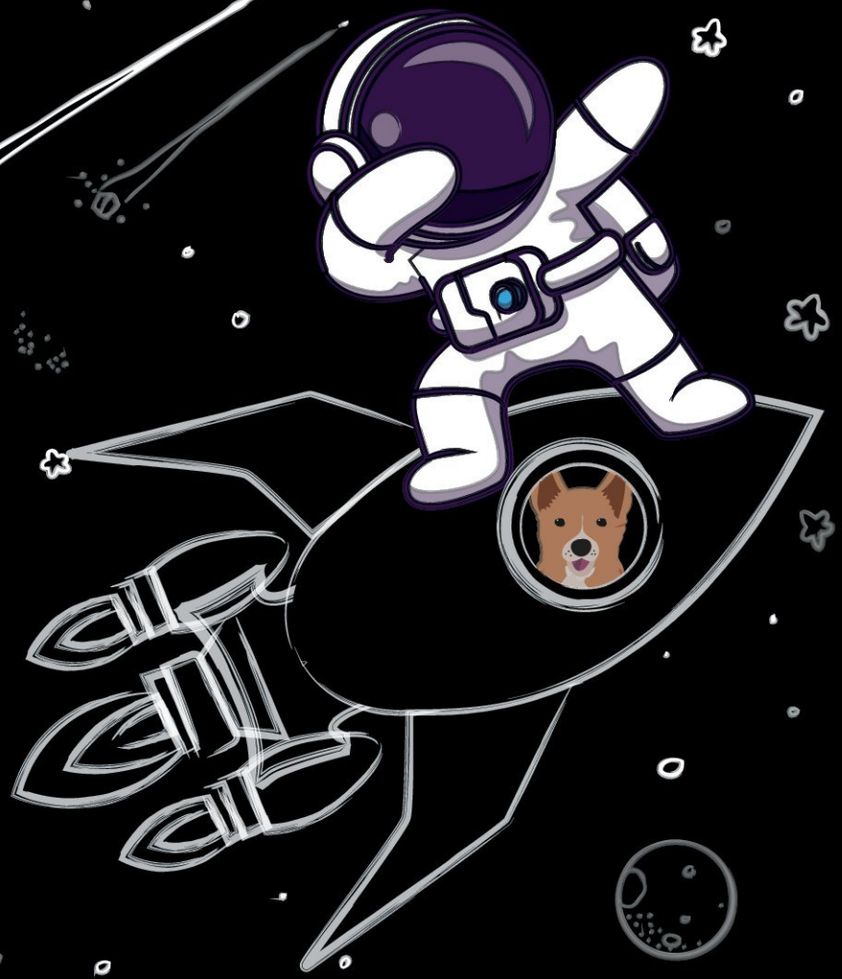


IGNITING INNOVATION

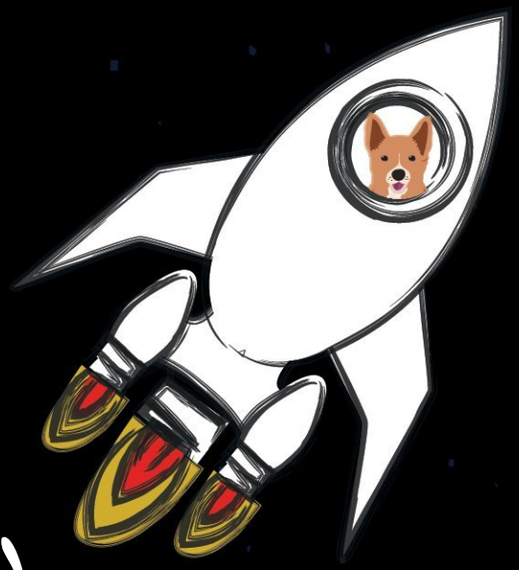
The How-To-Guide to Creative Problem Solving that fuels ideas and breakthrough solutions

Derek Bennington

Business Growth | Operational Efficiency | Company Culture | Employee Productivity | Customer Experience

we uncovered some amazing
things during our adventure.
Can you find them too?

CREATIVITY
is the fuel
that ignites
INNOVATION



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"Thank you all who have inspired me, pushed me, encouraged me, and supported me unconditionally... I am truly grateful."

- Derek

SPECIAL THANKS...

To the countless number of dear friends, colleagues, and amazing people that sacrificed time and energy to push this book forward.

SHOUT OUT...

Sandra Erdemanar - Designer of the Book
www.sandrae.design

Innovation isn't a luxury anymore.
It's a necessity.

Yet unfortunately as a business, you are severely limiting your innovation potential.
So, what's the solution?

Buckle up and let's find out!

why does this book exist?

To provide leaders and teachers access to an "easy button" for igniting innovation, in hopes they can create innovative solutions that delight their customers and employees alike.

FORWARD

You may have heard that “people are your greatest asset.” The question for you as a leader is this: to what degree do you believe people are your greatest asset, and to what degree are you committed to nurturing it? As a business leader, you understand there are two internal components that impact your success: process and people. Process makes companies good; people make them great.

However, the best processes will only take you so far. The difference-maker, and your competitive edge, is in tapping into the power of people and their unique creative gifts. Great businesses know how to truly harness the power of their people through creativity, which leads to breakthrough innovative solutions to the toughest business challenges. The biggest hurdle in doing this is to do it with *all* people, regardless of differences.

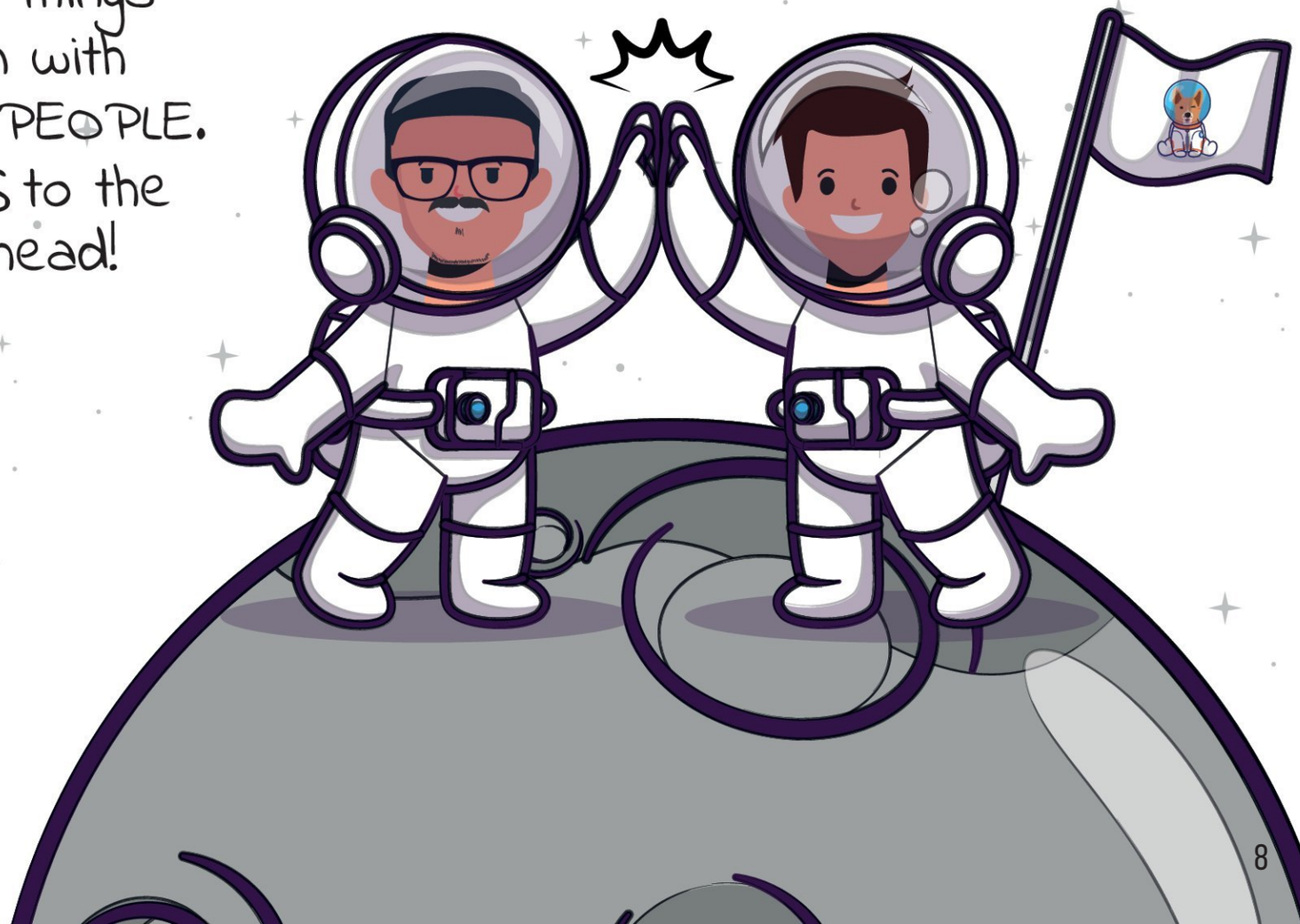
To ignite the power of *all* people, leaders must ensure everyone on their team feels valued, respected, and supported to do their best work and fully engage. When you do this, people will contribute their discretionary effort and feel “a part of” instead of “apart from” your leadership or team. You will also benefit from the full complement, force, and strength of a committed team willing to contribute their unique perspectives, ideas, and energy to drive innovation forward.

Leaders have the power to set the stage for an environment that supports people to engage at their highest levels. Innovation must be led from the top and be seen, and embraced, as a business driver. When cultivating creativity is seen as part of a leader’s role, there is a significant increase in creative performance and innovative solutions. Inclusion of *all* people, your greatest asset, will exponentially impact the innovation needed to meet or exceed your business goals.

How ready are you to maximize your greatest asset?

Rolando Garcia
Client Partner (Ret.)
Korn Ferry International
Inclusion, Leadership, and Development

Amazing things happen with AMAZING PEOPLE. CHEERS to the ride ahead!



WHETHER YOU WANT TO...

OPERATIONALLY

Grow the business, financially or otherwise
Sell more products and services
Increase operational efficiency or employee productivity
Eliminate the waste of precious time and resources
Improve marketing activities
Strengthen your online presence
Become more agile and flexible to changing conditions
Conquer labor and supply chain challenges
Create more revenue streams and stronger business models

CULTURALLY

Create a stronger and more resilient culture
Inspire employees to reach their potential
Enhance the effectiveness of remote, hybrid, and in-person teams
Become a top business to work for
Create an unforgettable employee experience

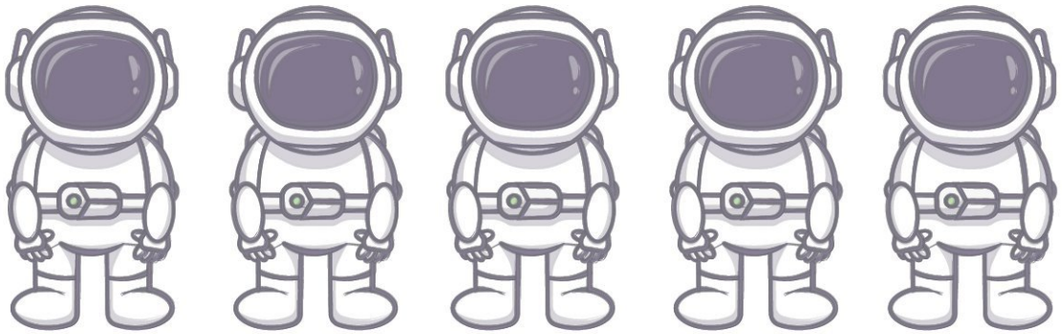
EXTERNALLY

Deliver a better customer experience
Segment and target customers more effectively
Grow or diversify the customer base
Deliver products and services that enhance the lives of your customers
Adapt and pivot based on environmental and marketplace challenges
Address competitive threats

YOU HAVE TWO CHOICES:

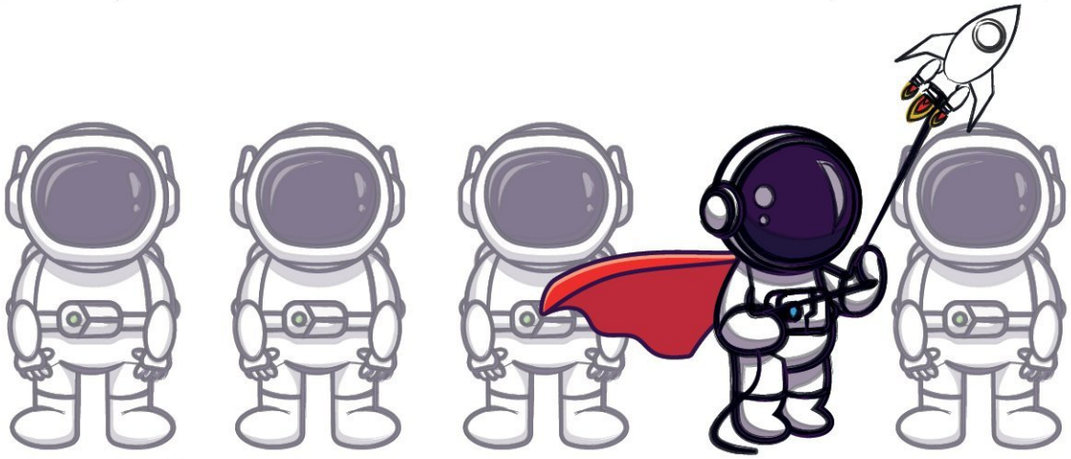
1

EITHER YOU CAN JUST IMPROVE LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, OR...



