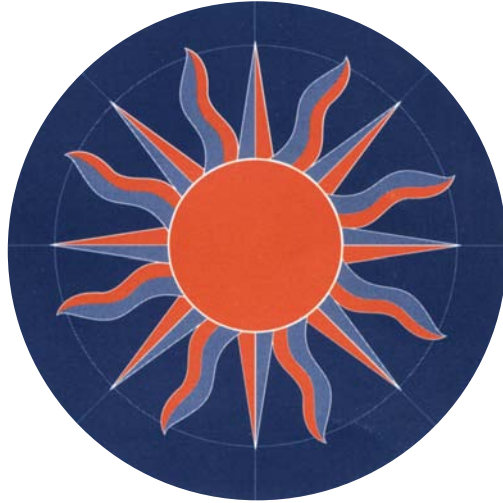




MELROSE



IDEAS INTO ACTION

with Mark Brown

guide

IDEAS INTO ACTION

guide

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MARK BROWN

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PREPARATION (for trainers)

MARK BROWN

Mark Brown is the founder and Managing Director of Innovation Centre Europe Ltd. which researches and promotes best creativity and innovation practice in organisations. He is also an Associate Faculty Member at Henley Management College where he helped set up the European Innovation Project.

In addition to consultancy and presentations around the world, plus writing management books and articles, he continues to research creativity and innovation in individuals and organisations at King's College, London University and Henley.

Publications include *The Dinosaur Strain*, *Memory Matters* and *Left-Handed: Right Handed*. Forthcoming books include *Your Creative Edge*, *Supercreative Teams* and *Successful Innovation*.

USING THIS GUIDE

Ideas into action package contains a video and this guide.

WHO SHOULD READ WHAT AND WHEN

This guide is addressed both to:

- ▶ Trainers/other people who intend to run a training programme based on **Ideas into action**
- ▶ Individuals who intend to use **Ideas into action** on their own.

The former should read the whole of this guide as part of their preparation for running the training programme.

The latter should read the first section of this guide, *About the Package*, and **before** watching the video try the *Nine dots problem* set out on page 39 (using Handout 1 and avoiding looking at the solution on Handout 2 and page 21). Having watched the video they can then read the rest of the guide to consolidate and develop what they have learned from the screen.

STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDE

This guide is divided into four main sections.

The first, *About the Package*, explains how to use the video and guide, and outlines some suggested training programmes.

The second, **Ideas into action**- *the video*, covers the points raised in the video in more detail.

The third, training programmes, sets out three suggested programmes lasting between one hour and one day.

The final section, *Handouts*, contains photocopy masters for nine handouts.

USING THE VIDEO

SUBJECT-MATTER, STRUCTURE AND STYLE

Ideas into action is a 10 minute video looking at the subject of creative thinking and innovation in organisations.

It begins by showing how we tend to restrict our thinking to narrow limits - limits we impose ourselves. After examining why this happens, it suggests ways of broadening the thought processes and increasing creativity.

The video proposes a three colour model for the creative thinking process. It then goes through each colour in turn suggesting simple but powerful techniques for overcoming these self-imposed obstacles to innovation.

It concludes by encouraging viewers to be as creative in the championing of their ideas as in the conception, to take the initiative and translate their *ideas into action*.

The video has been produced in a striking and original style, mixing live action and animated graphics, to reflect the spirit of the subject.

AIMS

Ideas into action is intended to stimulate creative thinking and innovation at work.

It aims to help people recognise how narrowly we tend to think and prompt them to free themselves from the largely self-imposed limitations of their thinking.

By suggesting various specific techniques it also aims to indicate how they might actually set about breaking down these barriers and expanding their creative thought processes.

Ultimately, **Ideas into action** is intended to encourage the viewer to come up with good, practical ideas for new or improved products and services, processes and procedures that customers {both external and internal} really want - and to put those ideas into action.

AUDIENCE

Ideas into action is appropriate for a very broad spectrum of audiences. It can be usefully viewed by people at any level within the organisation, from the shopfloor to the boardroom. It applies to any type or size of organisation in any industry or economic sector.

The video can be viewed in a group context or by individuals.

METHOD AND CONTEXT OF USE

The video is designed to provoke thought and discussion. It is much more effective when the viewing is supported by some exchange of ideas or working through of thoughts, whether in a group or individual context.

It can be used to get training sessions, seminars, conferences, team meetings or any work gatherings off to a flying start, to bring them to a powerful conclusion or to boost them in the middle.

Three training programmes constructed around **Ideas into action** are set out in this guide. Otherwise it can be integrated into courses or sessions on problem solving, quality, customer service, change, teamwork, etc.

Individuals using **Ideas into action** on their own may like to combine it with a reading of Mark Brown's book *The Dinosaur Strain* {published by Innovation Centre Europe, 1993 - available from Video Arts Ltd, see page 80 for details). The book covers the subject-matter of **Ideas into action** and other closely related areas in an engaging, interactive manner.

Working through the exercises contained in *The Dinosaur Strain* is an effective way of consolidating and developing the ideas in the video.

Whatever the context in which the video is being viewed, it is recommended that **immediately before** watching it viewers try the *Nine dots problem* as directed on page 39. (It doesn't matter if people are already familiar with the problem - the directions explain what to do in that case).

The video essentially functions on two levels. On one level it is communicating a single key message which every viewer will hopefully come away with - to be creative and innovative we need to think more freely and transform our consequent *ideas into action*. On another level it is showing a number of specific techniques and attitude shifts which can help in the realisation of ideas. Because the video functions on these different levels, and since the style of the video is challenging and fast moving, you may well like to play the video twice. Once straight through, then perhaps once pausing at points you wish to pick up on (using the Pause or Still button on your video player).

Exchanging views, sharing experience, working through thoughts prompted by the video will inevitably enhance its impact. Giving it a proper training context will help crystallise how it applies to viewers' specific work circumstances.

PROGRAMME OUTLINES

Here are outlines for three suggested training programmes centred on **Ideas into action**. These are suggestions only, by no means set in stone, to be adapted as desired to fit the particular circumstances and concerns of the viewers, organisation and industry.

Programme	Activities	Duration
Programme 1- 1 hour	Introduction and Nine dots problem	5 mins
	Ideas into action video	10 mins
	Personal implications discussion	20 mins
	Overall implications discussion and Action planning	25 mins
		Total: 60 mins

Programme	Activities	Duration
Programme 2 - 1/2 day	Introduction and Nine dots problem	5 mins
	Ideas into action video	10 mins
	Show your true colours exercise	10 mins
	The Ideas into action model	15 mins
	Blue:	
	Stuck in our ways mini-exercise	2 mins
	Matchstick triangles exercise	5 mins
	Neil & Maggie exercise	8 mins
	Put it another way exercise	30 mins
	or	
	Shoot for the stars exercise	
	Ask “,What’s good about it?” exercise	25 mins
	“Yes... But” discussion	10 mins
	Red:	
	Set and jump the hurdles discussion	5 mins
	Green:	
	Take the initiative (Freedom in a framework) discussion	25 mins
Rigid digits discussion	10 mins	
Creative championing role-play	25 mins	
Action planning	15 mins	
	Total: 3 hrs 20 mins	

Programme	Activities	Duration
Programme 3 - 1 day	Introduction and Nine dots problem	5 mins
	Ideas into action video	10 mins
	Show your true colours exercise	10 mins
	A world of change exercise	30 mins
	The Ideas into action model	20 mins
	Blue:	
	Stuck in our ways mini-exercise	2 mins
	Matchstick triangles exercise	5 mins
	Neil & Maggie exercise	8 mins
	Candle on the wall exercise	15 mins
	or	
	Tying the knot exercise	30 mins
	Put it another way exercise	
	Shoot for the stars exercise	30 mins
	Entertain the impossible exercise	30 mins
Ask “,What’s good about it?”	30 mins	
exercise		
“Yes... But” discussion	25 mins	
Red:		
Set and jump the hurdles discussion	20 mins	
Green:		
Take the initiative (Freedom in a	30 mins	
framework) discussion		
Rigid digits discussion	25 mins	
Creative championing role-play	40 mins	
Action planning	20 mins	
		Total: 6 hrs 25 mins.

PREPARATION (for trainers)

By the time you have read this guide and familiarised yourself with the **Ideas into action** video you will have a good grasp of Mark Brown's particular angle on the subject of creative thinking and innovation and be used to his basic model. If you wish to delve further into his work on the subject, his book *The Dinosaur Strain* (details on page 80) is an engaging and thought-provoking read. It contains additional ideas (or activities and exercises which you could incorporate in your programme.

During the process of fine-tuning the suggested programme to the particular concerns and circumstances of the participants and organisation, you may like to develop some additional written material, such as 'live' problems/opportunities, examples, case studies, etc., to slot in where appropriate. Some exercises (such as *Creative Championing*) require a reservoir of problems/opportunities for the participants to focus on. These can either be generated by the participants themselves or prepared by you in advance as a handout.

