

# Proposal for consideration as a presenter at the ACLE 2013 conference Brisbane

**Dr Irena Yashin-Shaw**

[irena@innovationedge.com.au](mailto:irena@innovationedge.com.au)

[www.innovationedge.com.au](http://www.innovationedge.com.au)

0411330301/(07)38495003

107 Zetland St. Upper Mount Gravatt. Brisbane 4122. Qld.

## Paper presentation but delivered in an interactive style with some workshop elements

### Abstract

*Title: How to energise thinking for success in the innovation age*

How can we keep our thinking fresh and innovative in the face of heavy workloads, time constraints and entrenched practices? When faced with challenges daily in both our professional and personal lives, it is easy to fall into habitual ways of responding to them. But these do not serve us well in a world of hyper-change and constant innovation. Learning to effectively use some simple but powerful cognitive tools can lift our productivity, energise our thinking and help us to be flexible and adaptable creative problem-solvers who can thrive in the innovation age. In this presentation find out how to:

- Leap out of mental ruts by learning to generate new solutions to challenges
- Access your vast store of un-utilised or under-utilised knowledge and put it to good use
- Be innovative about how to apply new ideas in your context
- Lift your productivity by solving problems quickly and creatively
- Use some simple but powerful cognitive tools to turbo-charge your thinking and problem-solving.

The results? Increased productivity, creative thinking and innovative outcomes.

This topic addresses the conference theme of "What does a 'transformed mind look like?" as the key messages address the importance of thinking differently and shifting mindsets to improve performance in Lutheran schools. As such it is relevant to all the various stakeholders who work within the school community.

## Bio

### DR. IRENA YASHIN-SHAW DIRECTOR *INNOVATION EDGE*



Doctor of Philosophy (Griffith University)  
Master of Adult Education (Griffith University)  
Bachelor of Arts (Qld University)  
Associate of Trinity College London  
Diploma of Teaching (QUT)  
Professional Member of the National Speakers Assoc of Aust.  
Fellow of the Institute of Learning Professionals  
Certified Learning and Development Practitioner  
Fellow Australian Institute of Management

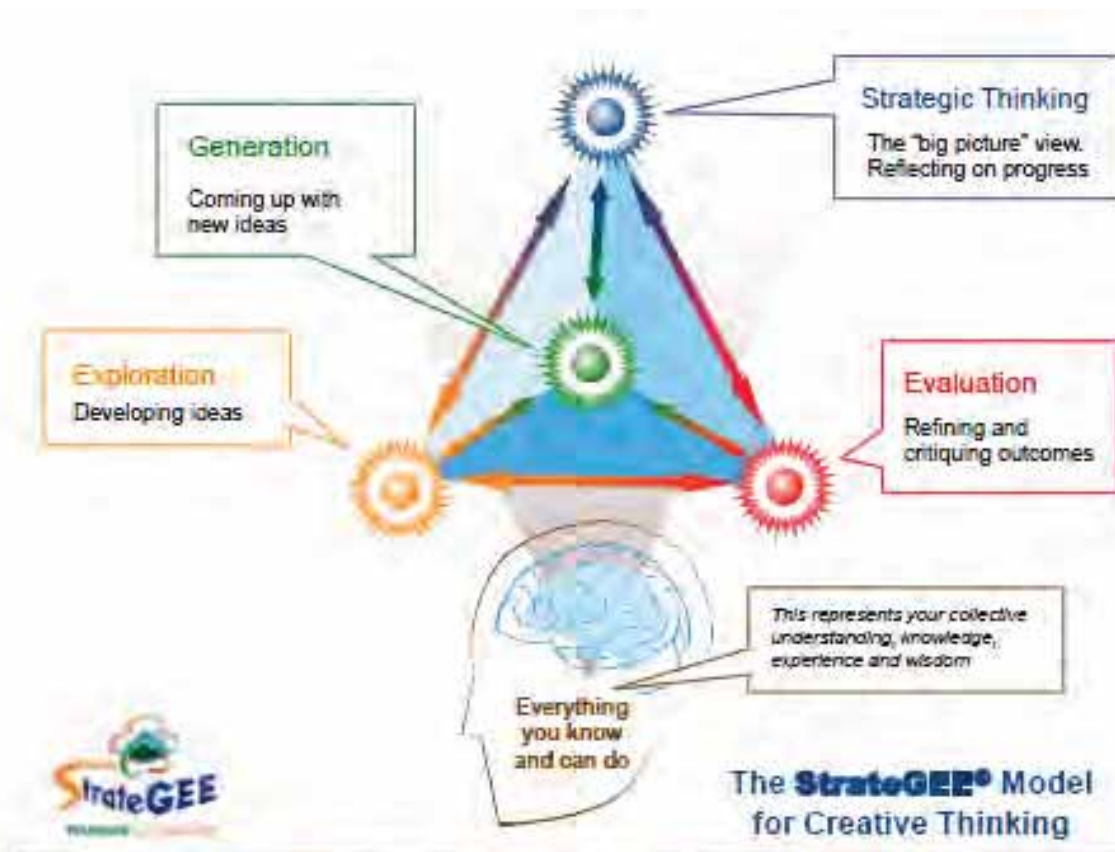
Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw PhD, founder of Innovation Edge is an innovation, creativity and communication specialist with a Doctorate in creative problem-solving, a Master's Degree in Adult Education. She is one of the most highly experienced, highly qualified and highly respected corporate educators and professional speakers working in Australia today. Prior to starting her consultancy in the private sector she was a *Senior Research Fellow* and academic at *Griffith University* where she worked on a number of university-wide strategic improvement initiatives while lecturing in various academic programs in the Education Faculty. Before that she was a high school maths/science teacher.

Now working nationally and internationally across the public, private and education sector, Dr. Irena has a rare combination of skills and experience with deep academic knowledge, real world business entrepreneurial experience and practical insights into what happens in classrooms and learning environments.

A sought after speaker and educator, Dr. Irena currently delivers programs across Australia as well as in Asia and the Middle East. Her expertise has been recognized by the *Commonwealth Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research* who in 2010, 2011 and 2012 awarded her competitive grants to educate businesses around Australia on how to improve their innovation capacity. The range of organisations she has worked with include large corporations such as BHP Billiton; Government departments of all levels such as the Australian Sports Commission, Qld Department of Transport and Main Roads and Brisbane City Council; to educational institutions such as Independent Schools Qld and SkillsTech, to SMEs such as Australian Aerospace, Stramit and Goodwill Engineering.

A committed lifelong learner, Dr. Irena practices what she preaches constantly updating her knowledge and skills to ensure that she delivers leading edge information, research and methodologies.

# HOW TO ENERGISE THINKING FOR SUCCESS IN THE INNOVATION AGE



## ***Innovation is .....***

- An iterative (messy) process rather than a clear, neat linear one e.g. you may choose to ask yourself some generation type questions later in the process or do some mini-brainstorming as you are exploring an idea. It is not something that should only be used at the beginning. So be prepared to be flexible.
- About applying heuristics (best guess/rule of thumb) rather than algorithms (formulas/tried and true methods)
- The *execution* of good ideas not just *having* ideas:
  - The StrateGEE model provides a support/ guide/ scaffold for the whole process from conceptualisation to implementation
  - Selectively use the question prompts on the next page to help move you through the process and give you some ideas about how to proceed
  - Do not follow the prompts slavishly in order but use your discretion about 'mixing and matching' the thought actions to move you forward.

