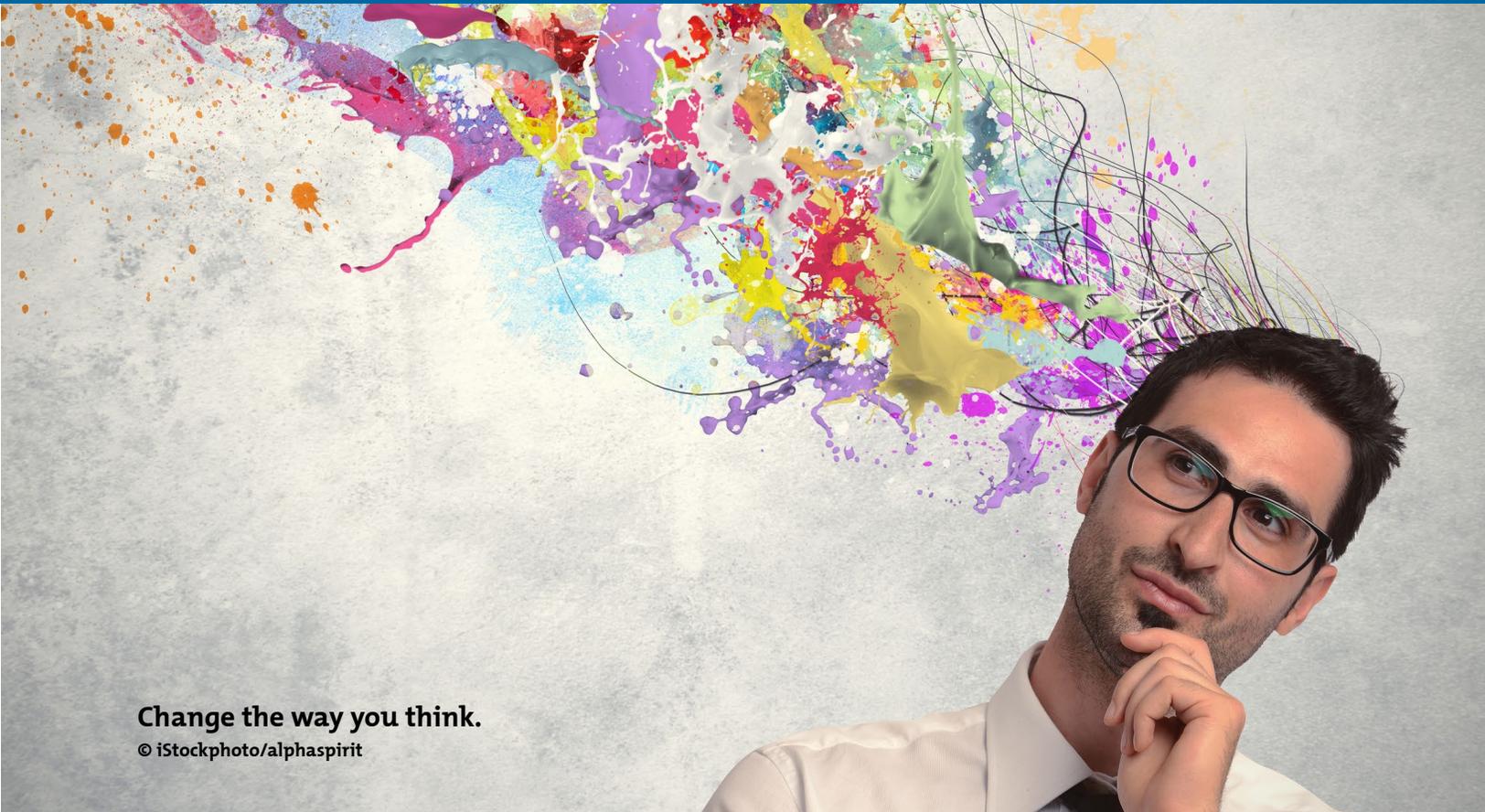


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Generating New Ideas

Your 10-Minute Guide to Thinking Differently



Change the way you think.

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Find out how to help your people think differently and spark their creativity.

"We need to think differently!" "This needs some fresh ideas!" "We have got to be more creative around here!" Are messages like these popping up more and more in your workplace?

Faced with complex, open-ended, ever-changing challenges, organizations realize that constant, ongoing innovation is critical for staying ahead of the competition. This is why you need to be on the lookout for new ideas that can drive innovation, and it's why the ability to think differently, to generate new ideas, and to spark creativity within a team become important skills.

This guide looks at how you can help your people to think differently and more creatively.

Please share it freely inside your organization.



You need to work actively on building and cultivating this skill, and it can be done!

Often, though, we make the mistake of assuming that good ideas just happen. Or worse still, we get caught in the mind trap that creativity is an aptitude; some people have it, others don't. Then there's the other self-defeating belief – "I'm not intelligent enough to come up with good ideas."

These assumptions are rarely true. Everyone can come up with fresh, radical ideas – you just need to learn to open your mind and think differently.

How to Generate New Ideas

Standard idea-generation techniques concentrate on combining or adapting existing ideas. This can certainly generate results. But here, our focus is on equipping you with tools that help you to leap onto a totally different plane. These approaches push your mind to forge completely new connections, to think in a different way, and to consider new perspectives.