2

INNOVATE, STAND OUT FROM THE CROWD, AND BECOME A BUSINESS THAT EVERYONE WANTS TO JOIN AND NO ONE WANTS TO LEAVE, CUSTOMERS AND EMPLOYEES ALIKE.



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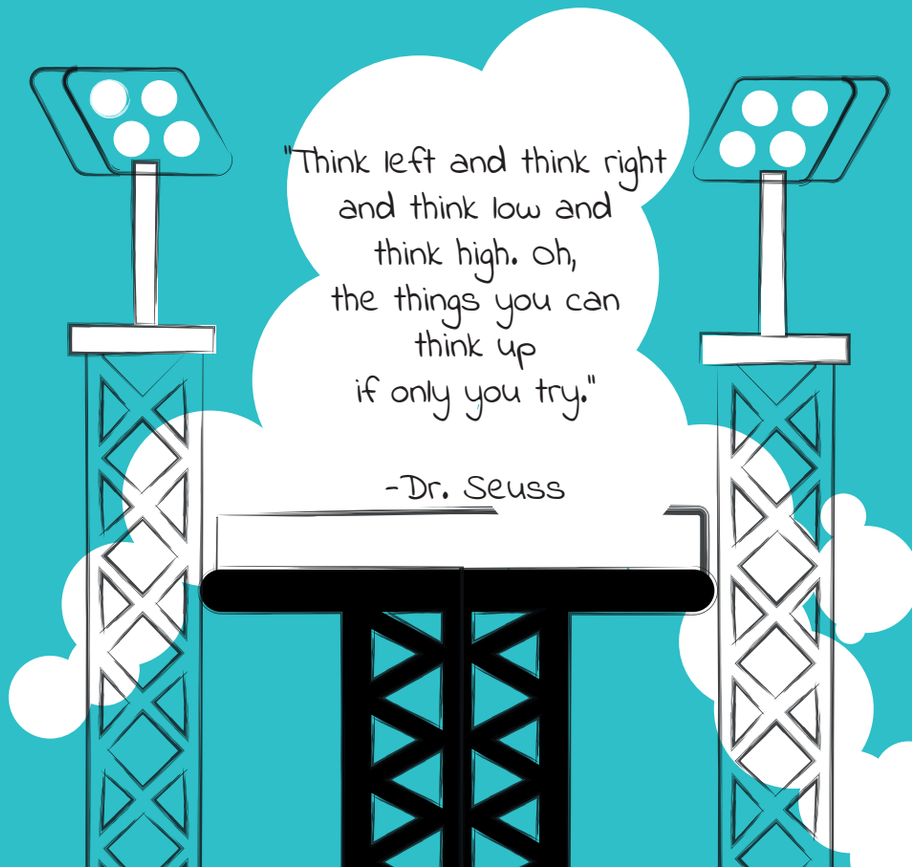

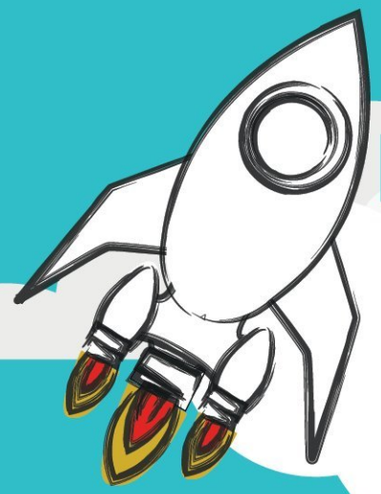

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TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE CREATIVE

Things are really that simple when it comes to creativity. If you are human, you are creative. Creativity is the ability to create ideas, so if you are human, you have a uniquely powerful ability to create ideas. The issue is that we don't understand what creativity really is or how to leverage it.

Every single person, no matter who you are, is unbelievably creative; each person just expresses their creativity differently in a way that represents a part of who they are. To be human is to be creative.

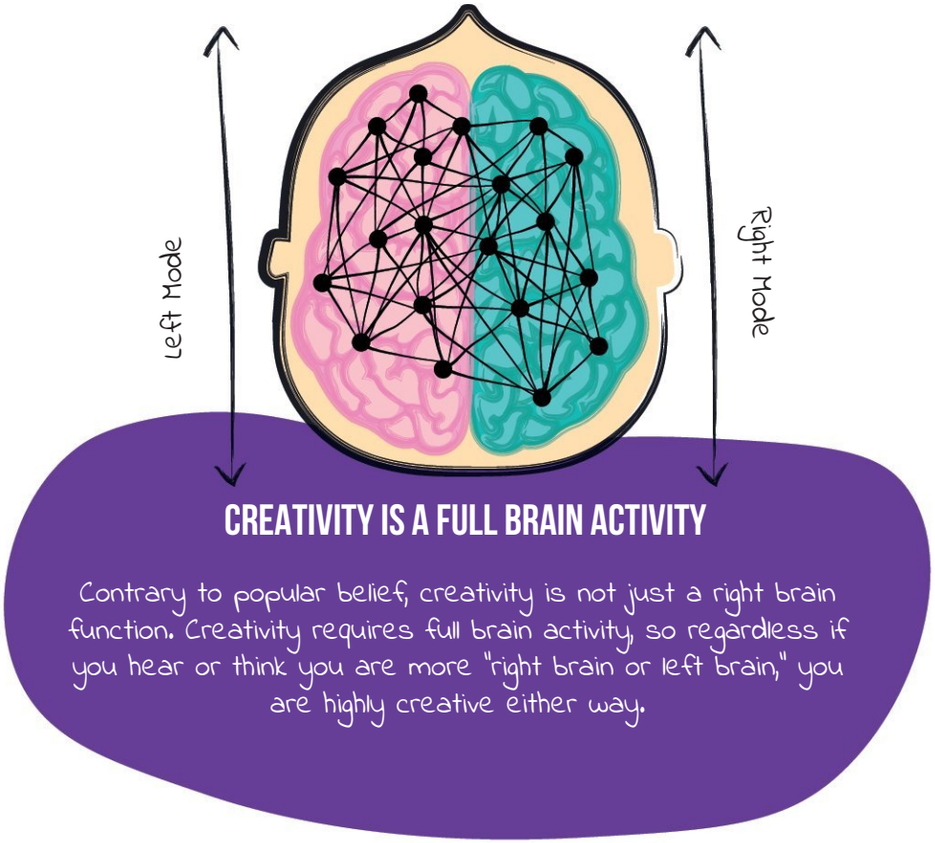
Growing up we were into everything. As kids, we asked questions and infuriated our parents with "why." We were curious. We didn't think about whether we were creative or not, we just had fun letting our brain wonder, daydream and explore the world of possibility. We had an endless supply of ideas and no fear of experimenting with them. Fast forward 20 years. At home, at work, or in school, does your creative juices still flow like it did when you were a kid? I would bet your answer would be no. Why?

As adults, questions and curiosity are not really desired - results and answers are. Boiling it all down, we lost our creativity, or at least that is what we think to be true. We not only forgot how to tap into our creative juices, but we also lost our confidence to be creative. In many ways, we became creatively complacent and lost our childhood curiosity to explore the world of possibility. The crazy part is that this didn't just happen as an adult; it starts around the age of 8 and continues to decline until, as adults, we basically believe creativity is gifted only to a select few. Maybe our creativity was pushed aside when our boss or team didn't need our ideas since they had it all "figured out." Maybe we thought we were mistakenly on a team that others branded "the creative ones."

No matter the reason, our confidence in ourselves to be creative has been crushed and much of our "creativity" has evaporated over time (more about Creative Evaporation on page 15). We lost our creative juices and sadly, even if we had them, very few people around us want to hear about it. To be human is to be creative. So, if we believe we are not creative, are we any less human? Of course not! We may not be able to change the naysayers around us, but we can get our confidence and swagger back - the juice is still there!

Shifting gears, let's talk a little about creativity and the brain. If you think creativity is a right vs left brain conversation, think again! As humans, when it comes to creativity, creating ideas, and problem solving, we are not left brain or right brain dominant. In fact, both hemispheres of our brain work together intimately, and creativity is born using both sides of our brain. We can think right, and we can think left. We just have a preference on where we start.

In a study led by Roger Beaty from Harvard University in 2018, creativity was shown to be a full brain activity using fMRI technology. However, this is really nothing new. Back in 1989, Ned Herrmann expressed a similar idea in his book *The Creative Brain*, which presented the four quadrant model outlining the foundation of Whole Brain Creativity (See sources on page 125).



"To be human is to be creative."

- Brené Brown

Your brain, believe it or not, is just like a muscle (more on this on page 29); we either use it or we lose it. We have to not only keep our minds fit and fueled, but also create environments that invite, inspire, and allow those elusive creative juices to flow. If you are thinking "I am not creative," or "I don't know how," then you just need to realize that you are innately creative, because you are human, and get those creative muscles flexing again!

Continuing on that thread of creative muscles, our brains are constantly changing and rewiring as we learn and experience things. This phenomenon is called neuroplasticity. Basically, it's our brains responding to stimuli, which create new neural connections, while also strengthening existing ones. As new neurons appear and new connections are made, the structure and function of of the brain changes. Neuroplasticity is exactly what the doctor ordered to get our creative juices flowing again!

So what is the takeaway here? If you are human, you are creative; and while we are very good at unlearning how to be creative, we can relearn it just as quickly with a little bit of help! Just think of it as personal training for your creative brain. Those workouts are key to building new neural connections, while also strengthening old forgotten ones. Your brain is an amazing thing, so keep it in shape! To be human is to be creative. Remember that.

DID YOU KNOW?

The brain has more than 85 billion neurons and over 1,000 trillion connections.

The goal is to build and excite more of the those connections, which will increase our creative performance!

CREATIVITY'S ROOTS GO DEEP, PERSONALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY

Decades of research build a formidable case for bringing more creative thinking into our lives:

Personally, creativity helps you:

- Become a stronger and more resilient person in the face of uncertainty
- Manage negative emotions and bounce back faster from setbacks
- Reduce anxiety and stress and overcome trauma
- Boost your mood, mental and physical health, and immunity
- Achieve high levels of motivation, fulfillment, and overall happiness
- Become smarter and increase cognitive function
- Dwell less on negatives and focus more on positives
- Confidently express yourself in your own unique way
- Gain faster and more meaningful traction towards your personal goals

Professionally, creativity helps you:

- Approach challenges and problems from new and unique angles
- Become a more valuable employee and asset to the business
- Develop competitive advantages due to your ability to uncover valuable ideas and approach problems differently
- Become a go-to person for advice, feedback, and ideas
- Gain faster and more meaningful traction towards your career goals

(See sources on page 125)

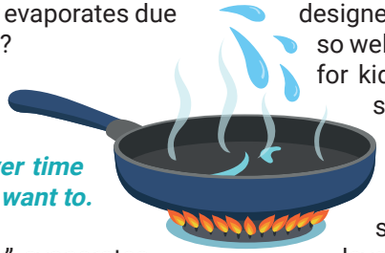
This next section is arguably one of the biggest root causes of why businesses struggle with innovation. Find a route through this meteor shower and your business will soar to new levels.

CREATIVE EVAPORATION

Did you know that only 2% of adults still have the creative juices necessary to create ideas and solve problems like they did when they were 5 years old? It's a systemic problem, and it absolutely crushes your business's innovation potential. Let me explain.

Have you ever thrown water on a hot pan and watched as it instantly vaporized? You may already know what I am getting at - evaporation. Water evaporates due to external forces unless it's refueled. Ready for the connection?

Think of "creativity" like water. It will completely evaporate over time unless we do something about it. However, our creativity is not what is evaporating; what does evaporate over time is our confidence to be creative and leverage it at the level we want to.



The sad truth is that as we get older, our sense of "creativity" evaporates over time. However, it is not our creative ability that is evaporating; that never changes. Our confidence in our creative ability and how good we are at it is what evaporates. In some of us, the effect is so stifling that we default to saying "I am not creative." The impact of this is not only felt in our professional lives, but also deeply within our personal lives (reference the list in To Be Human Is to Be Creative as a reminder).

