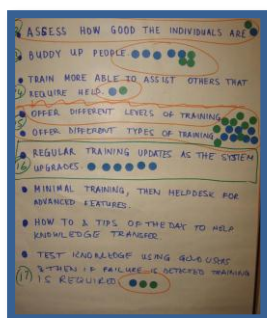


# THE CREATIVE GORILLA #114

*Use a range of idea generation approaches to avoid stale thinking...*

## Provoke Ideas

*"The best way to have a good idea is to have lots of ideas." - Linus Pauling, American Scientist*



*Lots of ideas*

What approaches do you have for idea generation?

Britain has recently had a general election. Reflecting on the televised leadership debates, the thought struck me, "What if the management teams of companies were elected?" No, not the Board; for most private companies the shareholders elect them. I mean staff voting for the management team. Imagine the CEO having to debate with rivals for his job in front of the staff...

This idea sneaked in to my head as I lay in bed and is an example of idea generation that we might call "Individual Spontaneity." It relies on our existing knowledge and making "connections" between pieces of knowledge in our brain, sometimes prompted by an external stimulus.

The advantage is that it is free and the ideas

can be brilliant; Eureka moments! The issues include that it is ad hoc and unreliable. The same can be said for "Group Spontaneity", where ideas arise when you are chatting with friends or colleagues.

For an organisation to rely on Spontaneity for new ideas is a little haphazard, even if your organisation encourages people to socialise and talk about work. Therefore, it will require some kind of structured approach to produce ideas more consistently.

I consider there are three structured approaches to generate ideas, which I term:

1. Structured Unprovoked
2. Structured Provoked
3. Structured Unlearning

Let's review them. As usual I would appreciate your feedback to broaden my perspective.

### STRUCTURED UNPROVOKED

Common in the workplace, someone gets a group of people together for a "brainstorming" session and says, "OK, give me ten ideas to save this company!" or similar challenge. Typically, it relies on the ability of individuals to generate ideas and be able to build on ideas from other people.

# THE CREATIVE GORILLA #114

## Pros

1. Can produce good ideas
2. People spark ideas off each other

## Cons

1. Many people find it difficult to generate ideas in a group or quickly on demand. To offset this, facilitators use techniques that encourage individual idea generation, before starting the group work
2. It often produces conventional ideas (or ideas that your competitors can think of) because:
  - The people in the group have similar backgrounds, read similar industry literature, meet similar people etc. Thus their ideas are triggered by similar knowledge and experiences
  - During the session, people process knowledge in the way they always process their knowledge, forming similar patterns of ideas
  - It can produce apathy (“Not another idea generation session”)

## STRUCTURED PROVOKED

To overcome the issue of conventional thinking, facilitators use a range of idea generation techniques to provoke unconventional thinking patterns and ideas.

## Pros

1. They can produce truly unconventional ideas that your competitors would not think of

## Cons

1. Using the techniques requires an open mind. Some people regard using them as “childish” and some resist using them because they are not conventional
2. The techniques can produce “ridiculous” ideas. However, a group can put these to good use if they treat them as stepping stones to provoke practical ideas

For a good selection of books on using such techniques, type *Idea Generation* in on Amazon.

## STRUCTURED UNLEARNING

In this way of generating ideas, individuals list everything they know about a topic in bullet point format. They share this knowledge with their colleagues, take one item from the list and ask, “How might this be different?” When new ideas are exhausted, the group selects another item from the list and asks the same question.

## Pros

1. Can be used by most people because the idea generation is based on their knowledge, experience and skill
2. Can produce unconventional ideas very quickly
3. It does not require such an open mind to use. It is not seen as “childish”.
4. Making all the knowledge, skills and experience known helps everyone

# THE CREATIVE GORILLA #114

in the group to generate ideas, even the most inexperienced

## Cons

1. Things we take for granted) which are often the basis for unconventional ideas

For a very good explanation of this idea generation approach, please refer to "[Smart Things to Know About Innovation and Creativity](#)" by Dennis Sherwood.

## SO

The learning from this is that a structured approach to generating ideas will be more consistent and productive. However, if you seek unconventional ideas, choose the latter two ways.

The overall lesson is that it is best to mix and match the approaches. This will help maintain interest and motivate people to attend your sessions.

## ACTION

Consider which way your organisation approaches idea generation. Is it stuck with conventional methods and approaches? Or perhaps it uses creative approaches but relies on similar techniques all the time. How might you change the approach?

## TO CLOSE

Back to management being voted in by staff and I can already hear some people growling, "You can't do that because..." Let's play with the idea though! What if staff voted for management in a democratic vote, rather

than individuals being chosen by senior people? What would management do to get elected? What would they not do, to ensure they can be re-elected?

Please let me know your ideas, preferably humorous, but all are welcome. There might even be a prize if there are some really good ideas. My choice will of course be totally undemocratic!

John Brooker | *Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.*

---



*We facilitate leaders and teams  
in medium to large organisations  
internationally to:*

- *Make Meetings Outstanding*
- *Make Transformation Simpler*
- *Make Innov8ion Flow*

*Imagine what we can do for you...*

*Contact John or Kate Brooker:*

*Speak: +44 (0) 20 8869 9990*

*Write: [hi@yesand.eu](mailto:hi@yesand.eu)*

*Read: [www.yesand.eu](http://www.yesand.eu)*

