

TAPPING CREATIVITY

Everyone has heard of ‘writers block’, but what happens when creative blocks impede individual efforts and innovation work in organizations? Many of the strategies that apply to individuals can also be applied to group and organizational situations. This article suggests ways to harness creativity and ‘break the block’.

1. **Think of opposites –**

A simple, and often very effective, way out of a block is to think of the opposite version of what you are working on. For instance if you are working on the shape of a product, and your group is nonplussed by a series of boxy, square alternatives, try intentionally creating roundish and curvy alternatives. While this method does not always yield immediate results, it is often helpful in stimulating new ideas.

By simply forcing a new set of thinking, the work may force work along a different path, new ideas and results may emerge.

2. **Use ‘Personas’ –**

Personas are a model of a typical user. For example if you are working on a software application, it may be helpful to create a template of a typical user. In larger organizations, this persona may be more concretely defined via marketing studies and focus groups. In smaller companies and in individual effort the persona may help to help creative focus and ensure that the user friendliness of the software is kept in line with the targeted user.

When using a persona strategy think about how the decisions you are making impact the eventual product or service with regards to the persona. For instance, does the layout of an interface make sense to the persona, or is in inconsistent with their use patterns?

Personas are a good way to ‘put yourself in another person’s shoes’ and are an excellent method for meeting design and product decisions, especially when you are operating in unfamiliar territory.

3. **Change the environment of the creative effort—**

Quite often people can get locked into patterns. Sometimes a simple shift in venue or in the setting of the activity can spur on creative solutions.

This might be as simple as walking out of your office or workspace, but also includes off-site planning meetings and corporate retreats.

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4. **Take a break –**

Leaving the work altogether is often a strategy without immediate tangible benefits. Like the strategy above a break can help open your mind to new possibilities that might not have been present in the focused workplace environment.

Rest and relaxation are a benefit for many people working hard to meet deadlines and stay ahead of their competition. Recharging ones batteries with a small break or vacation can be a very effective method of getting the innovative edge back.

5. **Invite the opinions of others—**

Effectively harvesting the opinions of other people is the goal. In organizations that can afford it, this can be done via focus groups or surveys, but it could also mean bringing in people from other departments, offices or by talking with your existing customers.

It is surprising how time and again the input of others, especially those not directly involved in a project can help your creative efforts.

This list of ways to tap creativity is by no means complete. Always be open to new ideas and opinions as they may help you in your innovative mission. When you do reach a block it is often necessary to take a break, work on a different activity, but if you force non-conforming solutions by using opposites or personas, you may often find the tool you need to unleash a creative and novel solution. ■