Besides photocopying the handouts provided (see photocopy masters in *Handouts* section), the only other materials you may need to arrange are as follows:

Show your true colours

White badges (one for each participant plus spares) coloured dot stickers (blue, red, green)

Matchstick triangles

Box of matches (6 matches per participant needed, you can use pencils instead to make the exercise less fiddly)

Blue discussions/ activities

Blue foam balls (tennis ball size, one per participant). These are Yes...But' balls - see page 46 for explanation.

Candle on the wall

Pinboard (or other vertical surface into which drawing pins can be inserted)

Drawing pins
box of matches (standard size)

Candle

You may like to get more than one set of these materials to make it easier for all the participants to have ago at the problem.

Tying the knot

String

Drawing pins

Chair

Scissors (children's type with rounded ends) [or alternative - see Safety note, page 59]

Paperclips

Rubber bands

Sheets of paper

You may like to get more than one set of these materials to make it easier for all the participants to have ago at the problem.

Creative championing

White badges (three for programme 2, one per participant for programme 3)

Coloured dot stickers (blue, red, green)

Ideas into action - the video

INTRODUCTION - Why innovate?

THINKING BEYOND THE SQUARE

THE IDEAS INTO ACTION MODEL

BLUE- ideas

RED - selection

GREEN - action

BE A DOLPHIN, NOT A DINOSAUR

INTRODUCTION. Why innovate?

Innovation is a long journey - from determining a goal or destination, through conceiving an idea or way of getting there, developing it, persuading others of its advantages, to actually translating it into action and making it a reality. Journeys like that demand time and trouble, energy and determination, so it is important to know why you are doing it.

From the individual's point of view it is easy enough to understand - it is in our very nature to grow, to progress, to create. We are constantly striving to better ourselves and our lives and it is that same striving which is at the root of why organisations have to innovate.

Customers want new, better products and services. Competitors will try to provide them. At the most basic level, organisations must innovate to survive.

If an organisation wants to stay ahead of its competitors, it is not good enough just to be reactive. It has to initiate, to stimulate productive change (not change for change's sake). Organisations must innovate to thrive.

Innovation is not simply about technology - new machines, gadgets and devices. It applies to new products of all kinds, to new services and systems, processes and procedures. Essentially it is about satisfying people, providing what they need or want, what makes their lives better. Sensitivity to your customers, actual or potential, external or internal, is the key to all successful innovation.

Given that we need to innovate to survive and thrive, the next question is: Why don't we innovate all the time? **Ideas into action** looks at what gets in the way of innovation and how to overcome it.

THINKING BEYOND THE SQUARE

THE NINE DOTS PROBLEM

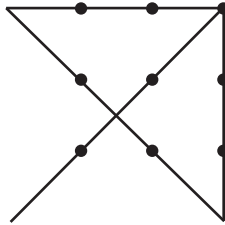
The Nine dots problem is an interesting and problem in its own right, but it also serves as an e the central message of **Ideas into action**



The challenge is simply this: To join all the dots using **four straight lines** without taking your pen off the paper or retracing a line.

The point is most people when tackling this problem tend to stay within the *apparent* square of the dots. Of course there is no square - we imagine it and impose it ourselves.

Once we go outside the limits of the square we can solve the problem. The video shows us this solution:

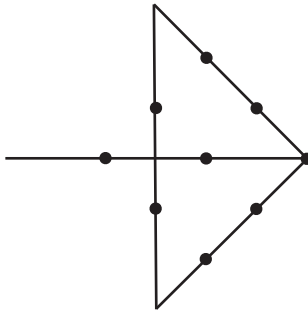


That's what **Ideas into action** is all about. It aims to make people aware that they tend to impose 'the square' (that is, imagined limitations) on their thinking and to encourage them to **think and act beyond the square**.

For people that are already familiar with the problem there is always the challenge of trying to solve it with only three straight lines. Or even with just one.

The video also shows us a three-line solution and a number of more laterally thought out one-line solutions. These solutions really confront the viewer with just how narrow our day-to-day thought processes can be. By approaching the problem in another (third) dimension, from another (global) perspective, by rearranging (folding) and reconstructing (cutting up) the components, by introducing new tools (scissors, etc.), these one-line solutions are in a sense extreme - or perhaps *radical* is a better word. To be truly innovative it is vital to go to the roots of the problem or challenge, to question every element of it, to examine it from every angle. If that reveals a mould-breaking solution to be best, then moulds need to be broken.

Appropriately enough the basic solution to the Nine dots problem is shaped like an arrow, emblematic of progress and the way forward.



A WORLD OF CHANGE

Paradoxically, the only constant in this world of ours is change. Technological change, social change, political and economic change, environmental change... All around us, all the time the world out there is evolving, revolving, reforming, transforming and we need to stay in touch, to make some sort of sense of it in ourselves.

The map of experience

To do this we construct a kind of map or grid in our head based on our experience. On the most basic level, once we learn that fire is hot we draw that into our mental map and know not to touch it. In this way we build up a store of (acts, experiences, reports of other's experiences - information which we use and apply to carry out tasks, make judgments, come to decisions.

But like any map or database, to be of on-going use and effectiveness our internal map or 'mind-set' needs continuous updating. If we fail to keep it up to date, it begins to fail us. If your roadmap doesn't have the new bridge marked on it, you go the old way and take twice as long to get to your destination. If your database hasn't had the change of address input, your letter doesn't get to the person and you lose touch.

It's all about keeping your perception of the world in line with how the world is actually developing, about staying in touch, about living in the present.

Dinosaurs and dolphins

Unfortunately many of us don't manage to keep our mental maps up to date. We see the world, our customers, our markets through a mental map that was current and worked five, ten, fifteen years ago, but not today.

With today's unprecedented rate of change mind-sets go stale quicker than ever. Considerable effort and an open mind are needed to keep them fresh.

People trying to survive with an out-of-date mental map will get lost in this fast-changing world. Such people have the dinosaur mentality and in the end will go the way of the dinosaur, plodding off to extinction.

Now more than ever the world of work demands lively, flexible, open, creative minds - the **dolphin** outlook - minds that are growing, adapting, communicating, moving swiftly and freely.

FIXED PATTERNS

We all start out with innocent and open minds - no preconceptions, no assumptions, no prejudices. If you need a management consultant get a child because they are always asking: But Why? Why do you do it that way? Why is it like that?

As we get older we use preconceptions and assumptions to simplify our day-to-day lives. If you completed a task one way in the past and it worked alright, why not do it the same way next time? Such thinking may be a very useful shortcut for routine operations in everyday life, from frying an egg to wiring a plug, but on a broader scale and in the longer term such patterns can become restrictive and obstructive.

In other words, in time we get stuck in our ways.

The hidden cow

The hidden cow problem in the video demonstrates in a simple, clear way how easily our perception of the world gets stuck, fixed, dinosaur-like.

When we are shown the pattern of black and white shapes we try to relate it to part of our historical map, to link it to something we have seen before - a bird, a human figure, a map, a face, whatever. Once the pattern is revealed as a cow it becomes almost impossible to banish that image from your head, to un-see it.

After being exposed to a pattern for just a matter of seconds we are already stuck. In the work context we can be exposed to particular patterns, set ways of doing things, of thinking about things, for months or years - plenty of time to get well and truly fossilised!

Processes and procedures, rules and regulations in the workplace build up incredible inertia. You can find yourself flying in the face of logic and common sense simply because “that’s the way it’s done here, that’s the way it’s always been done”. Breaking out of the prison of fixed patterns and ossified ideas can take a good deal of energy and determination.

RESTRICTED VISION

Another way our mental map can work against us is When we bend reality to fit it rather than vice-versa.

The six Fs

The six Fs Problem in the video shows this clearly.

Finished files are the result of years of scientific research combined with the experience of many years.

Many people fail to spot all six Fs because they are searching for the sound ‘f’ as in “finished” and miss the Fs that sound like ‘v’ as in “of”.

We perceive what fits our internal map and ignore what doesn't. Instead of reflecting the landscape, our map tries to shape it. In effect, the donkey is following the cart.

Dinosaur thinking, therefore, is by its nature a downwards spiral. Once your view of the world stops flowing and stagnates, you begin only to see the things that match your viewpoint or support your argument.

This kind of narrowing of perception is obviously anathema to successful innovation. Creative thinking requires the ability to view the problem or situation from a broad range of perspectives and to build up as complete an overall picture as possible.



So how can we move beyond these fixed patterns, beyond this restricted vision, beyond the self-imposed limitations of our thinking? How can we go beyond the square?

