



Sticky Wisdom

w e l c o m e  
t o t h e  
r e v o l u t i o n

'Innovation and creativity are vital to our growth.'

9/10 people we talk to strongly agree with this statement.

So do you know how to practise and inspire creativity in your day-to-day life at work?

Ask this question and 9/10 people admit the answer is 'no'.

Why is this?

## Doing not talking

**Instinctively, we all know creativity at work is important. If creativity sees the commercial light of day, if it actually happens, that's innovation; and innovation means growth. So ultimately all our business futures depend on our ability to be creative at work.**

We've been told about the need for innovation – about the need for a creative revolution – for a long time now, and not just in magazines and journals but from Chairmen and CEOs. For shareholders it's music to the ears but what's missing in most cases is the practical follow-through. Companies often talk about why they need innovation but seldom know how they are going to do it.

Why is this? Most people in business accept that innovation and creativity is 'important', but it's rarely classified as 'urgent', because the bottom line benefits of a creative act may not be felt for one, two, even three years. This does not easily fit the often short-term focus of modern business. Moreover, because creativity is seen as 'easy to talk about but hard to do', it can be intimidating; so companies don't bother.

There are other convenient reasons not to engage with creativity. There is always something else potentially more urgent... 'I need to get the core business sorted before I can even think about creativity.' 'If only I could recruit more people.' 'If only I had more funds.' 'I need more time to think.'

All of these reasons make it easy to put creativity on the back burner, something to be addressed later. The problem is there isn't a 'right time'.

If creativity is important to your business, the time to start is **now**.

This book contains what you need to start a creative revolution in your organisation; to get creativity working for you. It aims to demystify creativity at work by going beyond theory, providing a set of practical tools that will help you to just get on with it.

## Why be creative?

We use the words creativity and innovation a lot in this book; they are often seen as interchangeable, but to us they mean quite different things. By our definition, creativity only becomes innovation when ideas become useful. In the business world, that means when a new product or service is launched, or starts to make money. Creativity is a behaviour; innovation is a process.

Today, the business case for innovation is almost universally accepted. In recent years, company after company has tried to become more innovative to improve its competitiveness. But we believe it goes deeper than that; creativity is in our blood. It's a skill we all have and can all enjoy, whether it's inventing a new game with your children, painting your kitchen purple or landscaping your garden, we all recognise the joy and pride that comes from having an idea and making it happen. It's our ability to create, to make previously unseen connections, which really defines us as human beings.

Creativity is the greatest and most under developed skill in business today. In America, for example, the Intellectual Property Association has estimated that the so-called creative sectors – chiefly communications, information, entertainment, science and technology – are now far more valuable than automobiles, aerospace or agriculture.

But it's not just software developers and research scientists who require creative skills. Everything from problem-solving to process design, from strategy to customer service, requires creativity. Today, in every industry and at every level, companies are desperate for employees to be more innovative, flexible, imaginative, motivated, open to change. They want them to reinvent their jobs, processes, organisations, working practices, and just about everything else.

## Two worlds

Every single one of us can be more creative. Creative behaviour can be learned. The problem is that either we don't feel like bringing our innate creativity to work with us, or the business unwittingly suppresses it.

We believe there are two worlds to business, an **analytical** world and a **creative** world. Most large organisations have both, but they have much too much of the analytical world, leaving less opportunity for creative behaviour to take root and grow.

Our creative revolution doesn't advocate dismantling the traditional world of business – we think that world is fine most of the time. What

we're saying is that when creativity is on the menu we need to switch to another more creative world.

Ironically, the more successful companies become, the more they lose touch with their entrepreneurial roots. Over time, they develop systems that end up beating the life out of creativity. They get stuck in the analytical world, and find it harder and harder to step into the creative one. How and why the entrepreneurial spirit dies with corporate growth is an important issue, and one that we will explore further in this book.

Failure to navigate between the traditional world of 'analysis' and the world of 'creativity' not only compromises business growth, it undermines personal growth and job satisfaction, reducing feelings of fulfilment through work. Shutting off creative behaviour denies ourselves part of who we are. Yes, we all come to work to earn money, but there is much more to our motivations than that.

## Why listen to us?

**?What If!** is an innovation company based in London, UK. Our mission is to help large companies and organisations that have become stale recapture their inventive spirit and so make work a fantastic part of their people's lives.

One hundred passionate individuals work at ?What If! and, since we started in 1992, we've been lucky enough to help shape the culture of some of the world's biggest, fastest growing, and most profitable

organisations. We have helped our clients invent new airports, beers, stores, toys, holidays, shampoos and mortgages.

In that time, we have led hundreds of innovation projects and trained more than 6000 people all over the world in creative behaviours. We have also developed tools and techniques to kick-start enduring creative cultures in commercial and government organisations. Our intention has been to set up a unique way of working we call an ‘inside-out culture’. Part of that culture is to try new things habitually. We have had some spectacular disasters and phenomenal successes. As a result we have built up a vast store-cupboard of practical knowledge about how innovation really works, and what prevents it happening.

Constant experimentation allows us to keep pushing creativity deeper into the hearts of our clients’ organisations as well as our own. In our business, you can forget theories. You can only teach creativity by doing creativity. Everything we learn about designing and running innovation projects feeds into what we teach in our creativity workshops.

The other aspect of an ‘inside-out culture’ is that we try very hard to be what we teach. We have directly experienced all of the creative behaviours described in this book. Our battle-cry is ‘Living Innovation’ and when we do live these behaviours we know that they work. We have seen the results when we introduce them to clients and when we practise them ourselves.

## Why behaviours?

This book is about behaviours, being different, and trying new and different things. Unlike most business books, our challenge is not just to change the way you think, it's to change the way you act. We have found that focusing on behaviours is the most effective way of inspiring creative change.

Implementing and adopting new behaviours affects the way you feel. Maybe not instantly, but after a while you will definitely feel your creative capacity increase. Believe us, this stuff really works! If you've ever been out for the evening feeling low, but decided to put a smile on your face anyway, you will know what we mean. In a short time your mood changes, your smile makes you feel more positive. Creative behaviour works in the same way. Behave creatively and you will feel creative.

## So what do creative people do that's different?

At present, many people think creativity is the preserve of a certain type of person. Just telling people to be more creative doesn't help. So we have deliberately broken creativity down into six separate behaviours to make it accessible to everyone. Once you look at it in this simple way, creativity falls off its pedestal; it becomes like any other sort of activity, easy to talk about, practise and measure. Creativity is something we can all get on and do.



Our creative revolution involves adopting six specific behaviours, which we call freshness, greenhousing, realness, momentum, signalling and courage.

A survey we carried out of 500 middle managers from large multinationals, and 500 inventors (people who have patented at least one idea and get a significant proportion of their income from their own inventions) showed inventors were significantly more likely to exhibit the six behaviours than their managerial counterparts. The specific behaviours where inventors exhibited the greatest difference from managers were: greenhousing (15% more), realness (21% more) and courage (17% more).

These results probably won't surprise you. We all know that creative people spend their time in slightly different ways and, as we examine each of the six behaviours, we are sure many of our observations will resonate for you. That's because they tap into intuitive knowledge that you already possess. Whatever your job, whatever you do, the principles in this book can be adapted and applied to how you work.