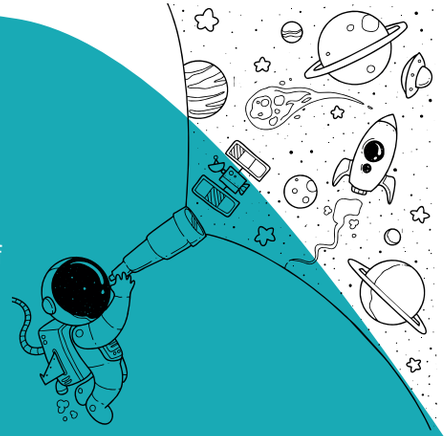
So, what stops us from being creative? Simply put, our society, education system, and work culture, whether intentional or not, don't nurture or cultivate true creativity; in many ways, they completely dismantle and destroy it. As we get older, we are subjected to higher levels of Creative Evaporation, which causes us to learn more non-creative behaviors and habits, and we start to hesitate and not share our ideas. George Land showcased this decline after working with NASA in 1968 (many other studies have discovered similar results, but nothing as famous as this).

George was asked to create a creativity assessment for NASA, which was designed to test how creative engineers and scientists could be. It worked so well that George wanted to see how creative levels changed over time for kids. The results of the study were utterly astounding, and frankly scary (visually explained on the next page).

At the tender stage of kindergarten, 98% of kids scored at the genius level of divergent thinking. This means that basically every single one of them, when they were about five years old, could leverage diverge thinking and create ideas equal to that of a genius. However, around the age of 8, kids started to plummet down the Creative Cliff. By the time they were 10, only 32% operated at the same genius level in divergent thinking, and by the age of 15, only 12% made the cut. Finally, when 200,000 adults were given the same test, only 2% tested at the genius level of divergent thinking. This means only 2% of adults were confident enough, and had the skills, to create ideas like they did when they were 5 years old.

This paints a pretty stark and compelling picture of the effects of Creative Evaporation. The sad reality is that very few of us survive into adulthood with our creative muscles still intact. We end up trading our creative juices and divergent thinking superpowers for "normalcy" and acceptance. It not only has heart-breaking effects on our Creative Confidence, but also on our ability in business to reach our performance and innovation potential.

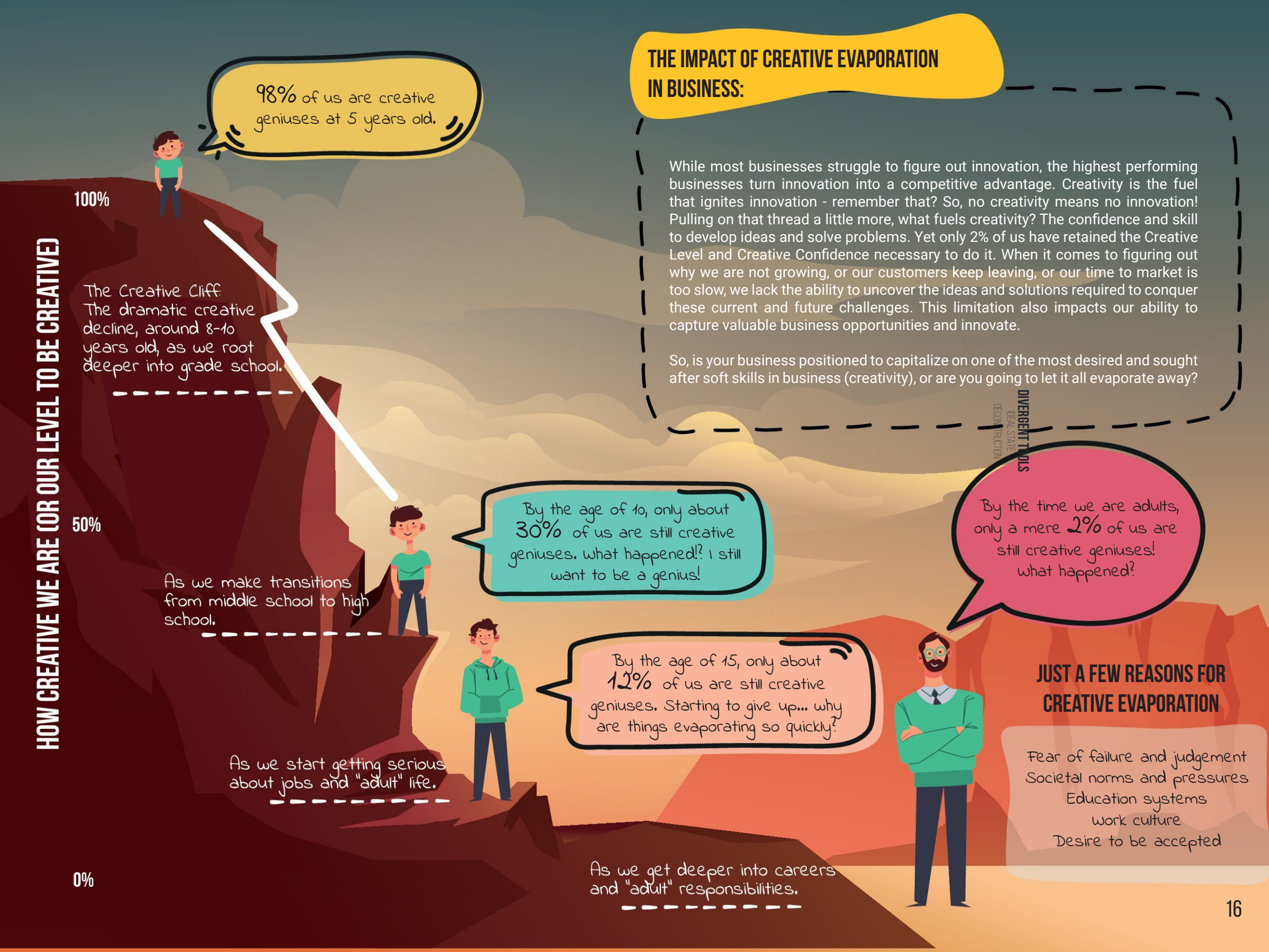
Divergent thinking is the method used when we need to create tons of ideas, explore the world of possibility, and consider "what ifs" with no constraints or limitations. While 2% of us can operate at a genius level of divergent thinking, 98% of us struggle to do so. However, every person has the potential to be as creative as they desire to be, if they choose to make the investment.



THE IMPACT OF CREATIVE EVAPORATION IN BUSINESS:

While most businesses struggle to figure out innovation, the highest performing businesses turn innovation into a competitive advantage. Creativity is the fuel that ignites innovation - remember that? So, no creativity means no innovation! Pulling on that thread a little more, what fuels creativity? The confidence and skill to develop ideas and solve problems. Yet only 2% of us have retained the Creative Level and Creative Confidence necessary to do it. When it comes to figuring out why we are not growing, or our customers keep leaving, or our time to market is too slow, we lack the ability to uncover the ideas and solutions required to conquer these current and future challenges. This limitation also impacts our ability to capture valuable business opportunities and innovate.

So, is your business positioned to capitalize on one of the most desired and sought after soft skills in business (creativity), or are you going to let it all evaporate away?



DIVERGENT TOOLS
IDEAL STATE
DECONSTRUCTION

INNOVATION

(The result of a new solution that creates substantial value and enhances the lives of people)

requires
relies on
depends on
thrives on
can't exist without

CREATIVITY

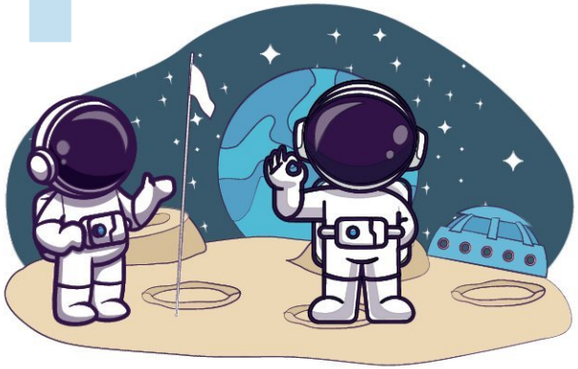
(The ability to create ideas)

IF CREATIVITY IS THE FUEL
THAT IGNITES INNOVATION...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING
TO ENSURE THE MISSION IS A SUCCESS?

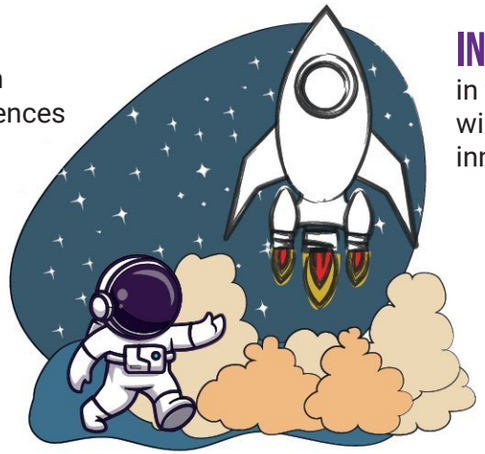
BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL FLEET OF INNOVATION ROCKETS STARTS HERE

1 DEDICATE RESOURCES TO YOUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE



APPRECIATE

the creative superpowers of each person and leverage those differences to enhance problem solving.



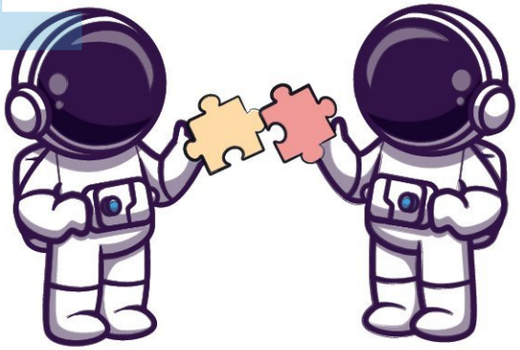
INVEST

in their creative skills, which will only make them stronger innovators for you!

CULTIVATE

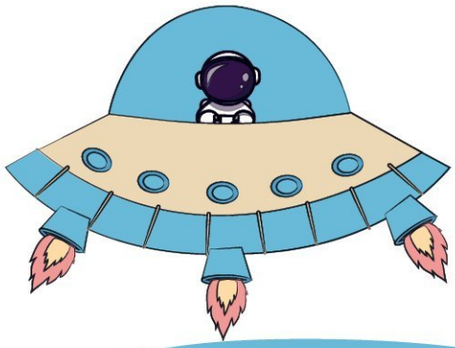
an environment that empowers each and every person to express their creativity in their own way.

2 DEVELOP TWO CORE COMPETENCIES



CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Creating ideas and solving problems using specifically designed tools and processes. This book provides the roadmap for this journey.



HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN

Creating solutions that address important unmet needs of your customers and employees.

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR INNOVATION OPERATING SYSTEM?

The magic is when strategy, culture, people, and process align. When it does, nurture it and protect it at all costs. This is when innovation becomes an untouchable competitive advantage!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

LEADERSHIP AND STRATEGY

- What are you doing to build an innovation competitive advantage?
- Do you have an innovation strategy that aligns with your business strategy?
- What innovation goals do you have?
- Do you have alignment with, and buy-in from, the people around you?

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS

- How is creative problem solving infused into daily management?
- What are managers doing to empower and support creativity?
- Are you capitalizing on the TONS of low hanging fruit ripe for picking on a daily basis, or is it rotting on the vine?

CULTURE

- Where is the business culture now, and what needs to happen to create one that thrives on innovation?
- How are you including everyone in the conversation to push creativity and innovation forward?
- What are you doing to engrain creative thinking and innovation into the cultural DNA?

YOU HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME AN INNOVATION MACHINE

THE NEED:

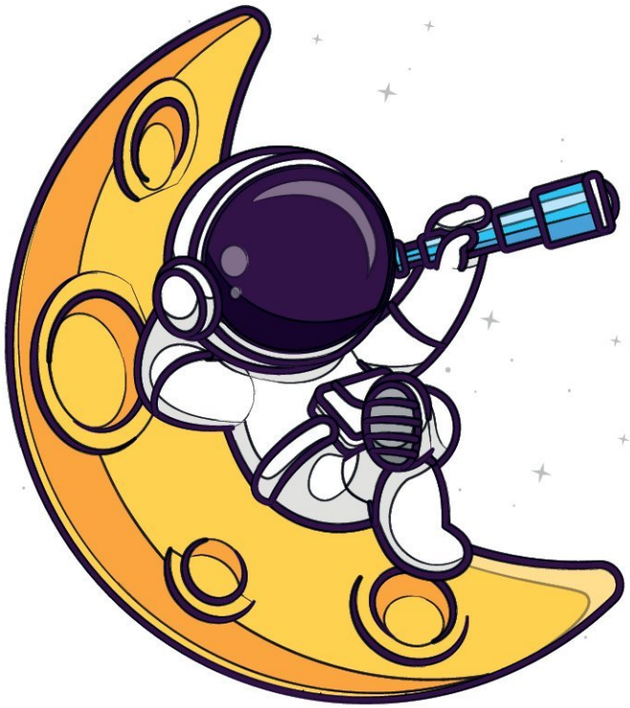
Stay relevant to your customers and employees and compete in the marketplace.

THE WANT:

Craft a competitive advantage so strong that your competition becomes irrelevant.

THE DESIRE:

Create an employee and customer experience so magical that they scream: "I can't afford NOT to work with you!"