**StrateGEE® Thought Actions for Creative Problem Solving**

<b>Strategising</b>	
What is the issue/challenge/purpose that needs to be addressed? <i>(Clarity)</i>	
When I'm finished what do I want this innovation to achieve? <i>(Goal Setting)</i>	
If this is a team project is everyone on the same page? <i>(Alignment)</i>	
If I need some fresh ideas - what else can I do? <i>(Switching)</i>	
Am I generally happy with the way things are going? <i>(Awareness)</i>	
Is what I'm doing going to help me achieve the aim of the project? <i>(Goal monitoring)</i>	
Is what I'm doing at the moment taking me in the general direction of where I think I want to go (even if I'm not sure about where that is exactly)? <i>(Interim strategy)</i>	
<b>Generating</b>	
What useful things do I already know about this project/issue/topic I can easily use to get started? <i>(Retrieval)</i>	
What other ideas can I come up with if I dig a little deeper? <i>(Search)</i>	
What are some related ideas that can extend my thinking? <i>(Association)</i>	
Can I blend two or more ideas together to come up with something different? <i>(Synthesis)</i>	
If I had to make a drawing or a model of this what it look like? <i>(Transformation)</i>	
What is the opposite of this and what insights does it give me? <i>(Contrast)</i>	
What would I see if I examined this situation from a completely different point of view? <i>(Perspective Shifting)</i>	
What is a good analogy or metaphor that will help me to explain/extend this concept? <i>(Analogy)</i>	
How can I make this idea really simple, easy and basic? <i>(Simplification)</i>	
<b>Exploring</b>	
How can I develop this idea by gathering and applying information from unusual/diverse sources beyond where I usually go for information? <i>(Research)</i>	
If I put this idea/project/potential innovation into a completely different place or time or context what would happen and what new insights does that give me? <i>(Changing context)</i>	
Are there interesting patterns/trends/ features that are emerging that I didn't notice before which can inform the process further? <i>(Attribute finding)</i>	
Are there other modalities/formats through which I can deliver this innovation? <i>(Experimenting)</i>	
What could be some of the problems, challenges or limitations I might need to think about and how could I address them? <i>(Acknowledging limitations)</i>	
Who can I team up with to enrich/extend/more easily implement this innovation? <i>(Collaboration)</i>	
<b>Evaluating</b>	
What are the strengths and weaknesses of this innovation when it is implemented? <i>(Analysis)</i>	
Being completely objective – does this solution represent a good 'return on investment'? <i>(Assessment)</i>	
When I run a 'pilot' or 'test drive' this innovation does it work well? What insights does it give me into what needs to be refined? <i>(Trialling)</i>	
Does this innovation do what it is supposed to? <i>(Criteria Fulfilment)</i>	
Is there anything that needs to be taken out because it detracts from the quality of the solution? <i>(Elimination)</i>	
Does this solution align with our strategic goals? <i>(Verification)</i>	
What's the <i>best</i> part of this solution/innovation? <i>(Selection)</i>	
Why is this outcome better (or worse) than another one? <i>(Comparison)</i>	
Could I 'sell' this idea to other people effectively and persuade them that it is a good solution? <i>(Advocating)</i>	

The problem-solving prompts are posed in the form of questions. This is because questions help to focus our thinking. If we want better outcomes we need to ask better questions.

These prompts are useful in both individual AND team problem-solving.

This list is not exhaustive – add your own!

## SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE

*What would I see if I examined this situation from a completely different point of view?*

What would I do differently in my school/classroom if I was .....

- *In this exercise put aside preconceptions and explore alternative ways of looking at a situation.*

Person	Their perspective

## ANALOGY

*What is a good analogy or metaphor that will help me to explain this concept?  
(Are there parallels here with other ideas or things?)*

An analogy is a comparison in which some similarity is found between different items. Analogies often provide *insights* and new ways of looking at concepts or situations and can be very instructive. Analogies find existing similarities even if they are very obscure. E.g.

**If your school was an animal what would it be and why?**



## KNOWLEDGE APPLICATION/RESEARCH

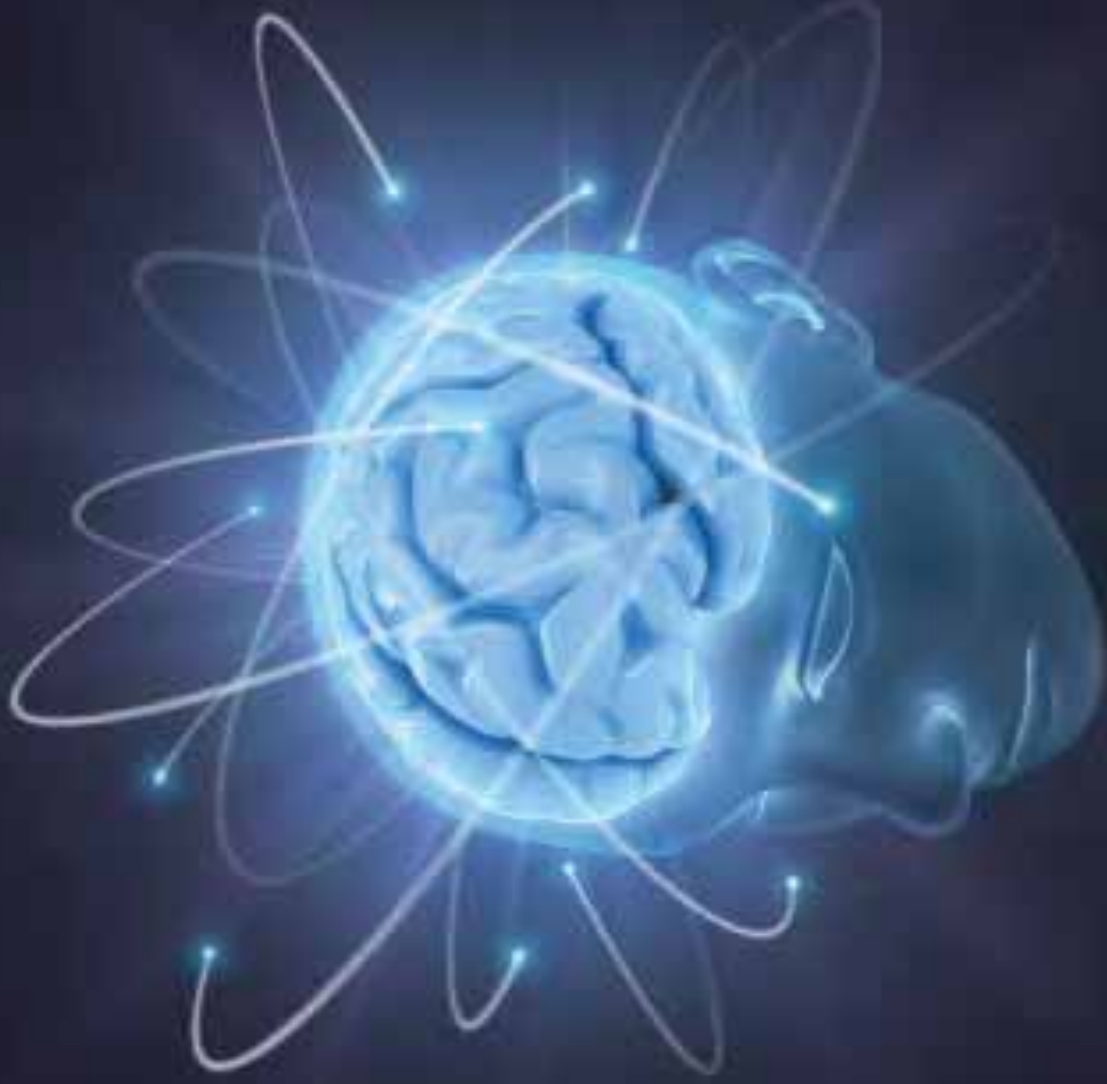
*Where can I go for more information?*

Where are the usual places I go to for information?	Where can I go for additional information that I have never tapped into before?

