Escape default thinking, boring results and poor teamwork. Multiply your team’s creative output, collaboration and solution quality.
Executive Summary

Contemporary workplaces and workplace problems are becoming increasingly complex. We need new and augmented ways of thinking and doing in order to rise to the challenges of the innovation age. But one of the most important and effective skills to help us with these challenges is also one of the most misunderstood. Consequently, we tend to underutilised it.

I am referring to our creative problem-solving abilities.

Future focussed workplaces consciously and deliberately nurture teams that are proactive, collaborative and flexible when it comes to solving workplace problems. They are adept at using their creative problem-solving skills and collaborate effectively. Consequently, they deliver fresh and interesting solutions that rescue workplaces from default thinking and business-as-usual ruts.

Conventional practices in workplaces which favour risk avoidance, one way communication, default solutions, an unchallenged status quo, silos, hierarchies, autocratic decision making, no time, space or prioritisation for creative thinking, will not serve us well if we are to transform into future focussed, future ready, adaptable workplaces populated with people ready, able and willing to think creatively about how to do things differently.

The ability to solve problems creatively is one of the biggest skills gaps in contemporary workplaces.

This White Paper identifies common barriers to creative problem-solving and provides a model by which these may be addressed. Leaders can use this paper as a guide to identifying which stage of performance their teams are at and how they may facilitate development to the next level of performance.

The highest level of performance is identified as Solution-Centeredness where teams are adept at engaging in collective creative problem-solving and collaboration. Team members understand their creative problem-solving dispositions and have designed a personalised program of on-going development to upskill themselves in creative problem-solving approaches. A model identifying the components and intersections of this process is presented.
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The Challenges of the Contemporary Workplace

Contemporary workplaces face many challenges. Workloads are increasing so people need to think differently about how they do what they do. Resources are scarce so people need to find new ways of increasing output without increasing input i.e. do more with less and do differently to achieve more. Clients and customers are becoming increasingly sophisticated with higher expectations for what is delivered to them.

Oft quoted wisdom from Einstein is “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” Similarly, William Pollard warns, “The arrogance of success is to think that what you did yesterday will be sufficient for tomorrow.” Or as Marshall Goldsmith might put it “What got us here, won’t get us there.”

All these great thinkers are telling us that if we want to be successful into the future, no matter how successful we have been in the past, we have to change and evolve our thinking and doing.

There is an imperative for organisations today to think about the problems that are facing them using different perspectives and also to solve those problems in different ways so they can come up with better outcomes. Problems have more moving parts more stakeholders, more variations, variables, more complexity, and paradoxically, also more constraints. A huge shift is required in the way we think and problem-solve.

Teams know that there are increasing expectations on them to work collaboratively to increase productivity. But when people are busy they default to established patterns of thinking because it is easy and quick. So, teams invariably solve problems in the same way over and over with only slight variations. What is needed is a culture of new ideas and new approaches to problem-solving to drive productivity in the workplace. This requires much more than the occasional brainstorming session – but an embedded approach to problem solving that encourages and evokes creative thinking.

The biggest challenge in organisations today is developing individuals with the ability to think creatively. The 2016 World Economic Forum Report entitled The Future of Jobs: Employment skills and workforce strategy for the fourth industrial revolution reports that by 2020 creativity will be third on the list of top ten workplace skills behind complex problem-solving and critical thinking. Creativity has become a core leadership competency.

The New Paradigm: It’s time for us to change our thinking about how we do creative problem-solving in the workplace.

We are moving from a workplace paradigm where creativity for so long has been a ‘fringe’ activity, the marginalised, poor cousin of logical thinking. But we are now transitioning into an era where creative thinking is gaining the respect and attention it deserves, taking its rightful place alongside analytical and critical thinking. It is becoming embedded in the culture of progressive organisations and is a first (rather than a last) resort when looking for solutions. Cinderella has finally arrived at the castle!

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http://reports.weforum.org/future-of-jobs-2016/  
How could it be otherwise in a world where success is as much dependant on experimentation as efficiencies and flexibility as formulas. Creative thinking is the compliment to logical thinking that unlocks the full gamut of higher order thought processes and problem-solving approaches. People who can be comfortable with switching among all different kinds of thinking are the ones who will bring deep and holistic solutions to complex problems.

