10 Creativity Tools

There is considerable debate about whether managers and staff in organisations can be creative given the constraints of the workplace. Personally, I think that there are enough different ways to be creative that the question is not whether they can be creative, but more one of how they can be creative, and is their creativity appreciated by senior management. It is often said that when staff are thinking (often staring into space or out of the window), the appearance is that they are not working. Again, this old-fashioned view should be expunged immediately. Appearances can be deceptive!

Here are 10 creativity tools which can be used – **note** the heading is **not** Top 10 Creativity Tools, merely 10 Creativity Tools – to stimulate thinking and ideas:

Five Ws, One H Technique

This technique can help enhance the understanding of the problem or opportunity – the Ws and the H can help identify ways to put into practice the ideas produced by the Ws. The Ws are obviously: 'who'; 'what'; 'where'; 'when'; and 'why'?, and the H is 'how'? This is a simple sounding technique which can be applied to a number of business situations such as strategy, decision-making and marketing for example.

Creative Challenge

This technique considers the current assumptions, beliefs, limitations, urban myths, legends, etc relative to the current situation, product or process. It questions three areas:

- Can some part of the current method be eliminated?
- What is the rationale behind the current method?
- Do any alternatives exist to the current method?

The answers to these questions should lead to some ideas for further thought and investigation!

HIT Matrix

This matrix takes characteristics from two unrelated products or services to produce new ideas – think of the telephone and computer. Combine the characteristics and you get the internet! To produce a matrix, list different characteristics from one product/service on the horizontal axis and characteristics of the other on the vertical axis. Pair one characteristic from each item to complete the matrix cells. Finally, consider each pairing and pursue those which might lead somewhere.

Left-Right Brain Alternations

This tool utilises the whole brain to solve a problem. Typical left brain functions include writing, logic, speaking, calculation and deliberation and in contrast our right brain controls our 'softer' abilities, such as art, visualisation, intuition and spatial perception. The creativity task can be formulated to require thinking from both sides of the brain with two columns on a white board being used to summarise the contrasting ideas.

SCAMPER

This tool utilises a set of questions which could help improve your existing product or service. The name is made up of the first letter of the different elements:

- Substitute – can any part of the product/service be substituted for something else?
- Combine – What can be combined to create a different product or service?
- Adapt – What can be adapted to improve the product, or eliminate a weakness?
- Modify – Can we change any of the current solution to come up with any alternatives?
- Put to other purposes – Can we use the current solution to help on another problem?
- Eliminate – Can we eliminate or reduce any current parts of the product, method or problem?
- Reverse – Can we change the order of any part of the process?

This should generate various ideas which can then be reviewed and considered.

Reverse Assumptions

It is all to common to adopt assumptions when none are stated. Furthermore, it is all too common to accept assumptions given. This tool enables the user to not take things for granted – challenge both given assumptions and assumptions which are assumed to exist through preconditioning or other influences. The process appears straightforward:

- List the assumptions about the subject.

- Reverse each assumption, ie what is its opposite?

- Then review how to overcome or accomplish each reversal.

- Finally, select one and work it up into a achievable idea.

In reality, it is more difficult to action as we are all preconditioned against looking at the opposite of the obvious. Nevertheless, there are merits of this system and it can produce good thoughts.

Attribute Association

This tool can be used to solve a known problem with a process or product, or identify new opportunities. Firstly, it is necessary to create a list of the attributes themselves. This can be management's subjective view. or it can be based on market research of customers' perceptions. Each of these attributes are then assessed against one or more of the following approaches:

- How can the attribute be modified?
- Can we remove or simplify any of the attributes?
- Can we multiply the attribute? (for example, more than one blade razor)
- Can we divide attributes? (for example split the grouping of processes or components)
- Can we unify any attributes? (for example, assigning new functions to existing attributes)
- Can we introduce cross-attribute dependency? (consider how pairs of attributes are

dependent, and through the development of new ones, add useful functionality)

Phoenix

This technique utilises questions to look at a problem from a variety of angles. Originally developed by the CIA to help agents consider a challenge, it works as a creativity tool as well. The process is simple:

- Write your problem, target the need for an answer, not necessarily the answer;
- Ask questions, using the phoenix checklist;
- Record the answers – information requests, solutions, and ideas for evaluation and analysis.

Examples of questions include:

- Why is it necessary to solve the problem?
- What benefits will accrue from solving the problem?
- What is the unknown?
- What is it you do not understand?
- What is the information you have?
- What isn't the problem?
- Is the information sufficient?
- Should you draw a diagram?
- What are the boundaries of the problem?
- Can you separate the various parts of the problem?
- What are the constants?
- Have you seen this problem before?
- Do you know a related problem?
- Can you restate your problem?
- What are the best, worst and most probable scenarios you can imagine?
- Can you solve the whole problem?

- What would you like the solution to be?

- How much of the unknown can you determine?

- Have you used all the information?

- Can you separate the steps in the problem solving process?

- What creativity tools can you use to generate ideas?

- How many different ways have you tried to solve the problem?

- What have others done?

- What should be done?

- Where should it be done?

- When should it be done?

- Who should do it?

- How should you do it?

- What do you need to do at this time?

- Who will be responsible for what?

- What milestones will mark your progress?

- How will you know when you are successful?

Brainwriting 6-3-5

This is a modified form of brainstorming that encourages involvement from all participants. Having chosen the participants, the first round of idea generation takes place. Participants produce three written ideas on a sheet, in three columns. The worksheets are then passed around to the next participant who adds three new ideas or builds on the ones above. This continues until every participant has written three ideas on every worksheet. Having completed this, you can now discuss, clarify, refine, and combine similar ideas and then make a list for further analysis. Anyone who has played the game 'Consequences' or 'Animal Consequences' will understand the concept!

Open your Mind

This really isn't a tool as such, merely a state of mind! To be more creative yourself, be yourself, expand yourself, open yourself. Read things which you would not normally read, talk to different people, look at different things, listen to different music, walk somewhere different, just do something different. Without a doubt, this will make you more creative!