## COLLABORATION

*Who can I team up with to enrich/ extend/ more easily implement innovation?*

In teams of 2 – 4 collaborate and combine your discipline with at least one other discipline to come up with a completely new area of study/ subject/ course that would benefit students.



# *How to Energise Thinking for Success in the Innovation Age*

Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw

If your school was an animal what would it be and why?

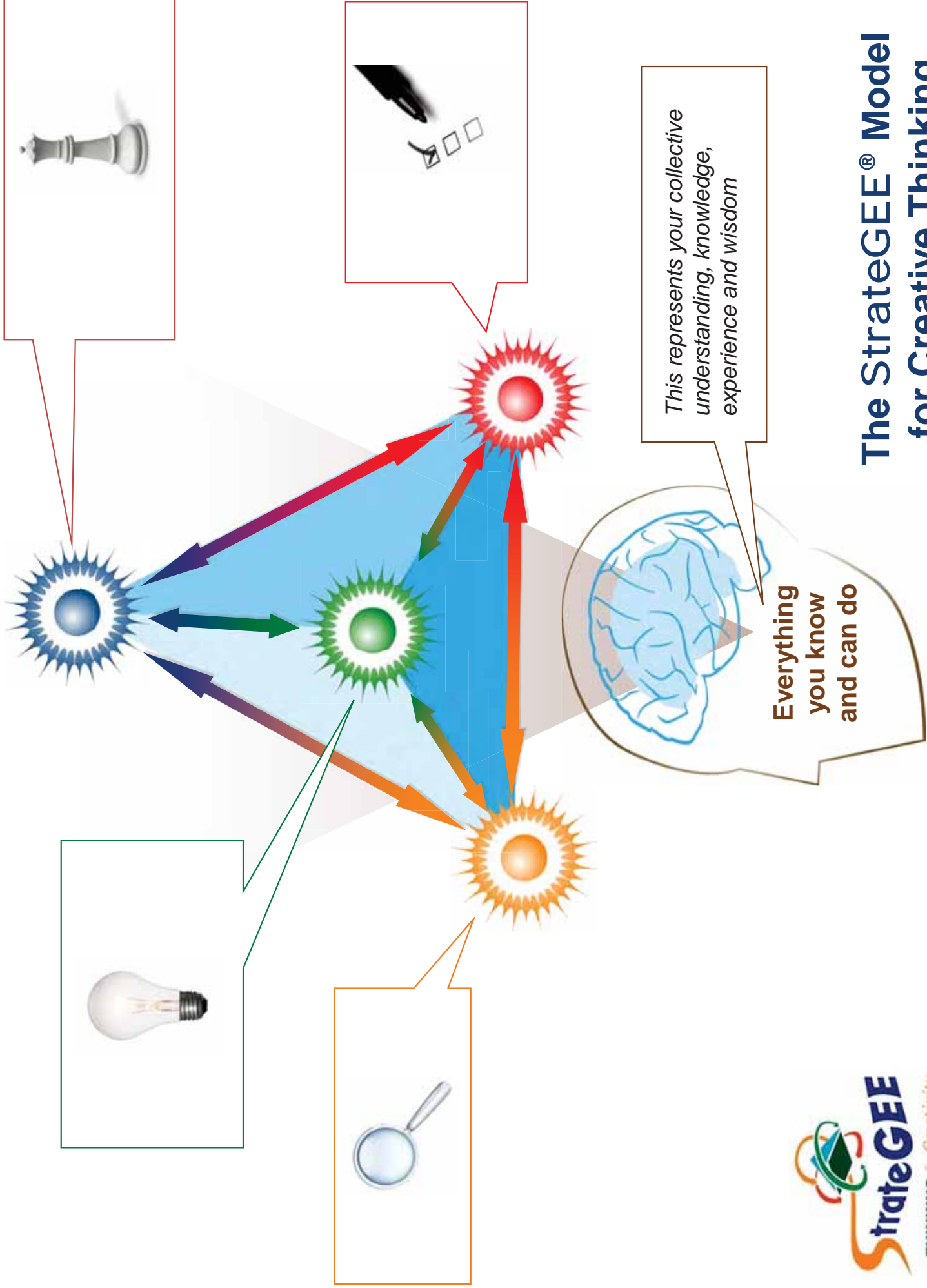




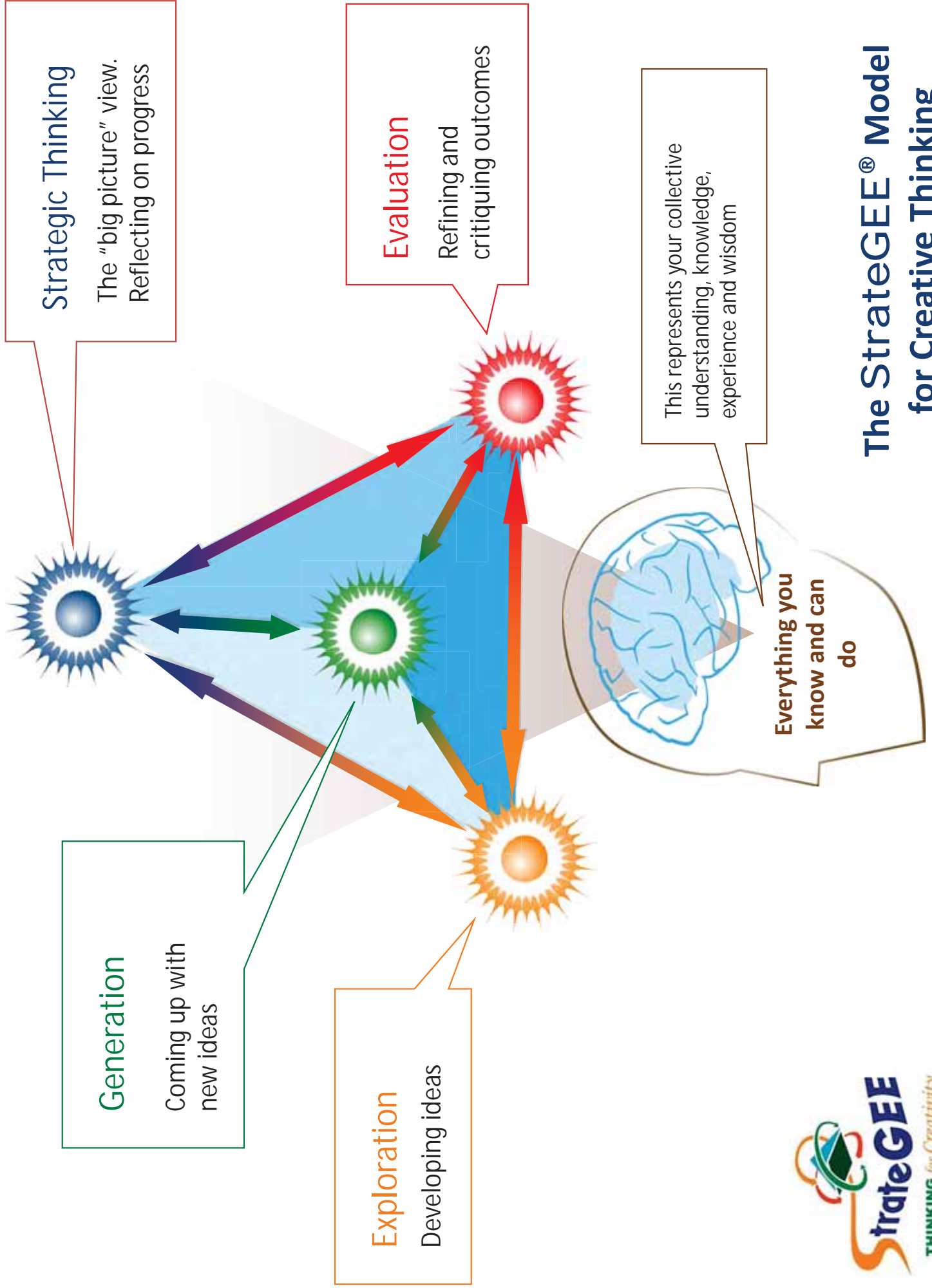


**StrateGEE**

**THINKING** *for Creativity*



# The StrateGEE® Model for Creative Thinking



**Strategic Thinking**

The "big picture" view.  
Reflecting on progress

**Evaluation**

Refining and critiquing outcomes