Progressive organisations with high performing teams know that:
1. Creativity must not be an incidental, but rather an embedded, regular activity
2. Creativity should not be left to a few brave mavericks but instead be practiced by everyone
3. Creativity should not be perceived as an inexplicable, mysterious force but is recognised and respected as a fundamental human capacity that complements, augments and enhances our other thought processes.

However there is a huge skills gap in most organisations when it comes to people being confident with using their creativity because traditionally developing people’s creative thinking skills has not been a priority in most organisations. This, despite the fact that research shows that high-performing work-places have cultures and leadership styles that support the innovation ambitions and creativity among staff. Most workplaces have a lot of catching up to do in this area.

Creativity Is For Everyone

We live in the innovation age. Innovation is generated by creative thinking and problem-solving. Creativity is the raw material that fuels and feeds the furnace of innovation. Any workplace that says they want a culture of innovation but ignores the role of creativity is destined for frustration. Creativity needs to be embedded into the DNA of future-focused organisations. Sadly, for some organisations DNA seems to stand for Does Not Apply. If we want innovation we need creativity! What’s more, it needs to be embraced at all layers of the organisation including the top management team.

People have lost their belief in their creative abilities. We need to reclaim it. While the last few years have generally brought higher levels of awareness about creativity as the new core leadership and workplace competency, there is a long way to go. Until we have a situation where the MAJORITY of the workforce sees themselves as creative problem-solvers, we have work to do. The good news is that it is improving. A few years ago, when I would ask the question during my conference keynotes of work-shop presentations “Who considers themselves to be creative?” very few hands would go up. Now there are more – but not enough.

“Access to talented and creative people is to modern workplaces what access to coal and iron-ore was to steel-making.”

Richard Florida, Professor at the University of Toronto said

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But it is neither a quick nor easy task to reshape decades, even centuries, of perceptions about creativity. For so long it has been thought of as the exclusive domain of the lone genius beavering away in a studio, a lab or in their parents’ garage.

But the last several decades of research from the fields of cognitive science, cognitive psychology and brain science have ushered in a new way of thinking about the skills and capacities generally referred to as creativity. These disciplines have revealed that – what for so long has popularly been considered the exclusive domain of a relatively small number of innately talented individuals, is in fact, a universal human capacity. What differentiates performance in this area is not just inherent giftedness born out of genetic predispositions (which some researchers say accounts for only about 25% of performance) but factors that are much less mysterious – such as desire, focus, practice, persistence, and learning methodologies.

This is wonderful news! This conceptualisation of creativity and creative problem-solving comes precisely at a time when we need a tidal wave of fresh and original thinking to address the complex challenges facing our world and our workplaces. Creativity is the new black!

**Develop rather than import**

The question therefore is no longer “How do we find and recruit talented and creative people and leaders to supercharge our workplaces for advantage in the innovation age?” but rather “How do we tap into and develop the natural capacities of all our people to become adept at creative problem-solving, able to rise to the challenges of the innovation age?”

But organisations typically go looking for ‘talent’ because it is the easy option. Much faster to hire someone with a reputation for creative leadership to head up a new team. But it is a short-term solution. Much harder to change the culture and bring everyone on the journey. But if the culture is not supportive of creativity even those who have been brought on-board will struggle. The result? They will either lose their spark or leave. If you drop ice cubes into a glass of room temperature water, they cool it down for a little while but soon melt and then the whole system returns to the original state. There is no substitute for doing the hard work of transforming the culture, implementing extended learning and development programs that develop people’s mental flexibility and creative problem-solving skills on an everyday basis.

The next section identifies and explores common barriers to embedding creative problem-solving in our professional practice.

**Hurdles:** Have you ever said or thought any of the following?

1. “We don’t have the time or space to think creatively”

Our ability to break out of established patterns of thought, to approach and solve problems in new ways, look at situations from a different perspective and bring in fresh ideas will determine the quality of our outcomes. Problem is that people are so busy that they are not motivated to think outside the box in order to generate better solutions. It takes additional effort, attention and yes initially time in order to change established practices. It takes a preparedness to sign up for some initial frustration and mental exertion as we challenge ourselves to think in new ways. Much easier to say, “What did we do last time we were faced with something like this?” While that may be a good starting point, if we don’t take it further to then look at how to do it better, consider alternatives that will improve outcomes or consciously and deliberately inject some fresh thinking into the situation, we are simply reproducing and further entrenching the status quo. In a world that is changing so fast, that is a dangerous practice.
2. “Our team meetings are predictable, repetitive, ‘business as usual’ experiences with ‘same ‘ol, same ‘ol’ results.”

