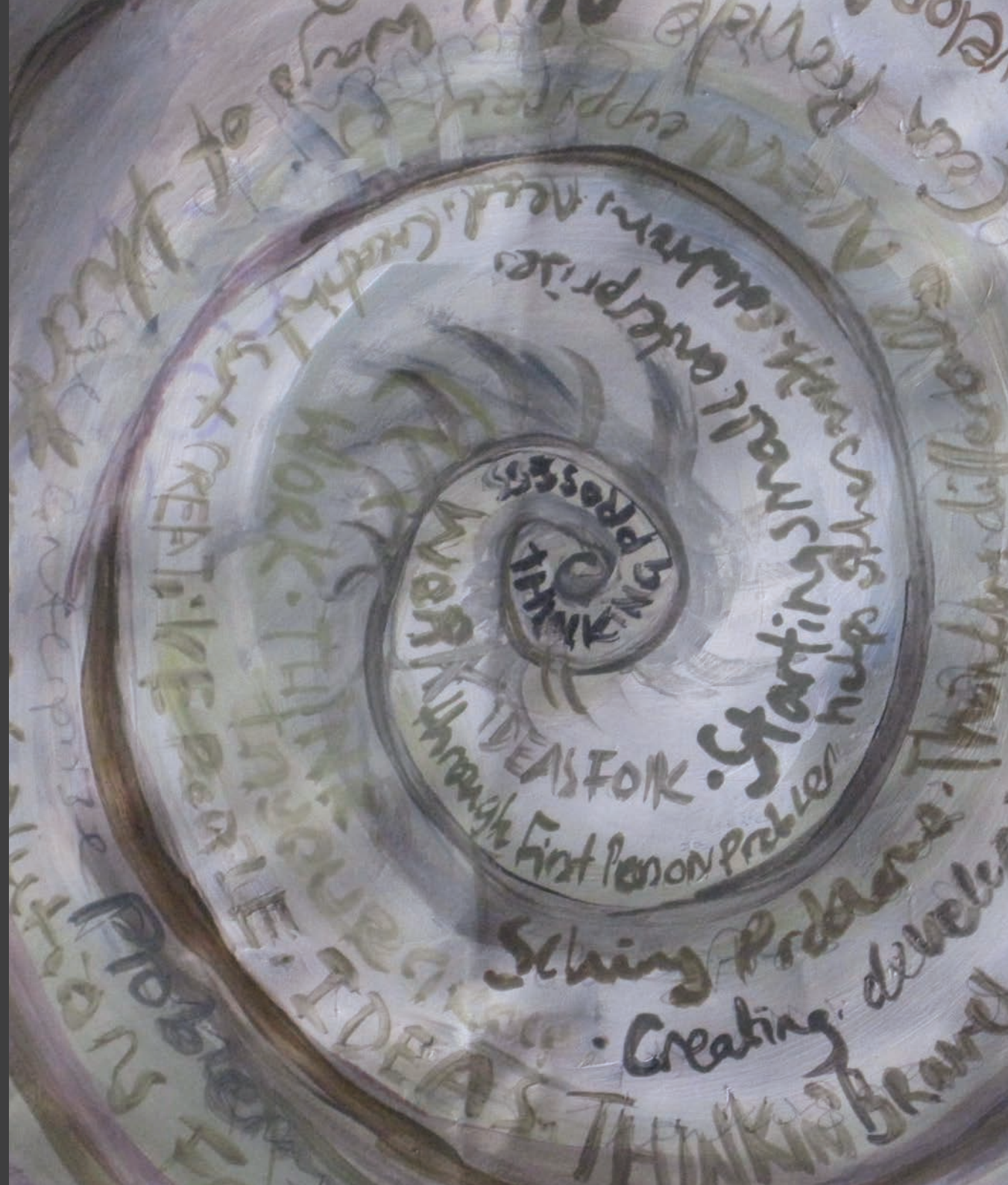
If a great calamity befalls you then this should tell you something! This approach can also be used to test to see how sustainable your business model is (see the earlier section How can I create a sustainable business?). Which options you choose, if any, will depend on your assessment of a) your final destination and b) how and in what state you arrived.