Systematic innovation has an 80% + success rate with creative problem solving and human-centered design at the core.

Flip the scales and leave your competition in innovation dust!

WITH THE SOLUTION OF THE CREATIVE DIAMOND

FRONTEND
where creativity is unleashed and the idea magic happens

BACKEND
where decisions are made and innovations become reality

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

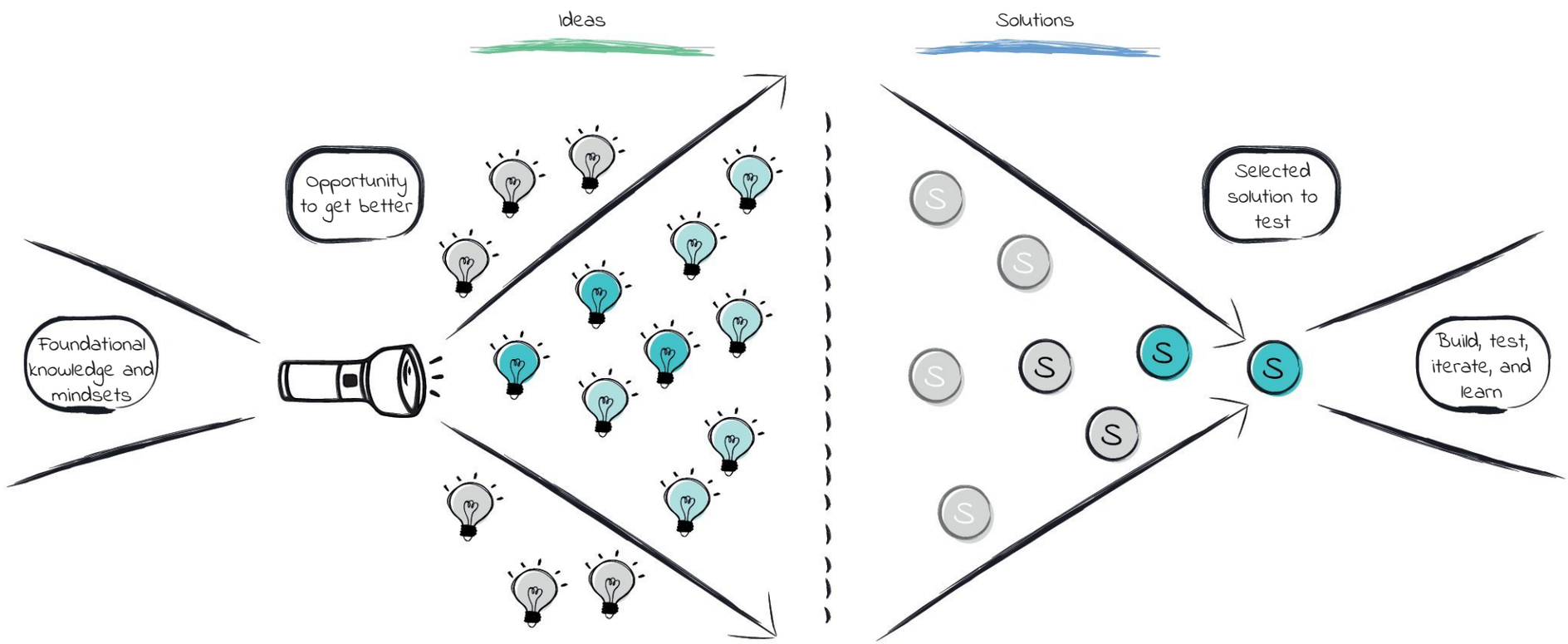
2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

3 IDEA EXPLORATION

4 SOLUTION DETERMINATION

5 DECISION POINT

6 RAPID PROTOTYPING



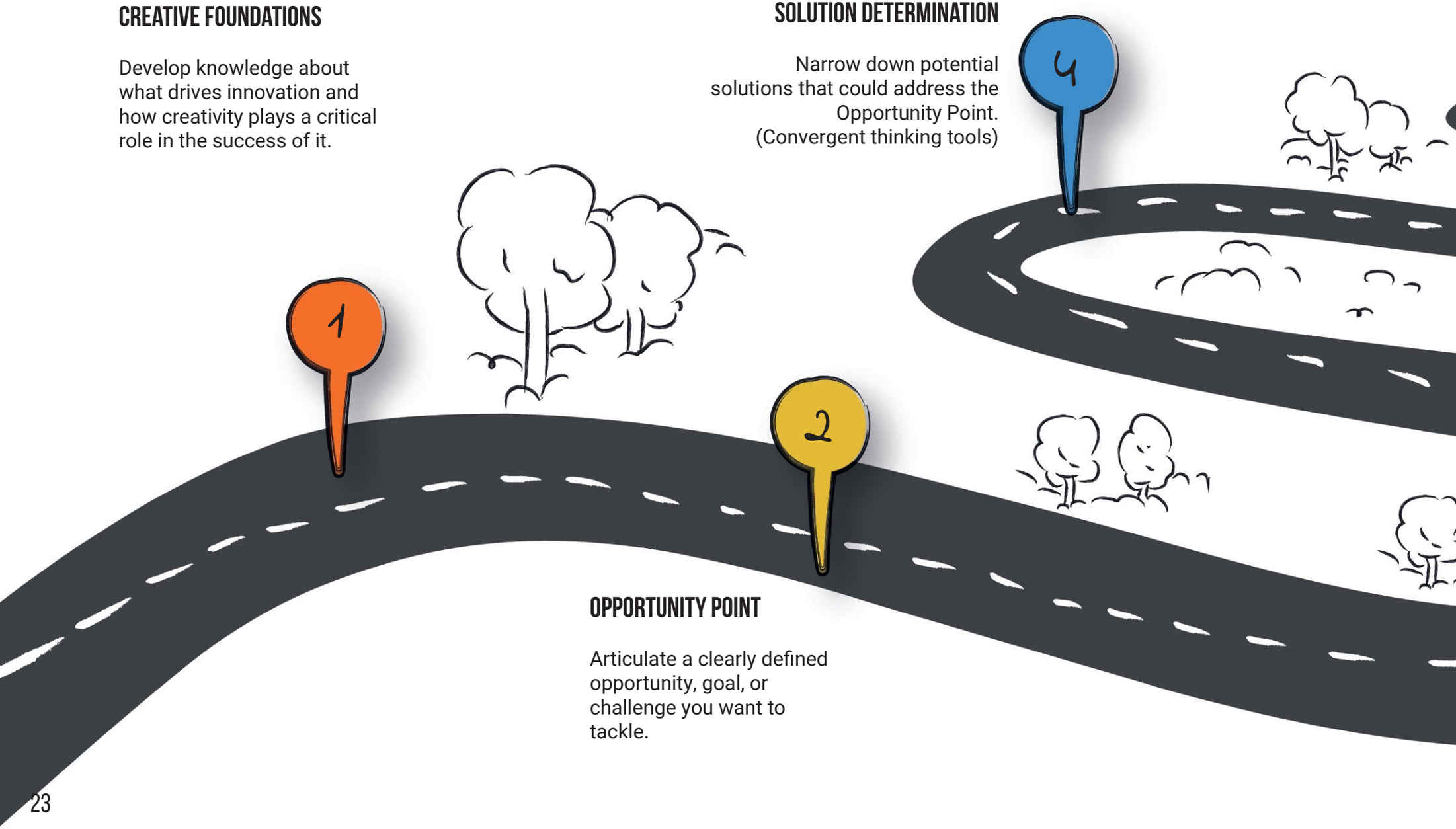
THE ROADMAP AHEAD

CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Develop knowledge about what drives innovation and how creativity plays a critical role in the success of it.

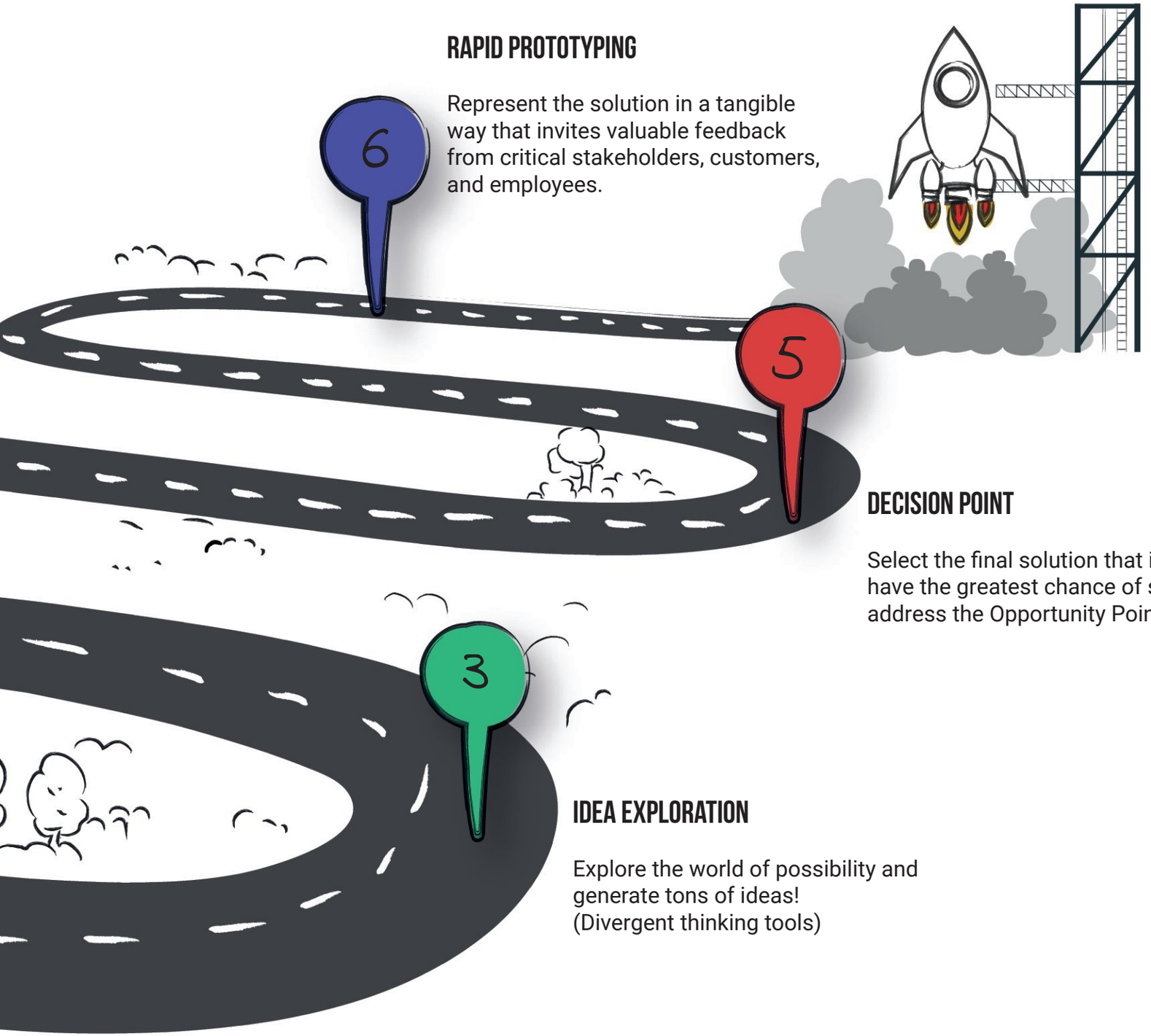
SOLUTION DETERMINATION

Narrow down potential solutions that could address the Opportunity Point. (Convergent thinking tools)



OPPORTUNITY POINT

Articulate a clearly defined opportunity, goal, or challenge you want to tackle.



RAPID PROTOTYPING

Represent the solution in a tangible way that invites valuable feedback from critical stakeholders, customers, and employees.

INNOVATION

Realize the result of a new solution that creates substantial value and enhances the lives of people.

DECISION POINT

Select the final solution that is believed to have the greatest chance of success to address the Opportunity Point.

IDEA EXPLORATION

Explore the world of possibility and generate tons of ideas!
(Divergent thinking tools)

Creative Foundations

The absolute need-to-know about the world of creativity, how it drives innovation, and the impact it has on business performance.

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Learn what drives innovation, how people actually internalize creativity, and how to cultivate it successfully.

2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

Define and clarify the opportunity at hand, so you have focus and direction.

3 IDEA EXPLORATION

Explore all possibilities, every idea, and every path, especially the ones that seem distant or hidden.