**Generation**

Coming up with new ideas

**Exploration**

Developing ideas

This represents your collective understanding, knowledge, experience and wisdom

Everything you know and can do

## Generation

- Search
- Retrieval
- Association
- Contrast
- Transformation
- Synthesis
- Perspective shifting
- Analogy
- Simplification

## Strategic Thinking

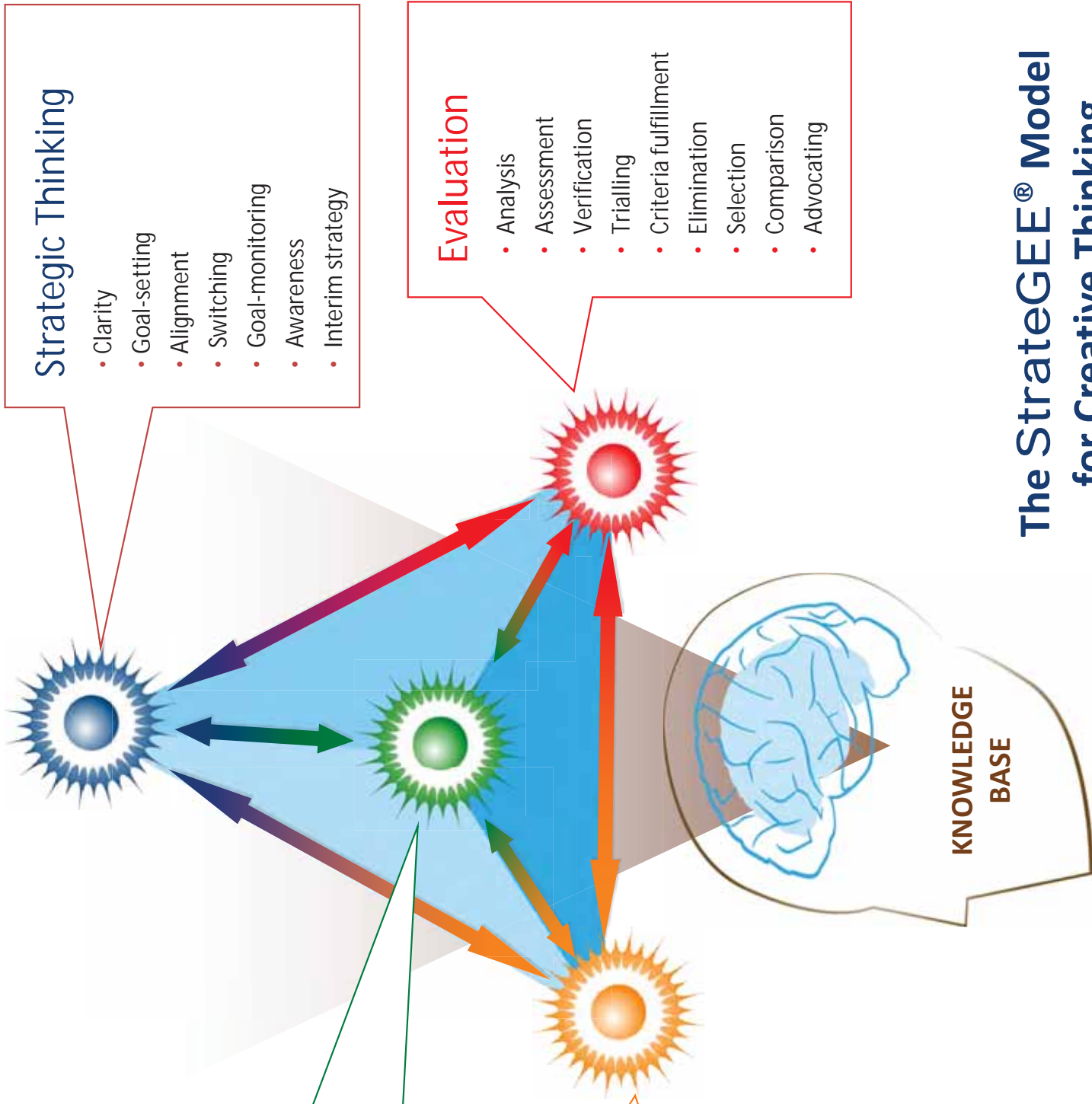
- Clarity
- Goal-setting
- Alignment
- Switching
- Goal-monitoring
- Awareness
- Interim strategy

## Evaluation

- Analysis
- Assessment
- Verification
- Trialling
- Criteria fulfillment
- Elimination
- Selection
- Comparison
- Advocating

## Exploration

- Research
- Experimentation
- Changing context
- Attribute finding
- Acknowledging limitations
- Collaboration



