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## **Seriously creative - building strengths in creative thinking**

Increasingly employees across the whole organisation are encouraged to come up with ideas to improve products, services or processes and to deal with complex problems, so developing creative thinking skills is key. Further, creativity can improve performance, engagement and job satisfaction.

The organisation's culture and value it places on creativity or innovation is important. So is the support and receptivity of managers to new ideas. In addition, three further dimensions are needed for creativity at work: an understanding of how ideas happen, a 'toolkit' of creative thinking skills and the motivation to use them.

I run workshops designed to address employee's will, skill and belief that they can think creatively. Vitally, as most participants do not consider themselves to be creative, these workshops are grounded in the reality of their specific organisation and/or team, and participants apply their learning to real issues during the workshop.

Participation in the workshops is voluntary. I have found that although many participants choosing to attend believed they were not inherently creative, they are "attracted by the idea of the workshop" because "it sounded interesting".

To foster motivation, the early part of the workshop explores the organisational and personal benefits of developing creative thinking skills. Building on this, 'creative confidence' is facilitated in two ways: by helping individuals examine their limiting beliefs about creative abilities and then, through subsequent activities, enabling them to challenge and reframe these. Participants learn that ideas don't just happen. There is a process through which they are generated.

The workshop explores core creative techniques, covering divergent and convergent thinking, selected to have face validity for 'non-creative' functions. Care is taken to explain the rationale behind each activity. Participants explore these techniques, trying them out on real issues they have identified. This helps in taking their new skills back to the workplace and further, participants feel a sense of progress on a topic they have been working on. Importantly, idea generation is followed by a look at the innovation process, showing the steps necessary to move from idea generation to implementation.

The final part of the workshop examines personal creative habits and blocks to creative thinking. Participants are invited to share ideas for working around barriers and for establishing new habits.

These workshops have enabled participants to move from lacking in confidence to releasing energy and enjoyment of creativity in the workplace. The positive affect experienced serving to increase their ability to generate more ideas. One participant's comments were typical. She started the workshop sitting stiffly saying, "I don't know why I signed up, I'm just not creative". By the end she said, "I can't believe I came up

with so many good ideas". Her manager later reported on the energy and enthusiasm she continued to display.

Vanessa King