But in the end, the value you extract will be in direct proportion to your willingness to take a leap and try out some of these behaviours – it's really up to you. However, the fact you are reading this book suggests you are already open to a new way of working, one that releases your creative potential.

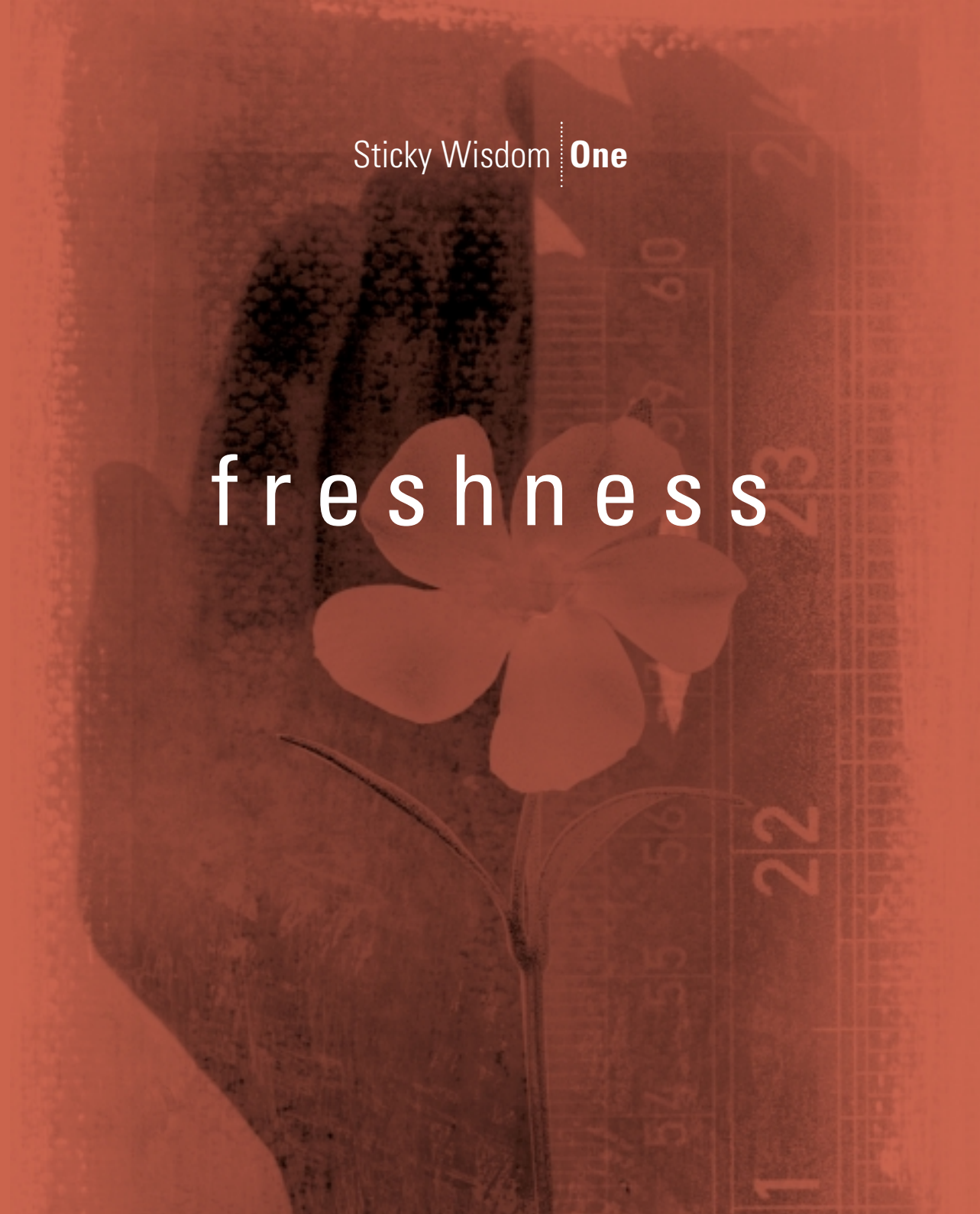
In this book we have collected all the experience and practical wisdom we have about encouraging creativity at work and written it down in a simple, no bullshit, style. That's because we want you to remember it and give it a go.

[xx / sticky wisdom]

**We want the wisdom to stick. Welcome to the revolution.**

Sticky Wisdom **One**

freshness

The image features a central orange flower with five petals, a stem, and two leaves. The background is a textured orange color with a faint, semi-transparent ruler and pencil. The ruler has markings and numbers like 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 22, 23, and 24. The pencil is positioned vertically on the right side of the ruler.

In a world where business is more interested in 'best practice' rather than different practise, is it any wonder that products and services, companies and organisations are all beginning to look the same?

## Is this you?

- ◆ **You do the same things every day. Take the same route to work, read the same newspaper and listen to the same radio station in the morning.**
- ◆ **You spend most of your time with people from similar backgrounds.**
- ◆ **You rarely go out of your way to try new things, meet new people or go to new places**
- ◆ **You're so busy that you settle for the first good solution to a problem.**
- ◆ **You suspect many of your ideas could easily be copied by your competitors.**
- ◆ **If you were really honest with yourself, you'd agree your ideas were more incremental than revolutionary.**

## Why freshness matters

Next time you finish a brainstorm, or put the final touches to your annual plan, step back and pause to look at the ideas you've generated. If you were being completely honest, how many of those ideas do you think your competitors could also come up with? Our experience tells us that many organisations don't ask themselves this question because of the

awesome implications of their answer. Shocking, isn't it, when we are relying on these very ideas to deliver growth in a competitive environment?

Part of the problem is that most of us are so wrapped up in a busy work schedule we seldom make time to question the quality and uniqueness of our ideas. Sometimes we are just so thankful to have a plan or agreement within our organisation, that we don't want to upset the apple cart by asking difficult questions about whether our competitors have the same plan. The truth is that competitive organisations are not always as competitive as they'd like to think they are. For a start, they often draw on a remarkably similar skill base, employing the same kind of people from the same backgrounds. What's more, they access and use similar data, and talk to the same consumers in the same way. They get excited when they spot a 'new' insight, apparently unaware that nine times out of ten competitors will be looking at the same information and getting excited about the very same insight!

You can see this in almost any category of product or service; companies launching similar initiatives at the same time in the same way. So much of what is expected to be step-change innovation is little more than another ride on the merry-go-round of incrementalism.

There is a very simple law in operation here, the first law of creativity – the quality and uniqueness of *stimulus in* has a direct impact on the quality and uniqueness of *ideas out*.

This is the basis of freshness, and it's why creative people and organisations do not rely on the same data their competitors have access to. They source a wider diet, seeking out new experiences and ways of thinking about their market, products and internal processes. This provides the critical stimulus that allows them to see and think about issues in a different way. The new perspectives they gain provoke them into making creative connections that others won't have made.

***“Go where your competitors can't or won't.”***

ANITA RODDICK, FOUNDER OF THE BODY SHOP

## What is stimulus?

Stimulus is any experience that is new to you or outside the boundaries of the problem you are dealing with. This is important. Stimulus is not a new idea in itself but the raw material of the creative process. In our experience, if you've got good stimuli, you won't be able to stop yourself from being creative – the unique connections will just flow from that.