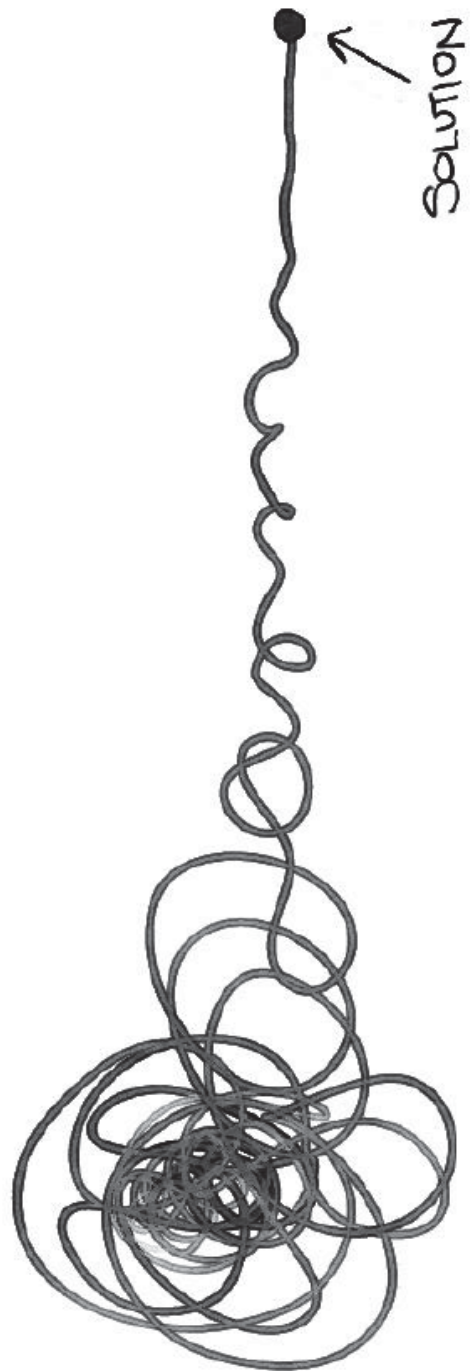
As you become better and better at creative problem solving and innovation which category of thought are you likely to use **more**?

**Generation**

**Exploration**

**Evaluation**

**Strategic Thinking**





*What innovation  
would I  
implement in  
my workplace  
if I was .....*

- Bill Gates
- Kath and Kim
- Nelson Mandela
- Arnold Schwarzenegger
- Walt Disney
- Andrew Denton
- Paris Hilton

# Knowledge Treasure Hunt

**Where do I usually go for information?**

**Where else can I go for additional information that I have never tapped into before?**



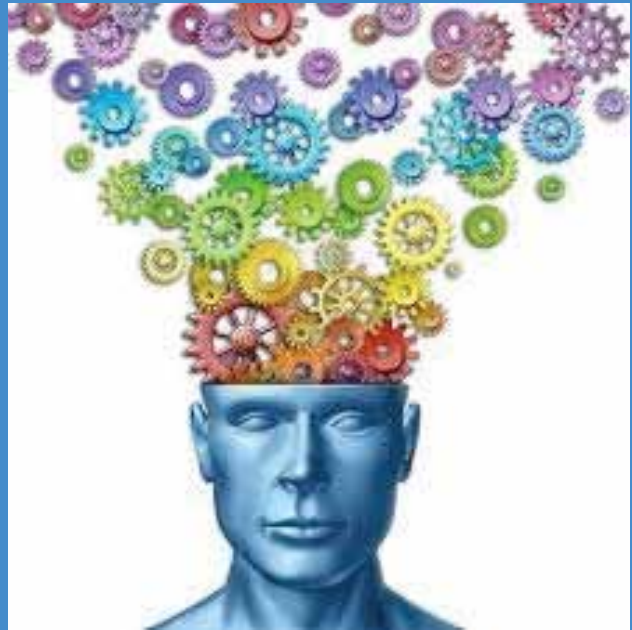
## Collaboration

*Who can I team up  
with to enrich  
/extend/more easily  
implement  
innovation?*



# Thinking Creatively

KEY TO  
TWENTY FIRST  
CENTURY  
SUCCESS



Once we learn how to tap into our creative potential in our professional and personal lives some very exciting things happen.

What is creativity?

That is a good question because many people think of creativity as artistic ability such as the ability to paint and draw or compose music, or make jewellery or design clothes or come up with an amazing new invention. And yes those are all creative pursuits but creativity is even more than that. So I want to broaden the definition of creativity and the way we think of it because we are all creative. All of us! Some people may think to themselves – no not me, I'm not creative. Let me assure you "if you have a brain you can be creative!" Sometimes people just need a little help tapping into and harnessing their creativity. I believe we are seeing creativity in action any time someone:

- \* Steps out of their comfort zone to experiment with doing something differently in response to a challenge
- \* Looks at a situation in a new way by shifting their perspective

Dr Irena Yashin-Shaw Phd

Speaker. Workshop Leader. Coach.

It may be something as simple as coming up with an unusual theme for your next dinner party that your friends will really enjoy or as grand as designing a brilliant new product for your business that totally captures the imagination of the marketplace.

It could be as personal as reorganising the furniture in your home to take better advantage of the natural light or as public as guiding your team or even your entire organisation through a new system or process of communicating and collaborating with each other that skyrockets productivity. So my definition of creativity (and it won't be everybody's) is very broad. It can be any new idea, plan or action that a person (or a group) comes up with that is a better way of doing something, in other words it is about having enough flexibility of thought to come up with a new response to an old challenge or for that matter a new response to a new challenge. We all have the capacity to do that, so you can see why I say that we are all creative.

## Why is creativity so important for success in today's world

The world we live in today is literally transforming itself before our eyes. This has brought with it the challenge to come up with new ways of doing business, of solving problems and of managing our lives and organisations. In the 21st century it will be the creatives not the conformists who will drive the world economy. People who can see possibilities, transform knowledge and solve problems in unusual ways are in high demand. In short creative thinkers are the new

professionals. They are the drivers of the 21st century global economy and will be rewarded accordingly.

It is interesting to compare the kinds of qualities that were rewarded in the twentieth century with what will increasingly be rewarded in the 21st century. For example just as important as having the right answers is also asking the right questions, collaboration as much as competition is being adopted as a good business strategy, and creativity over conformity. A

'whole brain' approach to problem-solving which incorporates creative thinking is replacing a strongly analytical style and design thinking which incorporates a significant creative problem-solving component is gaining traction as a 'best practice' management approach. It is not surprising to see this kind of a shift because this is what is necessary in an increasingly complex world where rigid ways of thinking will not meet the needs of highly complex workplaces.

IBM released a major global study in 2011 that identified creativity as a core skill in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. They conducted face to face interviews with over 1500 CEOs, General Managers and public sector leaders across 60 countries and 33 industries. The outcomes of the study are fascinating. Creativity was identified as the most important leadership quality! Twenty years ago that would not have been the case. But the world we live in today is much more complex as a result of globalisation and technology. So the necessary skill sets that we need for success are different to what was needed previously. At the top of the list is creativity – because creative leaders can build flexible, agile organisations and teams that can:

- a. Respond quickly to market forces and new opportunities
- b. Find imaginative ways of connecting with customers and clients
- c. Build business systems that are dexterous and adaptable.

All of these qualities are essential for twenty-first century success.

So I believe that the key to Twenty First Century success lies in mastering our ability to tap into and use our creativity for application in both our personal and professional lives.