It is so easy to fall into ruts with our organisational procedures. Things that may have served a purpose once but have outlived their usefulness stay entrenched simply because they’ve become institutionalised and no one has thought to change it. How we do meetings is a classic example. In a world where collaboration and collective problem-solving are proving to be keys to higher productivity, many workplaces are still running meetings as they did 10 years ago. They are one way talk fests, with one way communication resulting in disengaged, disempowered team members whose great ideas seldom get an airing.

3. “We know we need to think differently in order to do differently so we can deliver better project outcomes and meet workplace challenges in new ways - but we don’t know how.”

There is pressure on leaders and managers these days, often from senior leaders or the executive committee, to bring change into their teams and work units. However, they aren’t provided with professional development, upskilling, direction, mentoring or guidance about how to make it happen. Consequently, many managers and leaders struggle to implement the kind of meaningful change that transforms the culture, productivity and practices of the teams they lead in order to become truly solution-centred. Not because they don’t want to but because they don’t know how to.

4. “Even if we wanted to be better creative problem-solvers, my team and I are simply not creative”

Even with the best will in the world and an acknowledgement that their team’s outcomes and solutions would benefit from some creative problem-solving, many leaders (mistakenly) think of creative thinking and problem-solving as something they can’t do because they are not creative enough. It might be because they feel that logical, analytical, critical thinking comes more naturally for them rather than imagination, ideation and creation. Or it may be that people have lost faith in their capacity to be creative because it is a facility they haven’t used, practiced and honed in the workplace. They may be skilled technicians but don’t see themselves as out-of-the-box thinkers. Or perhaps they think that that sort of activity is reserved just for the Pixars and Googles of the world and not a government department or an organisation that doesn’t sit in the ‘creative’ sector.

5. We have to stick to what we know works rather than be creative because we operate in a risk averse environment and we can’t afford to make mistakes, take risks or waste resources.

In a world where most of us are being expected to do more with less, operate with high levels of accountability and be good stewards of limited resources, it is difficult to justify experimentation. Trialling anything new inevitably carries a potential risk of failure which is often considered unacceptable. Failures attract the wrong kind of attention, damage reputations and stall careers.
Five common reasons why teams do not reach their full creative problem-solving potential

1. A lack of insight into how people solve problems – both individually and collaboratively.
2. Team members do not understand their individual problem-solving preferences and how this impacts on their thinking and decision making.
3. Inability to use cognitive tools both individually and collaboratively that can significantly augment the quality of thinking and outcomes.
4. Teams do not know their collective problem-solving profiles and how this influences their capacity to deliver better solutions.
5. Teams are not leveraging their diversity through effective collaboration.

The Answer is Solution-Centeredness

In order to rise to the challenges of the contemporary workplace, teams need to learn how to:

- Create the space and environment in which good creative problem-solving can be facilitated
- Use the strategies and techniques needed that will help them to achieve creative outcomes
- Become confident in using cognitive tools effectively to produce creative solutions.

Such a team is referred to as a Solution-Centred Team. It is one that is high performing when it comes to developing creative responses and solutions to the challenges that face their team or their organisation.

Solution-Centred teams have three essential qualities. Clarity, creativity and collaboration. They have team members who:

1. Know and understand their creative problem-solving styles and preferences. (Clarity)
2. Are able to use the next generation of creative problem-solving tools such as StrateGEE® to think more productively about workplace challenges and issues. (Creativity)
3. Can work together effectively and problem-solve collectively to leverage their team diversity. (Collaboration)

These qualities will be examined in more detail later in this paper.

The Road to Solution-Centeredness

In this section I present three models. The first one, the Solution Quality Matrix, helps to identify the extent to which your team (or workplace) is able to operate as an expert creative problem-solving unit, the second model charts the pathway to solution-centeredness, and the third model is a matrix that unpacks the various characteristics of the different points in that journey.

