

UPGRADING YOUR CREATIVITY



When you need an idea or a solution to a problem, in the Idea Phase, the key choice is between Know and Imagine. You can draw on what you already know and what has worked for you before, or you can imagine new possibilities. The first option is obviously not going to be very innovative, while the second option is a critical component of your innovativeness.

This is easier said than done. It is one of the key challenges you face whenever you want to be creative. It is easy to fall into Knowledge Bias—the tendency to let prior knowledge and expertise create a subtle but powerful momentum that restricts the type of options you consider. In order to embrace new ideas, you have to be willing to let go of the old ones. Relying too much on what you know blocks your creativity and keeps things from changing. But you can never entirely escape your current grasp of things. In most situations, some initial understanding of the problem and the context is essential to inventing viable solutions. So the challenge is to leverage your knowledge without becoming trapped by it.

WHEN YOU ARE NOT CREATIVE: INNOVATION FAILS

What goes wrong...

- Fewer ideas
- Lower quality ideas
- Resistance to new ideas
- Overreliance on knowledge

What happens as a result...

- Lack of originality
- Limited options
- Poor choices
- Unsolved problems

What we already know is often a rich source of options and a foundation we can build on, but we have to be willing to question that foundation even as we use it. We need to become skilled at drawing on our knowledge while being careful not to use it to screen out possibilities. One reason the Innovation Cycle is so powerful is that it doesn't assume that great ideas fall out of the sky. Taking time to reflect and gain new insights provides a more flexible starting point than drawing on your expertise. It starts you down a path of exploration and frees you to consider new options.

GOALS

In the Idea Phase, you are trying to generate new possibilities and select those that are most promising. Your two goals are:

1. Come up with new ideas.
2. Identify which ideas you want to pursue.

Literally thousands of techniques have been invented to foster ideation, far more than can be covered here. So here are some guiding principles and a few of the most widely used and proven strategies.





CREATIVITY HABITS OF AN INNOVATOR

- 1) Clearly define your desired outcome—the problem to be solved or objective to be reached.
- 2) Treat your knowledge and expertise as a source of possibilities, rather than a filter.
- 3) Look first for potential, rather than flaws, in new ideas and approaches.
- 4) Relax and be playful and spontaneous when you're looking for ideas.
- 5) Look for metaphors, similarities and creative connections between diverse subjects and disciplines.
- 6) Treat apparent contradictions as challenges to be resolved rather than barriers to be avoided.
- 7) Get in the habit of writing down or otherwise noting your ideas when they occur to you.
- 8) Incubate. Give your brain time to process a problem and it will often give you a solution spontaneously.

ASK YOURSELF

- Exactly what do I hope to accomplish?
- What insights can I build on?
- What new possibilities can I imagine?
- How am I embracing newness and change?
- How am I seeking improvement?
- What possibilities does my knowledge and experience give me?
- How can I move beyond what I already know, or revise it?