## Barriers to creativity

Unfortunately there are many barriers to creativity. Let me split them up into two broad categories. Firstly there are the internal barriers inside our heads – in other words - how we think - the mental processes that can block creativity.

Secondly there are the external barriers - those that come from the environment that can also block creativity. Let me share just three from each category.



We've tried it before and it won't work.

## THE INTERNAL BARRIERS

These refer to the mental processes that can shackle creativity. Three barriers to thinking creatively are:

Mental ruts

Mindlessness

Myths

Let's deal with each in turn.

### MENTAL RUTS

Have you ever come across people who say things like "That's not how we do things around here"

"We've tried it before and it won't work"

"We don't have time to experiment with anything new"

"But this is how we've always done it".

We've all heard people say those sorts of things and that is a strong indication that that person is in a mental rut - that is - they want to keep using the same methods of approaching challenges that they always have. Why? Because it's comfortable. They don't have to think too hard. As Henry Ford

said "Thinking is the hardest work there is, which is why so few engage in it." Why is that? Let me share with you some of the cognitive psychology behind that.

As human beings we make sense of the world by creating mental templates called schemas to help us manage and store all the information that comes our way – which is a lot. These schemas are wonderful things because they help us to organise the enormous amount of information we have gathered over the course of our lives. Without schemas, memory would be a vast collection of isolated facts, which would need to be combed through every time information was

needed – we wouldn't be able to function very effectively. So schemas are good - life would be a confused mess without them. They enable us to solve problems quickly and easily which is wonderful.

But the downside is that they can lock us into particular ways of viewing, thinking and responding to the world. So the irony is that the better we are at applying a particular process to solving a problem the less likely we are to want to change it. So without even realising it people can become resistant to doing things differently or thinking about things creatively.

So that's the first barrier.

The second one is Mindlessness.

## MINDLESSNESS

Mindlessness is characterised by a rigid use of information treating it as though it only has application in a single context. Now that's a fairly abstract concept so I'd like to give you an illustrative example which will explain it. Let me tell you about an ingenious psychological experiment conducted by Professor Ellen Langer from Harvard University. She is one of my learning heroes. Some people admire sporting heroes – I have learning heroes and she is one of them. This is how her experiment went.

She used university students who were led to believe that they were participating in a consumer survey. Individually they were presented with three objects and asked to rank what they believed the price of the object should be from highest to lowest. They were split into two groups.

On the questionnaire the first group read "Object A is a dog's chew toy, Object B is a pen and Object C is a hairdryer attachment." Object A was in fact just a shapeless

blob of rubber. The important thing to note here was that the information was presented in a rigid way. The students were told this *is* something.

The other group read "Object A could be a dog's chew toy, Object B could be a pen and Object C could be a hairdryer attachment". In this case the important thing to note is that the information was presented flexibly with the words *could be*. Then after the students had finished ranking the objects, the research assistant, feigning controlled panic exclaimed "Oh no I gave you the wrong instructions, you were supposed to rank them the other way. I don't have any more forms or an eraser and you're not supposed to cross them out. What are we going to do?"

The reply to that question was really what the experiment was all about. 40% of the students in the 'flexible' group who had heard the words could be suggested that the researcher use the unfamiliar looking lump of rubber as an eraser. None in the other group did. Why?

Because the categories they had placed that information into were so certain that it stopped them from using that information in any other way.

Certainty closes our eyes to new opportunity and blocks creativity.

I often use that example when I speak to education groups because it has enormous implications for how we educate our students and the way we introduce them to new information. Rigidity of thought is dangerous in a world that is changing so quickly.

## MYTHS

Myths around creativity abound. Myths like

- you have to be a genius to be creative
- that creative ideas just drop fully formed into people's heads
- that if you are a highly analytical so called, 'left brained' kind of person – you can't also be creative.

All of these myths are not true but will stop people from seeing themselves as creative.



## The External Barriers

Now let us turn our attention to external factors from the environment that can act as barriers to creativity.

### GROUP-THINK

*Group think where a group of people within an organisation develops a pattern of agreement where no one questions ideas, policies or actions. It is quite common and is really dangerous. There are many examples of dreadful blunders and poor decisions being made because people didn't want to upset the status quo or they are afraid of appearing foolish or the culture is one where the leaders are placed on such a revered pedestal that to challenge a decision or advance a contrarian position would be unthinkable.*

The Titanic disaster is a classic example - 1400 people lost their lives in the freezing cold water of the North Atlantic Ocean in April 1912. A truly tragic event. In the investigation that followed it came to light that several of the planners and builders of the ship had indeed been concerned about a number of issues, but they hadn't raised their concerns in the company of their colleagues for fear of appearing foolish.

Kodak is another example. A long established company with a very hierarchical structure, they had created a culture that believed in the omnipotence of leadership where people simply would not disagree with the CEO. This kind of a culture is a serious barrier to creativity and subsequently innovation within an organisation and can threaten its viability in a marketplace requiring organisational nimbleness and responsiveness. And that indeed has been Kodak's fate. They went to the brink of extinction as a result of being unable to keep pace with the changing marketplace.

### RISK AVERSION

Realistically all organisations have some level of risk aversion and that is entirely appropriate, responsible and healthy. But when it becomes more important to protect what is than to create what could be, then an organisation is in danger of stagnating which ironically becomes even more dangerous. Every organisation could benefit from finding better ways of interacting with their clients and customers or identifying new or improved products for the market place.

I do a lot of work in the public sector and that is inherently a highly risk averse context because of the high levels of constant public scrutiny and accountability. But having said that I also know from firsthand experience that many government agencies have found ways of effectively innovating on both a macro and micro level in ways that have not involved irresponsible risk. For example I worked with three government agencies a while back that recognised the fact that they had great potential to collaborate but tended to operate in silos.

So I facilitated a collaboration retreat for them where they identified opportunities to dovetail their activities and create a more integrated service for the public which in this case happened to be the SME business community. It worked extremely well and was a significant step forward in service delivery without risk. All innovation is preceded by a creative idea. So there are certainly ways of being creative even in risk averse cultures.





## BUSYNESS

The danger of busyness applies on both an individual and organisational level. What happens when we get really busy? We don't take time out to think and reflect. So in an organisation where people don't take time to debrief properly on projects, products or processes they miss a great opportunity to learn and make themselves better and more successful. Yet being busy is endemic in organisations. There is always so much to do. So active reflection can't be left to chance otherwise it will never happen. Thinking – specifically creative thinking - needs to be a scheduled activity that is integrated into the organisational procedures and expectations. But you might say but aren't we thinking all the time? Well yes but there's thinking and then there's creative thinking. And for organisations to be successful and to move forward with

purpose – they need more of the latter. It might be as simple as:

Setting aside some time in regular team meetings that will be dedicated specifically to brainstorming or thinking strategically about challenges facing an organisation.

Or a mandate for teams to reflect on progress at specific times through a project or encouraging people to engage in some official uninterrupted 'thinking time' at work either in their usual space or in a specially purposed area.

One organisation I worked with recently just asked all their employees to spend 15 minutes a day thinking about how they could do better the next day.

All of these kinds of activities are a small part of the creative thinking process. There are certainly a number of barriers that will stop us from engaging in it which is why we need to deliberately plan for it.