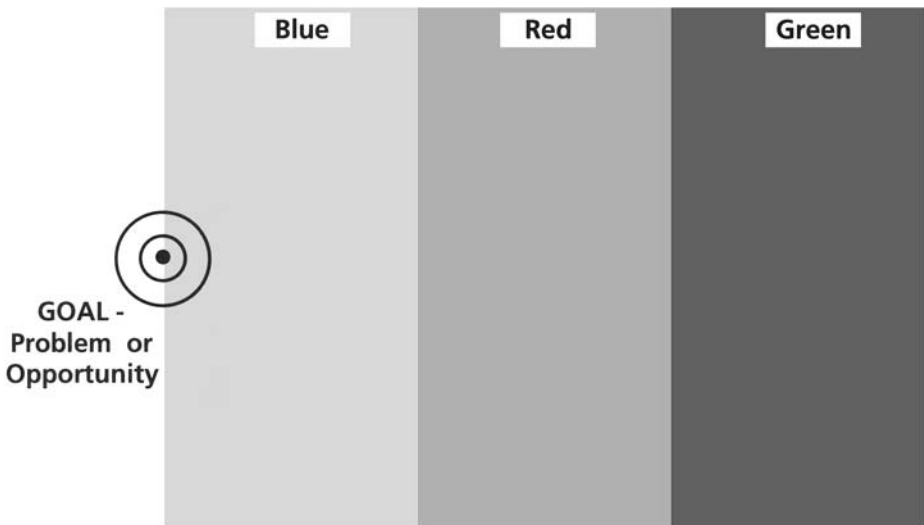
The following model for the creative thinking process forms the basis of an answer to this key question.

THE IDEAS INTO ACTION MODEL

Let's build up a simple model for the creative thinking process.

GOALS - problems and opportunities

We begin with a goal.



This can be in the form of a **problem** - How can we cut down the number of faulty units produced? How can we get more precise feedback from our customers? How can we reduce amount of paperwork involved? How can we speed up delivery?

But it can also be in the form of an **opportunity**. By and large we find it far easier to spot a problem than an opportunity. However, it is worth bearing in mind that sometimes you can

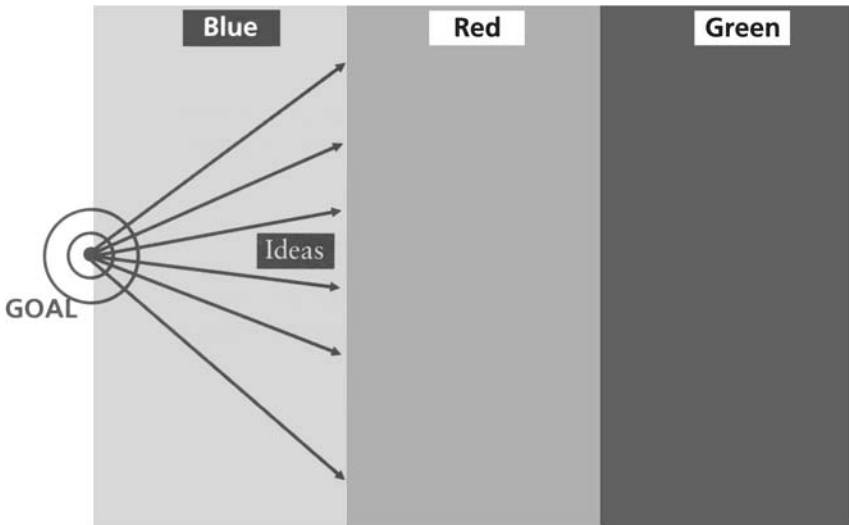
solve a hundred problems and still not have as much impact as seizing one good opportunity .

It is important to have a specific goal. Multiple goals (like, say, “to improve speed and accuracy of deliveries”) are best split up into their component parts.

How you actually define your goal is extremely significant. The very wording of your definition can have an enormous influence over how you approach the problem or opportunity. This point is picked up in the following *Blue* section (*Challenge your assumptions - Reframing the problem*, pages 29 -30).

BLUE - ideas

Once our goal is defined we start generating ideas or solutions. This phase can be coded **blue**, like the sky -limitless, free - as in the phrase” it came to me out of the blue”.



The key characteristic of this phase is the suspension of judgment. It is important to liberate yourself during the idea generation process from the constraints of logic, analysis, prejudice, precedent, Leave convention and received wisdom outside the door. In the realm of ideas anything is possible. Ideas are cheap so at this stage you have nothing to lose. Don't be embarrassed. Be extreme. Be oblique. Be free to come up with something new or better.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS - reframing the problem

A simple and very effective blue idea generating technique is to challenge your assumptions.

Many problems can be solved by identifying and challenging the assumptions shaping our thinking. We have to keep 'asking ourselves: "What assumptions am I making in the way I'm thinking about this problem, in the way I'm phrasing this question? Is there another way of looking at this?"

Einstein wrote: "The formulation of a problem is often more essential than its solution". The actual wording of your problem or goal can have a significant influence on how you actually approach it. The phrasing or choice of words can suggest a particular direction and thereby impose certain limitations.

The real-life example of reframing featured in the video concerns Ship salvage. By reformulating the problem from "How to *lift* sunken vessels" to "How to *get them back to the surface*" the Danish entrepreneur, Karl Kroyer, came up with a radical new solution. As a replacement for the established method using cranes and winches, he thought up the idea of pumping the sunken ship full of polystyrene balls to float it back up. (In fact the germ of that idea came from watching a Walt Disney cartoon which says something about the value of flexible and eclectic thinking!)

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS - rethinking the scale

Another way of challenging our assumptions is to rethink the scale of our goals.

The example in the video demonstrates this concisely: If the aim is, say, to improve output by 5%, the chances are you will come up with ideas that deliver a 3 or 4% improvement - But if the initial objective is to improve output by 100%, you may well come up with an idea that raises it by 20%. You have gained an extra 15% improvement simply by tackling the problem from a wider, more ambitious perspective. Looking at it more broadly helps detach you from the

day-to-day nitty-gritty details and concentrate on the more fundamental issues.

You have to ask yourself whether your sights are set too low in the first place.

If you shoot for the stars, you may hit the moon!

The dinosaur question is: “How can we maintain our market share?” The dolphin version is: “How can we triple it?” Bolder goals can bring bolder and better solutions.

ASK “WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT IT?”

Once you have a basic idea and start developing it and giving it substance, ask yourself: “What’s good about it?”

Dinosaurs invariably home in on the problems raised by the idea rather than picking up on the potentially beneficial elements and developing them.

By asking what’s good about new ideas you encourage a positive, creative frame of mind. This applies both to when you are examining your own nascent ideas and other people’s.

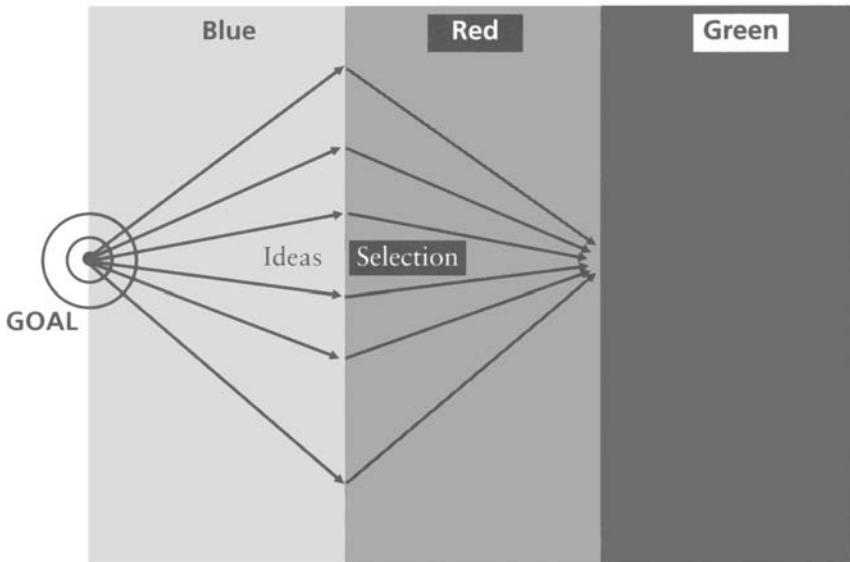
YES...BUT

Dinosaurs’ destructive critical thinking is commonly heralded by two short yet deadly words - “Yes...But”. Many a ‘Yes...But’ merely zooms in on the 20% of an idea which doesn’t work, ignoring the 80% which does. In other words, ‘yes...butting’ tends to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

The video gives us a salutary reminder of the two large corporations which ‘yes...butted’ and turned down the prototype for the photocopier. They said: “**Yes**, it’s interesting... **But** we can see no commercial application for it”. ‘Yes...butting’ can be very expensive.

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RED - selection



Having thought up various blue ideas, you select the best. This is the red phase. The light turns red, you hit the brakes, stop and look hard at the ideas. Now is the time to bring back the logical, rational, analytical powers you suspended during the blue phase. Many people are more comfortable with this more controlled, considered part of the process.

