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& Paul Birch



**Instant
Creativity**

Sample

*Change
the way
you work
now*

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1. Why Creativity

Creativity or bust

Depending on your point of view, the prospects for business are terrifying or elating. Once upon a time, business life was a bit like being on a train, moving from station to station according to a timetable. Now it's a roller coaster that has lost its guard rails. There has never been more pressure. Competitive pressures as more new ideas, more new competitors hit the market. Cost pressures as customers demand more for less. Customer service pressures as those pesky customers expect good service on top of all the savings. Time pressures as blossoming technology compresses everything from communications to the manufacturing cycle into less and less time.

There's only one way out. Creativity. It's not fanciful to state that without creativity there are very few companies in existence today that will still be around in a few years time. Change is the name of the game, and innovation is needed to stay above water as yet another wave of change hits the shore. Without creativity you are going to be wheeling out the same old solutions to problems. Sorry, it won't work - the problems are changing under your feet, and the opposition is getting better all the time. And you'll be pushing the same old products and services. Sorry again. They're already out of date. Creativity isn't a nice-to-have, it's a survival factor.

Can you catch it from a book?

It is all very well to acknowledge that every business needs creativity, but it's quite a different prospect to do something about it. A natural inclination might be to rush out and recruit some creative people. That may not be a bad idea. But the fact is that everyone has a lot more creativity in them than they generally use.

There are a number of reasons for this. It might be the wrong time of day. You may be tired, stressed or bored. And worst of all, everyone's natural potential for creativity has been suppressed. This comes from a combination of socialisation - it is often advisable to lower creativity to enhance survival prospects - and education, which is generally more about getting to the required answer than coming up with a creative solution. There is nothing wrong with this, but it gets in the way when you need creativity.

This book can't inject a magic dose of creativity from a big syringe labelled 'innovation', but it can act as a catalyst to free up some of the natural creativity which is bottled up by habit, training and (lack of) energy. The bulk of the book consists of a series of short exercises and

techniques, designed to shatter constraints and get the participants thinking differently. These techniques aren't creative in themselves, any more than a typewriter or word processor actually produces novels. But they are effective tools to release our pent-up creativity.

What's the hurry?

An essential aspect of this book is the 'instant' in the title. These aren't lengthy, long-winded processes to establish an innovation framework (or other such management gobbledegook), but quick hits to push up the creativity level. Such an approach isn't always beneficial. In chapter six (other sources), you will find references to a number of books which will help with larger scale creativity initiatives. These more structured approaches are absolutely essential when dealing with a large problem, or looking to implement systematic creativity in a company. We would very much recommend that you investigated these too. They will help transform your company. But there is often the need for urgency.

Think how often you have had to come up with a solution to a problem quickly. Or there was only time for ten minutes of the meeting to be dedicated to it. Or there was immense pressure to get something done. Or you had to come up with some fresh ideas by yesterday. The fact is, the need for creativity goes hand-in-hand with time pressure. Without instant creativity in your tool bag to compliment any longer term approaches, the chances are you will never get off the ground.

2. Creativity primer

What is it?

It is possible to know that you really need something without being sure what it is - creativity is a bit like that. The problem with creativity is that it's a blanket term for several related things.

There's artistic creativity, the production of a book or painting or piece of music that is in some way original. There's the creativity of discovery, whether it's Archimedes leaping out of his bath shouting 'Eureka!' or a new product concept. And there's the creativity of humour. There is something special about humour, because it involves seeing the world in a different way, and that is an essential for creativity.

It is true that much business creativity concentrates most on the second of those types. We are looking for the solution to a business problem, or an idea to come up with a new product or service. Yet in reality, almost every act of creativity merges the three. To really be innovative, the chances are there will be elements of artistic creativity present - whether it's in the elegance of a business plan or the style of a design. And to be creative effectively usually demands the presence of humour. If this is a problem, ask yourself what you've got against people enjoying themselves, just because they're working. Does it really make sense?

What stops it?

It is often easier to stop people being creative than to enhance their creativity. We do it all the time. We have already referred to the restraints of social and educational conditioning. It's not surprising that there are social restraints on creativity. Young children have a very creative view of the world. They aren't constrained by habit and teaching. But they are also at risk from hazards they aren't prepared for. Some of our creativity is pushed aside to keep us safe. Yet when using creativity to solve a business problem we are in a safe, cushioned environment. We can afford to take more virtual risks; in fact we need to if something new and wonderful is to emerge.

In education, creativity is frowned on, because it runs counter to the desired output. Like it or not, our education system is largely designed to get young people through exams. This means getting them to give the answers the examiners want. Not the most original answer, not the creative answer, but the single right answer that is on the answer sheet. Real life isn't like that. Any problem, any requirement is likely to have many right answers. When we need to get creative it is because the obvious answer isn't good enough. Someone else has already done it. It has already been tried. We need something new and different.

5.5 Someone else's view

Preparation – none.

Running time – fifteen minutes.

Resources – none.

Teams – individual/team.

As a big blockage to creativity is tunnel vision, this technique uses another person's opinion to provide a different solution. Pick another person - historical, fictional, topical or just a role (like 'plumber' or 'brain surgeon'). It doesn't matter who, as long as they're a long way from you in experience and outlook. To make it easier, we've provided a list in Appendix 2 (page 113, but feel free to pick someone yourself). You needn't know a lot about this person - just enough to have a caricature of who they are or were.

Now imagine that you are this person. Get under their skin. Spend a few moments getting the feel of being them. Then address your problem. How would your adopted persona deal with the problem? How would they understand (and misunderstand) what it was all about? Get together a good list of ideas from this person's point of view.

Finally, pull the suggestions back to the real world. Are they practical? Could they be modified? What do they make you think of?

Feedback – It is common for participants to reject a persona because they don't feel comfortable with it, or they feel it's unsuitable, or they have no idea who the person is. Only the last argument is valid. As long as the participant has a vague idea who they are meant to be, the persona will be valuable - and the less 'suitable' for the problem the better.

Outcome – Provided the participants throw themselves into this technique, it is reliable. Without inhibitions, it is very effective.

Variations – In a team, each member could take the same person, but it is better if each takes a different one. Team members should think of their ideas separately, then pool them. At a large event with more time, this technique can be enhanced by giving participants the opportunity to dress up, maintaining their persona for a considerable period of time. As a variant, imagine phoning up an old friend with whom you've lost touch and asking for their views.

<i>Expertise</i>	☆☆
<i>Direction setting</i>	☆☆
<i>Idea generation</i>	☆☆☆
<i>Problem solving</i>	☆☆☆☆
<i>Fun</i>	☆☆☆