Some people are highly disciplined about taking in fresh new experiences. They deliberately organise experiences for themselves and their teams. For others the process is more intuitive. Their raw material for creativity is constantly topped up by a deep curiosity about the world. Whether by design or instinct, the most creative people and organisations ensure they get a bit of each. Freshness can be both a personal and corporate behaviour, which secures genuine competitive advantage, because 'true' freshness is impossible to replicate.

The behaviour of freshness is the continual search for different experiences that jolt you into making new and unique connections. Whilst creativity may appear entirely intuitive, it is in fact a skill you can develop, practise and plan into your everyday life. This chapter will show you how.

It will explore why stimulus is the key to creativity and how you can inject freshness into your everyday working life. We will introduce the concept of ‘river-jumping’ (using techniques to stimulate fresh thinking at any time), and then look at the long-term behaviour changes necessary to build up your ‘freshness store-cupboard’.

***“New ideas come from differences. They come from having different perspectives and juxtaposing different theories.”***

NICHOLAS NEGROPONTE, AUTHOR

But first, let us take you on a brief journey to explore the workings of that most amazing human organ, the brain. We’ll tell you why it’s hard-wired to make creativity difficult and how to use stimulus to trick it out of its non-creative channel.

## **The world’s greatest filing system**

The human brain is an amazing piece of equipment that unfortunately hasn’t come with a user’s manual. Since the late 1950s a huge amount has been learnt about its structure and abilities, yet few people have been taught how to maximise its potential. However, it has been discovered that the brain’s main default setting actively inhibits the ability to think creatively. Unless you learn how to work around this, your potential to produce new ideas will be severely limited.



The brain has a function known as a 'self-organising mechanism'. It automatically sorts all the data it takes in without your having to think about it. Like a huge filing system, information is digested and stored in a logical and easily retrievable way. The brain classifies and interprets new information by looking for similarities with what's already on file. So when you see something new, your brain will automatically ask, 'Where have I seen something like this before?' and it goes into its filing system to look for it. When it finds what it's looking for it opens that existing file and uses the memories stored there as a point of reference to generate thoughts and make decisions. You can see this in the exercise below.

## TRY THIS

What sort of car does each of these people drive?



Because you don't personally know these people you've had to guess. Your brain's automatic response is to jump into a 'river of thinking' based on previous experiences. Perhaps you 'guessed' the man in the suit drove a Lexus, the woman a hatchback and the man in the open-neck shirt a BMW? Whatever you guessed is not important for this exercise, it's *how* you did it that's important. The connections you made were based on past experience – it was the brain's filing system at work.

As we have seen, faced with any situation, the brain's automatic response is to put us into a 'river of thinking' based on previous experiences. If you want to test this, next time you go on a long car journey, play this simple game. When you pass a car take a glance at the driver and passengers, make up a story about who these people are, where they are going and why. It's amazingly easy to do. From just that quick glance at the make of car, the ages and dress of the occupants and other details, a whole life for these people can be imagined. This is the brain's filing system at work.

Human beings have the capacity to take in huge amounts of information. The sheer volume of data we absorb means it would be virtually impossible for us to work out and interpret everything from the word 'go'. Instead we make educated guesses based on similarities and past experience. The brain simply says, 'I don't really need to know, from first principles, how to act, respond or judge a certain situation every time I see it. What I'll do instead is direct you, based on what I've seen before that looks similar.'

Imagine if this process were visual; that information were like rain falling on a hillside. The brain would decide which river to funnel the rainwater down by looking for similarities with past experiences. The more the rainwater fell,

the more the brain would connect the similarities and the deeper the rivers would become. Imagine how paralyzing life would be if the brain didn't act in this way, if every day you had to find out how and where to put your socks on. Instead the brain simply says, 'that looks like a sock, it'll go on your foot.'

This basic brain classification system has been developing and growing since you were born. An infant's brain is bombarded with millions of new pieces of information which fall like raindrops. The brain starts classifying, creating streams of recognition, which speeds up the sorting process, allowing it to handle more information.

The process continues at school. Over time, you get faster at classifying information by recognition and the rivers become deeper. With good teaching, you continue to add new rivers to the existing ones as different and stimulating ideas come along which challenge your preconceptions. Then you leave school or college and go to work. When the initial excitement of learning about this new environment wears off, the flow of new ideas starts to slow down. But the flow of information speeds up and the rivers have to handle more rain and so they get deeper.

The brain's classification system has huge advantages, allowing people to handle vast amounts of data. But there are two big drawbacks to making such rapid classifications. First, the assumptions the brain makes can sometimes be wrong, causing you to jump to conclusions and make snap decisions about people and situations.

Second, the way the brain processes information kills creativity. Every time you try to think of something new, the brain keeps bringing you

back to the original river. It leads you to a ‘this is how it is’, rather than a ‘this is how it could be’, scenario. So how can you break away from this? The answer is to deliberately find a way of overriding the brain’s classification system. To trick the brain into believing you are thinking about another river, you must get out of the original river altogether, then approach it again from a new and different perspective. This is called a lateral step – we call it ‘river-jumping’.

Let’s look at an example of how this works.

Imagine you’re trying to improve photocopiers and you decide to begin by using an insight based on customer research. This insight is that people find the machines have an annoying habit of getting jammed, or blocked, at critical moments. The company that solves the problem will have a competitive advantage. What’s needed is a flash of creativity. But because of the way the brain works every time you try to think about new and different improvements to photocopiers, it pulls you back to the river of current realities and past experiences it has already created. You can’t help thinking about how you’ve tried to sort out this problem before. To generate new ideas you have to use techniques that enable the brain to make new connections. This is where river-jumping comes in. By using a piece of stimulus, we can focus the brain on something completely different, and break out of our ‘river of thinking’.

This is how it works. The problem with photocopiers is that they can get blocked. So first of all, and this is important, forget photocopiers altogether. Use a piece of stimulus to look at the issue from a fresh perspective. Your stimulus is to ask the question, ‘What else gets blocked?’

Say we come up with ‘noses’; noses get blocked when you have a cold. Start to think more about noses. What happens next is that the brain instantly forgets all its rules and past experiences of photocopiers and starts reminding you of the things that relate to noses – a different river altogether.

You’ve made a lateral step. Now from this very different place turn round and make a connection back to the original topic. In other words, use the nose as a piece of stimulus to think differently about photocopiers. What happens when your nose is blocked? Well, one of the great things about noses is that even when you have a cold both nostrils rarely get blocked at the same time. Now refer back to the original problem. What if photocopiers had a second feed system so that when they got blocked or ran out of toner you just flicked a switch and a second system kicked in? This would relieve the end-users’ frustration when the machine jams at a bad moment. Now, thanks to the stimulus, we have an idea that’s worth building on. Ideas rarely emerge fully formed, and often need to be built by several rounds of creative iteration – but more on this later.

Remember the stimulus doesn’t give the answer; stimulus is not an idea itself, it simply provides fresh context and perspective. Stimulus allows you to jump out of one river of thinking into another; from this new river you can get insights and make new connections back to the first river. And guess what? Now it’s much more difficult for your competitors to follow you and make the same connection. In fact, the more rivers you jump in the creative act, the harder it becomes to follow.