SET AND JUMP THE HURDLES

At the start of the red phase it is important to define clearly your decision criteria (the hurdles).

When you check your idea against these criteria, if it fails to meet any, analyse why and return to 'blue thinking'. In this way you can come up with a creative solution to the identified weakness, strengthen the idea and fulfil all your criteria. If an

idea consistently falls at the hurdles, it may well be fundamentally flawed and best rejected.

In practice it often becomes obvious which idea(s) to carry forward for actioning. The selection and decision making process draws heavily on intuition. However, intuition can prove misleading.

For example, picture a paper tissue which is 0.01 inch thick. Imagine folding it in half. And imagine (although it is practically impossible: to do) continuing to fold it in half until you have done so 50 times. Roughly how thick do you reckon it will have become?

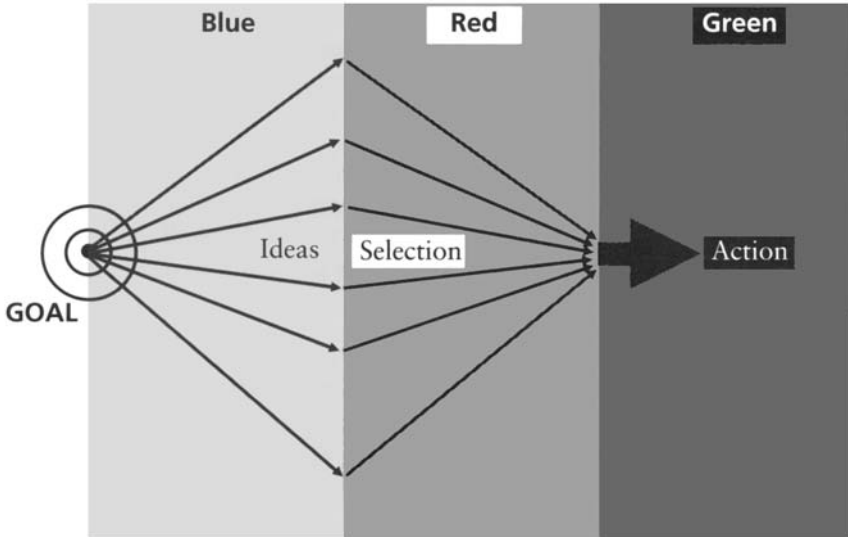
Intuition might suggest that it will have become fairly thick perhaps a few hundred feet high. A little more reflection, remembering the multiplying effect of compound interest, might make you revise your estimate to one or two thousand feet. The answer is 17,770,000 miles thick!

Intuition and gut-feeling are important in decision making but it is essential to balance them with thorough analysis.

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GREEN - action



As the old saying goes “ideas are ten a penny”. What really counts is realised ideas - ideas translated into action. The all-important action phase is green, as in getting the green light, going ahead.

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

If you don't get 100% behind your own idea, why will anyone else? It's up to you to make it happen. Determination and energy are vital factors in the green phase, but creativity is as important here as in blue thinking.

Rigid digits

What often paralyzes people in organisations is a sense of powerlessness, of being a small cog in a huge machine, a pawn in someone else's game. They point the finger of blame, the

'rigid digit', at other people or at the organisation and they fail to act. They put it down to their boss, some other department, the system, the company.

It is important to recognise that the organisation is not some kind of monolithic giant. It is basically a collection of individuals - including you. People underestimate the impact they can make with some well directed energy and commitment. To get an idea from the drawing board to the real world the best bet is to take the initiative yourself.

Creative championing

To transform an idea into action you need to be creative in championing it, in persuading and motivating others.

First ask yourself: "Whose backing do I need to make this happen? Who do I need to excite with the idea? Who do I need to win over?"

Once you have identified these individuals, you need to use your Imagination again and think yourself into their place. Try to see the world through their eyes and understand what makes them tick. Decide what kind of thinking they tend to prefer - blue, red or green?

If blue, stress the creativity and originality of the idea. Show how you have improved or replaced an outdated approach or method. If red, make it clear that the practical issues have been thoroughly thought through. Demonstrate that potential problems have been anticipated and addressed.

If green, show how your idea is to be actioned. Draft an action plan with dates and deadlines.

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BE A DOLPHIN, NOT A DINOSAUR!

Ideas into action is at heart a motivational video. It is intended to spur us into action, to prevent our brains fossilising, to keep our minds lithe and lively, to open out our thinking and perspectives.

If the viewer comes away conscious of the narrowness of our day-to-day thinking and aware of the wide world of possibilities within our reach then the video will have achieved its end.

If he/she has also picked up one or two ideas about how to grasp those possibilities then all the better.

The closing shot of the video, the dolphin leaping towards us and plunging into the open sea, captures the essence of creativity and innovation - energy, flexibility, daring, liveliness... and an ocean of opportunities.

Training programmes

PROGRAMME 1

PROGRAMME 2

PROGRAMME 3

The text in this section is addressed to trainers or anyone planning to present a course based on **Ideas into action**

There follow outlines for three training programmes on creative thinking and innovation, varying in length between one hour and one day.

These programmes can be used as presented here or adapted to suit the specific concerns and circumstances of the participants and their organisation. Otherwise they can be incorporated into larger programmes, such as courses on problem solving, quality, customer service, teamwork, change, etc.

It is important to recognise that these programmes are suggested outlines only and by no means carved in stone. The more they are fine-tuned to the participants, the more effective they are.

It is strongly recommended that where possible participants bring a 'live' problem to the programme (i.e. an actual problem they are currently or imminently tackling at work). They can then, as a group, apply what they are learning directly to one or more of these;

PROGRAMME 1 - 1 hour

INTRODUCTION AND NINE DOTS PROBLEM 5 mins

Introduce the session; including briefly explaining its aims and outlining the programme.

Give each participant a few copies of *Handout 1*, the Nine dots problem blank. (The photocopy master is in the *Handouts* section of this guide.)

Explain that the challenge is simply this: To join all the dots using **four straight lines** without taking your pen off the paper or retracing a line.

If any participants are already familiar with the problem, challenge them to do it with three straight lines. And if any know both the four and three-line solutions, ask them to try it with one line only. Give them a couple of minutes to have a good go at solving it, then play the **Ideas into action** video. **Don't give them the solution(s)** because the video does and you may lessen the impact of its opening.

Having the participants try the Nine dots problem before watching the video reinforces their recognition of how narrowly we tend to think and their realisation of the importance of 'thinking beyond the square'. It also gets the session off on a strong participative note.

(More information on the Nine dots problem can be found on pages 20- 22.)

IDEAS INTO ACTION VIDEO 10 mins

Show the **Ideas into action** video.

PERSONAL IMPLICATIONS

20 mins

Give out handout 2: Nine dots solution.

Discuss the implications of the video for the participants as individuals:

- ▶ In what areas do we tend to restrict our thinking to, ‘within the square’?
- ▶ How can we go ‘beyond the square’?

It is better to couch the questions in terms of ‘we’ rather than ‘you’ because in practice participants prove more responsive when they do not feel they are being accused or singled out. It is a general problem and recognising this in the form of the question makes for more open, relaxed discussion. People will of their own accord look at their particular experience and situation and draw out the personal implications.

Talk about the difference between problem and opportunity-type goals [see page 27]:

- ▶ What opportunity-type goal is waiting out there for you to seize?

Where possible get participants to apply the points raised in the video, to a ‘live’ problem/opportunity (i.e. an actual problem/opportunity they are currently or imminently tackling at work):

- ▶ What assumptions have you made with this problem?
- ▶ Is there another, better way of defining it?
- ▶ Could you be tackling it on a different scale?
- ▶ What’s good about the solutions you’ve come up with?
- ▶ How can you set about strengthening their weak points?

- ▶ How systematic are you in analysing your ideas?

As time is quite limited on this programme, the point is more to **open people's eyes to the possibilities' of alternative approaches** than to go into the real nitty-gritty of their specific problems.

OVERALL IMPLICATIONS AND ACTION PLANNING

25 mins

Now discuss the implications of the video for the participants in the context of their organisation. (The phrase 'organisational implications' has been avoided here in order to keep the focus on the individual as a significant element of any organisation and so discourage the perception of the organisation as "some kind of monolithic giant".)

- ▶ In what ways is your organisation dinosaur-like?
- ▶ In what ways is it dolphin-like?
- ▶ Do you sometimes point the, 'rigid digit'?
- ▶ Do you approach the right people in the right ways?
- ▶ What initiatives can you take to sell your ideas more creatively?

Conclude the session by giving out *Handouts 3a* and *3b: Action plan* and asking the participants to each fill in their plan. Make sure that everyone has identified at least one action to take to increase the creativity of their thinking and approach at work.

Briefly check with the participants that the aims you set out at the beginning of the session have been met. Agree and organise a system of reviewing their action plans.

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PROGRAMME 2 - 1/2 day

INTRODUCTION AND NINE DOTS PROBLEM 5 mins

Introduce the programme, including briefly explaining its aims and outlining the structure/timing.