4 SOLUTION DETERMINATION

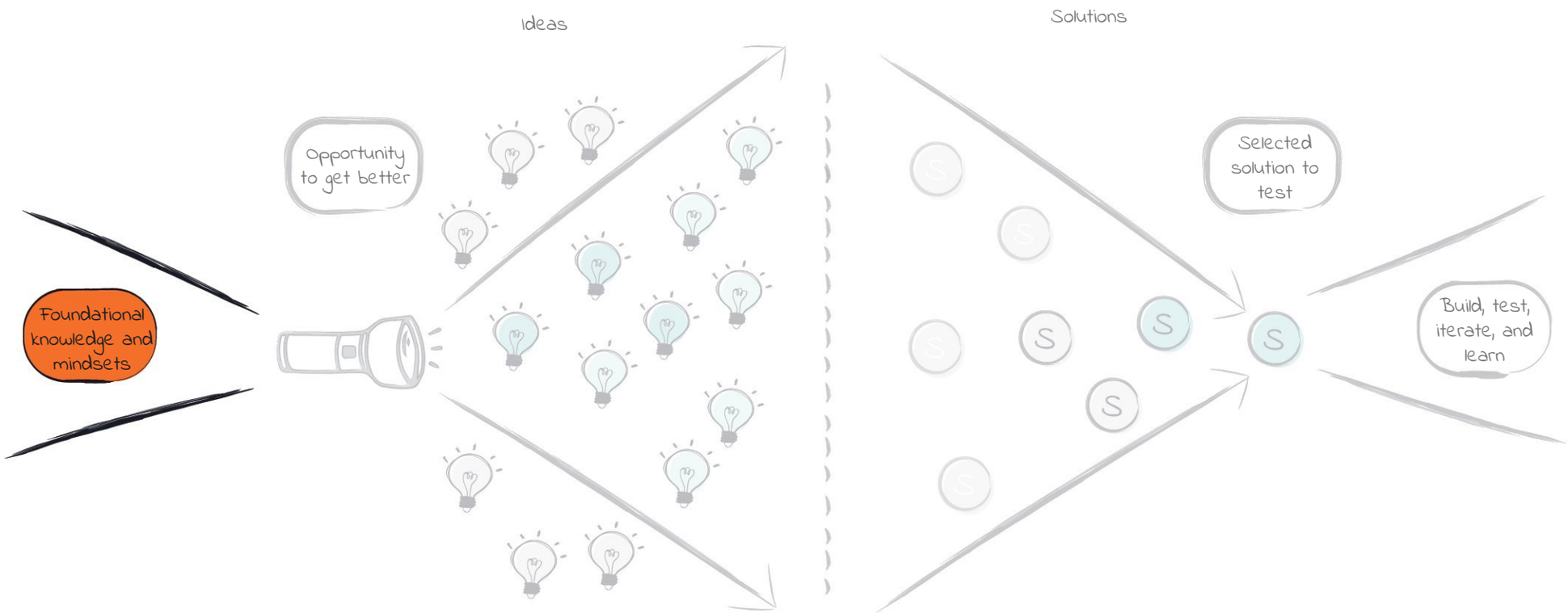
Create a clear path forward by deciding on the right solution with confidence.

5 DECISION POINT

Decide which solution to act on and assess success.

6 RAPID PROTOTYPING

Gain valuable insight into your solution by testing important assumptions and answering critical questions.



CREATIVITY DECONSTRUCTED

THERE'S MUCH MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

FIRST, THREE OF THE MOST COMMON, AND MOST DANGEROUS, CREATIVITY MYTHS:

1

THE MYTH:

Some people are creative and others are not.

THE TRUTH:

This is the result of Creative Evaporation. The truth is that we are all creative; however, the world, society, education systems, business culture, and many other factors have completely shattered our confidence. Sometimes it gets so bad that ultimately get to the point of believing we are not creative. Nothing could be further from the truth - we are all 100% uniquely creative!

2

THE MYTH:

Creativity is reserved for those who are artists, painters, and visual creators.

THE TRUTH:

This is the most common way in which people talk about creativity. However, this is dead wrong. Art, dance, or any visual representation of something is simply the expression of creativity. We are all creative, just in our own ways. Remember, creativity is the ability to create ideas. Each of us just expresses those ideas differently (learn more about Creative Expression on page 32).

3

THE MYTH:

People who think "out of the box" are the creative ones.

THE TRUTH:

You may see the trend here. Creativity is not tied to only "out of the box" conversations. We are all creative; we just leverage it in our own preferred style. You can be just as creative "in the box" as "out of the box." Both require creativity, which is the ability to create ideas. What is different is the style and the level in which your creativity flows.

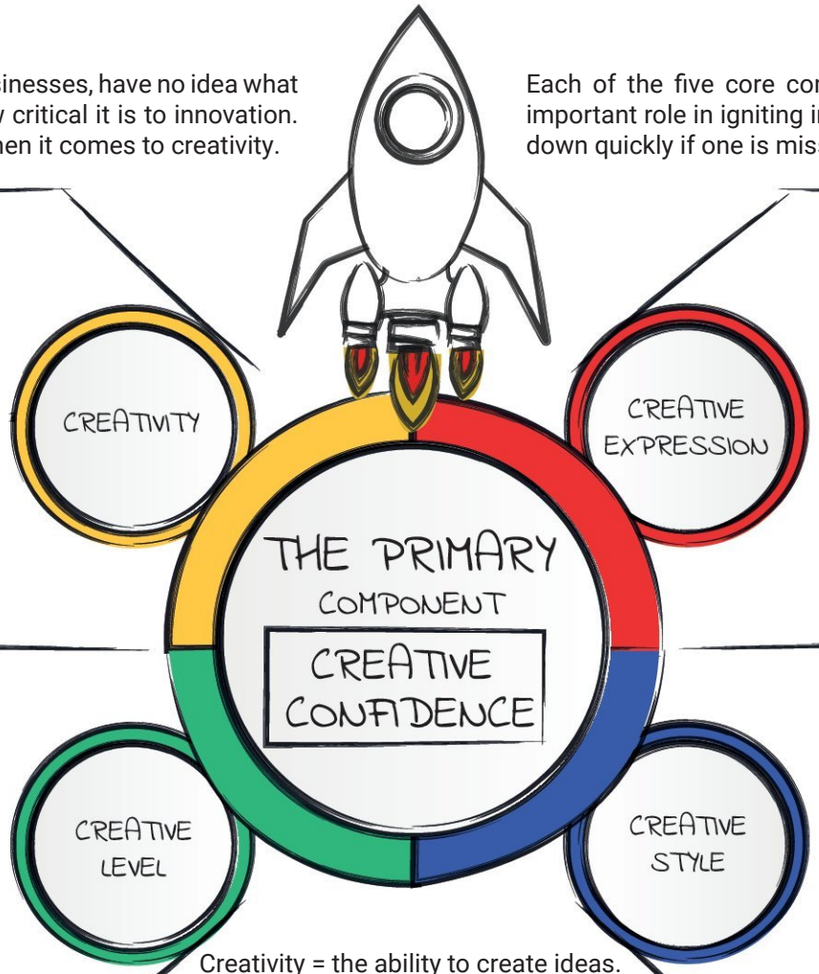
"If we want to make significant, quantum change, we need to work on our basic paradigms."

-Stephen Covey

SECOND, THE 5 CORE COMPONENTS OF "CREATIVITY" THAT FUEL INNOVATION

The sad fact is that most people, and most businesses, have no idea what creativity really is, how to leverage it, and how critical it is to innovation. There is so much more than meets the eye when it comes to creativity.

Each of the five core components of creativity play a significant and important role in igniting innovation. However, innovation starts to break down quickly if one is missing from the conversation.



Creativity is the ability to create ideas.

Every person has the ability to create ideas; therefore, we are all creative. To be human is to be creative. The largest factor is how confident we are in ourselves to be creative. Unfortunately, most of us lack confidence in ourselves to be creative, which leads us to believe, or even say, "I am not creative." The underlying root cause of this is Creative Evaporation.

Creative Expression is how we choose to express our creativity to ourselves and to the world.

Expression is not creativity. Creativity is our ability to create ideas. We then express those ideas in visual and tangible ways.

Dance, art, music, photography, our clothing, business presentations, and even developer code are all examples of Creative Expression. Every person, because we are human, expresses their creativity in their own way. The question is whether they trust the world and have the confidence in themselves to express it.

Creative Level is a measurement of how creative you are.

Some people are more creative than others, yet every person is creative. The difference is how much more. Think of level as the lines on a measuring cup. The more water you have, the higher the level. Creative Level is heavily influenced by not only the right tools, processes, and mindsets, but also Creative Confidence.

Creative Style is how we prefer to create ideas and approach problem solving.

Some people prefer to be creative "in the box," while others prefer to be creative "out of the box." Every person can do a little of both, but we have a preferred go-to style.

The problem to solve or the opportunity to capture will determine the best mix of styles required to succeed.

Creativity = the ability to create ideas.
Confidence = faith in ourselves.

Creative Confidence is the faith we have in ourselves to be creative.

We then determine if we trust those around us, feel included, and think the world is worthy of our ideas, level, style, and expression.

CREATIVITY

Creativity is the ability to create ideas. There is no reason to make it more complicated than that - to be human is to be creative. It really is that simple.

Yet, for some reason, we constantly complicate the simplicity of it. As you discovered above, we unfortunately wrap up too many important components under the creativity umbrella. Creativity is its own thing, while level, style, and expression all play unique and complementary roles.

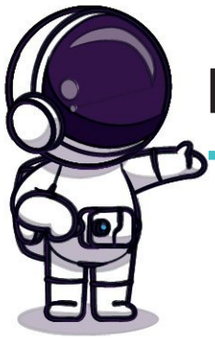
Creativity matters because this is our idea generation engine. We need our creative juices flowing to generate ideas, solve problems, and innovate. Creativity is something that needs to be nurtured and cared for just like a beautiful flower garden. If you dedicate time and energy into developing your creativity, you will see positive changes in your life. Your perception of the world, and importantly how you operate in it, will also change in new and exciting ways.

Our Creative Confidence plays a massive role in this endeavor as well. To be human is to be creative - it binds us, makes us unique, and allows us to creatively solve problems when the world throws curve balls. I would argue that creativity is not simply important to life, it's what allows us to live. We solve hundreds of problems a day, whether we realize it or not, and it's our creativity and ideas that allow that to happen naturally.

THE IMPACT OF CREATIVITY IN BUSINESS:

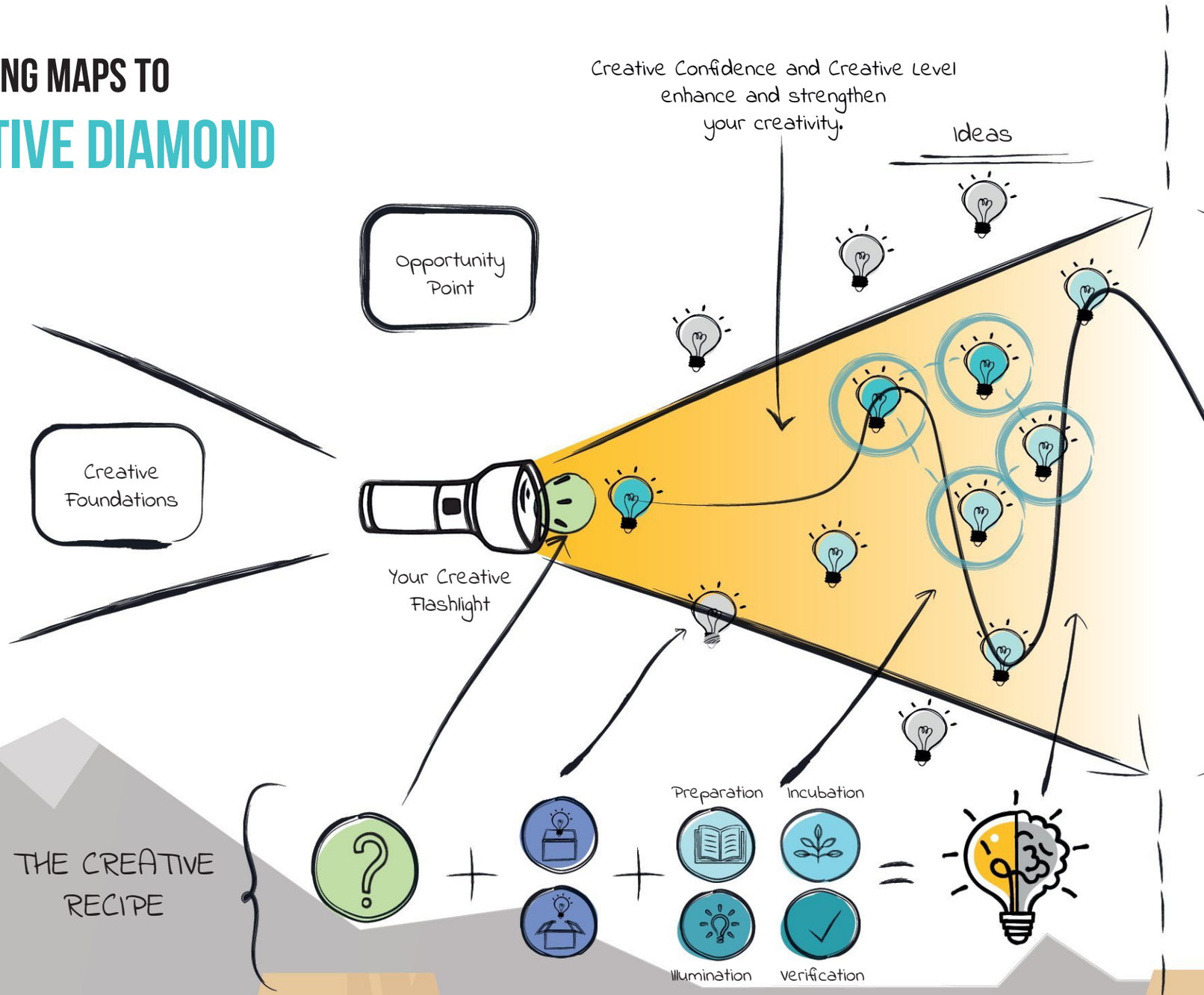
Frankly, if the business wants to stay relevant and stick around in the future, you better learn how to leverage people's creativity. Innovation requires problem solving and ideas. Creativity is what provides the fuel. If you never learn how to fully leverage your team's creative potential, innovation will ever blossom as a result.

