

CREATIVITY:

GOOD FOR YOUR BUSINESS, GOOD FOR YOUR TEAM AND GOOD FOR YOU

Most organisations say they value creativity and innovation. At a time where traditional business models and the landscape they are operating are constantly changing, they know it's important for growth. The Australian government recognises the importance of creativity through its Department of Innovation.

However, for many organisations, the reality of making it happen seems to be much harder to implement than first realised. I was meeting with a large financial organisation last year who had listed Innovation as one of their key values and as a driver of their people and organisation. When I asked what they did to foster and develop this creativity and innovation, the reply was "well, we don't really do anything". In a paper published recently by the Australian Business Foundation, Graham Hubbard, of Adelaide University, noted that official figures suggest only 35 per cent of Australian businesses say they innovate at all.

Creativity, innovation and the trait of curiosity are essential to our existence. Through these our society has developed. All of the those great things that we have in our homes and lives: MP3 players, microwaves, major medical advances, surround sound entertainment systems, cars and water purifiers to name a few, have come from creativity and innovation. Creativity and innovation is big business.

So did the people who thought of these products have 'powers' that others didn't? Were they just a hippy artist, blissed out in a field when a flash of inspiration hit them? For the first question, it's a probable no. For the second question, we may never know but you can make an educated guess. So how did they do it?

The brain is pretty amazing and what is

exciting is that science is only starting to scrape the surface of its potential. The brain is designed to work in balance to influence everything that we do. In general terms – the left hemisphere of the brain is perfectly designed to complement that right hemisphere and vice-versa. For example, the left hand side sees detail whereas the right hand side sees the big picture. The left hand side is logical where the right hand side is more intuitive. The left hand side reads a joke; the right hand side tells us if it is funny or not. Your brain is a perfectly balanced thinking machine.

Imagine your brain as a muscle but you only keep working out one side, the left hand side. Almost everything you do, day in and day out keeps working out the left hand side. What happens to the right hand side? In non literal terms, it gets smaller as the left hand side gets larger. Your brain becomes unbalanced. Your brain is not functioning at its full capacity.

You will often find books, material or organisations that say 'we will help you to think more creatively' or 'develop your creative thinking skills'. Whilst creative thinking is hugely important, it is not the only part of creativity. Rather than just being a way of thinking, creativity is a behaviour. It's more than just being locked in a room with tools and techniques. It's an action. Creative behaviour exercises your brain. It's what you do that drives creative thinking.

So when we ask how did these people who invented our MP3 players come

up with their great ideas, it comes down to what they were doing (and the organisations they often worked for) just as much as what they were thinking. Everyone has different creative behaviours that we can learn from: theatre producers, advertisers, painters, writers, marketing teams, sculptors, inventors and graphic designers but you will find that they search for stimulus, freshness and new experiences to change how they think. The things they do and the behaviours they engage in make their brains think differently. This then drives the creative thinking and innovative results that can be produced.

So how do you kick start this creativity? It would be shortsighted to say "this is the only way..." but there are some great steps to take.

It's about changing a negative mindset. By far, the majority of people we work with, either in a workshop or a creative team building program will say "I am not creative". They believe it with a passion! What this actually translates to is "I haven't done anything creative for a very, very long time!" As children, we are all creative. We all start on a level playing field. It is in everything that a child does – their play, their energy, their thinking. Its part of a child's internal fabric. If you walk into a room of 5 year olds and ask "Who here is an artist?" you will find every hand in the room shoots up energetically with everyone shouting "I am, I am!" If you walk into a room of 25, 35 or 45 year olds and ask the same question, most eyes will drop to the floor thinking "Please don't pick me!" So what's the difference?

The structure of school, life and work often encourage us to do the things that do not work out the right hand side of the brain. Beatrix Potter, the children's

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author said "Thank goodness I was never sent to school; it would have rubbed off some of the originality." We learn to be uncreative.