***“Problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which they were created.”***

ALBERT EINSTEIN

## Greg Garrison's flight of fancy

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In 1993, Greg Garrison was put in charge of a key initiative at the financial services and information giant, Reuters. Garrison was given the task of improving the usability of the computer trading systems the company supplies to the dealing rooms of banks in over 130 countries.

A key aim of new product development was to ensure that computer systems – especially the graphical interface that the customer sees – can be mastered quickly, so that dealers minimise their down-time. In a business where millions of dollars can be made and lost at the stroke of a keyboard, users of the Reuters systems were understandably reluctant to spend time retraining. Usability was vital. They said they didn't have time to read instruction manuals, but were adept at feeling their way.

What was needed, the Reuters team realised, was a graphical interface that was easy to learn, and could master updated features. With the launch of the company's new product range approaching, the team sought inspiration. But in the pressure cooker atmosphere of the company's London base, the creative juices didn't seem to be flowing. Even the cool-headed Garrison was starting to worry. A breakthrough was needed. But it wasn't going to happen in the office.

Garrison set off on one of his frequent fact-finding missions, travelling to the Far East to talk to customers in other markets. Away from the hustle and bustle of the Fleet Street office, he relaxed. His curiosity returned. He began to search out fresh stimulus to jolt his thinking around the task.

On his return flight he asked to see the flight deck of the 747 he was travelling on. Surrounded by a wall of sophisticated instrumentation, he was amazed at how pilots could move from one aircraft to another in the same class with such ease – and without retraining. When he asked them, the pilots explained that instruments were arranged in a logical and consistent way across the 747 class, which made flying one aircraft much the same as any other.

Garrison made a new connection. What if the graphical interface on the next generation of Reuters systems was modelled on a pilot's cockpit? It would mean that switching from one system to an updated system would be relatively straightforward. Back in London, he reported his idea to the rest of the team. The idea took off.

Team members built on the original insight, adding a range of features that included autopilots and navigators, which would help the dealers find their way around the new system. Like a pilot's instrument panel, the idea was to place technical support and training at the customer's fingertips. At the touch of a button, traders would be able to move from the realtime market environment into on-screen simulations, calling up features such as autopilot tools to steer them through products – without having to call Reuters for support. In the end, the system was not implemented in full as it was superseded by adherence to the new Microsoft Office style desktop environment. Nevertheless, many of the tools the aviation metaphor gave rise to were included in the next generation of Reuters products, providing trading and operating support for end-users.

All because Greg Garrison looked outside the environment of his problem and gave himself the stimulus to make a fresh connection – that's the essence of freshness.

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## Learning how to do river-jumping

So how do you get started? What can you do now to get freshness into your thinking? It is often assumed that creativity is a spontaneous activity, but creative people in the know use tools and techniques to push their thinking. Far from being spontaneous, they plan creative sessions in advance.

As we have seen, understanding the brain's natural classification system is the first step to managing creativity. The ability to make new connections is limited only by the ability to jump out of one river of thinking and into another. The tool you can use to do this is stimulus. Think of it as an investment. You devote a short amount of time to not thinking specifically about the problem or issue, but investing in the stimulus that will subsequently enable you to make far more, and far richer, connections.

Hundreds of tools have been devised to help people stimulate different thinking, but we believe there are in fact only four main categories of behaviour that jump your thinking, and almost all creativity tools fit into one of these areas. Once you understand the underlying principles, you



will be able to invent your own techniques tailored to the exact challenge you are working on at the time. To make them easier to remember, each principle starts with the letter R. We call them **the 4Rs**.

They are:

**Re-expression** – finding an alternative way of describing or experiencing an issue or problem.

**Related worlds** – looking at other areas where a similar issue or benefit can be seen. (This is the technique used in the photocopier example above.)

**Revolution** – identifying and then challenging the rules and assumptions we are using.

**Random links** – making connections and links between the issue and random items found in the world.

Let's look at each of these in more detail.

## First R: Re-expression

The way tasks and issues are expressed in business tends to be quite limited. Often we rely on business jargon and descriptors, which send us off down the same old rivers of thought. Simply describing or experiencing the issue in a different way will automatically prompt the mind to approach it from a fresh perspective, because the brain will put the new words into a different river.

You can get started with our three favourite re-expression tools.

### 1 · Re-express with alternative words

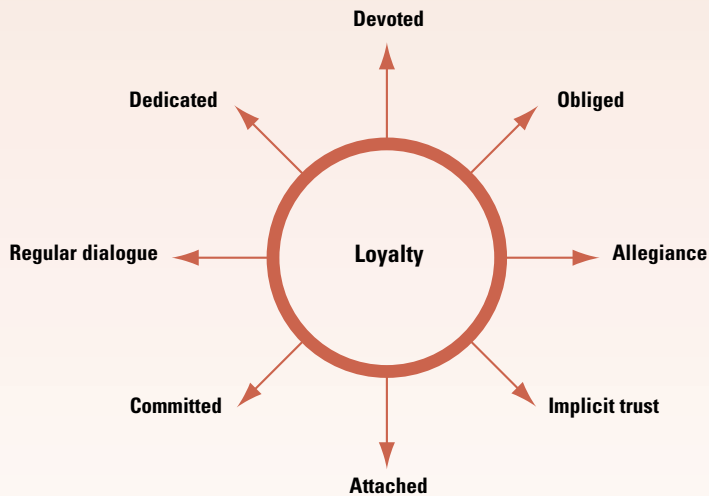
As implied, simply replacing key words in your creative challenge will enable your brain to think in a different way. There are many words you use in your business life which become loaded with a certain meaning. When you hear them, your brain automatically sends you into a well-worn river of past association. Re-expression is a technique which tricks the brain out of this often non-creative assumption-making.

If you look at the loyalty example below, you can see how using many different expressions gives the brain lots of potentially new connection points back to the original problem. Similarly, you may re-express loyalty as a powerful metaphor, for example, 'a marriage' – you could then think of the many different ways loyalty is encouraged in a marriage, e.g. courting, ceremony, public commitment, legality, pain of divorce, and use these fresh perspectives to help you reconnect with your 'loyalty' issue.

## Loyalty

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We recently worked with a major blue chip business to help it find more creative ways of increasing customers' loyalty. Having asked the obvious questions about what loyalty meant and getting the obvious answers (repeat purchase, greater share of second time buyers, etc.), we set about trying to re-express the challenge.



Simply by using alternative words we were able to expand the perception of the problem and open up new avenues of thinking. 'Allegiance' led to an idea about clubs, which consumers paid to join; while 'obligated' led to an idea about a penalty scheme for lack of loyalty.

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## 2 · Re-express using different senses

Using words is only one way to be creative. You have many other senses open to you which you used freely when you were a child, but conceal as an adult – especially as business people. For example, instead of relying on words, why not use a drawing to describe an issue, make a clay model or even act it out to make a physical representation of an issue or a business process. This may all sound a bit weird, but it does work.

### Creating a wok legend

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We were asked by a large food retailer to help their people ‘breathe some life into the stir fry category’. So we got them together in a creative session, ‘made’ a wok out of beanbags and chairs and asked them to act out being ‘a stir fry’ for two minutes. Not surprisingly, they were a bit uncomfortable at first, especially when we started giving them roles: ‘You are the beansprouts; you are the oil...’ Soon they overcame their shyness and were hurling themselves into the wok. All great fun, but at the debrief afterwards there were some acute observations. The chicken thought that he would have probably poisoned someone because he had been undercooked and the oil felt everyone had jumped on her before she was hot enough!