Creativity is like a muscle that can be trained and strengthened over time. If you don't nurture it, if you don't challenge it, and if you don't do anything about it, it's going to atrophy. Once that starts, your confidence in your creative abilities starts to fade, and you get to the point of saying, and sometimes even believing, "I am not creative." The good news is that if atrophy and evaporation have set in for you, fear not, because your creative juices can be refueled and reignited! Creative Evaporation isn't a life sentence. With new knowledge and the right mindsets, tools, and processes, you can start to rebuild and nurture those creative muscles again, and restore a stronger and more resilient Creative Confidence.



HOW EVERYTHING MAPS TO
THE CREATIVE DIAMOND

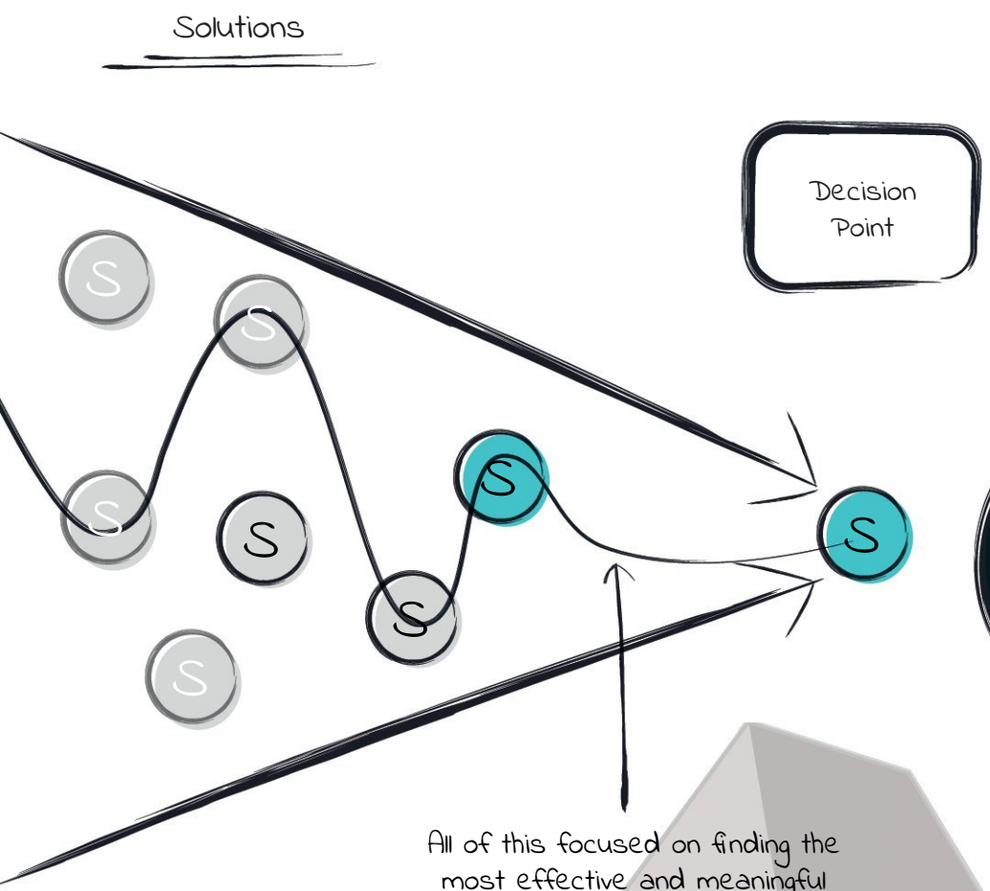
CREATIVITY IS THE FUEL



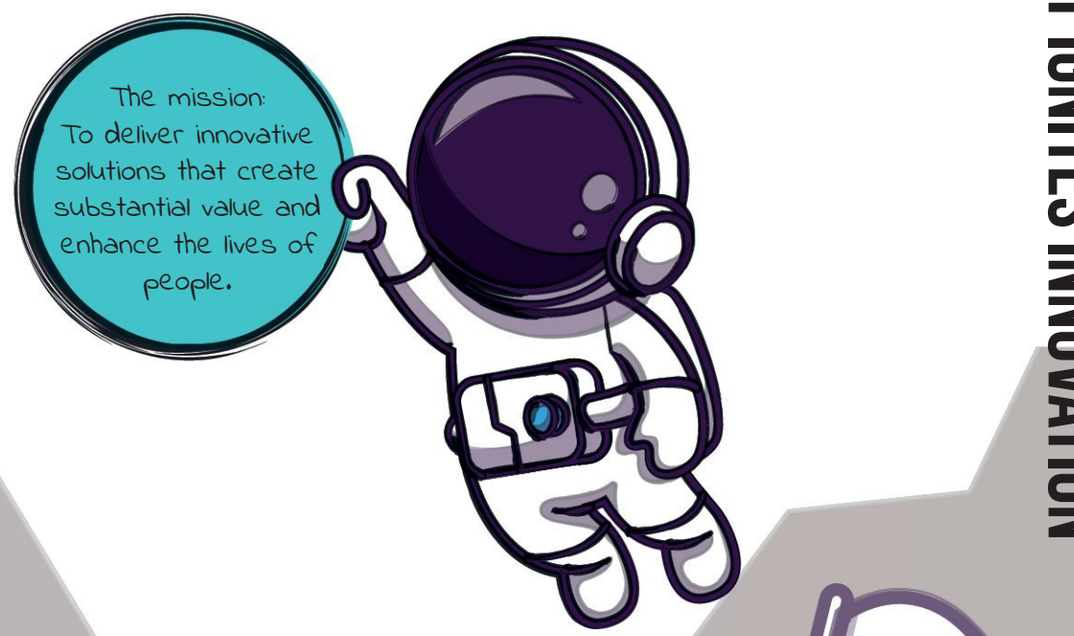
THAT IGNITES INNOVATION

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

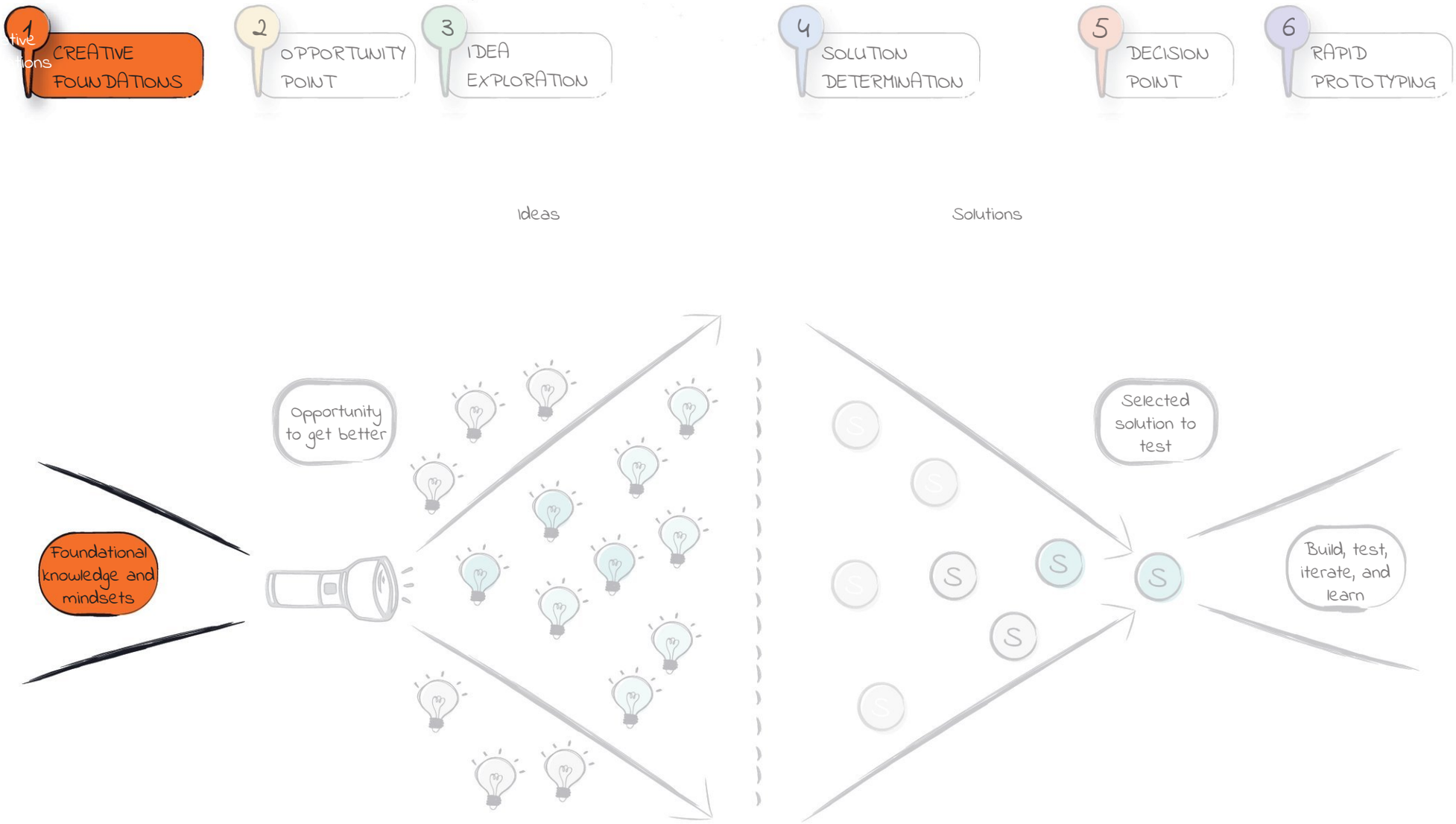
My creative idea was to connect everything we have learned together in one awesome visual. This illustration is the expression of that idea.



All of this focused on finding the most effective and meaningful path from ideas to solutions that ignite innovation.



WE HAVE STARTED TO DEVELOP FOUNDATIONS.



NOW, LET'S START TO MASTER THE RIGHT TOOLS AND PROCESSES.

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

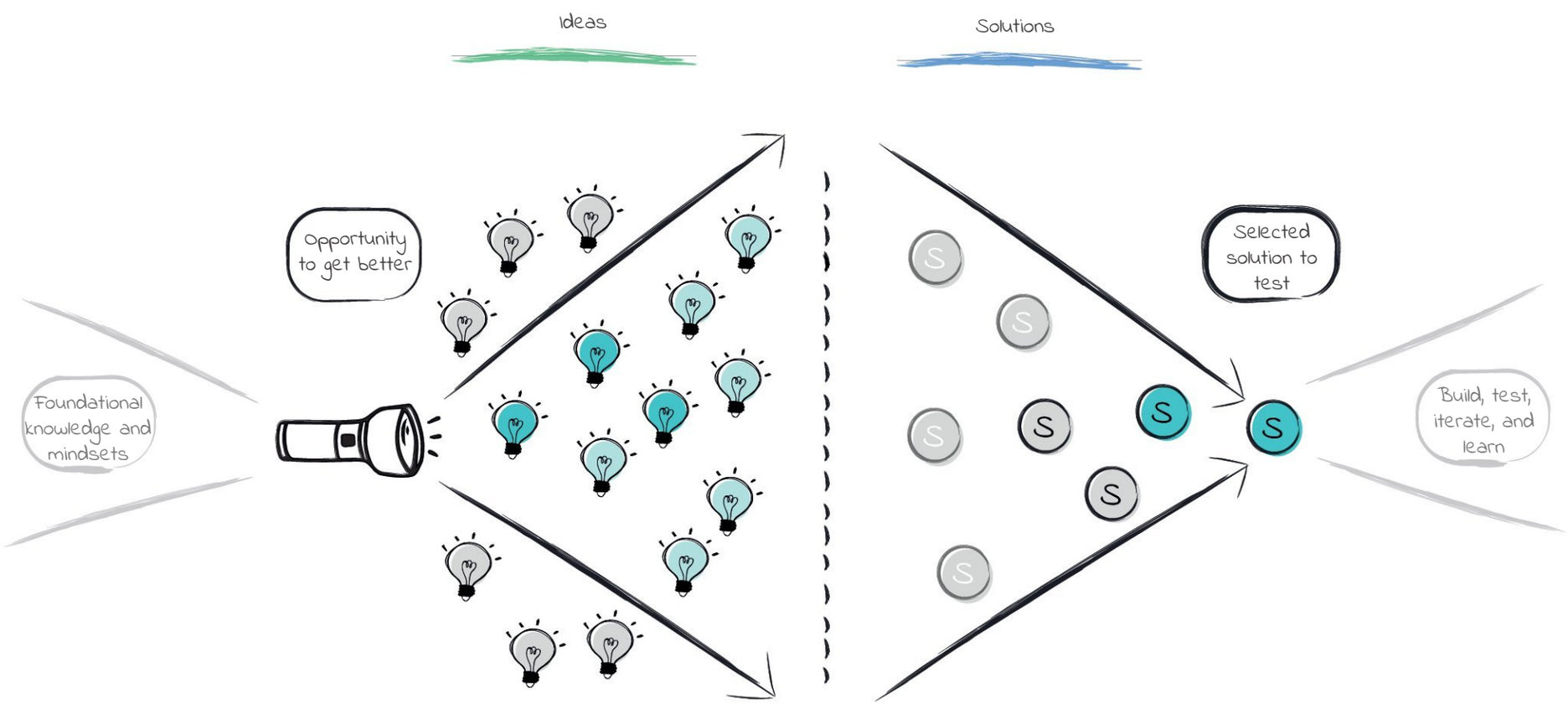
2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

3 IDEA EXPLORATION

4 SOLUTION DETERMINATION

5 DECISION POINT

6 RAPID PROTOTYPING



The step-by-step process and tools needed to

Liftoff!