Give each participant a few copies of *Handout 1*, the Nine dots problem blank. (The photocopy master is in the *Handouts* section of this guide.)

Explain that the challenge is simply this: To join all the dots using **four straight lines** without taking your pen off the paper or retracing a line.

If any participants are already familiar with the problem, challenging them to do it with three straight lines. And if any know both the four and three-line solutions, ask them to try it with one line only.

Give them a couple of minutes to have a good go at solving it, then play the **Ideas into action** video. **Don't give them the solution(s)** because the video does and you may lessen the impact of its opening.

Having the participants try the Nine dots problem before watching the video reinforces their recognition of how narrowly we tend to think and their realisation of the importance of 'thinking beyond the square'. It also gets the programme off on a strong participative note.

(More information on the Nine dots problem can be found on pages 20- 22.)

IDEAS INTO ACTION VIDEO 10 mins

Show the **Ideas into action** video.

SHOW YOUR TRUE COLOURS

10 mins

Get the participants to display their preferred colour of thinking by putting coloured dot stickers on a white badge. If they feel that they have split tendencies they can put two colours on their badge.

Divide them into smaller groups and get them to compare and discuss their thinking preferences.

- ▶ Is there a preference in the group?
- ▶ Do they detect any organisational preference?

THE IDEAS INTO ACTION MODEL

15 mins

Reassemble the group and distribute *Handout 4: The ideas into action model*. Remind them of the model by talking them through it stage by stage with reference to the handout. When talking about the Goal stage draw a distinction between problem and opportunity-type goals (see page 27).

Encourage discussion of the model. Bring out the point that models are by definition simplifications of life - in practice the creative thinking process is not strictly linear (we are likely, for example, to switch into blue mode several times in the process of developing and realising an idea as we address identified weaknesses or potential objections).

You may like to talk about how the blue and red stages are commonly fused, causing people to judge and reject ideas prematurely.

[See pages 27 - 35 for information on the **Ideas into action** model.]

BLUE - Ideas

[See pages 29 - 31 for information on blue thinking.]

STUCK IN OUR WAYS

2mins

This is a very simple but effective exercise for demonstrating how stuck we are in our ways, how inflexible our thinking is and how difficult it can be to change.

Ask the participants to fold their arms in the way they usually would. Now ask them to fold their arms the other way (i.e. with the other arm on top).

Most people take a good few moments to get it right and make this adaptation because they are having, in effect, to break the habit of a lifetime and actually think about and rethink what they are doing.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Use the following two fun problems to increase the participants' awareness of how narrowly we tend to think and how that narrowness is due to self-imposed restrictions.

Matchstick triangles

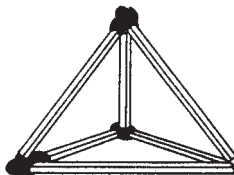
5 mins

Put 6 matches on a tabletop in front of each participant.

The challenge is to construct 4 equilateral triangles using the 6 matches. The sides of the triangles should each be the length of one matchstick. (The participants should not break the matchsticks as that is not necessary to solve the problem.)

With most people, our past experience or mind-set makes us try out various solutions by shifting the matches into different positions on the tabletop. The tendency is to work in two dimensions.

As soon as you expand your thinking into the third dimension the problem is quickly solved. The solution is to build a three-sided pyramid like this:



This demonstrates clearly how we tend to restrict our thinking to within unnecessary boundaries and how effective crossing those boundaries can be in problem solving.

Neil & Maggie

8 mins

In contrast to the matchstick problem which is basically spacial, this is a verbally-oriented one.

Set the scene for the participants using these words:

Neil and Maggie are lying dead, naked, side by side on the bedroom floor. There is broken glass and spilt water all around them. A black cat is prowling about the room. Outside it's raining heavily.

Split the participants into pairs. Get each pair to decide who will be the investigator and who the assumption-challenger.

The question is simply: *What happened?*

The investigator pieces together an explanation. The assumption-challenger keeps asking: "What assumptions are you making there?"

Reassemble the group. Ask for two or three explanations of what happened. Then give this explanation:

Neil and Maggie were actually goldfish. The cat knocked their bowl off the table and it smashed.

(The heavy rain was just a red herring!)

The 'real' explanation will make the participants aware of the assumptions they were making in their attempts to solve the mystery.

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LIVE PROBLEM

As mentioned in the introduction to this (Training Programmes) section of the guide, participants' learning will be enhanced if they are each able to bring a 'live' problem/opportunity to the programme (i.e. an actual problem/opportunity they are currently or imminently tackling at work). The group can then apply the ideas contained in the video directly to one or more of these.

This is the point at which (if you have not already done so) to bring these live problems/opportunities into play.

Alternatively, you may want to suggest a particular problem/opportunity for the group to focus on.

This is also the point at which you may like to introduce the 'Yes...But' balls [see *Preparation (for trainers)*, page 16]. These are tennis ball-sized blue foam balls. Distribute them among the participants. Whenever anyone makes a premature judgment (i.e. thinks red when they should be thinking blue) whoever spots it is free to launch a 'Yes...But' ball at them as a helpful (but not painful) reminder!

REFRAMING THE PROBLEM

30 mins

There are two options for this half-hour session. Participants can look at the **angle** from which the problem is approached (*Put it Another Way*) or the **scale** on which it is tackled (*Shoot for the Stars*). (In the context of the half-day programme there is not time enough to examine both.)

Put it another way

Select some live problems/opportunities to concentrate on. Split the participants into smaller groups, allocating each a selection of problems/opportunities. Get them to generate some ideas using blue thinking. Remind them that the

emphasis here is on generation and creativity - absolutely not on analysis or judgment.

Next ask them to analyse the way each problem/opportunity has been phrased and worded in order to identify what assumptions are built into it (that is, into the very definition of the goal) . Get them to focus on the specific words and turns of phrase used in defining the problem/opportunity and see if they are unnecessarily restrictive or directive. On the basis of this analysis, get them to rephrase or reword the goals. Now ask them to generate some more ideas using these redefined goals. (You may like to remind them of the ship salvage example in the video - Karl Kroyer redefined the problem from lifting sunken vessels to *getting them back to the surface.*)

Reassemble the group and compare the ideas/solutions generated from the original goals to those from the redefined goals. Spotlight any instances where the redefinition of the goal has obviously broadened and liberated the thought processes and led to more imaginative, innovative ideas.

OR

Shoot for the stars

Select a live problem/opportunity to focus on where the goal is a relatively modest increase or improvement (say, 5-10%). Divide the participants into small groups and get them to generate ideas using blue thinking. Remind them that the emphasis here is on generation and creativity - absolutely not on judgment or analysis.

Then up the ante by changing the goal to a 100% increase/improvement and send them back to the drawing board to generate ideas accordingly.

Reassemble the group and compare some of the initial (5-10%) ideas with the later (100%) ones, highlighting any of the bolder suggestions that look like they would, even if they fell well short of the 100% target, deliver a significant (more than 10%) increase/improvement.

[See pages 29-31 for information on reframing and rescaling goals.]

ASK "WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT IT?" **25 mins**

Select a live problem/opportunity to focus on. Divide the participants into small groups and ask them to generate solutions/ideas using unrestricted, unprejudiced blue thinking - that is, avoiding analysis and judgment.

As they come up with ideas, get them to develop each and every one by constantly asking "What's Good About It?" and building on the good elements.

It is a good idea to have the 'Yes...But' balls at hand for this idea development exercise as suspension of negative criticism is vital to this stage of the process.

Reassemble the participants and draw the session to a close by asking for examples of where an idea that looked unpromising to start with developed into something innovative and practical by building on its good points.

YES... BUT **10 mins**

Ask participants to recall times when they have had one of their ideas 'yes...butted'. Then ask for occasions when they have 'yes...butted' someone else's. Get them to identify the many ways people in effect say "Yes...But". Bring out in the discussion how various and destructively ingenious the methods of 'idea assassination' can be.

[See page 31 for information on 'yes...butting'.]

RED - selection

[See pages 32 - 33 for information on the red stage.]

SET AND JUMP THE HURDLES

5 mins

Briefly discuss the importance of being systematic in the way you analyse, evaluate and select ideas.

Draw attention to the need to switch back from red to blue mode in order to strengthen ideas that have failed certain criteria.

This is a good opportunity to drive home the more general point that models are necessarily a simplification and the **Ideas into action** model, being no exception, is to be used flexibly - blue, red and green thinking should be applied as appropriate and not in a narrow, linear way.

GREEN - action

[See pages 34- 35 for information on the green stage.]

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

Freedom in a framework

25 mins

Lead a discussion about creative thinking and innovation in **the context of the organisation.**

Look at the conflicting demands on the organisation in general. On the one hand, to keep pace with change in the modern world, to adapt, to grow, to innovate. On the other hand, to co-ordinate the actions of individuals, to regulate efficient and reliable processes and procedures, to organise.

