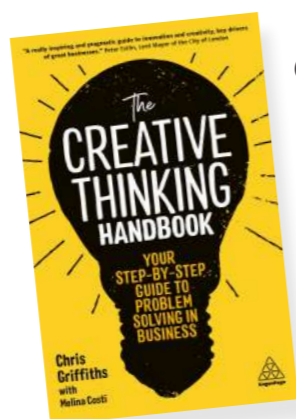# Get creative about creativity

Chris Griffiths

Chris Griffiths, a TEDx creativity expert who has previously coached the Dalai Lama, Royal Family and Nobel Laureates, explains to Alan Hosking that HR Professionals have an opportunity to lead the way in introducing innovation into their companies. His new book *The Creative Thinking Handbook* by Chris Griffiths and Melina Costi is out now, published by Kogan Page, priced at £14.99.

Why is creativity important in business?

A huge question. I travel around the world speaking to different audiences and I'm finding that more and more executives are becoming concerned about the direction their company, or career, is going in. Today, we operate in a world overrun by change and complexity. There's a very real threat of being 'left behind' if we just continue doing things the way we've always done them. We need different ways of engaging our teams, grabbing the attention of customers and increasing our productivity to stay one step ahead, and this calls for creative thinking.

Creativity is an even bigger differentiator for the 21st century now that 'knowledge', which was a hot topic just a decade ago, is becoming little more than a commodity. The trouble with knowledge is that it makes it harder to find novel solutions to our challenges because we resort to the same worn-out strategies that worked for us in the past. If people solve a problem using a tried-and-trusted approach or 'best practice', that's great. They've solved the problem. But have they moved forward? Have they innovated? Have they come up with something new and exceptional? Ongoing success is no longer about what you know, but what you can create.

What are the most common mistakes people make when it comes to being creative?

Most people think that being creative is just about having lots of slick ideas. They see it as a nice-to-have, something fun and fluffy to embellish a product or the company's image. They don't view it as having real substance, and if they're already drowning in lots of suggestions or they're strapped for time, it's not going to be something they prioritise. This is a big mistake. Creativity is as much about solving difficult business problems as it is about coming up with a catchy new brand slogan.

My approach doesn't focus purely on generating ideas, though that's a big part of the process. Just as crucial, however, are all the other components and steps that people need to work through to reach a harmonious solution. This includes evaluating and analysing all your ideas and objectively deciding how to take the right ones forward. At the end of it all, a good idea is still just an idea, it brings about a tangible effect within the company or society at large.

The problem is that most professionals only use partial strategies when making decisions, they don't cover the 'whole'.

Why should HR teams care about creativity?

In many organisations, people aren't allowed the freedom to play around with ideas. They're not taught how to 'think outside the box', so they stay within the confines of what they know they can achieve right now, rather than looking at what might be possible in the future. Most jobs today are about speed, reacting to events and doing more with less, so creativity gets crowded out. I don't think this is right. Creativity makes people feel valued. By giving teams the time, space and resources to experiment, you're enabling them to unlock their potential and improve their contribution to the company. Forward-looking brands like LinkedIn, 3M, Apple and Intuit know this and allow their workers free time to tinker with new ideas and work on side projects. When creativity is made a HR priority, you can create conditions that boost the overall morale and long-term productivity of the workforce.

What can HR Professionals be doing to boost employee creativity?

The short answer is lots! Firstly, you need to think about people's thinking and make it easy for them to do so too. In a study of over 1,100 UK workers by Microsoft Surface, 49% believed that learning new creativity skills would help them be more effective in their role, but 75% said they had not been equipped with the relevant training and tools to nurture these skills. So, what HR Professionals need to do is provide workers with the right learning and tools to stimulate their creative abilities and overcome the fear of getting started.

Another way HR Professionals can help to get the best out of teams is to create the right environment for ideas to surface. Try revamping the office space to create water cooler opportunities where people can 'bump' into colleagues from different work units or visitors from outside, strategic coffee machines, flexible seating, printers in the middle of the office, moveable walls, a central atrium and, of course, games rooms. These informal encounters facilitate the exchange of information and cross-fertilisation of ideas that can help the company progress.

What are some of the common 'thinking traps'?

There are three main thinking errors to watch out for when trying to be creative:

1. **Selective thinking.** The tendency to validate certain ideas and discount others. When people come up with what they think is a great option or decision, what do they do? They immediately look to justify it, accepting the information that supports their position, while snubbing the counter arguments. Check your habits. Is selective thinking holding you back from challenging a 'pet' idea or actively seeking other options?
2. **Reactive thinking.** This is when we jump to react to external influences, events or ideas. Many of us are prone to decision making using 'quick and dirty' mental shortcuts and don't do enough creative exploration, largely because our days are so busy. However, when we're constantly reactive, we end up being 'followers' in the big scheme of things because our progress is always being led by something or someone else.
3. **Assumptive thinking.** An assumption is a belief, convention or idea we accept to be true, often with no proof. Some examples are things like 'work only takes place in the office', 'our customers are all young people', or the one that's most damaging, 'I'm not creative'. By challenging our assumptions, we can uncover new perspectives and push past our usual boundaries.

Tell us a bit about your new book

The aim of *The Creative Thinking Handbook* is to offer a complete strategy for thinking creatively. My experience is that business people are getting fed up with hyped up brainstorming and creativity schemes. These are packed full of fun techniques but are often missing a vital ingredient – context. It's no good putting tools to work without understanding how your mind functions first. This is why we encourage people to use our free online Decision Radar profiling tool, so they can get to grips with the fundamentals of their thinking.

Once you're aware of how your current mindset might be hindering your ability to be creative, it becomes very easy to take control and generate new ideas. This book puts a practical system behind the act of creativity, one that individuals and teams can easily apply in the real world to deliver visible results.

The four-step Solution Finder brings together the key thinking skills in the correct order so you can work through your problem fluently and take your ideas to fruition, while at the same time keeping biases in check. ∎