From this session came two key insights about cooking stir fry at home – people cooked at too low a heat; and ingredients went in at the wrong time so were often under or overcooked.

These insights produced two product ideas. First, cooking oil which changed colour when it had reached the right temperature for

cooking and second, segmented and numbered packaging which showed the sequence to put the ingredients in and the time they needed to cook properly; the big breakthrough on the second idea was precision-sliced ingredients, cut so they could all go in at the same time.

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### Bubbling under

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Let's look at another re-expression.  
Here's a picture that was drawn  
in a creative session.



We were exploring how people were feeling about their jobs. After the initial response we asked people to draw their feelings. The person who drew this picture, let's call her Jo, was quiet, but when describing her drawing became animated. 'I feel like the fizzy drink. I feel full of potential but trapped.' Her comments were a rich vein of stimulus that led to many new ideas. Because she re-expressed the issue Jo was able to jump the whole team into a new way of thinking about their jobs. A picture really does say a thousand words!

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### 3 · Re-express from someone else's perspective

Try deliberately describing the world and your issue through the eyes of someone else. For instance, how would an alien describe this? How would your most feared competitor describe it? What about a five-year-old? The creative options are endless.

#### Liquid teeth

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A client once gave us the challenge of launching a toothpaste in countries where the use of toothpaste was very low. The creative session had hit an all time low. The scientist attempting to explain how toothpaste works to the creative team was having a hard time. His molecular structure diagrams were not helping us understand the benefit of the product. Through the glassy-eyed mist we suggested that he explain it to us as he would to a five-year-old. 'Well, kids, teeth are made of calcium,' he said, feeling rather embarrassed. 'And the amazing thing is that toothpaste has calcium in it too!' 'Wow,' said one bright spark, as a creative connection was made. 'Could we talk to the target market about liquid teeth?!' Before long we were tumbling over ourselves to offer ideas based on a toothpaste tube full of liquid teeth – a great creative idea, and all because we tried to re-express our challenge from someone else's perspective.

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## Second R: **Related worlds**

Never assume that you are the only person to have faced an issue like the one you are facing, or that you cannot learn something valuable from the world around you. ‘Related worlds’ is a technique that enables you to harness the experiences of others in a creative context. It is the art of identifying situations or events that in some way mirror the creative challenge that you face right now. You probably won’t want to steal their ideas or experiences directly, but the principles or stimuli of another’s approach can be identified and reapplied to your own challenge.

This is what management writer Tom Peters means when he refers to business people ‘swiping with glee’. It is the very opposite of the ‘not invented here’ syndrome. It means deliberately encouraging people to go out and see what they can learn from others. The creative act occurs when you reapply this to your own challenge in a unique way. The roll-on deodorant is exactly this principle in action. The steal was to look at the ballpoint pen and apply the same principles to deodorant – another world where a liquid had to be spread equally thinly across a surface.

***“Originality is nothing  
but judicious imitation.”***

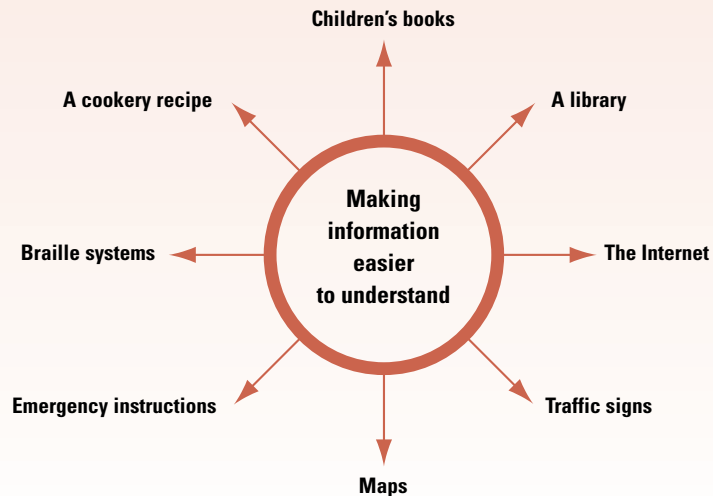
VOLTAIRE

Related worlds is a great principle for demystifying the creative process. All you have to do is ask, ‘Where in the world has my challenge (or anything like it) been faced before? What can I learn and steal from that?’ Curiously, most people’s eyes light up when we re-express creativity as ‘stealing’!

To apply the technique start by considering, ‘What am I trying to do, or achieve?’ Write this as a short summary in the middle of a circle with a set of spokes coming from it. Now invest some time in thinking where else this issue has been encountered. Before long you will have a fabulous wheel of related worlds stimuli to base your creative thinking on.

### **Making music easier to buy – Virgin Music**

As befits their continual focus on the customer, Virgin Music engaged us on a project to help make store layout easier to access for consumers who weren’t necessarily music experts. (Virgin had learnt that non-music experts told them it was it hard to find what they wanted in music stores.) We decided to do a related worlds exercise. It looked like this:





We then spent time investigating each of these worlds – drawing out principles and insights that we could reapply to our own issue. For example, when we looked at maps we realised that they cleverly used lots of symbols to convey complex information. From there we had the idea of creating a symbol for each different sort of music and posting a big visual key right at the front of the store.

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Related worlds are everywhere. To start you off try the following.

### **Other businesses**

When was the last time you visited a business outside your category? On a recent project about speed to market, for example, we sought stimulus from McDonald's (an inspiring speed system in action) and Formula 1 cars (pit stops reduced from six minutes to less than 15 seconds in the modern age). We can guarantee another business somewhere sometime has faced a challenge of a similar nature to the one you're working on right now.

### **Other people with related expertise**

We call them 'naive experts' – people expert in your challenge area but not in your business. In a workshop we ran with a food company, our brief was to provide new ways of thinking about health. The brand team – stuck in busy day-to-day jobs – had no way of experiencing fresh perspectives. So over the course of a day we introduced them to eight different 'health experts'. These included the owner of an alternative practise clinic, a gardener, a super-fit 80-year-old, a slob (no interest in health), a personal

trainer, a homeopath, a faith-healer and a doctor. Our challenge suddenly felt very new and very broad.

### **The wider world of science, history or nature**

George de Mestral used nature as the stimulus that led to the innovation of Velcro™ after a day of hunting in the Jura mountains in France in 1941. Carefully inspecting the burrs in his woollen clothes and his dog's coat, he found hundreds of little hooks engaging the loops in the material and fur. This natural hook and catch system gave him the initial idea for Velcro™. De Mestral went on to make a machine to duplicate hooks and loops out of nylon.

## Third R: **Revolution**

Revolution is creativity at its most provocative. It's the deliberate challenging of the rules and assumptions that exist. Some of the great creative leaps of our time have come from revolution. What if we could fly? What if we could have sex without babies? What if...!

Very often our ability to come up with innovative ideas is limited by the rules that define our particular river. As we saw earlier in this chapter, the mind continually judges ideas and stimuli to try and make them fit with what we know already. Revolution is all about deliberately breaking the mind's rules. So the first step in revolution thinking is to be aware of the rules which already exist in life or in your mind. This can be hard, so deep are the rivers we're in or strong the rules that exist. For instance, nearly all generations of writing implements have copied the original quill shape:

ink pen, pencil and Biro™. It's only recently that pen manufacturers have started to change the rules with inventions like the ball-shaped pen, which actually suits the task of writing better.

