Innovation Series 5: Divergent Thinking

Details
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Kachero opened her business on a Thursday morning. As she unlocked the main office door, she began mentally arranging her team’s brainstorming session for later that day. Kachero desired more innovative technology products emanating from her firm.

Kachero already restructured her firm and incorporated intrinsic rewards on teams, but would her employees rise to the occasion and generate innovative and creative results? After exploring ways in Business Talk for companies and leaders to foster greater creativity and innovation in workplaces, let us turn our attention to individual creativity.

A modern executive desires his or her team to do away with behavioral mimicry. The renaissance manager does not crave flattery nor copy cat convergent thinking whereby employees solve problems that have a single correct solution. Employees must stop the madness for group tunnel thinking and go forward thinking independently.

Gary Davis profoundly states that creative thinking exists as much more than utilizing one’s own imagination to crank out lots of new ideas. Creative thinking instead incorporates a lifestyle…..a way of perceiving the world, a way of interacting with other people, and a way of living and growing.

Improve your own creativity by exploring divergent thinking. The method tries to imagine and explore as many solutions to a problem or situation as possible. Such exploration creates novel ideas, divergent directions, and a variety of solutions.

Would a fashion designer rather think solely about the best usage for a green fabric or would she rather come up with thirty uses and then consumer test the multiple options? Would a furniture showroom in Parklands rather decide on the best design and put forward dozens of similar pieces or instead think of dozens of products that could tantalize consumer desires in home furnishings? Should a singer limit his expression to tried and true musical combinations or venture into multiple explorations of sound and the human response?

Divergent thinking opens up one’s mind for bucking social and workplace conditioning. Carine Lewis in the UK utilizes Alternative Uses Task (AUT) tests, as do many other researchers. Psychologists, teachers, and organizational behaviorists put an object on a table. The subject individual should think of
as many uses for that object as possible, whether functional, operational, external facing, etc.

Now, get ready to time yourself. Put a one minute timer on your phone. Think of as many different uses for a common kitchen spoon as possible in one minute. Stop reading and begin.

If you exceeded ten different uses, then you are well on your way towards divergent thinking. Keep practicing with varying objects until you can eventually surpass twenty uses per object. It forces your brain to think in divergent ways and you will notice markedly improved workplace solutions that you develop.

Among education professionals, divergent thinking is a key buzzword now. Teachers and parents should reward young learners with how many logical answers they can generate rather than holding as exemplary the student who recounts regurgitated memorized answers. Successful lives thrive less on memorization but rather on creativity and quick thinking. If you fear that the Kenyan education system does not adequately prepare your children for a life of creative solutions, then practice with them at home.

Even CNN recently ran a feature story on University of Connecticut professor James Kaufman's research into generating divergent thinking creativity among pupils. He implores teachers and professors to ask questions that have more than one answer. Come up with as many answers as one can for the same questions. In assessing adults, Dr. Kaufman utilizes a permanent marker pen and asks participants to come up with uses. The average respondent for the pen generates twelve uses.

As you mature into a professional in the workplace, you never reach an age too old to train your brain for creative thinking. In addition to practicing alternative uses imagery for objects, Dr. Lewis highlighted that professionals can increase their divergent thinking by forcing themselves to give presentations in the workplace without preparing remarks in advance and without looking at slides. The art of improvisation aids the brain to think of new patterns on the spur of the moment. Also, she found that improvisation with creating music, even casually on a keyboard, with drums, or on a simple recorder helps workers break away from set patterns of thinking when they return to the office.

Take brain breaks, like walks or other enjoyable but minimally mentally challenging tasks, to enhance your brain's creativity. Also try mind mapping your ideas to unlock your potential. Google mind mapping for lists of free software.

Despite stereotypes, Morteza Kooraeim and team discovered in 2012 that no biological differences exist between men and women's thought patterns with regard to creative divergent thinking. Ever known someone who could only think of one way to do anything or perform a task? Was it frustrating? Unfortunately, could you be that type of person? So, are you an individual who is open to new ideas,
new foods, new places, and meeting new people? Do you enjoy intellectual debates and new types of art? Do you take sensible risks? If you answered no to any of the following, then you may lack divergent thinking and should practice the above enhancement techniques.

Human resources professionals should incorporate AUT questions into interviews for positions requiring creativity. Divergent thinking forms the underpinnings of product development. Product design merges into the field of design thinking as highlighted by Kenyan intellectual Stanley Gichobi in his writing. A divergent thinker may develop products that best enhance a customer’s user experience.

Share your ideas on how to your own creativity with other readers through #InnovationForum on Twitter.

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