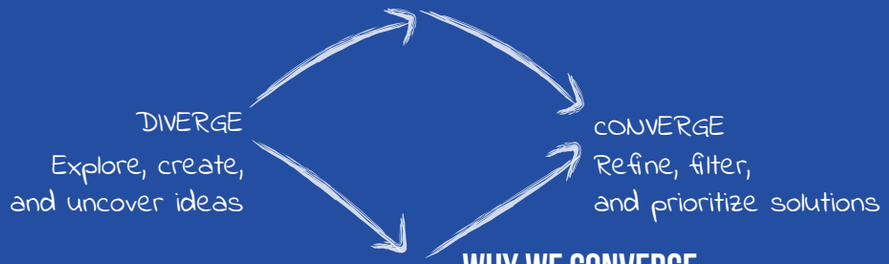
BEFORE WE LIFT OFF, YOU NEED TO KNOW THAT...

IDEAS ARE NOT SOLUTIONS. SOLUTIONS ARE NOT IDEAS.

WHY DOES THIS DISTINCTION MATTER?

Most of us talk about ideas and solutions like they are synonymous, but the distinction is quite important. Ideas are the gateway to innovation. However, ideas are not solutions; and yet in too many cases ideas are confused with solutions, which can lead to consequences down the road. Ideas are transformed into solutions, and solutions are what actually address the opportunity. A subtle yet transformative mindset that separates the most successful innovators from the rest is the ability to distinguish between ideas and solutions.

Here is a quick mental hack on how to think about ideas and solutions: You need, want, and desire to solve problems, conquer challenges, and capture opportunities. To do that effectively and efficiently, you need solutions that stick. To uncover the most ideal solution, you need all potential ideas on the table.



WHY WE DIVERGE

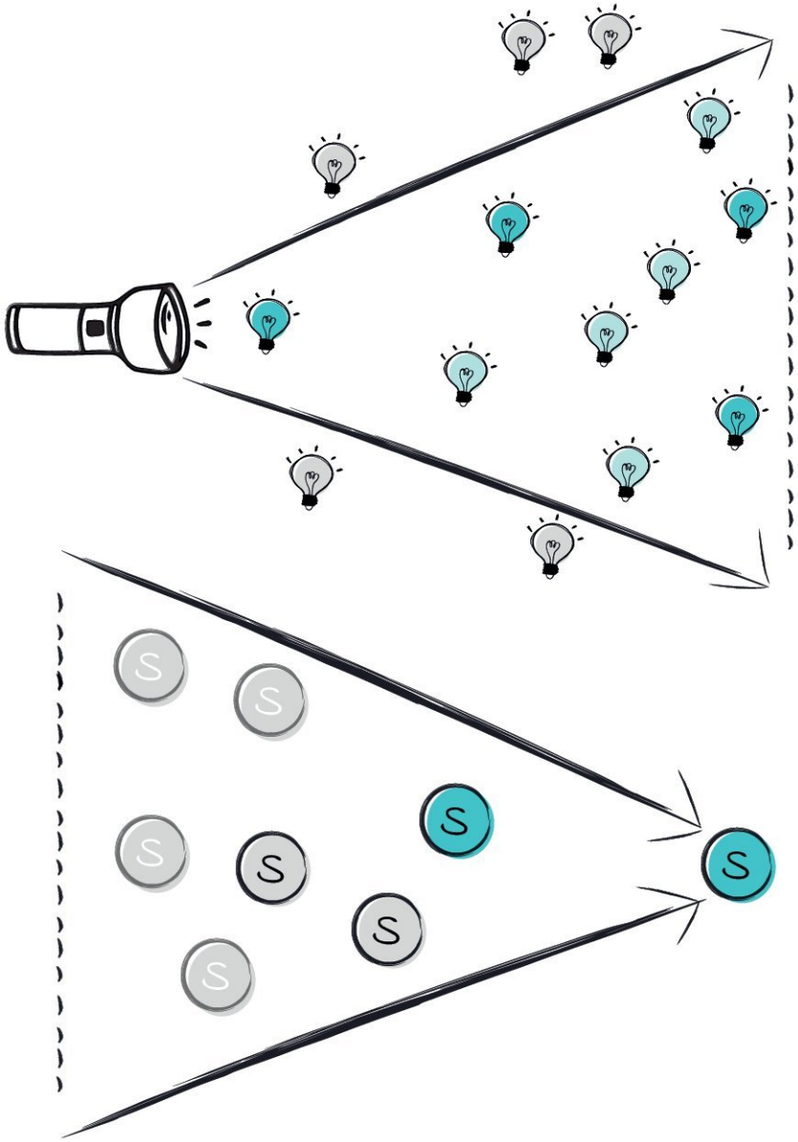
Divergence is all about moving apart, separation from a center, and going about things in unconventional ways. In relation to creativity and innovation, it's about exploring all ideas and possibilities one can imagine. It's important to note that while diverging, there is no room for idea killers like: "that cannot be done," "we tried that once," or "it didn't work." **In divergence, anything and everything is possible; *all* people, both inside and outside of the box thinkers, should be given full rein to explore.**

WHY WE CONVERGE

Convergence is all about narrowing the field, prioritizing solutions, and preparing for action. In relation to creativity and innovation, it's about taking all potential solutions and narrowing them down to something we can manage, act on, and implement, with the resources and capabilities surrounding us. **In convergence, anything is possible, everything is not. We must make hard decisions and focus our energy and valuable resources strategically.**

DIVERGE TO EXPLORE, CREATE, AND UNCOVER IDEAS

Ideas are all the ways in which you COULD potentially address the need or tackle the opportunity (aka the Opportunity Point). Most of the time, an idea is a fragment of a solution and more refinement is needed to ensure the idea is ready for the big leagues. Also, keep in mind that an idea itself may be a potential solution, but do not confuse it with "the solution." We have a tendency to jump to solutions to quickly and forget those are sometimes glorified ideas we try to force into the equation.



CONVERGE TO REFINE, FILTER, AND PRIORITIZE SOLUTIONS

Solutions clearly detail how they WILL address the need or tackle the opportunity (aka the Opportunity Point). They are a mashup of ideas and insights that will need to be refined, filtered down, and assessed, with a goal of selecting "the solution" (the Decision Point). A solution itself tells a story – a story of what it is, how it works, who it's for, and how it will address the opportunity. The best solutions also take into consideration how the end customer or consumer will expect it to work and how it will make their lives better.

We all have the tendency to jump to solutions, and this can have painful consequences down the road. Try starting a new habit of first exploring all the potential ways you could do something, and then determine the most ideal solution to act on.

THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS TO IGNITING INNOVATION

1 DETERMINE YOUR OPPORTUNITY POINT

This is your clearly defined jump off point. It's important that the words chosen represent exactly what you want ideas for. Nothing is worse than wasting precious resources on the wrong thing!

(See page 59 for reference)

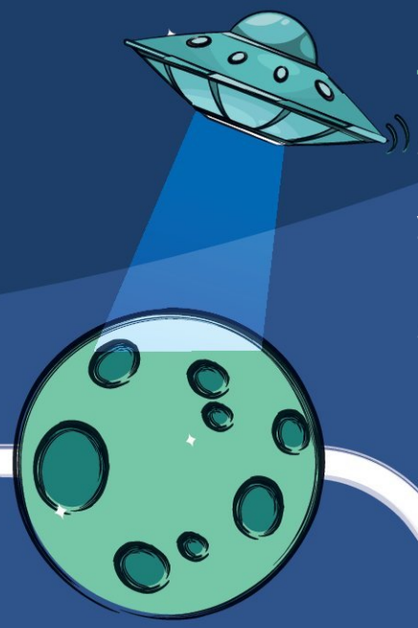
2 SELECT YOUR TRACK OR TOOLS OF CHOICE

Tracks are designed to guide you and your team through the process based on a certain business need. If desired, freely leverage any set of tools. Regardless, you will start to create many more fresh ideas and solutions.

VIDEO TUTORIALS, PDF TEMPLATES, AND OTHER RESOURCES

Tip: Start an idea and solution database! You never know when and where they may come in handy or spark new ideas later due to the natural magic of the Creative Process.

All materials and additional resources can also be found at www.derekbennington.com/books/igniting-innovation



TAG YOUR IDEAS AS YOU GO

Strengthen your creative muscles by mapping your ideas to the tools used. This sparks your memory, so you can remember what, when, how, etc. For example, if you are using How Might We...?, tag all idea sticky notes with HMW, or RS if you are using Random Stimulus.

3 DIVERGE: EXPLORE THE WORLD OF IDEAS

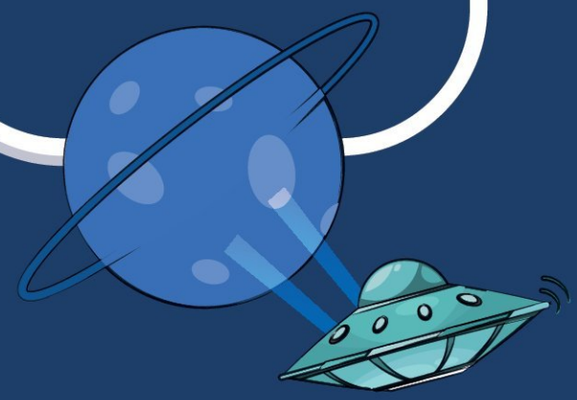
This is where you fire up your Creative Flashlight, diverge, and create as many ideas as possible. Remember, this is the world of possibility, and you will want to get your creative juices flowing as much as possible!

(See page 69 for reference)

4 CONVERGE: NARROW DOWN YOUR SOLUTIONS

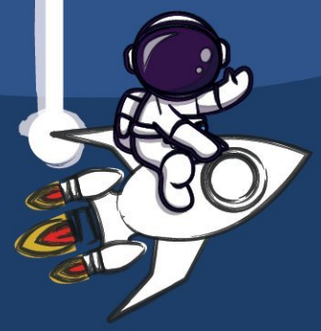
This is where you filter and prioritize solutions as you converge down onto the final Decision Point. As you do this, keep track of the story you are telling based on what you do and why. This helps you explain the journey you and your team went on with clarity.

(See page 99 for reference)



5 PROTOTYPE YOUR SELECTED SOLUTION

Once you have selected your final solution to test (the Decision Point), put pen to paper and get crafty. The goal is to start learning how to best improve the solution and successfully address the opportunity.



REFINE IDEAS INTO SOLUTIONS

Remember, ideas are not solutions. Take the time to clarify and add detail as necessary. You want to create actionable solutions that address the Opportunity Point (See page 59 for reference).

Opportunity Point

The power source that fires up your Creative Flashlight and sets the stage for idea exploration.

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Learn what drives innovation, how people actually internalize creativity, and how to cultivate it successfully.

2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

Define and clarify the opportunity at hand, so you have focus and direction.

3 IDEA EXPLORATION

Explore all possibilities, every idea, and every path, especially the ones that seem distant or hidden.