## HOW TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS TO CREATIVITY

On an individual level, on a day to day basis, we can prompt ourselves into thinking more creatively simply by constantly asking ourselves questions like:

- If I looked at this situation or challenge from a completely different perspective what would I see?
- What else is going on here if I look past the obvious?
- In responding to this situation how can I step out of my comfort zone?

Just keeping these kinds of questions top of mind will help us to live more creatively. They stop us from falling into habitual and unconsidered responses to situations. However there are also more specific creative thinking techniques that can be applied in more deliberate ways to work on a challenge. Here are just a few that people can use either in a group or if working alone.

## BRAINSTORMING

This is a process that most people are familiar with these days. And it works. It is a great way of generating ideas to kick start the creative thinking process. The key to brainstorming is to generate a lot of ideas quickly, record them on butcher's paper and don't judge or evaluate them. There's plenty of time for that later. Suspending judgement stops

people from eliminating ideas that may be valuable, or act as stepping stones to other ideas. You can do this in a group or individually.

## ANALOGY

This is a great way of getting insights by looking for similarities or parallels between ideas. The Swiss scientist who invented Velcro applied this kind of thinking after he went for a walk in a field and came back with his trousers covered with cockleburs. He came up with an innovative way of fastening that is similar to the hook like features of burrs. You can find relationships between virtually anything although you need to think fairly abstractly to do it. I was lecturing in creativity in an undergraduate course some years ago and asked the students this question – "How is a university like a matchbox?" I got lots of responses like they're both full of bright sparks; you have to step out of the box in order to light up; although you can light up you can also burn out. But my all time favourite was "You can't park on either of them!" All the students roared laughing because there was a real parking problem on campus which was a constant source of annoyance and inconvenience.



## ASSOCIATION

This is where we make a mental connection between unrelated ideas. Recently I was designing a creative thinking workshop for a group of business people. I

wanted to engage them in a process of reflecting on their core competencies. So I asked them this question "If your business was an animal what would it be and why?" Some of the responses I got were things like:

*A dog because we are very loyal and dependable where our customers are concerned, they know they can rely on us to deliver on time every time*

*A cheetah the fastest animal because it is our job to be quick off the mark and at the leading edge of the industry with the latest technology*

*A chameleon because when we consult to an organisation we go in, find out everything we can and blend in so well that you'd think we'd been there forever.*

Then I asked them this question. "Just suppose you could by some miracle of genetic engineering cross breed that animal with another animal to produce offspring that would combine the best of both creatures – what would it be? Why?" Examples of responses to this question were things like:

*We'd cross with an eagle which flies really high because it would help the business to be able to see the big picture and think very strategically*

*A starfish to decentralise the structure of the organisation by making the various arms of the business more autonomous.*

People enjoyed this exercise using analogy as it was an unusual and creative way of gaining some insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the business.



## SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE

Asking ourselves the question “What would this situation look like from someone else’s eyes?” helps to bring a completely different point of view and set of values to a situation. Every organisation should do this from time to time and take a look at themselves from the point of view of their customers, suppliers or community collaborators.

It is really amazing the insights that this simple question can bring. In one of my presentations I ask people “What would you do to make a positive contribution to your workplace if you were Bill Gates, Kath and Kim, Nelson Mandela, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Walt Disney, or any other well known personality that would be known to the group. In the space of 5 minutes of group brainstorming people come up with the most amazingly creative and often extremely funny responses. And usually many of the ideas are immediately implementable.

So far I’ve discussed individual strategies for generating interesting ideas. But we do just need to keep this in perspective. Coming up with creative solutions is much more than generating some ideas. The creative thinking process is much more holistic. It is a great start but those ideas have to be explored, evaluated and implemented. So if someone is working on a major project it is useful to think of creative

problem-solving as an integrated thinking process that incorporates not just generation of ideas, but also exploration and evaluation of ideas. One particularly important component that is often overlooked is the importance of strategic thinking. In other words being clear about what you want to achieve in broad terms and then regularly checking that you are on track. All this will give you a much higher quality outcome. Creative problem solving is not a ‘free for all’, rather it is most effective when it has some guidelines which can help make the process more effective. Imagine if these simple processes were used in organisations on a regular basis either during team meetings or think tanks or team building retreats.



If organisations tapped into the collective brain power of their people more often and more effectively they could totally explode their business success. That would really be the key of success.

## THE BENEFITS OF BECOMING A MORE CREATIVE THINKER

There are many benefits to releasing our creativity. It's great for the health of our brain, and the health of our heart & the health of our careers

Why is it good for our brain? Engaging in good creative-problem solving can actually help release the brain chemical called dopamine which helps us to feel good and think better which is why engaging in creative activity can feel very rewarding and prepares us for good learning.

When you have an ‘Ah-ha moment’ you actually get a little squirt of dopamine which is a pleasant experience. All of us have had the wonderful experience of suddenly getting the flash of insight or inspiration. For example a creative activity that I frequently engage in is developing new workshops. I am constantly looking for creative ways of helping people to learn more effectively in my programs as well as have really enjoyable experiences so that the learning sticks.

Every time I have a moment of insight that leads to a really cool new activity or methodology I get an instant little brain buzz and feel very pleased and satisfied with myself. We’ve all had that experience. It can be a relatively small one like my example of creating a new activity or a massive moment of insight that makes history – as happened to Archimedes the great ancient Greek mathematician.

The story goes that he was grappling with a difficult problem that the King had set for him about testing whether or not the King's crown was pure gold or mixed with another metal. As he stepped into the bath he noticed the accompanying displacement of water and suddenly solved the problem. History tells us that he was so excited about it that he ran naked out of the bathhouse yelling "Eureka! Eureka!"



I've been exploring the benefits of creative thinking to brain health but I do just want to add a caveat about this though – the creative thinking process does need to be managed well so that it stays in the domain of being a positive challenge rather than an experience of overwhelming frustration. If it is the latter then the brain releases norepinephrin rather than dopamine and people go into their 'panic zone' rather than their 'learning zone'.

Thinking creatively challenges us to step out of our comfort zone to prevent mental ruts by exercising the brain which is

good for brain health just as physical exercise is good for the body. There is also some reputable research showing that creative activity in older people is associated with reduced dementia and increased longevity. So it is definitely good for the health of our brain.

How is it good for the health of our heart? The response to this one is a little more subjective. There isn't as much research around about the direct link between creativity and physical health but certainly there is evidence that engaging in creative activities reduces stress and that's got to be good for the heart.

From my own personal experience emersion in a creative activity can leave a person feeling both mentally and physically energised and invigorated. It's fun, fulfilling and refreshing. Absorbing yourself in a creative activity can send you into a state of 'Flow'. That is a title of a book by [Mihály Csíkszentmihályi](#), who coined the term.

This is where you are so focussed on an activity that you enter a place where time seems to stand still. And when you emerge from that place you feel revitalised. In my younger days I would have that experience when I painted. I could easily spend an entire day without a break working on my 'masterpiece'.

These days I get that same experience from writing. My masterpieces today are not for hanging on walls but rather in creating memorable learning experiences. Interestingly – although the products are so vastly different, the effect of the creative experience is the same. And as a stress reducer it is great, so that's how it's good for the health of our heart.