Together these models may be helpful to you in identifying which level of performance your team members are at in relation to creative problem-solving performance.

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7Disclaimer. Anytime I present a model I always include the caveat that models are simultaneously useful and flawed. Real world applications are rarely as cut and dried as represented in models. Nonetheless models are useful conceptual frameworks that provide a reference point from which to examine contexts and situations.
Model 1 - The Solution Quality Matrix

The matrix below looks at the kinds of outcomes produced by workplaces or teams depending on the extent to which they have embraced creative problem solving. The two axes are a continuum between creative-problem solving versus routine problem-solving and the extent to which creative approaches to problem solving are a core versus casual activity.

The Axes

The X Axis - ‘Creative-Problem Solving’ Versus ‘Routine Problem-Solving’ Axis

This represents the extent to which people stick to well defined procedures versus consciously and actively looking for fresh solutions, processes and ideas. At the creative end, people are seeking better solutions and are confident in the use of tools and cognitive frameworks to scaffold and extend their thinking and collaboration, especially when dealing with complex, ill-defined problems.

At the routine end, people follow well-defined progressions through problem-solving relying on processes that have worked well previously to solve clearly articulated and well defined problems.
The Y Axis - The ‘Core’ Versus ‘Casual’ Axis

This is the extent to which a commitment to creative problem-solving is embedded into a team’s or organisation’s systems or processes.

If it is a core value, then creativity is front and centre with a VIP seat at every meeting. It is prioritised and embedded into the systems and processes of the team or organisation. There is a commitment to it on the part of the leaders and team members.

If it is a casual activity then creativity is ad hoc, inconsistently applied and seen as an ‘add-on’, nice-to-have, not a need-to-have. Creativity is only put on the agenda when someone remembers occasionally.

The Quadrants

The ‘Solution Unreliability’ Quadrant

This quadrant represents the teams that have perhaps had some training and development in creative thinking and problem-solving in an attempt to improve outcomes but are not using and applying their learnings regularly and systematically. Because they don’t practice often enough, on the occasions when they do get around to it, their activities and outcomes are clumsy rather than elegant. Occasionally they may produce a result that is creative, that addresses the issue they were solving; however, it is more by serendipity than by design. Generally speaking, their efforts are hit-and-miss and they can’t be relied on to deliver consistently.

The ‘Solution Chaos’ Quadrant

This quadrant is the home of ineptitude. Little or no training and development, or awareness-raising has been provided in relation to thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, information-sharing, collaborating. Outcomes are often below par as even routine solutions (let alone creative ones) are not produced effectively. Confusion reigns. Team meetings are dysfunctional. Members of teams in this quadrant lack clarity about processes that would lead to good outcomes. Channels of communication are blocked. People have no idea where the relative strengths lie of team members so they can be harnessed. Because outcomes are poor, it is hard for people to feel proud of their work which leads to a lack of motivation and purpose frequently accompanied by high levels of disengagement.

The ‘Solution Predictability’ Quadrant

Teams in this quadrant are excellent at producing standard responses and predictable solutions. They work well together to use tried-and-true processes which they have honed over time and which have become standard routines. They apply existing processes and procedures well which means that they default to ‘business as usual’ approaches. They can be relied on to deliver competent but uninspired results when solving well-defined problems. Their strength is in reproducing the status quo without necessarily looking for better procedures, outcomes or ways of adding value. Their solutions are neat, orderly and conventional. Thinking is generated using existing mental models without actively seeking to experiment - so they could be in danger of stagnation. They are ideally suited to static environments but would struggle in a VUCA\(^8\) context or solving complex ‘wicked’\(^9\) problems.

\(^8\)Volatile Unpredictable Complex Ambiguous

\(^9\)A class of problems characterised by constantly changing conditions which makes them resistant to resolution.
The ‘Solution Centred’ Quadrant

This is the quadrant where future-focussed teams and team members, committed to consistent, high quality, fresh outcomes reside. They have been upskilled in the use of various creative thinking techniques and tools, understand the processes and are confident with their ability to produce interesting solutions that move on from ‘business as usual’ responses. Solution centred teams understand the different kinds of creative problem-solving approaches in their team and use that knowledge to collaborate effectively. They know how to deal with the frustrations that often arise when tackling complex problems so as not to damage team relationships and cohesion. Consequently, their solutions are invariably elegant, effective, original. And they can be relied on to produce these consistently rather than sporadically because they apply creative thinking tools regularly and systematically.

