

**Topic:**  
CAD/CAM Market  
Statistics

## How to unlock creativity in your organisation



What does your organisation do to stimulate and nurture new ideas?

iCAD invited **Kristina Murrin, Managing Director** of innovation consultancy **What If!** to provide some food for creative thought...

*iCAD is produced by Business Advantage, a B2B research, business development and marketing consulting practice operating in the global IT, Digital and Telecommunication sectors.*

***"Innovation and creativity are vital to our growth."***

9 out of 10 people we talk to strongly agree with this statement.

***"So practically, do YOU know how to practice and inspire creativity in your day to day life at work?"***

Ask this question, and 9 out of 10 people admit the answer is no.

### Why Is This?

Instinctively we all know that creativity at work is important. If creativity sees the commercial light of day, if it actually happens, that's innovation - and to most of us innovation means growth. To some extent then, all our business futures depend on our ability to be more creative.

[What If!](#) is an innovation consultancy whose unique use of creativity helps clients unlock the potential of their people, products, brands and organisations. They run over 50 innovation projects each year.

Important stuff, but hardly new. We've been told about the need for creativity and innovation for years. Chairmen and CEO's regularly extol these virtues, and for shareholders it's a message that falls on eager ears. What's missing in most cases is the practical follow through. Why do companies keep talking about why we need it, rather than how are we going to get it?

The simple answer is that most of us are unsure how to actually go about creating a culture where innovation will flourish. While there are lots of books and articles about "releasing our inner creative child" and "right brain thinking" very little has been written about the wider organisational issues of innovation and how to foster it. One of the reasons for this is that until recently there hasn't really been a consistent view on what actually makes a difference.

The team at What If! was struck by this when we started looking at innovative companies nearly ten years ago. Surely to be innovative you needed to create a young, funky environment filled with creative types in casual clothes? Companies such as Disney Imagineers and St Luke's seemed to provide evidence that these attributes mattered.

But how did this sit with organisations like NASA and 3M - consistently highly innovative, but staffed by middle-aged people in suits in standard corporate offices?

We had a hunch that many of these surface differences didn't actually matter. What if innovation was not a factor of a certain style, but of more fundamental behavioural attributes? What if all innovative businesses looked different, but underneath were actually spending their time on similar activities?

Two years ago we set out to prove this hypothesis by carrying out one of the largest British innovation surveys ever conducted. We analysed the day-to-day activities and behaviours of middle managers versus proven innovators. Some of these innovators were within corporations, some were loners, but all had at least two patented inventions to their credit.

Not surprisingly we discovered that the innovators spent their time in very different ways from the managers. Six key behaviours became evident as key to success innovation.

**Freshness** - *the deliberate organisation of new and different inputs and stimuli to your work to provoke alternative perspectives.*

Most companies spend their time reading the same research reports and dissecting the same sales data and are then surprised when they produce similar ideas to their competitors. Innovators realise the importance of getting out and about and stimulating themselves to look at their issues freshly.

**"Problems cannot be solved by thinking within the framework in which they were created."** Albert Einstein.

**Greenhousing** - *to nurture fledgling ideas until they are big enough to look after themselves.*

When you see a little green shoot pushing through the soil it is impossible to know if it will be a weed or a flower. Only by growing it for a period can we assess its potential. Yet in business we are expected to assess fledgling ideas all the time. Innovators find ways of questioning and building to help them assess an idea's potential - rather than rushing straight in to kill it.

**"A new idea is delicate. It can be killed by a sneer or a yawn. It can be stabbed to death by a joke or worried to death by a frown on the right person's brow."** Charles Browder.

**Realness** - *bringing ideas to life in whatever way you can.*

Innovators do not operate in the world of memos and documents. They bring their ideas to life early and repeatedly in order to create understanding and excitement in those around them.

**Momentum** - *the management of personal, team and corporate energy to ensure innovation happens.*

Ever looked at your diary and realised it resembles a bar code? Little black blocks of time - 30 minute here, 1 hour there. This is a very inefficient way of working - innovation needs focus and a sense of momentum to create real creative energy.

**Signalling** - *explicit signs telling yourself and others what response or behaviour is needed.*

One of the tricky things about innovation is that it needs two very distinct worlds or behaviours: madness - a free flowing creative state, and measure - the more traditional business analysis skills. Without measure, creativity is just an enjoyable pastime. Measure makes the decisions and makes things happen. The issue with these two worlds is that they don't really mix! That's what makes innovation so hard. Signalling is all about informing those around you which behaviour is required at any one time.

**Bravery** - *doing what it takes to stay true to one's ideals.*

Creative people will always encounter opposition from people seeking to keep the world the way it is. Only bravery will keep you going.

***"There is a microscopically fine line between being brilliantly creative and acting like the most gigantic idiot on earth. So what the hell, leap!"*** Cynthia Heimel.

None of these behaviours are particularly easy to adopt. Many of them go against the established ways we tend to operate at work and where we feel comfortable. The organisations that are successfully embedding them are those that realise this, and are establishing structures to help employees. Here are some examples:

<b>Freshness</b>	Unilever Bestfoods organises "Raging Curiosity" afternoons every Wednesday for their marketing and R&D staff. Staff are encouraged to get out and visit flavour houses, consumers, other businesses - anything that could offer a fresh perspective on their food business.
<b>Greenhousing</b>	Bass brewers have introduced red and yellow cards in meetings. If you squash and idea without building on it, you're shown a yellow warning card. Do it again and your red-carded out of the meeting!
<b>Realness</b>	Asda (supermarket chain) built a large development kitchen in the centre of their marketing department to remind employees that their core business was food. It also allows them to get their hands dirty and try ideas out quickly.
<b>Momentum</b>	At ?What <i>!f!</i> we hothouse projects, taking clients off to a cottage somewhere and working day and night on a project. We estimate we do in three days what it would otherwise take at least 1 month to do.
<b>Signalling</b>	Advertising agency, HHCL, has 'stand up' meeting rooms to signal that quick decisions are needed.
<b>Bravery</b>	Microsoft asks all new senior hires about the biggest mistake they've made in their career. They think they should all have one otherwise they're not being brave enough!

Getting your organisation to be more creative and innovative is not a case of simply writing it in your mission statement and hoping for the best. Establishing new behaviour patterns in staff takes real effort, and the establishment of many structures to reward and encourage new ways of being. It might all sound like hard work but when companies like those mentioned above are taking it that seriously, can you really afford to delay the Creative Revolution any longer?

Kristina Murrin is a co-author of the best-selling book '**What If! - How to Start a Creative Revolution at Work**'. This can be downloaded for free from the 'What If!' website, <http://www.whatif.co.uk/?>. For further information about 'What If!' call Dan Proctor on + 44 (0) 20 7535 7557.

iCAD found three vendors willing to give examples of how they stimulate creative thinking in their organisations:

**Revit** has borrowed practices from academic circles, and they get their wellies dirty....[find out more](#)....

**Solidworks** picks the brains of bright young things.....[find out how](#)..

At **think3**, teaching Italian industrial design students has got their brains storming.....[find out how](#)...

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