When faced with a creative challenge, one of the simple techniques to get you started is to write down the 'rules'. Set as many as you possibly can down on paper. What's the shape, use, feel, touch, application, aesthetics, dimensions, process, etc., etc.? Below is an example from the world of shampoo.

<b>Rules</b>	<b>Revolution</b>
It's liquid	Solid, a mousse, a milk, a cream, etc.
In plastic bottles	Capsules, a beautiful glass bottle, a fabric, etc.
For washing	Cleansing, massage, stimulation, cutting, etc.
Used with water	Dry with your hairdryer, a gas, etc.
Once a day	Morning and night, on the run, at the office, etc.
For beauty	Invigoration, repair, sensitising, pleasure, etc.

You can break each rule in many ways, each of which offers the chance of a fresh perspective or new idea. Once you've got your rules you can start to play around with them. For example, try exaggerating, opposing, reducing, and reversing as many of the assumptions as you can.

## **FIVE OF OUR FAVOURITE REVOLUTION QUESTIONS ARE:**

### **1 · What if we did nothing?**

Rather than getting worried about the difficult-to-pour super-thick consistency of tomato ketchup, Heinz simply turned this feature into a benefit. The advertising campaign leaves a clear message – if it comes out too easily then it must be low-quality ketchup.

### **2 · What if we had to make it for half the cost?**

The humble Mars Bar is a great example of revolution thinking. By filling the centre of chocolate with other, lower-cost sweet ingredients (toffee and caramel), the confectionery market was created and Mars had a worldwide best-seller.

### **3 · What if people bought twice as much?**

What do you get if you double the size of a shopping basket? A basket you can't carry or a basket with wheels. The supermarket trolley was born!

### **4 · What if we reversed the process?**

At the end of the 1980s most car companies were concentrating on big, modern family cars. Two Japanese designers at Mazda reversed this thinking, persuading the company to launch a retro racer based on the Lotus Elan. The MX5 (or Miata as it's known in the US) was launched and the two-seater sports car market reborn.

## 5 · What if we exaggerated the issue?

The potato chip was invented in 1853 by a Native American, George Crum, who was a chef in a hotel in Saratoga Springs, New York. The story goes that, following guest complaints about George's thick undercooked fries, in a fit of pique he sliced his potatoes as thin as he could and fried them extra long. The guest was delighted and asked for more! Soon the word spread and by 1900 Saratoga Chips were famous over the East Coast of the USA. George Crum would indeed have been surprised that this 'exaggeration' created a \$4bn industry in the USA alone!

***“Rules are for people who aren't willing to invent their own.”***

CHUCK YEAGER, FIRST MAN TO BREAK  
THE SOUND BARRIER

### **Pollution solution**

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A few years ago, a city in the Netherlands had a refuse problem. A once clean section of town had become an eyesore because people had stopped using the trashcans. Cigarette butts, beer bottles, chocolate wrappers, newspapers and other trash littered the streets.

Obviously, folk at the sanitation department were concerned, so they sought ways to clean up the city. One idea was to double the littering fine from 25 guilders to 50 guilders for each offence. They tried this, but it had little effect. Then somebody asked the following revolution question:

'What if, instead of punishing the people who drop litter, we reward those who keep the place clean?' At first this seemed daft – how can you reward people who put rubbish in bins?

Fortunately, the people who were listening to this idea didn't evaluate it in the context of current reality. Instead, they just asked in what circumstances it would be possible. In the end, the sanitation department developed electronic trashcans that had a sensing unit on the top that would detect when a piece of refuse had been deposited. This activated a tape recorder that played a recording of a joke. As a result people went out of their way to put their trash in the trashcans, and the town became clean once again.

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## Fourth R: **Random links**

This is probably the principle that 'feels' the most creative. It is the simple art of selecting at random a piece of stimulus that has *nothing to do with your creative challenge* and then deliberately forcing a connection.

There are only two rules with this technique.

### **1 · The random item must be truly random**

You want items which have no connection with what you're working on. The random nature of the stimulus creates surprise and freshness.

### **2 · You must find a connection**

The harder you work to find a connection the more likely it is to be unique and therefore interesting. (Remember what we said about competitive advantage.)

For example, imagine you work in telecommunications. Can you force yourself into making a connection between a garden hose system (or lawn sprinkler) and a telephone?

Here goes: what if, like the sprinkler, the telephone had detachable equipment for listening, or you could attach different kinds of equipment to the headset? Or the telephone was made rugged enough for use in any weather conditions? Or what if you set up outdoor electrical points to charge up mobile phones?

The point here is that the stimulus does not give you the idea. Instead it has a whole host of attributes, values and benefits, which you can appropriate and adapt for your challenge. Its value is that it has absolutely nothing to do with your challenge so it will force you to think more broadly – in a way your mind without stimulus may never do.

## Putting the 4Rs together

### **An example brainstorm plan**

The great thing about the 4Rs is that they are not prescriptive. They are principles that can be tailored and adapted to any challenge. So when you're sitting at your desk with that 'empty headed... where do I start' feeling, turn to the 4Rs to get you started.

The 4Rs can also be used in a much more formal way as the planning tool for a really good brainstorm session. Here is an example.

Our challenge was to invent breakthrough products for the hair care market. We gathered together a mixed team from sales and marketing, R&D, design and advertising agencies. We also invited some external participants, including consumers and a number of 'naive' experts from other disciplines to keep us fresh. Then for two days we immersed ourselves in a highly stimulated world based on the 4Rs.

Used in this way, they can provide an incredibly powerful framework for creating brainstorming and ideas workshops. No more bare rooms, blank flip charts and blank faces. Instead, an inspired team constantly stimulated with fresh perspectives to provide the basis for genuinely new and different ideas.



## Day 1

	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
<b>Day 1</b> 8:30 am	<b>Kick-start</b> Facilitators welcome participants, play introductory games, set up the rules of creative behaviour, and explain logistics for the next two days.	Introduce participants. Create welcoming atmosphere. Highlight different ways of working.
9:00 am	<b>Set-up</b> Project leader sets up the challenge explaining the purpose of the session in a motivating way.	Participants have a common vision of what success is; they feel valued and motivated.
9:15 am	<b>First burst</b> Team gives opening thoughts and ideas they've already had for solving the issue.	People won't have new ideas until they've got their current ideas off their chest.
10:00 am	<b>Consumer workshop</b> Live consumer research 'focus' group using appropriate target consumers.	<b>Re-expression stimulus</b> Looks at the challenge from the consumer's point of view. Grounds whole session in consumer reality.

