

Chapter 4: Creative Connections Power Tools

Creative thinking is really about discovering new connections through the use of:

(1) The imagination: In order to stand out from the crowd, you must be able to see something **distinctly new and better** than what others are seeing and then, of course, you must put this new insight into action.

- Imagine **more than one use** for your product or service.
- Use your imagination to **do the opposite** of what is expected.
- Look to other industries or areas for inspiration.
- Imagine the wildest idea you can and then tame this wild idea.
- Encourage all team members to use their imaginations.

(2) Diverse stimuli: (Something that encourages activity in people):

Stimuli are key ingredients for making new connections. Most people need to jumpstart the process with the raw ingredient of creativity—**other ideas**. If 98 percent of ideas already exist in one form or another, the answers must already exist somewhere. All one needs to do is find them and then **combine and recombine them** in a unique way that makes them work in solving a new challenge. In the "cycle of ideas," all or at least most ideas are reincarnated from a previous life in some other company, agency, industry, or country.

Decide what type of stimuli (inspirations) you need—related or unrelated.

e.g., if the team is looking for ideas to improve the school's fundraising efforts, the team might want to bring in examples of previous programs and advertisements from other fundraising campaigns as stimuli for fresh connections. Alternatively, the team might want to seek out unrelated stimuli. For example, they might want to look at how banks attract new customers, how lotteries are conducted, or how the Army recruits new soldiers, in order to find new insights that could help them design a better fundraising program.

Look internally as well as externally for diverse stimuli.

Sources of diverse stimuli Table 4.1

Historical review	Television	The mail
Children	Old files	Paint Colors
List of trends	Travel	Other companies

Photos	Complaints	Ads
Opinions	Catalogs	Children's books
Intuition	Factory	Competition
Nursing homes	Construction site	Retail

The simplest way to collect new ideas generated from stimuli is, obviously, **to write them down**. Carry a small idea notebook or use a Palm Pilot to capture these fleeting thoughts, or they might disappear forever. Many great ideas surface during meetings. Where do they go?

(3) Creative-Connections Power tools:

- Creative-Connections Power tool 10: Rummaging in the Attic:**
 There are many great ideas simply sitting in the "attics of our minds" as well as in the "attics of our organizations". We have a tendency to trash the past and hold the perception that an idea from five years ago will be of little use in helping to solve our current challenge. However, elements of previous solutions or ideas can prove to be very valuable fuel for jumpstarting our idea engines. Look at ideas such as bell-bottom jeans, disco music, scooters, pogo sticks, and roller skates, all of which have resurfaced.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 9: Cultivating Obsession**
 The best way to find new ideas for a certain product, service, or process is to become obsessed with the challenge. At the beginning of all projects, the members of the design team take the time to understand the market, the client, the technology, and the perceived constraints of the problem. They observe real people in real-life situations to find out what makes them tick—what confuses them, what they like, what they hate, and where they have latent needs not addressed by current products and services.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 8: Analyzing Frustrations**
 "Solving customer problems sparks innovation." One of the most fertile areas for identifying new ideas is discovering what frustrates others about the current product, service, or process.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 7: Identifying the Gold Standard**
 Identify organizations that have achieved excellence in your particular challenge area.

- Creative-Connections Power tool 6: Adopting and Adapting
Great ideas already exist somewhere else in the universe. All you need to do is find them and **adopt them** as your own. Find out what others are doing well. Do not limit the stimuli to your own company and only "fast adapt" ideas from within the four walls of your own organization.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 5: Combining Ideas
Creative thinking is a bit like cooking: a little of this and a little of that. Creative thinkers are aware of the objects or ideas around them and look for new connections through combining diverse objects or ideas.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 4: Finding Similarities
When you are faced with a creative challenge, a good technique is to think of other challenges that might be similar. For example, find similarities in nature: How is the organization like a tree, or how is the process like a tornado?
- Creative-Connections Power tool 3: Breaking Down the DNA
Sometimes the problem or situation is overwhelming in its complexity. A good technique in this case is to **break the problem down** bit by bit so that the focus is on the "bits" instead of on the whole problem all at once. It is then easier to understand what is driving the problem and identify unique ideas to solve part, if not all, of the problem.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 2: Listing and Twisting
Once the steps in the process or attributes of the product or service have been "listed," they can be "twisted" to find new ideas. Add a step, Eliminate a step, Rearrange the steps, Outsource a step, Add an ingredient, Eliminate an ingredient, Change an ingredient etc.
- Creative-Connections Power tool 1: Becoming a Visual thinker
Mind mapping, created by Tony Buzan, is another visual creative connections technique. In brief, it is a visual depiction of the links and connections between thoughts. This particular non-linear technique helps to generate ideas in a way that, especially when presented in group settings, is less prone to produce biased reactions than are traditional "lists" of ideas. Mind mapping also makes transparent the relationships between ideas and concepts.

Evolving from Brainstorming to Innovation Groups

- The Challenges with Brainstorming:

The application of the original concept and process of brainstorming has been modified over time, resulting in a loss of its effectiveness.

Innovation Groups

- A preferred method for idea generation is holding an "Innovation Group," which, because of its comprehensive and rigorous design, goes beyond the more common brainstorming method. This method is more effective because of following factors:
 - A more complete process
 - Reducing the pressure to be creative in one meeting
 - Choosing a skilled leader
 - Choosing the best participants
 - Providing guidelines
 - Clarifying the real problem
 - Introducing stimuli
 - Using the Creative-Connections Power tools
 - Ensuring follow-up