

# Every business can be a creative business

The first, and often only, place many businesses look to boost innovation and creativity is to an external agency. But, *argues Cris Beswick from Let's Think Beyond*, such an approach completely ignores the potential creativity and innovation within every business that is simply waiting to be unlocked.

When I was at school I certainly didn't learn how to think. If asked a particularly difficult question in Maths, and sometimes if I'm honest not even a particularly difficult question, my reply of "Don't know, Sir" would be met with the retort, "Well think boy! THINK!" As if by shouting the word louder everything would suddenly become clear and I would instantly have the beautiful mind of John Nash.

And what I've found in business is that quite often the same school structures and approaches still apply. The 'repeated shouting' method of getting in an advertising or design agency, attending a residential workshop or going on a day's training course doesn't fundamentally change how a business can become more successful through harnessing the power of creative thinking by the people who really matter: all those who work in the business.

Looking externally to deliver creativity and innovation can of course work. But if no effort is made to improve creative and innovative thinking by people at all levels within the business, then every time a new problem comes along the business will default externally for help, advice and support. Longer term such an approach means spending more money to improve a market position, or sometimes simply just to maintain it.

Businesses that embrace innovation and creativity know that it is never just a one-off project, nor something only relevant to a particular team or department. Creativity and innovation in business is the adoption of a company-wide mindset wedded to the idea that only through constantly questioning,

constantly tweaking and constantly improving every aspect of the business can the organisation stay at the forefront of the market.

In Japan, such an approach is known as Kaizen and is synonymous with Toyota, where small improvements at every stage of production were led and delivered by small groups improving their own environment and productivity. The Kaizen methodology ensures that when any changes are made, they are monitored, evaluated and then adjusted. By breaking down the business and the issues it faces into bite-size chunks, the need to suddenly deliver large-scale, expensive improvement programmes is completely negated and the business is kept innovative and dynamic as a matter of course.

When it comes to your own business and your own people, don't let anyone tell you – or believe it of yourself – that creativity and innovation isn't inside every single one of us. Every time a problem is solved or a new solution is delivered in your business, it's because someone, somewhere has been creative and innovative. If you're heading to an important business meeting in the car and on the radio you hear that the route you were following is closed, you will then program your SatNav to find an alternative, get out the map book and do it yourself or find a nearby hotel or business centre and have the meeting virtually through digital conferencing facilities. What I'm quite sure you won't do is simply turn round and head back home because it's too difficult to think of an alternative.

And yet, there are still many businesses



that constrain their potential by doing nothing to eradicate the limiting beliefs of the people in their organisation when it comes to creativity and innovation. We've tried that before and it didn't work; we did a brainstorming day and it generated little of value; we had an innovation project team in the past but they didn't really tell us anything we didn't already know. If you can get over that first hurdle of looking, and I mean really looking, at how the people in your organisation think, then you're already significantly ahead of many of your competitors in becoming a more innovative and creative organisation.

Cris Beswick is the principal of Let's Think Beyond, which helps businesses unlock their inherent creativity and innovation to deliver tangible commercial benefits.

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