## Day 1

	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
1:00 pm	<p><b>Act it out</b></p> <p>Physically act out the whole hair care process from beginning to end as a piece of hair. (What does it feel like to be dirty/washed/dried/styled?) Experience acting out each new alternative.</p>	<p><b>Re-expression exercise</b></p> <p>Gets people out of their comfort/analytical zone to consider the feeling and emotions of the washing process.</p>
2:00 pm	<p><b>Gym instructor and nutritionist</b></p> <p>Discussion with fitness instructor and nutrition expert.</p>	<p><b>Related worlds exercise</b></p> <p>Creates new concepts based around fitness and nutrition. It also gives us lots of new vocabulary concepts.</p>
3:30 pm	<p><b>Hairdresser</b></p> <p>Half-hour talk on latest styles and tricks and tools of the trade from a top hairdresser.</p>	<p><b>Related worlds exercise</b></p> <p>The professional's view is very different from that of a major corporation.</p>
4:30 pm	<p><b>What if game</b></p> <p>Series of provocative statements designed to challenge current world perspective, e.g. 'What if products were twice the price?' 'What if you didn't need water?' 'What if shampoo didn't exist?' 'What if all products were solid?'</p>	<p><b>Revolution exercise</b></p> <p>Deliberate acts of provocation to focus people way outside the conventional market wisdom.</p>

## Day 2

	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
<b>Day 2</b> 8:30 am	<b>DIY</b> Participants washed their hair. One-third washed as normal, one-third with only one hand, one-third blindfolded.	<b>Re-expression exercise</b> Stops people talking and makes them 'do' instead. Direct experience provokes new ideas.
9:30 am	<b>Magazine beauty editor</b> The editor spends half an hour talking about the latest trends across the whole beauty market.	<b>Related worlds exercise</b> A completely fresh perspective from beyond the world of hair care but from categories with real relevance.
11:00 am	<b>Foreign hair care commercials</b> Ad agency shows a 20-minute video of hair care advertisements from countries outside Europe.	<b>Re-expression/related worlds exercise</b> Moves us from verbal to highly visual interpretation of our challenge with very different cultural interpretations.
12:00 noon	<b>Pottery class</b> A potter shows us about the moulding and shaping of clay. He includes tools and techniques for styling and colouring effects.	<b>Related worlds exercise</b> Fantastically rich related world for styling products. Just like people styling their hair, the potter needs 'body and hold'.

# Day 2

	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>PURPOSE</b>
1:00 pm	<b>Random box</b> Whole series of random objects taken out of a box. Participants asked to make connections.	<b>Random links exercise</b> Freshness exercise designed to get us making connections and thinking outside the box of hair care.
2:00 pm	<b>Filtering and harvesting</b> Final two-hour session to give all the participants time to review the ideas generated.	Switching brain states from creative to more developmental/analytical.
4:00 pm	<b>Select leading ideas</b> Highlight areas for future development, pull out key learnings.	Gives everyone the chance to have their say.
5:00 pm	<b>Action/next steps</b> Focus on the key actions and next steps.	Maintains momentum and turns ideas into concrete business actions. Applications of project planning disciplines.

A two-day creative session like this takes a lot of energy to organise and needs a skilled facilitator. Imagine that you organised a similar session. Would you generate new ideas that your competitors hadn't even dreamed of?

### Long-term freshness

So far we have concentrated on the day-to-day tools of creative thinking, the techniques that you can use straight away to radically improve the quality of your creative output. We know, however, from our own experience that this is only part of the picture. The skill of river-jumping allows you to make creative connections in a particular moment, but a lifetime of continual freshness will give your brain a store-cupboard of stimulus, allowing you to make free-flowing connections at any time.

The freshness store-cupboard is your store of internal mind stimulus. It comes from your unique experiences of life, and it will always stick with you to use in making connections whenever a creative challenge emerges. For us there are three types of idea, as shown in the model below. Ideas B and C can only come from planned stimulus, but idea type A can come at any time. And it is the quality of your own store-cupboard that dictates how good your free-flowing type A ideas will be.

Top of mind ideas. Sourced from your freshness store-cupboard	<b>A</b>	Automatic and intuitive
Ideas stimulated by river-jumping techniques	<b>B</b>	Brainstormed and planned
Ideas built upon by team members	<b>C</b>	Co-operative and interactive

There is no hierarchy at play here. A good idea is a good idea no matter where it comes from (although you will often have to use all three levels to get a real breakthrough business idea). The behaviour of the freshness store-cupboard gives you the ability to operate quickly, intuitively and spontaneously.

### **Let us explain**

Most people follow set routines at work and even at home. The concept of the freshness store-cupboard recognises this fact and deliberately does something about it. It involves going out of your way (and out of your comfort zone) to experience new things, meet people you wouldn't normally come into contact with and to see the world from different perspectives. It involves making a deliberate break with your usual pattern of life.

### **Topping up the freshness store cupboard**

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Here are ten pattern-breaking ideas.

1. Take a new form of transport to work next week. You'll be amazed at who you'll meet and what you'll see.
2. Deliberately read a magazine or newspaper, listen to a radio station or watch a TV programme that you wouldn't normally (children's TV is good for this).
3. Plan a monthly lunch with people from other parts of the business you don't usually consult. Chat to them about an issue they are working on and get their perspectives on issues you are working on.

4. Get out of your normal environment for at least half a day a week. At least 70% of what we think is the result of what's around us.
  5. Ask your family (especially kids) to help solve a problem you're working on.
  6. Allocate twice as much time as you normally would to solving a problem. Make sure you have at least three solutions before you choose one.
  7. Block out 'freshness time' for you and your team once a month. Go somewhere you wouldn't normally go together or do an activity you wouldn't normally do.
  8. Take a walk in the park during office hours. Change the pace of your thinking. Take time to ponder.
  9. Listen to the music charts. (Do you know what's number one at the moment?)
  10. Reinvent your job role at least once a year.
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This represents the start of creating a freshness habit. Rather than relying on willpower, create your own processes to make sure freshness is part of your life.

Breaking patterns is important because it provides a constant top-up of freshness. The freshness store-cupboard is kept well stocked by background stimulus. This means that when you need to be creative, you

have a ready supply of freshness to draw on to make new connections. This is the first place you access when trying to have new ideas in the absence of stimulus. So how do you do it?

The tough part of pattern-breaking is that it forces you to move outside your comfort zone. The reason most of us got into patterns or rivers in the first place was because they make it easier to cope with the demands placed on us. At work, this is about the demands of our jobs, but for many of us this spills over into our home lives. At the weekend, you find you are more comfortable doing what you know than trying new things. Avoiding new situations becomes a coping strategy not just for work but for life. As we get older, and the demands on us multiply, most of us find we become more and more set in our ways. These patterns allow you to streamline your life – avoiding situations and people you don't regard as essential to the tasks you have to complete.

***“An idea is a feat of  
association.”***

ROBERT FROST (1874–1963),  
AMERICAN POET

Pattern-breaking turns this upside-down. It means making yourself do things you wouldn't normally do, or don't like doing. Faced with an invitation to meet new people or an opportunity to try something different, the logic of the accomplished pattern-breaker is: 'I'm not sure I'm going to enjoy this. Good, I'll do it anyway.' In this way, the pattern-breaker ensures a diet of fresh experiences. At a simple level, going to new places provides more freshness. Reading a different newspaper or listening to a different radio station puts stimulus in the cupboard for a rainy day.

It sounds easy. But we've discovered the hard way that pattern-breaking behaviour involves some serious discomfort. It means reprioritising – and that inevitably involves some pain. But pain with a purpose.



