



Seeing tomorrow's ideas...Today

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Focus on Innovation

Focus on Innovation is a monthly electronic newsletter designed to provoke thoughts and ideas on how to bring innovation to life within the organizations in which we work.

For Those on the Run

It is Monday morning or better yet, 3:00pm and you and your colleagues are being tasked to do some brainstorming to come up with an innovative solution to a yet another challenging problem. You are definitely not in the "creative" mode - What do you do? Read this month's newsletter to discover four creativity exercises that will help warm-up those under-used creative muscles.

Creativity Technique: Creativity Warm-ups

"If you spend too much time warming up, you'll miss the race. If you don't warm up at all, you may not finish the race."

- Grand Heidrich

In most workplaces, "normal" behaviour is encouraged at work, as this is the easiest, most efficient way to get things done. As a result, our creative self often is hidden away, getting flabby from under-use. Then along comes an opportunity to do some brainstorming. Ouch!

Like un-used muscles, creativity improves with exercise, so here are some creativity exercises to warm-up those under-used creative muscles.

Four Creativity Exercises to Warm-up Your Next Idea Generating Session

- **Idea Explosion.** Provide participants with lots of paper (cut into small squares). Identify a theme (something broad and/or a visual photo). Write the theme up on a flipchart.

Instructions include:

1. Put lots of the cut up pieces of paper on the floor or table.
2. Tell them that they are to respond quickly not thinking too hard or judging. They need to respond in "lightening" speed; don't discuss ideas and to withhold judgment.
3. Ask Person 1 in the group to take 2 pieces of paper and ask them to add one idea per paper, i.e. what the theme makes them think of.
4. Person 1 passes their two pieces of paper to two other people in the group and they add two ideas (on separate pieces of paper) to the paper they received.
5. Repeat the process for 5 minutes, i.e. every time one idea comes in (one piece of paper)

- they generate 2 more ideas (pieces of paper) and passes them to someone else
6. At the end, they should have about 100 ideas related to that theme in a pile on the floor or table. If time, debrief asking the following questions:
- What happened?
 - What surprises do you have?
 - Was that easy or hard for you to do and why?
 - What are you taking away from this warm-up activity as it relates to the problem we are trying to solve?

- **Who's Line is it Anyway?** Just like the TV show, the principle of this brainstorming exercise is simple - improvisation. Collect 5 random props from home, the office or from the problem solving team e.g. belt, toy dog, post-it notes, lunch box and paper clip. Leave these props in the middle of the room and encourage people to come up with different uses for the props e.g. the belt could become a Japanese warrior's head-band or the toy dog is hidden from the group and is "dog-gone". You get the drift!

Give this exercise a time limit of 10-15 minutes and encourage all team members to take part. Even the shyest will have some creative use for the props!

If you're aiming to develop a new solution, take your existing product or process and see how you could use it or look at it in a different way. The whackier the better at this stage - remember you're aiming for quantity not quality - and take note of the ideas generated. It's only later that we put our critical hats back on, and rate the ideas and assess their suitability.

- **Compare Opposites.** Begin with a comparison that is opposite: a big thing and a little thing "An elephant is like a mouse" or two things that seem not alike "Rain is like a cemetery" and then explore how they're alike. You can use one comparison or many comparisons in this warm-up activity.

Here's something quick as an example:

An elephant is like a mouse.

Both are gray with long dangling attachments and papery ears and dark button eyes

Rain is like a cemetery.

They're gray and dreary and make the grass grow.

A peach is like a snake.

They bulge when they are full of food.

A ghost is like a pencil.

You find them in the most unexpected places.

- **Fat Chance.** The idea is to warm up your brain for the task at hand, much as you might stretch before going for a jog. Here's how it works: The team chooses an impossible goal or objective to be solved in an unrealistic time frame. "The tighter the better," she says. Since this is an exercise, have fun with the subject matter and use the brainstorming session to tackle topics such as how to boost Paris Hilton's IQ 100 points by the end of the week, or how to raise \$10 billion dollars by dinner tonight.

Break into small groups to generate three solutions that don't have to be logical or rational. "Indeed," she says, "those types of solutions won't actually solve the problem." After five minutes, present your solutions and have a good laugh. You're now ready for business.

What's the Bottom line

Like un-used muscles, creativity improves with exercise. Take 5 - 10 minutes before engaging in a creative activity to warm-up those under-used creative muscles.



Please feel free to pass this newsletter on to others.

If you would like more information about the ideas and topics listed in this issue, contact Judy Laws, Ph.D. at jlaws@foursightconsulting.com.

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