You may like to use the short quotations from Peter Drucker and Theodore Levitt on page 167 of *The Dinosaur Strain* [see page 80 for details] as a basis for this discussion.

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Both innovation and organisation are essential for survival. Innovation needs to happen within a framework, otherwise it leads to chaos.

Talk about the concept of 'tight' and 'loose' organisations and systems.

Many organisations realise that their culture has historically been too tight or controlling, too red. Often this is because their core activity involves a commodity or product where tight control is required (money, electricity, hazardous substances, etc.) and these tight controls spread into other areas of the organisation where they are not necessary or appropriate. Such organisations then want to involve and empower people more and to spur initiative, so they swing loose and encourage creativity, innovation and empowerment. A year or two down the line, worried by some "silly mistakes" and feeling somewhat out of control, senior management decide they have to reimpose control. Scepticism and resentment result and the previous sense of disempowerment is increased.

'Tight - loose' is not an either-or concept but a continuum, a balance.

Give out *Handout 5: Freedom in a framework* and explain it to the participants. The diagram represents a framework for innovation within the organisation.

The 'NO GO' area is total disempowerment. Some areas of activity in organisations are necessarily 'no go' - that is, certain rules are essential for its effective operation, in the same way as society disempowers individuals from driving on the wrong side of the road.

The 'YES then GO' area is where people are largely disempowered - only if you ask the boss and the boss says "Yes" can you go.

The 'GO KNOW' area is where people are basically empowered but need to inform others of their actions - you can go and do something but let the boss know what you have done.

And 'GO' is total empowerment.

People in organisations - individuals and teams - need to know which parts of their job fall into which parts of this framework. They need to know their zone of control. They need to be clear about which ideas they can carry straight through into action.

Discuss with the participants how they perceive their job and their team's work in terms of this framework. Has their zone of control been clearly defined? What can they usefully do to clarify it further?

Conclude by emphasising that initiatives are much more likely to succeed if creativity and innovation are operating within a clearly defined framework.

RIGID DIGITS

10 mins

Give out *Handout 6: Rigid digits*. Ask the participants quickly to jot down on the handout some occasions when they have pointed the 'rigid digit', blamed another person or department, their boss or the system for not seeing an idea through.

Ask for a few brave individuals to share their examples with everyone else.

CREATIVE CHAMPIONING

25 mins

This role-play exercise highlights the need to be creative in the selling of your ideas, not just in coming up with them in the first place. It draws attention to the need to use your imagination and think yourself into the place of the person to

whom you are presenting the idea, to see the world through their eyes, to understand what makes them tick. What will turn them on, attract their interest, fire their enthusiasm, get their support?

Ask for three volunteers to play a blue thinker, a red thinker and a green thinker. Give each a badge with an appropriately coloured sticker.

Then ask three other volunteers to sell them each a difficult idea.

Get the remaining participants to act as observers, noting what angles of argument they try and in particular which words, phrases and expressions are effective (and which are not).

The ideas to be presented can either be ones drawn by the idea-sellers from their own work situations, ones suggested by the rest of the group or ones you have prepared in advance on a handout.

Action planning

15 mins

Conclude the programme by giving out *Handouts 3a* and *3b: Action plan* and asking the participants to each fill in their plan. Make sure that everyone has identified at least one action to take to increase the creativity of their thinking and approach at work.

Briefly check with the participants that the aims you set out at the beginning of the programme have been met. Agree and organise a system of reviewing their action plans.

PROGRAMME 3 - 1 day

This programme is basically an expansion of Programme 2 as Programme 2 is quite intensive and most of the discussions and activities in it would benefit from having the luxury of a little more time to explore and develop the ideas and issues raised.

INTRODUCTION AND NINE DOTS PROBLEM 5 mins

Introduce the programme, including briefly explaining its aims and outlining the structure/timing.

Give each participant a few copies of *Handout 1*, the Nine dots problem blank. (The photocopy master is in the *Handouts* section of this guide.)

Explain that the challenge is simply this: To join all the dots using **four straight lines** without taking your pen off the paper or retracing a line.

If any participants are already familiar with the problem, challenge them to do it with three straight lines. And if any know both the four and three-line solutions, ask them to try it with one line only. Give them a couple of minutes to have a good go at solving it, then play the **Ideas into action** video. Don't give them the solution(s) because the video does and you may lessen the impact of its opening.

Having the participants try the Nine dots problem before watching the video reinforces their recognition of how narrowly we tend to think and their realisation of the importance of 'thinking beyond the square'. It also gets the programme off on a strong participative note.

[More information on the Nine dots problem can be found on pages 20- 22.]

IDEAS INTO ACTION VIDEO

10 mins

Show the **Ideas into action** video.

SHOW YOUR TRUE COLOURS

10 mins

Get the participants to display their preferred colour of thinking by putting coloured dot stickers on a white badge. If they feel that they have split tendencies they can put two colours on their badge.

Divide them into smaller groups and get them to compare and discuss their thinking preferences.

- ▶ Is there a preference in the group?
- ▶ Do they detect any organisational preference?

A WORLD OF CHANGE

30 mins

Give out *Handout 7: A world of change*. Ask the participants to think back to how their organisation and industry was five or ten years ago (whichever is most appropriate for them).

Over that time, what changes have occurred that impact on their work and how do they impact?

Get them to list their observations on the handout. Ask them to think in particular about:

▶ General changes:

- Technological
- Economic
- Social
- Legislative
- Political
- Environmental

► Organisational changes:

- Structural
- Strategic (i.e. overall direction)
- Procedural/system
- Cultural
- Market

Lead a discussion on the general and organisational changes the participants have observed, the impact of these changes, the problems of keeping up with them and the dangers of getting left behind.

THE IDEAS INTO ACTION MODEL

20 mins

Distribute *Handout 4: The Ideas into action model*. Remind them of the model by talking them through it stage by stage with reference to the handout. When talking about the Goal stage draw a distinction between problem and opportunity-type goals [see page 27].

Encourage discussion of the model. Bring out the point that models are by definition simplifications of life - in practice the creative thinking process is not strictly linear (we are likely, for example, to switch into blue mode several times in the process of developing and realising an idea as we address identified weaknesses or potential objections).

You may like to talk about how the blue and red stages are commonly fused, causing people to judge and reject ideas prematurely.

[See pages 27 - 35 for information on the *Ideas into action* model.]

BLUE - ideas

[See pages 29- 31 for information on blue thinking.]

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STUCK IN OUR WAYS

2 mins

This is a very simple but effective exercise for demonstrating how stuck we are in our ways, how inflexible our thinking is and how difficult it can be to change.

Ask the participants to fold their arms in the way they usually would. Now ask them to fold their arms the other way (i.e. with the other arm on top).

Most people take a good few moments to get it right and make this adaptation because they are having, in effect, to break the habit of a lifetime and actually think about and rethink what they are doing.

CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Use the following fun problems to increase the participants' awareness of how narrowly we tend to think and how that narrowness is due to self-imposed restrictions.

Matchstick triangles

5 mins

Put 6 matches on a clear tabletop in front of each participant.

The challenge is to construct 4 equilateral triangles using the 6 matches. The sides of the triangles should each be the length of one matchstick. (The participants should not break the matchsticks as that is not necessary to solve the problem.)

With most people, our past experience or mind-set makes us try out various solutions by shifting the matches into different positions on the tabletop. The tendency is to work in two dimensions.

As soon as you expand your thinking into the third dimension the problem is quickly solved. The solution is to build a three-sided pyramid as shown on page 44.

This demonstrates clearly how we tend to restrict our thinking to within unnecessary boundaries and how effective crossing those boundaries can be in problem solving.

Neil & Maggie

8 mins

In contrast to the matchstick problem which is basically spacial, this is a verbally-oriented one.

Set the scene for the participants using these words:

Neil and Maggie are lying dead, naked, side by side on the bedroom floor. There is broken glass and spilt water all around them. A black cat is prowling about the room. Outside it's raining heavily.

Split the participants into pairs. Get each pair to decide who will be the investigator and who the assumption-challenger.

The question is simply: *What happened?*

The investigator pieces together an explanation. The assumption-challenger keeps asking: "What assumptions are you making there?"

Reassemble the group. Ask for two or three explanations of what happened. Then give this explanation:

Neil and Maggie were actually goldfish. The cat knocked their bowl off the table and it smashed.

(The heavy rain was just a red herring!)

The 'real' explanation will make the participants aware of the assumptions they were making in their attempts to solve the mystery.

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The following two exercises demonstrate a particular kind of assumption we make based on the conventional functions of things. You can use either one to make the point effectively.

Candle on the wall

15 minutes

Present the participants with the following objects: a vertical surface, a pin board or the like, to represent a wall (and into which it will be ok to insert drawing pins); some loose drawing pins; a box of matches; a candle.