Model 2 - Moving Towards Solution-Centeredness

Any team wanting to become more ‘solution-centred’ needs two things. Firstly, training and development in problem-solving and collaboration using greater flexibility of thought to produce fresh outcomes. Secondly a commitment to using these new ways of thinking and problem-solving on a regular basis in team meetings, when collaborating and progressing through projects.

Where does your team sit?

Most workplace teams are in the solution predictability quadrant. However if they are below the line and are clumsy or inept problem-solvers then an initial starting place is to engage in some basic problem-solving training to learn how to think productively together as a team before tackling the more challenging and demanding task of group creative problem-solving.

Let’s focus on the ‘Solution-Predictability’ quadrant. Suppose a team is highly effective at routine problem-solving but realises they are stagnating and wants to become more creative in their approaches. The pathway is represented by the 4 positions on Model 2 following.
POSITION 1 represents a team that is deeply entrenched in established problem-solving approaches. One characteristic of this position is that the team could be stagnating because of their reliance of business-as-usual approaches. If this team wants to become solution centred they need to be prepared to dis-embed their default procedures and begin to move towards approaches that are more creative and experimental.

POSITION 2 represents the team that is questioning the value of their established procedures and approaches to problem-solving, realising that they are not delivering the kinds of outcomes they are seeking. They are interested in actively looking for better ways of doing things.

POSITION 3 represents the team that has found approaches to problem-solving that allow them to cross over from routine to creative problem-solving. They have moved past the tipping point into the solution centred quadrant. This is where they begin to experiment with creative problem-solving techniques.

POSITION 4 represents the team that has made effective creative problem-solving the new normal and has embedded the practices of solution-centeredness.
Model 3 - Characteristics of teams at different levels

As teams move towards becoming more solution-centred their focus shifts as does their value to the organisation, as illustrated in the model below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Solution Centered Problem-Solvers</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>X8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Engaged Problem-Solvers</td>
<td>Experimentation</td>
<td>X4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interested Problem-Solvers</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>X2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stagnant Problem-Solvers</td>
<td>Maintenance</td>
<td>X1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below the line</td>
<td>Resistant Problem-Solvers</td>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>X-1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

INFLECTION POINT

Model 3: Position characteristics

Let’s start at the bottom and work our way up.

**RESISTANT PROBLEM-SOLVERS** (positioned below the line in Model 2) are in denial. They either don’t realise how much trouble they are in or don’t care. They tend to be a combination of disengaged and defiant and may even intentionally undermine attempts to generate and/or introduce new ideas and different ways of thinking. Not only do they not want to improve their problem-solving skills, they don’t want others to do it either because it will show them up. So, they undermine any initiatives or training and development aimed at this. Behaviour may take the form of passive aggression or deliberate derailing of meetings where new thinking techniques are being introduced. Their activity reduces rather than enhances the productivity of the organisation. If you said to this person or this team, “We need creative solutions to our workplace challenges, they’d say, “Not going to happen”.

**STAGNANT PROBLEM-SOLVERS** (Position 1 in Model 2) are entrenched in default thinking. They rely on existing procedures and practices to address workplace problems. They are preoccupied with maintaining the status quo and are uncomfortable with the uncertainty that comes with change and new thinking. They are content to stay in their comfort zone. If you said to this person or this team, “We need more creative solutions to our workplace challenges” they’d say, “Too hard” or “I don’t have time” or “If it ain’t broke why are you trying to fix it?”
INTERESTED PROBLEM-SOLVERS (Position 2 in Model 2) are aware that the team/organisation needs fresh thinking so they are questioning their existing practices and are prepared to consider alternative ideas. They are open to doing things differently but are not sure how to proceed. If you said to this person or this team, “We need creative solutions to our workplace challenges, they’d say, “I’m listening. Go on.”