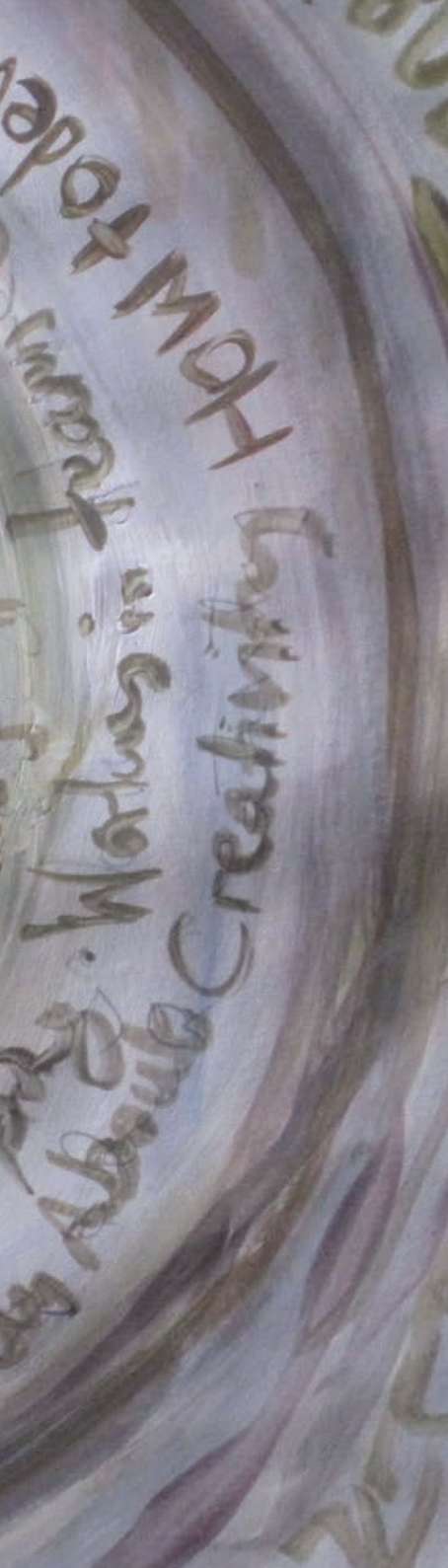
4.24 How can I predict the future?

In the previous section we evaluated different options and covered the topic of scenarios. To many people this is the same as predicting the future. This is not so, it is just 'future proofing', a way of trying to anticipate what might happen and putting in place something to deal with it. This is like stationing an ambulance near an accident black spot.

It would be very useful, and helpful from a business planning perspective, if we could actually work out what the future looked like. We could then create a nice simple plan without the thousands of 'what if?' statements and if the future looked very different from the present we could gain a significant advantage over our competitors.

It is often said that the future is already here, we just do not have all of the pieces. There will be aspects of the future that have no link with the present, but many do. These are often called 'weak signals' and they are what we are looking for. The further ahead we look, the weaker and more embedded in noise they are. They are, however, present. So what we are trying to do is remove the noise, look for patterns and spot the conditions that might lead to significant events.





We will still be at the mercy of earthquakes, tsunamis and other significant but random events.

So what techniques can we use to isolate these 'weak signals'? First of all we can crunch some numbers. This will tell us what things will be like a short time into the future (maybe 1 or 2 years). To look beyond that we need to take a look at a few other things:

- Gigatrends (significant global or national trends such as demographics, running out of oil etc.)
- Delphi surveys/focus groups – ways of getting knowledge from real experts not just opinions
- Scenarios/possibility spaces – seeing where our stories might lead
- Wild cards - not entirely random events but less likely than those above

To achieve the above using our technique toolbox we can employ:

- Reverse Brainstorming to create a list of likely and less likely events
- Back casting (working backwards from the endpoint of our storyboard)
- Storytelling to gather knowledge from experts and put it into a sensible format
- Visioning/imagery (such as Movie Screen) to put it all together and describe the future
- Storyboarding to create a plan of how to get to your virtual future

As we get more and more information the patterns become stronger and we can be more confident about our predictions. Note that what really distinguishes this from just generating ideas is that we are gathering data from experts, not just putting a wetted finger into the air.

Do not be put off by the term 'expert', it is all relative. However, your experts should be people who do follow trends in their chosen field and can provide relevant data on a local, national or global scale as appropriate.

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