The problem is to attach the candle upright to the wall (vertical surface) so it can be lit.

Let each of the participants have a go at solving it.

People have difficulty working out a solution because they have set ideas about what the objects at their disposal are for. They see the drawing pins as things for attaching, the matches as things for igniting and the matchbox as just a container .

A simple solution is to empty the matchbox, take out the drawer part of it, fix that to the wall with some drawing pins and sit the candle in it. In other words, to use half of the matchbox as a shelf rather than as a container.

Once you challenge your assumptions about the functions of the objects before you, the way to solve it becomes clear.

OR

Tying the knot

15 minutes

This exercise takes a little setting up but really drives home the point.

Attach two pieces of string to the ceiling (using drawing pins or similar). They should be far apart enough so that when you are holding on to the free end of one, you cannot reach the

other. But they should be long enough that you could tie them together.

Leave a chair, a pair of scissors [see *Safety Note* below], some paperclips, rubber bands and sheets of paper for the participants to use.

The problem is for one person on his/her own to tie the strings together using only the objects provided.

Let each of the participants have a go at solving it.

The difficulty is that you cannot grasp both strings at once. The participants will try various ways using the objects provided but they probably won't manage to work out a solution.

A simple way to do it is to tie the scissors to one string and set them swinging as a pendulum. [Important: See *Safety Note* below.] Then take hold of the other string and pull it towards the swinging scissors, grabbing them when they come within reach. Then the knot can be tied.

The reason people find it difficult to solve this problem is that they are making assumptions about the use of the objects at their disposal. They assume that the scissors are to cut with. They assume that the chair is to get up on. The scissors are not perceived as a weight - only their conventional function is recognised.

[Safety Note: To carry out this solution, the blades of the scissors should be bound together using a couple of the rubber bands. Also scissors with rounded rather than pointed ends should be supplied (i.e. children's scissors). If you are not comfortable with using scissors in this exercise, you can replace them with another object such as a hole-punch, a pair of pliers, a small plastic bottle of correction fluid, etc.]

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LIVE PROBLEM

As mentioned in the introduction to this (*Training programmes*) section of the guide, participants' learning will be enhanced if they are each able to bring a 'live' problem/opportunity to the programme (i.e. an actual problem/opportunity they are currently or imminently tackling at work). The group can then apply the ideas contained in the video directly to one or more of these.

This is the point at which (if you have not already done so) to bring these live problems into play.

Alternatively, you may want to suggest a particular problem/opportunity for the group to focus on.

This is also the point at which you may like to introduce the 'Yes...But' balls [see *Preparation (for trainers)*, page 16]. These are tennis ball-sized blue foam balls. Distribute them among the participants. Whenever anyone makes a premature judgment (i.e. thinks red when they should be thinking blue) whoever spots it is free to launch a 'Yes...But' ball at them as a helpful (but not painful) reminder!

REFRAMING THE PROBLEM

The first of this pair of exercises (*Put it another way*) concentrates on the **angle** from which the problem is approached. The second (*Shoot for the stars*) examines the **scale** on which it is tackled.

Put it another way

30 mins

Select some live problems/opportunities to concentrate on. Split the participants into smaller groups, allocating each a selection of problems/opportunities. Get them to generate some ideas using blue thinking. Remind them that the emphasis here is on generation and creativity - absolutely not on judgment or analysis.

Next ask them to analyse the way each problem/opportunity has been phrased and worded in order to identify what assumptions are built into it (that is, into the very definition of the goal). Get them to focus on the specific words and turns of phrase used in defining the problem/opportunity and see if they are unnecessarily restrictive or directive. On the basis of this analysis, get them to rephrase or reword the goals. Now ask them to generate some more ideas using these redefined goals. (You may like to remind them of the ship salvage example in the video - Karl Kroyer redefined the problem from *lifting* sunken vessels to *getting them back to the surface*.)

Reassemble the group and compare the ideas/solutions generated from the original goals to those from the redefined goals. Spotlight any instances where the redefinition of the goal has obviously broadened and liberated the thought processes and led to more imaginative, innovative ideas.

Shoot for the stars

30 mins

Select a live problem/opportunity to focus on where the goal is a relatively modest increase or improvement (say, 5-10%). Divide the participants into small groups and get them to generate ideas using blue thinking. Remind them that the emphasis here is on generation and creativity - absolutely not on judgment or analysis.

Then up the ante by changing the goal to a 100% increase/improvement and send them back to the drawing board to generate ideas accordingly.

Reassemble the group and compare some of the initial (5-10%) ideas with the later (100%) ones, highlighting any of the bolder suggestions that look like they would, even if they fell well short of the 100% target, deliver a significant (more than 10%) increase/improvement. [See pages 29-31 for information on reframing and rescaling goals.]

ENTERTAIN THE IMPOSSIBLE

30 mins

The essence of blue thinking is that it is untrammelled, free from the restrictions of judgment, rationality, prejudice, convention.

This exercise is designed to indicate the value of such free thinking as well as to demonstrate how difficult it is to liberate our minds from these bounds.

Select a live problem/opportunity to focus on. Divide the participants into small groups. Ask them to come up with some way-out, whacky ideas/solutions. It doesn't matter how crazy their suggestions are as long as they solve the problem.

After a few minutes of idea generation ask them to select three way-out ideas from their list. Get them to put each of the three on a separate flipchart sheet. Then have them spend five minutes on each idea, developing it into a practical solution.

The three way-out ideas on the flipchart sheets need not be taken literally. They can be regarded simply as starting points. An innovative element can be picked out, developed and applied. The participants should keep asking the question "How?" to transform their crazy idea into a potentially practical one.

Reassemble the participants and ask for a brief report from each group of the best innovation to have resulted from a way-out starting point.

ASK “WHAT’S GOOD ABOUT IT?”

30 mins

Select a live problem/opportunity to focus on. Divide the participants into small groups and ask them to generate solutions/ideas using unrestricted, unprejudiced blue thinking - that is, avoiding analysis and judgment.

As they come up with ideas, get them to develop each and every one by constantly asking “What’s Good About It? “ and building on the good elements.

It is a good idea to have the ‘Yes...But’ balls at hand for this idea development exercise as suspension of negative criticism is vital to this stage of the process.

Reassemble the participants and draw the session to a close by asking for examples of where an idea that looked unpromising to start with developed into something innovative and practical by building on its good point.

YES...BUT

25 mins

Ask the participants firstly to recall times when they have had one of their ideas ‘yes...butted’ and to note them down. Then to recall and note occasions when they have ‘yes...butted’ someone else’s ideas.

Lead a discussion centred on the following questions:

- ▶ How does this organisation kill ideas?
- ▶ How do you kill ideas (other people’s/your own)?

Get them to identify the many ways people in effect say “Yes...But”. Bring out how various and destructively ingenious the methods of ‘idea assassination’ can be. Spotlight ways to escape idea assassination. [See page 31 for information on ‘yes...butting’.]

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RED - selection

[See pages 32 - 33 for information on the red stage.]

SET AND JUMP THE HURDLES

20 mins

Discuss the importance of being systematic in the way you analyse, evaluate and select ideas.

Give out *Handout 8: selection grid* and talk about how it can be applied in practice. It is designed for the selection criteria to be entered in the column labels. These can then be marked (using highlighter pens or the like) to distinguish between those criteria which **must** be met and those which you would like to meet. You then go through the list of criteria with each idea ticking or crossing the boxes as appropriate. By focusing on the crosses you can develop any idea, re-enter it in the left-hand 'ideas' column and check it back against the criteria. The Selection Grid helps weed out ideas that just cannot satisfy a 'must' criterium, strengthen ideas which are basically sound but slightly flawed, and identify the real winners.

During the discussion focus in particular on the need to switch back from red to blue mode in order to strengthen ideas that have failed certain criteria.

This is a good opportunity to drive home the more general point that models are necessarily a simplification and the **Ideas into action** model, being no exception, is to be used flexibly - blue, red and green thinking should be applied as appropriate and not in a narrow, linear way.

You might like to bring in to the discussion, by way of example and inspiration, instances from the history of invention of ideas that have succeeded only through perseverance and a long process of switching between blue and red, such as Thomas Edison and the light bulb.

GREEN - action

[See pages 34- 35 for information on the green stage.]

TAKE THE INITIATIVE

Freedom in a framework

30 mins

Lead a discussion about creative thinking and innovation **in the context of the organisation.**

Look at the conflicting demands on the organisation in general. On the one hand, to keep pace with change in the modern world, to adapt, to grow, to innovate. On the other hand, to co-ordinate the actions of individuals, to regulate efficient and reliable processes and procedures, to organise.

You may like to use the short quotations from Peter Drucker and Theodore Levitt on page 167 of *The Dinosaur Strain* [see page 80 for details] as a basis for this discussion.

Both innovation and organisation are essential for survival. Innovation needs to happen within a framework, otherwise it leads to chaos.