ENGAGED PROBLEM-SOLVERS (Position 3 in Model 2) are willing to experiment with fresh ideas and want to find new and better ways of addressing workplace challenges. They are able to use tools to improve thinking, problem-solving & decision making. If you said to this person or this team, “We need creative solutions to our workplace challenges, they’d say “Sure let’s give it a go”.

SOLUTION CENTRED PROBLEM-SOLVERS (Position 4 in Model 2) proactively, confidently and regularly use problem-solving models and tools to scaffold mental agility, adaptive thinking and collaboration to deliver better outcomes. They are comfortable with ambiguity and complexity and are committed to producing outcomes that add value rather than reproducing what already exits. The solution-centered individual comes to you with SOLUTIONS rather than problems. The solution centered team knows how to boost performance through creativity to deliver innovation. If you said to this person or this team, “We need creative solutions to our workplace challenges, they’d say “Bring it on! I’ve got some ideas”.

Creating Solution-Centred Teams

In a previous section Solution Centred Teams populated by Solution Centred Problem-Solvers were identified as having have three essential qualities. Clarity, creativity and collaboration. Let us now look in more detail at each of these qualities and examine their intersections.
Clarity
Profiling tools have, for decades, been popular ways of helping us to understand behaviour, personality styles and thinking preferences. Because of the insights they bring, they can help individuals as well as teams to function more productively, identify potential sources of conflict and help managers to understand and appreciate the diversity of their workforce.

Most people are unaware of their natural creative problem-solving styles. Using a simple profiling tool to identify preferred approaches has many benefits. If team members know and understand their own and others’ preferences and approaches to problem-solving it can help with decision making, productivity and working relationships.

Creativity
Our amazing brain is highly responsive. If we nurture it in the right way and provide it with some helpful tools we can become even more creative. In the same way that our muscles develop strength and flexibility when we go to a gym regularly, our brain develops creative capacity when we practice creative thinking. And to continue the analogy, just as having purpose built equipment at a gym can help a workout, using well-crafted, comprehensive, next generation, cognitive tools such as StrateGEE® can help with developing our creative thinking skills.

StrateGEE® shows problem-solvers how to fluidly move among different kinds of thinking modalities in order to develop mental flexibility. It takes a ‘whole’ brain approach to problem-solving’ that is more nuanced than the traditional left brain – right brain integration. Rather it is about being able to weave together four different modes of thought and know when to switch among them in order to make our thinking adaptable and agile.

Collaboration
Diversity in teams is a source of strength but can also be a potential source of conflict. A group of people working together is not necessarily a ‘team’ if they work at cross purposes, misunderstand each other’s styles, approaches and dispositions and undervalue each other’s strengths.

It is therefore useful for team members to know and understand the creative thinking styles of their fellow team members. Instead of being a source of potential frustration or conflict, people’s different creative thinking styles can be appreciated for the strengths they bring to a team. Highly diverse teams display a greater propensity for creative problem-solving. Research shows that a diverse team will develop better solutions than a team of like-minded experts.

Learning to harness that diversity is a powerful resource for future-focused workplaces.

Clarity + Creativity = Individual Plans
There is always opportunity to develop and capitalise on creative capacities. Once people are clear about their preferences and understand the various dimensions of the StrateGEE® creativity tool, they can develop an individual plan for themselves to help them to extend their thinking in different ways.

StrateGEE is a creative problem-solving framework and methodology developed by Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw as part of her Doctoral research into creative problem-solving.
Creativity + Collaboration = Group Problem-Solving

Group problem-solving, is often not well done in workplaces - especially for complex problems requiring creative outcomes. The process can be greatly facilitated through the use of tools and methodologies that prompt people into new ways of thinking. StrateGEE® is a heuristic which helps to support people’s creative thinking as they work through complex situations. It can be used to guide a group through a problem space towards higher quality outcomes using cognitive prompts in the form of questions.

Collaboration + Clarity = Team Profiles

Creating a team profile (or cluster map) based on the aggregate of individual team member’s dispositions gives the team valuable insights into their collective strengths and weaknesses. It is useful for a team to be aware of their ‘mix’ so they can consciously address gaps. An insight into the collective profile of a team’s creative thinking preferences can be an excellent starting place for improving productivity and outcome quality as well as cohesion and relationships. If projects run behind schedule or over budget, some of the reasons for this could be found in the team constituency.