Finally why is it good for the health of our careers? Creativity is the number one core competency for the 21st century success. Organisations are looking for people who can think flexibly and cross intellectual boundaries, people who can see things from different perspectives, who are prepared to take calculated risks, who can be comfortable with complexity.

People who can demonstrate their creative thinking skills by coming up with interesting solutions to challenges will get the right sort of attention. They'll acquire a reputation for being out of the box thinkers which will be a very good thing for their career in the long run.

I mentioned earlier that IBM conducted a global survey of CEOs called *Capitalising on Complexity* which identified creativity as the new core skill in a complex world. Simultaneously, they also interviewed *Chief Human Resource Officers* to produce another report called *“Working Beyond Boundaries”*. One area identified by this cohort as being crucial to organisational success and sustainability was the identification, nurturing and development of creative leaders to drive creative solutions. So it can definitely be good for careers.

Thinking creatively is intrinsically tied to success in so many ways in both our personal

and professional lives. So it is worth investing some time and effort into developing this aspect of ourselves and the teams and organisations we work with. Contact Innovation Edge for information about how to do this.

Dr Irena Yashin-Shaw PhD

T/F: +61 7 3849 5003

M: 0411 330301

[info@speakingedge.com.au](mailto:info@speakingedge.com.au)

[www.speakingedge.com.au](http://www.speakingedge.com.au)



# BIOGRAPHY



*Dr. Irena Yashin-Shaw is a creative thinking expert, innovator and an entrepreneur with a unique blend of academic and business experience which makes her the ideal partner for organisations seeking to improve their productivity and effectiveness through creativity and innovation. Irena enables organisations to achieve their strategic goals by empowering all levels of staff to tap into their creative potential. Her ground-breaking doctoral research in the field of creative thinking and innovation has taken her to the UK, Russia, China, India, The Middle East, New Zealand and Malaysia.*

# TESTIMONIALS

"Thank you for sharing your wisdom Irena in the 'Innovating to Compete in a Global Economy' workshop. I go to these events to learn just one new thing that I can take away to add value to my business and clients, but I left with pages of notes and brimming with new knowledge I can apply straight away. A great investment of time! "

John Millar  
M.D, More Profit Less Time  
2012

"Dr Yashin-Shaw and I spoke at the same "Innovation in the Public Sector" conference in Jordan. The three-stage model she has developed to help all organisations implement innovative thinking and deliver change, is as powerful as it is simple. Dr Yashin-Shaw is an engaging speaker who presents her ideas clearly and appropriately for her audience."

David Tee  
Founder and Principal Consultant,  
GrowthWorks  
2011

"Irena delivered an Innovation Skills for the Public Sector program that invited the participants to think about the innovation challenges in the public sector. Throughout the day Irena unpacked a toolkit of effective methodologies and processes that anyone can use to start thinking creatively when problems need to be solved. One key message I took away was that "there is a role for everyone when it comes to organisational innovation." Great stuff Irena, I certainly enjoyed the workshop."

Bryan McSweeney  
Principal Advisor (Design Capability Development)  
2011

"Irena is an amazing and genuine person who puts herself fully into her authentic workshops. She gives her time, talent, creativity fully and her workshops really get you thinking at a different level. I don't know how she can keep so focussed after 8 hrs of giving as much as she does. Irena's authenticity and passion truly shines through . Her material will certainly fill gaps in your life and business as it has in mine. In her creative thinking workshop called 'Thinking Beyond Boundaries' she didn't just fulfil my expectations she exceeded them by literally changing the way I think. I can certainly see why Irena has achieved such fantastic success in her various roles as an academic, entrepreneur and professional speaker and seminar presenter . Please contact me if you would like any verbal confirmation of what I have said here about Irena and her work."

Gary Carson  
Works4us  
2011

"Dr. Irena's workshop on Innovation for Growth & Profit in Regional QLD was brilliant! Think of how often you have attended an event with other business owners but don't have the opportunity to tap into their great minds and business experience. This event was the opposite – we were all able to share our thoughts and great ideas with each other to get some terrific business insights. As the President of the Bundaberg & District Chamber of Commerce, I would recommend that any business contact Irena about her next presentations and make it a "must attend" for 2011. Great job Irena and happy to attend further events run by you!!"

Dion Taylor  
Committee Member Bundaberg & District, Chamber of Commerce  
2011

"Dr Irena gave a well informed session regarding thinking outside the square in a recent forum in Brisbane. With emphasis on using collective minds to implement new procedures and solving problems outside the square so to speak. Hoping to use part of her knowledge in actually implementing this in the workplace."

Matt Heraghty  
Project Officer, Department of Environment & Resource Management  
2011

"After attending one of her Innovation Edge workshops recently, we came away feeling inspired, very motivated, and equipped with some wonderful strategies and ideas to implement new innovations and improve the growth and profit of our business. The workshop was the most enjoyable business workshop I think I have ever attended. Irena's sparkling & energised personality & dynamic presentation skills allowed us all to feel relaxed and motivated to participate. My business partner and I felt we got a lot out of Irena's insights, as well as those of the other participants due to the interactive, dynamic & collaborative nature of the workshop.

We now have a fresh outlook on our business going forward, and look forward to the follow up services & support Irena offers as a result of attending the workshop."

Lisa Goodwin  
Owner, Smart Tours Property Videos/  
Get Smart Online Productions  
2011

"I just love the vitality that Dr Irena brings into her work with everyone. Using her extensive skills and her bubbly personality, she engages people into thinking in new and exciting ways about their business, and awakens the potential of their own skills to further opportunities personally and professionally. In the Innovation workshop I learned so much from her

and had fun doing it. She is a true professional and really enjoys helping people succeed. I can't recommend her highly enough."

Colette Quelhurst, Consultant.  
2010

"On a personal recommendation, I was introduced to Irena in mid 2009 when we required a creative and inspiring facilitator for an upcoming collaborative workshop. Irena demonstrated an exceptional ability to understand our needs and translate them into a fun, engaging and thought provoking event that kept everyone's attention for the whole day. Irena has since delivered a number of well received workshops for our clients and I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending her for any future opportunities."

Paul Hodgson  
State Director, Enterprise Connect  
2010

"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."

Michelle Delebet  
B.M OSD Pipelines.

"The creative thinking workshop was delivered very professionally, but most importantly with warmth and immense sincerity which is often lacking in professional development sessions. The day was logically and effectively sequenced. It provided me with valuable insights about how to successfully address challenges in the workplace. Congratulations!"

David Cockburn  
Coordinator, Iona College.

"I enjoyed the Creative Thinking Workshop as it not only brought out my own creativity but generated new thinking skills in dealing with challenges that I face in my life and work. Thank you!"

Dr Jacinta D'Souza  
Principal, School of Social Work-  
Mangalore (India)

"Irena adapted her presentations effectively to meet the different requirements of the events for which we engaged her. She has a lively presentation style that blends conceptual information with audience participation and humour. She consulted with us to establish the objectives for each event and tailored her content accordingly. From the Tribunal's perspective, Irena met our aims of engaging our organisation in more innovative thinking".

Shelly Fisher, Executive Officer, Mental Health Review Tribunal.