Talk about the concept of 'tight' and 'loose' organisations and systems.

Many organisations realise that their culture has historically been too tight or controlling, too red. Often this is because their core activity involves a commodity or product where tight control is required (money, electricity, hazardous substances, etc.) and these tight controls spread into other areas of the organisation where they are not necessary or appropriate. Such organisations then want to involve and empower people more and to spur initiative, so they swing loose and encourage creativity, innovation and empowerment. A year or two down the line, worried by some "silly mistakes" and feeling somewhat out of control, senior management decide they have to reimpose control. Scepticism

and resentment result and the previous sense of disempowerment is increased.

'Tight - loose' is not an either-or concept but a continuum, a balance.

Give out *Handout 5: Freedom in a framework* and explain it to the participants. The diagram represents a framework for innovation within the organisation.

The 'NO GO' area is total disempowerment. Some areas of activity in organisations are necessarily 'no go' - that is, certain rules are essential for its effective operation, in the same way as society disempowers individuals from driving on the wrong side of the road.

The 'YES then GO' area is where people are largely disempowered - only if you ask the boss and the boss says "**Yes**" can you **go**.

The 'GO KNOW' area is where people are basically empowered but need to inform others of their actions - you can **go** and do something but let the boss **know** what you have done.

And 'GO' is total empowerment.

People in organisations - individuals and teams - need to know which parts of their job fall into which parts of this framework. They need to know their zone of control. They need to be clear about which ideas they can carry straight through into action.

Discuss with the participants how they perceive their job and their team's work in terms of this framework. Has their zone of control been clearly defined? What can they usefully do to clarify it further?

Conclude by emphasising that initiatives are much more likely to succeed if creativity and innovation are operating within a clearly defined framework.

RIGID DIGITS

25 mins

Give out *Handout 6: Rigid Digits*. Ask the participants to note on the handout some occasions when they have pointed the ‘rigid digit’, when they have blamed another person or department, their boss, the organisation or the system for not pursuing an idea.

Generate discussion, encouraging examples from the group, of the kind of situations where people point the rigid digit, how it stops ideas in their tracks and how to avoid it.

CREATIVE CHAMPIONING

40 mins

This role-play exercise highlights the need to be creative in the selling of your ideas, not just in coming up with them in the first place. It draws attention to the need to use your imagination and think yourself into the place of the person to whom you are presenting the idea, to see the world through their eyes, to understand what makes them tick. What will turn them on, attract their interest, fire their enthusiasm, get their support?

Divide the participants into threes. Get each trio to perform three role-plays:

- between a blue thinker and an idea-presenter
- between a red thinker and an idea-presenter
- between a green thinker and an idea-presenter.

In each case the idea-presenter has to sell a difficult idea to the thinker .

.
. .
.

The remaining member of the group acts as observer, noting what angles of argument the idea-presenter tries and in particular which words, phrases and expressions are effective (and which are not).

The trio should switch roles for each role-play, each person alternating between idea-presenter, thinker and observer. Every trio should be given a set of three badges with coloured stickers to clearly identify the thinkers.

The ideas to be presented can either be ones drawn by the idea-presenters from their own work situations, ones decided on by the trio or ones you have prepared in advance on a handout.

Reassemble the participants at the end to share observations.

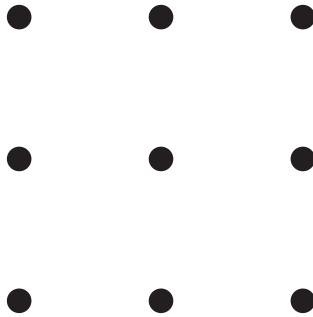
ACTION PLANNING

20 mins

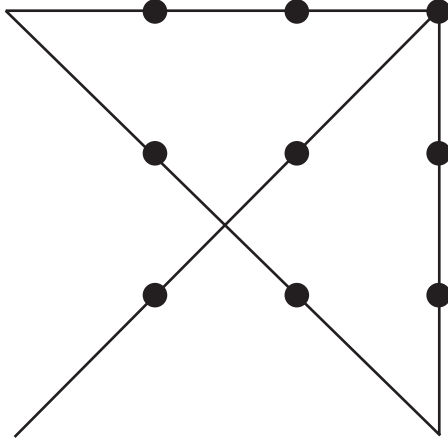
Conclude the programme by giving out *Handouts 3a* and *3b: Action plan* and asking the participants to each fill in their plan. Make sure that everyone has identified at least one action to take to increase the creativity of their thinking and approach at work. Briefly check with the participants that the aims you set out at the beginning of the programme have been met. Agree and organise a system of reviewing their action plans,

Handouts

HANDOUT 1: THE NINE DOTS PROBLEM



HANDOUT 2: A NINE DOTS PROBLEM



Think and act beyond the square

HANDOUT 3A: ACTION PLAN

Here are some prompts (some general, some problem/opportunity-specific) to help you in drafting your Action plan:

GENERAL

- In what areas do you tend to restrict your thinking to ‘within the square’
- How can you go ‘beyond the square’
- What opportunity-type goal is waiting out there for you to seize?

SPECIFIC PROBLEM/OPPORTUNITY

- What assumptions have you made with this problem/opportunity
- Is there another, better way of defining it?
- Could you be tackling it on a different scale?

- What’s good about the ideas/solutions you’ve come up with?
- How can you strengthen their weak points?
- Are you being systematic in analysing your ideas/solutions?

- Are you pointing the ‘rigid digit’?
- Who do you need to approach with your ideal solution?
- Whose backing do you need?
- How is the best way to approach them?
- What initiatives can you take to sell your idea more creatively?

HANDOUT 3B: ACTION PLAN

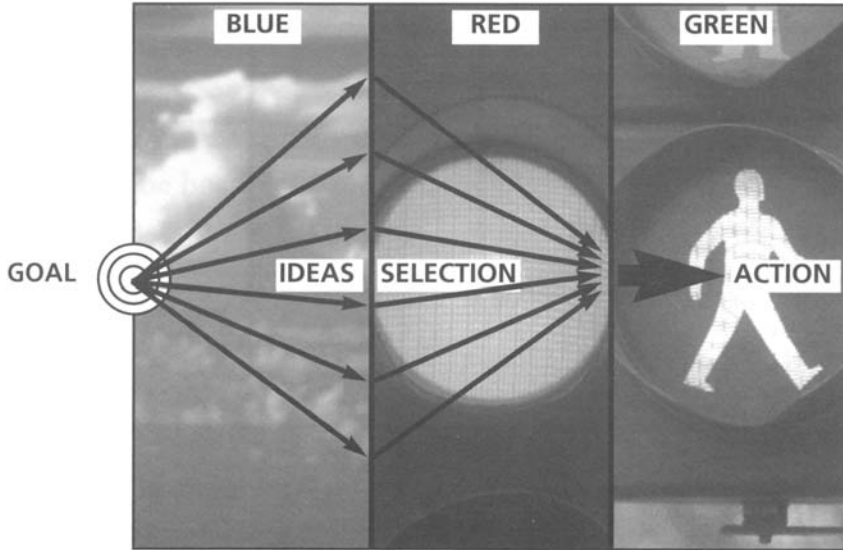
Action to be taken	by when	who involved

Date of first **review** of this Action plan

with

Date of subsequent reviews

HANDOUT 4: IDEAS INTO ACTION MODEL



HANDOUT 5: FREEDOM IN A FRAMEWORK

NO	YES	GO	
	then		GO
GO	GO	KNOW	

HANDOUT 6: RIGID DIGITS

A colleague

A colleague	
The boss	
Another department	
The organisation	
The system	
Someone/something else	

HANDOUT 7: A WORLD OF CHANGE

GENERAL CHANGES

Technological changes

Economic changes

Social changes

Legislative changes

Political changes

Environmental changes

ORGANISATIONAL CHANGES

Structural changes

Strategic changes

Procedural/system changes

Cultural changes

Market changes

- *What changes have occurred that impact on your work?*
- *How do they impact?*

CHANGES	IMPACT

THE IDEAS INTO ACTION SERIES

Three companions to the **Ideas into action** series are:

The blue movie - *Generating great ideas*

The green movie - *Empowerment within a framework*

The red movie - *Elements of decision making*

These are available from:

Video Arts Ltd

6-7 St Cross Street, London EC1N 8UA

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Fax: 020 7400 4900

THE DINOSAUR STRAIN

Mark Brown's book 'The Dinosaur Strain' (published by Innovation Centre Europe, 1993) covers the subject-matter of **Ideas into action** and other closely related areas in an engaging and thought-provoking way. Copies are available from Video Arts Ltd at the above address.

THE DOLPHIN STRAIN

To help ensure the future of dolphins and their environment contact:

The Whale & Dolphin Conservation Society

Alexander House

James Street West

Bath BA1 2BT

Tel: 012253345110

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- How to avoid idea assassination.
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