Next steps

If you would like to know more about creating Solution-Centred Teams populated with solution-centred problem-solvers who can transform your workplace, request an information brochure from Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw.
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About the Author

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Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw is on a mission to liberate innovation, creativity and leadership within people and organisations.

A highly experienced, qualified and respected corporate consultant, educator, mentor and professional speaker she knows what works and why when it comes to helping individuals and organisations grow and develop. She thrives on demystifying, enabling and facilitating innovation and creativity and is skilled at unlocking the enormous human potential that languishes within most organisations.

Dr. Irena has a potent combination of deep academic knowledge and real-world entrepreneurial experience. With a PhD in creative problem-solving and a Master’s degree in Adult Education, she is well placed to help leaders develop effective approaches to innovation and creative leadership.

Although working across all sectors, for the last few years Dr. Irena has specialised in assisting public sector agencies to become more innovative. Her work in this area ranges from delivering single workshops or keynotes through to long term projects designed to change the culture of the organisation.

She is the author of Leading in the Innovation Age: Unleash knowledge, talent and experience to create an innovative workplace.

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What People Are Saying

“The Solution Centred Teams framework was an excellent individual and team based assessment model. It was quick to implement, easy to understand and has provided significant insight for my team, not only as individuals, but also in identifying team gaps and areas for development. In only one hour I knew individual and our team’s creative problem-solving preferences. Within two hours the team was looking at strategies to develop into areas they are less comfortable in. These developments were incorporated into their individual performance appraisals and will be recalled when forming project teams.”


“Irena’s program was exceptional! I felt motivated and inspired and my dormant creativity jumped to attention. You have an amazing delivery that is inclusive, informative, consultative and challenging.”

A. Walker. Dispute Resolution Centre. Cairns

“The StrateGEE® tool is easy to apply and not intimidating. Leaders can easily understand it and relate it to their teams.”

Danielle Anderson. Executive Director. DSITI.

“One of the key wisdoms from the Ancient Greeks is to “know thyself”. To truly know yourself and identify your strengths and weaknesses is incredibly powerful. The StrateGEE® model does just that. It is a simple and structured method that brings self-awareness about the type of ‘creative problem-solver’ you are and what traits typically represent you. Most importantly, it is adaptive and doesn’t ‘pigeon-hole’ you, but rather gives insight into how you can evolve your thinking. It then goes a step further to help you develop and capitalize on that. With this important knowledge, you can get the best out of your team, your peers and yourself.”

S. Duke, Senior Manager Sustainability. North Queensland Bulk Port Corporation.

“Irena’s StrateGEE® model taps into a variety of fundamental creative problem-solving skills and synthesises them into a powerful tool to access new ideas about old problems.”

M. Delebet, Manager, OSD Pipelines.

“Irena’s Solution Centred Teams program has provided increased knowledge for our team, built their skill and also their confidence to challenge their perceptions and change their behaviour. She has an ability to relate to and engage with everyone in the group when presenting, bringing in everyone’s contribution. I am already seeing great results in altered thinking, and application of the learnings. Thankyou Irena for your contribution in helping our leadership team master collaboration for dynamic business outcomes.”

Sandra Gillanders. CEO. Hy-Performance Fluid Power Pty Ltd.

“A very useful tool and process to help facilitate the development of high performing teams.”

R. Gibb. Account Manager. DSITI.

“Being able to think outside the square and to bring innovative perspectives to challenges can make the difference between average performance and admired success! Irena conveyed complex information in an accessible and understandable way, providing participants with an array of creative-problem-solving tools. My staff who would not normally have seen themselves as being creative now feel empowered and able to do so. Thank you Irena.”


“I love the concept of a simple, no frills, easy-to-use tool that helps me understand the rest of the world. Now I know to allow space for others to offer ideas and how to encourage others to follow my lead without overpowering them.”

P. Burgmann. Project Manager. DSITI.

“I have done a lot of programs in my career and have found this to be one of the most useful. Irena’s training was snappy and well run. And the tool is easy to use and implement in the business.”

Sarah Vandersee. Director Advisory Services. QSS. DSITI.
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