

# YES! AND... CREATIVE GORILLA # 140

*If you want to enhance your creativity you need to interrupt your trains of thought ...*

## Enhance Your Creative Thinking...

*"I have coined the term "bisociation" to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single plane, and the creative act which always operates on more than one plane.*

*Arthur Koestler, Philosopher in "[The Act of Creation](#)".*



*Information in Motion?*

### How might you enhance creative thinking?

I was on holiday in Spain last week and with glorious weather and time to think I began playing with a concept that I last wrote about in Creative Gorilla 80 in April 2008. This was the idea of using a railway metaphor for how people think and create ideas, leading to how you can stimulate your creative thinking.

As I pondered on it, the whole concept became a lot clearer for me so I thought I would build on that last article.

In this telling of the metaphor, the track is your life path. All of your learning, skills and experience sit in carriages (or coaches). The carriages at the back contain all of the information from your childhood, one each for pre-school, primary school and secondary school, perhaps one for childhood outside school (chunk the carriages how you like).

This is your own "train of thought" (sorry for the pun!). Information was poured in to the carriage(s) from the world outside, either actively introduced through interaction with people, by

personal experience or passively absorbed.

These carriages now contain memories. You can access the carriages and the memories but logically cannot add anything as you move on to a new piece of track (another period of your life). The memories are your "baggage" tied together with string and nets and available when you need to access them (though a few bags may be sitting in the "Lost Luggage" office).

During childhood, other people were making decisions for you by setting the signals. They were also the engine, pulling or shunting you along. As you moved in to adulthood, you likely started to set your own signals ("I'll go to that university", "I'll take that job", "I'll live there") and took your engine off down tracks of your choosing.

Right now you are on the current piece of track in your life because you set the signal(s) at a major junction. You will shuttle back and forth along this same piece of track (the daily routine) until you set a signal at the next big junction. You probably added a couple of "live" carriages when you reached the new track, one for work and one for personal life (feel free to have what carriages you like; it's your train).

Much new information entered these carriage(s) when you crossed the latest set of points. It came from new experiences, interaction with new people and from new learning.

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You mixed this new information with the baggage from the back carriages and generated some new and creative ideas.

Let's pause the metaphor there and look at the quote from Koestler at the start of the article. Koestler's thesis is that creativity happens when you 'bisociate' (or mix) information from one plane with information from another plane (an unfortunate mix of metaphors with our train, but bear with me).

Back in our metaphor, the new information you received was on one plane and the baggage was on another and so you created new ideas.

However, over time you tend to find three issues which hinder your creative thinking:

- Much of the information you are now receiving has become familiar; in fact so familiar you don't even notice it. As a result you start to miss small signals that the information is changing
- You have already bisociated the incoming information with the baggage from previous carriages. You "run out of ideas"
- With so much information to absorb, your mind tends to chunk it up, so when I am writing this article on my computer I am not thinking about its 4Gb of RAM, the Bluetooth keyboard, the 27 inch screen, I am just thinking "Mac" (or I was until I started this bullet point). That's good for everyday coping, but if I had opportunity to redesign the Mac, that detail information would be invaluable

These issues reduce the potential for you and your team to find new ideas.

## SO

There you have a metaphor to explain the need for creative interventions personally and in organisations. Interventions you can use to overcome these issues are:

- Change your routine and stimulate new sources of information (as happened to me in Spain)
- Use creative tools to shake up the baggage, challenge your assumptions and force the baggage or new information on to Koestler's different planes
- Stop taking things for granted and think afresh about what you and your team are doing  
What else might you do?

## ACTION

Try doing what I have written in "SO".

## TO CLOSE

I wanted to see if my metaphor made sense so I discussed it with my son, who is 14. For signals I used the example of the choice of secondary school he made. "If you had pulled the signal this way you would have gone to Watford, but you pulled it that way and so went to your current school." Quick as a flash he said, "Yeh, but they are both on the same track."

Puzzled and wondering if I had explained it badly, I asked him how both schools could form the same track. Surely they would lead to different places? "Well, they are both on the Metropolitan Line," he said cheekily.

Laughing, I quickly wrote his response in my notebook; it was a great example of Koestler's point, taking my idea on a metaphorical plane and making a joke by putting it on to a literal plane.

May 2012 bring all you wish for.

*John Brooker , Facilitate, Innovate, Transform.*

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