But first, a word of caution. These techniques are extremely effective, but they will only succeed when they are backed by rich knowledge of the area you're working on. This means that if you're not prepared with adequate information about the issue, you're unlikely to come up with any great ideas even by using the techniques listed here.

Incidentally, you can apply these techniques to spark creativity in group settings and in brainstorming sessions as well.

Breaking Thought Patterns

We can all get stuck in certain thinking patterns. Breaking these thought patterns can help you to get your mind unstuck and to generate new ideas.

There are several techniques you can use to break established thought patterns:

- **Challenge your assumptions:** For every situation, you have a set of key assumptions. Challenging these assumptions can give you a completely new spin on possibilities.

You want to buy a house but can't since you assume you don't have the money to make a down payment on the loan. Challenge the assumption. Sure, you don't have cash in the bank but couldn't you sell some of

your other assets to raise the money? Could you dip into your retirement fund? Could you work overtime and build up the kitty in six months? Suddenly the picture starts to look brighter.

- **Reword the problem:** Stating the problem differently often leads to different ideas. To reword the problem, look at the issue from different angles. "Why do we need to solve the problem?" "What's the roadblock here?" "What will happen if we don't solve the problem?" These questions will give you new insights. You might come up with new ideas to solve your new problem.

In the mid 1950s, shipping companies were losing money on freighters. They decided they needed to focus on building faster and more efficient ships. However, the problem persisted. Then one consultant defined the problem differently. He said the problem the industry should consider was "how can we reduce cost?" The new problem statement generated new ideas. All aspects of shipping, including storage of cargo and loading time, were considered. The outcome of this shift in focus resulted in the container ship and the roll-on/roll-off freighter.

- **Think in reverse:** If you feel you cannot think of anything new, try turning things upside-down. Instead of focusing on how you could solve a problem/improve operations/enhance a product, consider how could you create the problem/worsen operations/downgrade the product. The reverse ideas will come flowing in. Consider these ideas – once you've reversed them again – as possible solutions for the original challenge.
- **Express yourself through different media:** We have multiple intelligences but somehow, when faced with workplace challenges, we tend to use just our verbal reasoning ability. How about expressing the challenge through different media? Clay, music, word association games, paint – there are several ways you can express the challenge. Don't bother about solving the challenge at this point. Just express it. Different expression might spark off different thought patterns. And these new thought patterns may yield new ideas.

Connect the Unconnected

Some of the best ideas seem to occur just by chance. You see something or you hear someone, often totally unconnected to the situation you are trying to resolve,

and the penny drops in place. Newton and the apple, Archimedes in the bath tub; examples abound.

Why does this happen? The random element provides a new stimulus and gets our brain cells ticking. You can capitalize on this knowledge by consciously trying to connect the unconnected.

Actively seek stimuli from unexpected places and then see if you can use these stimuli to build a connection with your situation. Here are some useful techniques:

- **Use random input:** Choose a word from the dictionary and look for novel connections between the word and your problem.
- **Mind map possible ideas:** Put a key word or phrase on the middle of a page. Write whatever else comes into your mind on the same page. See if you can make any connections.
- **Pick up a picture.** Consider how you can relate the picture to your situation.
- **Take an item.** Ask yourself questions such as “How could this item help in addressing the challenge?” or “What attributes does this item have that could help us to solve our challenge?”

Shift Perspective

Over the years we all build a certain type of perspective and this perspective yields a certain type of idea. If you want different ideas, you will have to shift your perspective. To do so:

- **Get someone else’s perspective:** Ask different people what they would do if faced with your challenge. You could approach friends engaged in different kind of work, your spouse, a nine-year old child, customers, suppliers, senior citizens, someone from a different culture; in essence, anyone who might see things differently.
- **Play the “If I were” game:** Ask yourself “If I were ..., how would I address this challenge?” You could be anyone: a millionaire, Tiger Woods, anyone.

The idea is that the person you decide to be has certain identifiable traits. And you have to use these traits to address the challenge. For instance, if you decide to play the millionaire, you might want to bring traits such as flamboyance, big thinking and risk-taking when formulating an idea. If you are Tiger Woods, you would focus on things such as perfection, persistence and execution detail.

Employ Enablers

Enablers are activities and actions that assist with, rather than directly provoke, idea generation. They create a positive atmosphere. Some of the enablers that can help you get your creative juices flowing are:

- **Belief in yourself:** Believe that you are creative; believe that ideas will come to you. Positive reinforcement helps you to perform better.
- **Creative loafing time:** Nap, go for a walk, listen to music, play with your child, take a break from formal idea-generating. Your mind needs the rest, and will often come up with connections precisely when it isn’t trying to make them.
- **Change of environment:** Sometimes changing the setting changes your thought process. Go to a nearby coffee shop instead of the conference room in your office, or hold your discussion while walking together round a local park.
- **Shutting out distractions:** Keep your thinking space both literally and mentally clutter-free. Shut off the Blackberry, close the door, divert your phone calls, and then think.
- **Fun and humor:** These are essential ingredients, especially in team settings.

Key Points

The ability to generate ideas is an essential work skill. You can acquire it by consciously practicing techniques that force your mind to forge new connections, to break old thought patterns, and to consider new perspectives.

Along with practicing these techniques, you need to adopt enabling strategies too. These strategies help in creating a positive atmosphere that boosts creativity.

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