Imagine if you don't exercise for a long time, you become unfit. You then say "I could never run around the block three times without stopping" You most likely wish you still could, but you can't. It's the same with creativity. People we look on as being 'creative' have continued to do the things that exercise the right hand side of their brain – writing, playing the guitar, sewing, collecting things to decorate their house, going on adventures or designing their garden. That's the difference. Creative people do things that encourage them to be creative, enabling them to see the world in a unique way.

Once the 'I am not creative' paradigm is broken, it becomes about the doing; for individuals, teams and organisations.

I currently don't play music, so therefore I could say my paradigm is "I am not musical". However, if I buy a guitar, pick it up, practice and learn to play it, I become a guitar player. I start to hear things differently, appreciate new things and exercise a part of my brain that I haven't before. As I play more and improve, most people would say that I was musical. The difference between me being musical and non musical is the doing. It's the same with creativity. Obviously, some people are naturally more talented musically than others – that's what makes the world so interesting. We will all have different creative strengths. However, you have to make effort for the music (and creativity) to start.

Visualfunk team building encourages teams to unleash their creative potential by experiencing and 'doing' things outside their creative comfort zone. Embracing and enjoying the experiences

that 'those creative people' do. To allow people to take risks, try out new ideas, have fun, open up new lines of communication, break a negative mindset and discover in the process that they really are creative. Teams are able to achieve something that they would not have thought possible. Whilst, like any new behaviour, creativity takes practice, a creative team experience where people 'do creativity' is a fantastic kick start to the world of creativity and innovation. A mindset of 'I can and I have' rather than "I cant" makes a huge difference to the creative process and success in any area of life and work.

And creativity feels GOOD. Creativity helps people to feel fulfilled. It puts a smile on a person's face. It gives a feeling of accomplishment. It enables a sense of achievement and connection with oneself. It lets people be closer to the person they dreamed of being. It gives people a broader view of the world. It gives people more choice and the knowledge that anything is possible. It restores balance in people's brains enabling whole brain thinking. It will also restore some balance in their work and personal life. It's good for the soul.

A saying I love is "If you do what you have always done, you will get what you have always got". The same applies to the results achieve at work. If you continually do the same things day in and day out, you will stay in the same place whilst your competition moves ahead. Along the same lines, Einstein said "a problem can never be solved from the same mindset it was created in". So get out there and do something different with your team, something that will exercise your team's whole brain, open up a new way of thinking and change the mindset you are currently working in.

Encouraging creativity is not about putting down anyone who does a left brain centered job or someone who loves detail, logic and order. These things are essential!! They keep our lives functioning smoothly and successfully. They help us asses the feasibility of our creative ideas for innovation. But, just imagine what's possible if you complement these skills

with your right brained abilities – as we all should.

Just imagine what is possible if every person in your team was fulfilling their creative ability, delivering amazing results for your team and making your organisation money from innovation. Imagine a more productive way of doing things, a more successful way of achieving results. Imagine keeping ahead of your external competition, a way of everyone in your team exceeding their KPI's – just imagine what is possible with this potential. Imagine what is possible with a culture of fresh ideas, fresh results, creativity and innovation.

Almost any and every book and consultant will tell you that people are the commodity that drives success in teams and organisations. If your people are not engaging their "whole brain" and using its full capacity, they are not fulfilling their full potential.

Do something creative – unleash the true potential in your team.

As the Director of Visualfunk, Simon Banks lives by his philosophy of "To teach creativity and innovation you must practice creativity and innovation". Previously a facilitator with Oxygen Learning in the UK, Simon has combined a career in training and development with being a professional artist. Simon delivers creative training, team building and conference programs and keynote addresses throughout Australasia. As an artist, He has had solo shows in both Europe and Australia with works held in collections in both countries. In the arts he has also appeared on radio and television, lectured on paintings for the National Gallery of England and developed programs for the Museum of Contemporary Art. He can be contacted on simon@visualfunk.com.au