

Creative Thinking

Why should I think creatively?

Many companies have a set of processes and procedures for carrying out most tasks. However, in many areas of businesses, creative thinking is likely to help organisations to be more efficient and effective and ultimately make a point of real difference from competitors.

This creativity might manifest itself in enhanced customer service, or a more motivated team, due to everyone having the opportunity to exercise their creativity.

Creative and analytical thinking

In many ways creative thinking is the opposite of analytical thinking, although both have their uses and both should be used at the appropriate time. Some of the differences look like:

Creative thinking

- Looks sideways and all around for ideas
- Looks for new and different ideas
- Welcomes random ideas
- May be uncomfortable
- Thinks in jumps, may challenge previous steps
- Generates many ideas to select from
- Explores unlikely answers to see if they can be used or adapted

Analytical thinking

- Looks straight ahead for the next step
- Looks for what is right and logical
- Concentrates on relevance
- Is within comfort zone
- Thinks one logical step at a time
- Generates only the one obvious idea
- Concentrates on the most likely answer

Some barriers to creative thinking

In order to think creatively, it is helpful to recognise why we may not be doing so at the moment:

- We tend to have pre-conceived ideas of what is right or will work
- We've 'always done it that way', not wanting to challenge
- We don't want to be ridiculed for being different or to look silly
- We fear risk-taking or failure
- We don't generate enough ideas, preferring to stick to the obvious
- We make assumptions which restrict our thinking
- We tend to use a 'house style' rather than looking outside
- We think 'why can't it work?' rather than 'how can I make it work?'
- Analytical thinking is easier or more acceptable
- The assumption that there can only be one right answer
- Rigid functional boundaries
- Evaluating too quickly

Simple exercises to help, creative thinking

You can do this in the otherwise 'dead' times of the day such as when commuting. Think of a normal household object and try to think of a hundred different uses for it. At first you will struggle to get more than twenty or so, but when you repeat the exercise you will gradually come up with more and more ideas. Don't worry about how feasible the ideas may be, quantity is more important than quality at this point.

A variation on this is to play word-association games by yourself or with a partner, trying to find a link between two unconnected words.

Some tips for creative thinking

Firstly, work consciously to eliminate the barriers identified above. When you have done this, try some of the following ideas:

- ❑ Challenge the boundaries and constraints of your current thinking. patterns – ‘think outside the box’
- ❑ Start with a blank sheet of paper – literally
- ❑ Start with the end (where you want to be) in mind and work backwards to where you are now
- ❑ List as many possibilities as you can and allow them to develop before you start to evaluate or discard them
- ❑ Look at the problem or situation in alternative or irrelevant ways – you may find some useable ideas out there!
- ❑ Don’t just concentrate on new ideas, see if you can adapt some existing ideas that have been shelved or cast aside at the time
- ❑ Tackle the issue when you are at your freshest, or let your subconscious work on it while you are asleep
- ❑ Ask yourself ‘What if.....?’
- ❑ Use your past experience in other companies or organisations – what worked there may not translate exactly, but could be adapted to suit
- ❑ Always be on the lookout for good ideas, even if you are not trying to solve a problem. You may find that a phrase or object will set an idea in motion, which will answer a problem you didn’t know you had
- ❑ Try thinking differently – for example instead of describing a task to a colleague, draw the result you want. This can help you to see things differently yourself
- ❑ Make sure you have all the information before you start
- ❑ Use the power of other people
- ❑ Look how others do it, to see if they have ideas you could use or adapt
- ❑ Get other people’s perspective on the problem, especially if they bring thinking from outside the organisation
- ❑ Challenge your team – ask them to come up with different ways of working. They may have many good ideas, just waiting to be asked!
- ❑ Try brainstorming with your team, and go for a quantity of ideas before evaluating them

And of course – it’s a long process, so don’t give up at the first hurdle!

For related topics see Top Tips:

- ➔ **Analytical Thinking**
- ➔ **Decision Making**
- ➔ **Problem Analysis**
- ➔ **Strategic Thinking**