

Diversity as a Cure for the One Track Mind

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Tanyika Fraser, Strategy, Design & Planning Consultant, Author, Self Employed and AIB MBA Alumni.

Divergent thinking can be a two-edged sword. This article discusses some of the advantages to be gained, but also some of the pitfalls.

Good ideas are often hard to come by. Even though everyone is capable of the creative *thinking* that produces ideas, we're not all capable of using our creative mind to produce the kind of business worthy ideas that make fame and fortune. If you've ever been hired for a role that needs creativity and then felt let down by your new talent, you'll understand what I mean.

[Sigmund Freud](#) had a theory that our conscious state is similar to a valve, much like a tap, releasing thoughts that have surfaced from the cavernous unconscious. It's a deep thought indeed and one that Freud himself struggled to gain any traction with. Still, it helps explain why skills of the imagination are so elusive to business. You really have to dive deep to find them.

For some organisational leaders, creative thinking is both the biggest asset and the biggest risk in their business. Simply because they are bipolar opposites. Business likes rigour and timeliness and making money. And creativity... well creativity likes getting lost in a dream world and can be indifferent about money.

A popular strategy I've seen amongst leaders who want to gain some control over creativity and offset its risks, like budget, goal and timeline blowouts, is including greater *diversity of thought* amongst their teams. On paper, diversity of thought is a brilliant concept where our physical make up is entirely irrelevant. What diversity of thought seeks to achieve is a better flow of ideas through the business.

However, the real concern of diversity of thought for leaders is that they also have to make sure that they have enough people capable of thinking in the direction the business needs. Not all creative thinkers are created equal. Getting the balance right between new ideas that are good and ones that are bad is a challenge for every business. Mediocrity awaits the business that does not get this balance right. Mediocrity is the enemy of innovation.

During the GFC, I worked alongside the Managing Director of The Advertising Works in Brisbane, Australia. This MD passionately believed that “no one holds the stake on ideas”. The MD felt that so long as an idea meets the needs of the customer, does it really matter where it comes from? Such an approach removed the territorial boundaries around creativity across the various departments. Of course, not every idea was executable, feasible or sensible. Some evolved from good ideas into great successes that the whole team celebrated. For example, in one instance a Media Manager had the idea to incorporate the Brisbane Broncos football team in the promotion of a retail clients electronic goods. That idea succeeded and produced an exciting campaign that afforded both the creative and account teams an occasion to work with a larger array of marketing channels.

For all the sifting through ideas, it was exciting to see enlightenment within those brave enough to share their ideas. For some people it was *the* moment when they realised they were capable of delivering good creative ideas *at work*.

Thinking “out of the box” does not come easy to some people. Everyone to some extent tends to think in patterns. This is one of the ideas discussed by Nobel Prize winning author Daniel Kahneman in [Thinking Fast and Slow](#). Kahneman explains how we extract ideas from our memory, with each idea connected to many others. Much like branches on a tree. A person might continue the pattern by choice or they might be trapped by it. For their whole life they might follow the same pattern. You could say they have a one track mind. It's not until embracing the opportunity to break the cycle that a new pattern and new ideas form. They then start to see new potential and create new realities.

The mindset that is encouraged in teams matters to creative output. Creativity is not just a capability, it's a *mindset*. As John Heskett, author of [Creativity and the Wandering Mind](#) reminds us, creativity is a state of mind that can be activated by anyone looking for new ideas. Which means that when we're looking for new ideas in our business, all we need to do is open our creative mind.

It's a given that we all have different thoughts already because we are all different. But we are all capable of being more creative than we might think we are. Every business needs to encourage every member of staff to believe in their own ability to imagine innovative ways to improve the business. Such an approach will help grow both your business and the people within it.



Tanyika Fraser

Corporate and Competitive Strategist, Oceanic Strategies.

Tanyika provides competitive strategies and action plans for the health, education, infrastructure, urban development and consumer goods markets. Tanyika completed AIB's Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2020. In her free time, Tanyika acts as a strategic advisor to not-for-profit organisations.