## Freshness at ICI

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ICI paints division has the look and feel of traditional big business. We were invited in to start breaking a few patterns. Ian Kenyon had just been appointed head of innovation. He had a clearly defined vision and a realisation that if ICI stayed firmly fixed in the world of paint it would never hit the stretching business targets set by the wider company. But all around him and his team surged the fast-flowing river of paint. Paint products; paint business targets; paint market research. They needed some fresh stimulus.

As part of our creative journey together, Ian, his team and *What If!* explored far beyond the world of paint. We set out to find some truly different related worlds. For example, we met a Colour Me Beautiful consultant who talked to us about how she matched colour to someone's skin tone and personality, then a colour psychologist who had a complex model matching personality types to tonal colour groups. (Interesting. Could we sell colour on personality types rather than simply names? London Retro Cool Colours range, for example, or English Country Lady range?)

A West End theatre lighting designer told us he could create any illusion with the use of light. (Interesting. Could we produce a range of paints that responded differently to different lighting conditions?) We met a fashion predictor – one of the people responsible for telling us that 'grey is the new black'! – while an interior decorator evangelised about how colour

can change the mood. 'If I could paint the world,' he said, 'I could change how everyone feels!' Still more. An estate agent gave us tips for making a home more saleable. It's all about colour, smell, look, airflow (don't be fooled, this is a real art form!). We talked to an Australian computer programmer who had created the world's first commercial 'room on a screen' interface, allowing DIY enthusiasts to experiment on-screen rather than on their own walls.

The result of this work was a huge insight about how ICI wasn't really selling paint, but was in the mood creation business. This in itself opened up a number of exciting possibilities. One specific innovation was the creation of the world's first integrated home decorating solution. This system allows even the least accomplished decorator to integrate colours safely by sticking to a family of matching interiors which link colour on the walls to the décor around the room. Consumers can create a whole range of room feels with different fabric, paints and furniture on screen before making a final choice.

A success story in the making? We hope so. But don't underestimate these two important points: it takes awareness to realise you're stuck in a river in the first place – this is the first key step that Ian and his team took. Second, a journey into the unknown comes at a price. More time out of the office; the uncertainty of success; the questioning of others from a traditional business world who just don't get it. Stocking the freshness store-cupboard is a real investment. And, yes, it is worth it.

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## Structure in some freshness

At the individual level, you can bring some freshness into your working life by becoming a pattern-breaker. We've come across a number of enlightened companies that have put structures in place to support this kind of behaviour (there are some examples below). Most companies don't. Does yours?

### Superquinn

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Fergal Quinn, the charismatic founder of the Superquinn supermarket chain in Ireland, wants his people to stay fresh and creative about food and ways of selling it. So he set up a system whereby everyone in the company (right down to the shelf stackers) is responsible for reading one food-related magazine a month. Each employee is allocated a specific publication from around the world to read. Their job is to use it as stimulus and send Fergal any ideas or observations.

### ?What If!

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Every two to three months we stop work for an afternoon. Responsibility for planning and organising our stimulus session is rotated so that everyone has a go. The guidelines are simple – the experience must involve the team doing something which we would never normally do and ideally stretch us. In these sessions we've: played bingo with pensioners in Kilburn, North London; drummed with African dancers; had our fortunes

told; got tattooed (removable after two weeks); been on the world's scariest theme park rides; visited Japanese supermarkets; taken part in Shamanic rituals; had Reiki sessions; run a children's Christmas party... and so on. Nobody tries to explain what we will get out of it directly – it's understood, it's our freshness store-cupboard.

### **Ben & Jerry's**

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Ben & Jerry's Home-made Ice Cream is famous for its groovy flavours. Successes include Cherry Garcia, Chubby Hubby and Chunky Monkey. But coming up with new ideas year after year isn't easy. To stay fresh, the company has instituted 'Dessert Tours'. Folks from the R&D Kitchen go on annual culinary tours of leading American restaurants on the East and West Coasts, chatting to top chefs and customers to get insights from the leading edge of food. They ask what flavours and ingredients are popular this season, and could be big in the ice cream world next. The only guideline is that they must eat as many desserts as they physically can.

### **Southwest Airlines**

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A few years ago, Dallas-based Southwest introduced a scheme for people to spend one week every six months getting away from the office to have ideas about how the team was working and what they were focusing on. The scheme was so successful the practise is now encouraged across the whole of the business. Teams can go anywhere and do anything they like (within reason!) as long as they get stimulated to have ideas about how they can work most productively over the next six months.

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## Unilever

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At Unilever Best Foods, a sophisticated freshness system has been designed. The 'germination process' as they call it, involves several people from every category team being nominated as stimulus hunters. Part of their role is to spend time out in the world searching for stimulus to jolt the rest of the team's thinking. Whole cupboards of stimulus are collected and used throughout a project. The germination process is formal, structured, with clear responsibility lines and agreed budgets. It is a clear demonstration of the company's commitment to the principle of freshness. In India, Unilever has a programme called 'Feel the Pulse', in which all of its 1500 managers go out of their offices, factories or labs for three days twice a year to 'look, listen and learn about consumers', by visiting their homes. All managers, not just sales and marketing managers, are included. It's a powerful way to enhance not only the consumer orientation of the company but to align managers across all functions.

## Richer Sounds

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Julian Richer, founder of UK hi-fi retailer Richer Sounds, has realised the benefits of getting employees out of the office. Each branch or department is expected to meet once a month. 'We don't pay for their time,' says Richer, 'but we give them £5 a head allowance for liquid refreshment.' His simple observation is that the primary thing employees have in common is their work. When they go out for a drink they eventually end up talking about their jobs. In the very different environment of the pub all sorts of fresh and innovative ideas start to emerge. Richer collects these using a simple ideas suggestion scheme.

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## Freshness – a final word

Our own experience at ?What If! is that structured ‘freshness’ experiences are no substitute for a stimulating life outside of work. We ask our people, ‘How do you want to work? How can we fit around you?’ The result is that many of our people negotiate their own contracts – preferring to take school holiday time off or have three or four day weekends. This flexibility comes at a cost to the employee (less salary) and means the resourcing of our project work is not always easy. However, the long-term payback of fresh employees buzzing with ideas, and very few leavers, easily outweighs any negatives. Admittedly this is easier to do for small companies but even if you work in a supertanker company just stop for a moment and ask yourself what if employee freshness was paramount? What could we do differently?

## Summary

The brain is not set up to make creativity easy. That's because the brain is hard-wired to use an automatic and subconscious classification system based on past experiences. When it takes in a new piece of information it simply classifies and interprets it according to what it has experienced or seen like it before.

This system is highly effective and allows human beings to process huge amounts of information very quickly. But it also keeps us locked into current and past realities.

To break out of this limiting mode of thinking, we have to distract the brain from its current rules using stimulus. By focusing on a piece of stimulus, we can then find a connection back to the original problem which allows us to see it in a fresh way.

There are four river-jumping techniques.

**Re-expression** – finding an alternative way of describing or experiencing the issue.

**Related worlds** – finding an alternative but similar issue or benefit in another field.

**Revolution** – identifying then deliberately challenging the rules and assumptions.

**Random links** – using a deliberate connection with a random item.

In the longer term, deeper freshness can be achieved by building up a personal, 'freshness store-cupboard'. This begins when we deliberately break out of the patterns in our lives and fill our minds with varied and unusual experiences.

Finally, remember freshness and stimulus won't give you the idea itself, they are simply the raw material for a new connection.