

Sparking creativity in teams: An executive's guide

Senior managers can apply practical insights from neuroscience to make themselves—and their teams—more creative.

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Although creativity is often considered a trait of the privileged few, any individual or team can become more creative—better able to generate the breakthroughs that stimulate growth and performance. In fact, our experience with hundreds of corporate teams, ranging from experienced C-level executives to entry-level customer service reps, suggests that companies can use relatively simple techniques to boost the creative output of employees at any level.

The key is to focus on perception, which leading neuroscientists, such as Emory University's Gregory Berns, find is intrinsically linked to creativity in the human brain. To perceive things differently, Berns maintains, we must bombard our brains with things it has never encountered. This kind of novelty is vital because the brain has evolved for efficiency and routinely takes perceptual shortcuts to save energy; perceiving information in the usual way requires little of it. Only by forcing our brains to recategorize information and move beyond our habitual thinking patterns can we begin to imagine truly novel alternatives.¹

In this article, we'll explore four practical ways for executives to apply this thinking to shake up ingrained perceptions and enhance creativity—both personally and with their direct reports and broader work teams. While we don't claim to have invented the individual techniques, we have seen their collective power to help companies generate new ways of tackling perennial problems—a useful capability for any business on the prowl for potential game-changing growth opportunities.

Immerse yourself

Would-be innovators need to break free of preexisting views.

Unfortunately, the human mind is surprisingly adroit at supporting its deep-seated ways of viewing the world while sifting out evidence to the contrary. Indeed, academic research suggests that even when presented