4 SOLUTION DETERMINATION

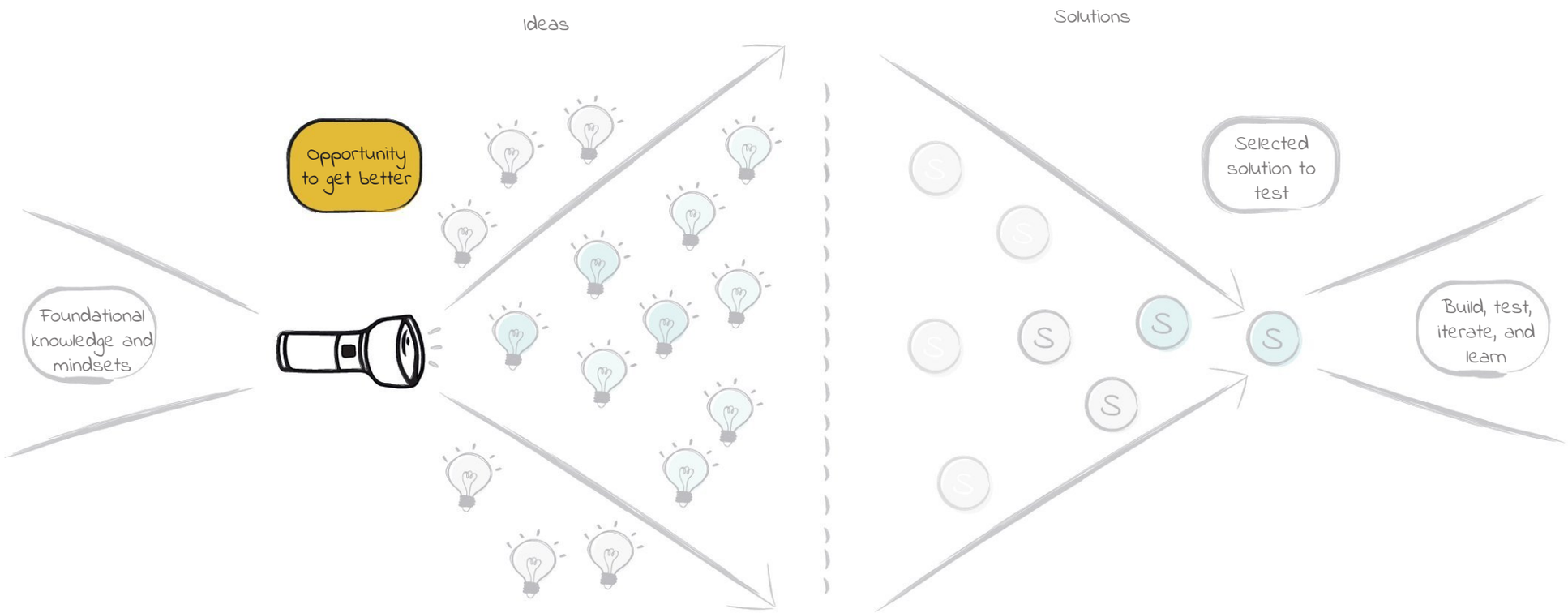
Create a clear path forward by deciding on the right solution with confidence.

5 DECISION POINT

Decide which solution to act on and assess success.

6 RAPID PROTOTYPING

Gain valuable insight into your solution by testing important assumptions and answering critical questions.



STEP 1

OPPORTUNITY POINT

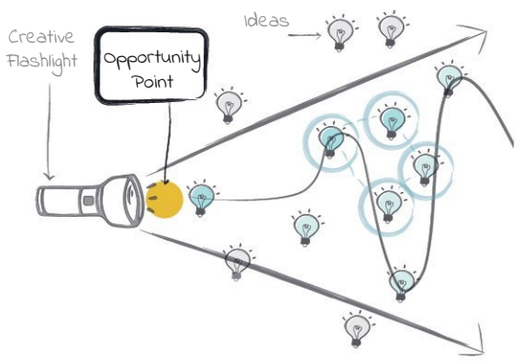
Simply put, the Opportunity Point defines what your goal is or what you want to accomplish. Some may refer to it as the problem statement. Regardless, it is the opportunity to do something better, and it should be something that you can control or heavily influence. This ensures that your end solutions will have a greater chance of success and bigger impact. Your mission is to develop and articulate a clearly defined Opportunity Point that focuses creative efforts and ideas in the right direction, at the right level, and at the right target. Needless to say, this is sometimes easier said than done.

Everything in front of you is an opportunity to get better - a goal, a problem, a challenge, a frustration, or a barrier. Whenever you hear or say "We need to...," "We want to...," or "We desire to...," that is your cue that an Opportunity Point is right in front of you! Whether you are focused on something you want to tackle for personal reasons or professional reasons, we naturally default to this "need/want/desire" expression. This sets the tone for your opportunity.

Furthermore, reframing these situations as opportunities has tremendous positive effects on your ability to be creative. The reason is that when we use the word opportunity, we start to shift our mind away from focusing on something that feels like a burden, an issue, or "something I have to deal with," to one that inspires positive growth, inspirational thinking, and a "I really want this!" mentality.

We accomplish this subtle yet transformative mindset shift simply by rephrasing our problem, challenge, or goal with: "We have an opportunity to..."

With this opportunity in mind, you now have a target in your sights. Now, let's set the stage: The ship is fueled and you are ready for liftoff. However, are you sure your coordinates are right and the path ahead is clear? Is your operation center 100% aligned? These are the same questions to be asking about your Opportunity Point.



How your Opportunity Point is articulated will drastically impact how, and what, ideas are created. While a clearly defined Opportunity Point will invite specific ideas that align with the end goal, a poorly defined and unclear Opportunity Point will shoot you off course, which will lead to sub-par results.

The question to consider when finalizing your Opportunity Point is this: "Is this really what I want ideas and solutions for?"

FOR EXAMPLE, YOU MAY HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY AS A...

growth minded professional to...
upskill for the next job, get a promotion this year, learn something completely new this year, find a way to mentor the new team member, or be indispensable at work.

entrepreneur or business owner to...
grow your business, better serve your customers, reach more people, close more deals, become the trusted-adviser, or grow brand awareness.

seasoned leader to...
empower my team to take on more responsibility, provide more professional development opportunities, become more people oriented, or increase team performance.

It starts with defining, clarifying, and focusing the opportunity, then letting your creative juices take over and allow your Creative Flashlight to shine bright as you create more and better ideas.

DEFINE

Defining the scope of the opportunity is critical, as this will be the spark that fires up people's creativity. How you define the opportunity will also heavily influence the end solution chosen, so it's important to get right from the start.

If you define the scope too wide, your ideas may not be targeted enough; and if the scope is too narrow, you place unnecessary constraints on what ideas, and possible solutions, will work. When you define the opportunity, you want to set boundaries. Imagine you are defining your target. If it's too big and the bullseye is massive, you lose meaning and impact. If it's too small, it feels impossible to hit, which can lead to discouragement and seemingly impossible scenarios.

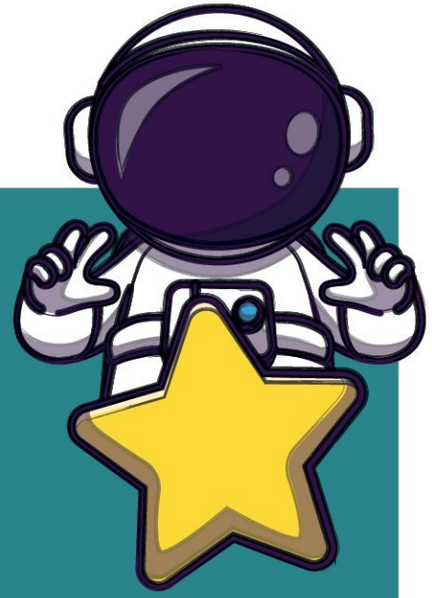
Three questions to consider when defining your Opportunity Point:
1. **At what level do you want to tackle your opportunity?**
2. **Do you have full control, or at least a heavy influence, on the way the opportunity is stated?**
3. **Is your opportunity potentially too wide or too small?**

CLARIFY

Clarifying your opportunity is also a critical step. Imagine a car windshield. What happens when it's dirty and foggy as opposed to clean and clear? What happens if it's completely covered in mud?

A clear opportunity statement leaves no room for ambiguity or interpretation. Everyone in the room knows exactly where to go. If it's not clear, there is a risk of creating ideas that will have little or no impact, and they will not be aligned with the results desired. Perhaps most importantly, a lack of clarity will inevitably lead to wasting precious time and resources along the way. Think of it this way: defining the opportunity sets the size and location, while the clarity sets the direction.

Three questions to consider when clarifying your Opportunity Point:
1. **Is there any room for ambiguity or interpretation?**
2. **Is the statement coherent and understandable to everyone involved?**
3. **Would anyone not involved in the process understand with perfect clarity what we are trying to do?**



Your Opportunity Point should be specific, at the right level, and clearly defined.

So, what opportunity exists for your team?

OUR OPPORTUNITY IS TO

This is your Opportunity Point. Use it in the following process as your jump off point for idea exploration.

THE IMPACT OF THE OPPORTUNITY POINT IN BUSINESS:

The greatest waste is spending precious resources, time, and human intellect on solving the wrong thing. Ever release a new product just to have it fail? Did your amazing employee retention strategy fall right on its face? Wonder why your business is not growing, or why competition is eating your lunch? Every single time we step up to the plate as a business focused on "getting better," we are problem solving and positioning to capture opportunity. Success or failure both boil down to how you frame and state your Opportunity Point. Would you bet everything on the fact that you are laser focused on the bullseye? If not, you may consider stepping back and making sure you are pointed at the right target.

EXAMPLES OF HIGH-IMPACT OPPORTUNITY POINTS

CUSTOMER

- Increase customer experience.
- Improve the initial experience customers have with our new products.
- Increase our ability to retain existing customers.

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- Align our product features/backlog with unmet customer needs.
- Deliver new offerings that delight our customers in new ways.
- Create solution portfolios that steal customers from other competitors.

CULTURE

- Strengthen our culture to a point that no one ever wants to leave.
- Align our cultural principles with employee incentives.
- Enhance our ability to handle change/transformation.
- Become more agile in responding to market conditions.
- Become a more cross-collaborative business and less siloed.

MARKETING

- Strengthen our unique value proposition.
- Create an online presence that inspires people to engage with us.
- Increase the likelihood that we stand out from the crowd and not become a commodity to our customers.
- Better position our offerings with customer unmet needs.
- Enhance customer experience through new channels.

SALES

- Involve our customers in the sales process and experience.
- Identify new sales channels that are harder for competition to tap into.
- Develop new pipelines of customer leads.
- Increase sales performance through customer driven training.

STRATEGY AND PLANNING

- Create stronger alignment and buy in with our people and leadership.
- Ensure clarity of our strategic plan, so people can execute with precision.
- Create goals and objectives that push the business, so it can uncover its potential.

BUSINESS MODEL

- Develop multiple new revenue streams with massive margins.
- Increase our market share of our core products.
- Uncover new growth opportunities that make market changes irrelevant.

HR AND OPERATIONS

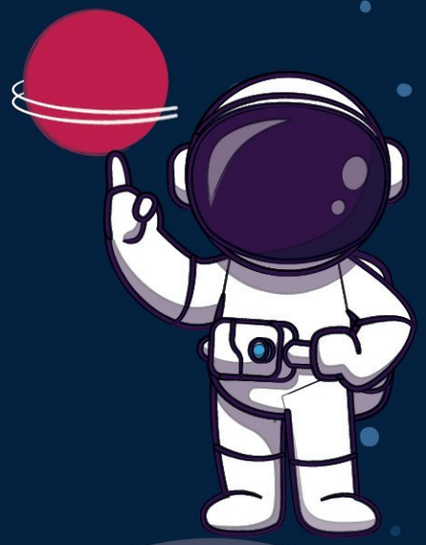
- Optimize our processes.
- Create new pipelines that tap into an endless supply of talent.
- Increase our ability to retain talent.
- Increase the likelihood that we stand out from the crowd and not become a commodity to our employees.
- Increase employee productivity to unheard of levels.
- Increase operational performance to a point that it makes competition wonder what we are doing.

EMPLOYEE

- Increase engagement between in-person and remote employees.
- Decrease employee turnover; or even better - increase the likelihood employees stay longer.
- Inspire our employees to the point that they become advocates for our business.
- Increase overall employee happiness.
- Increase our employee skills with cutting-edge training.

STEP 2

THE TRACKS



These tracks are designed to guide you and your team through the process based on a certain business need when you desire more fresh ideas and solutions.

Whether you need help breaking through the typical idea drip or leveling the playing field with people that overpower the group, there is a track that will leverage the creative superpower in the room.

Select your track or tools of choice

TONS OF IDEAS IN A SHORT TIME (30 MIN)

Diverge: How might we...,
Wouldn't it be cool if...,
QI Brainstorming, Improv: Yes, and...

Converge: Heat Mapping

Follow this track across the tools outlined

TONS OF IDEAS IN A SHORT TIME (30 MIN)

Diverge: How might we...,
Wouldn't it be cool if...,
QI Brainstorming, Improv: Yes, and...

Converge: Heat Mapping

Use the tab colors on the upper right to help guide you
(e.g. if you want the tons of ideas in a short time, look for the YELLOW tab colors)

Remember: You can always change up your flow, add to it, or veer off track if you want. As you get more familiar with the tools, you will start to uncover what works best for you and your team.

SELECT YOUR TRACK

TONS OF IDEAS QUICKLY

Diverge:
How might we...? (page 77),
Wouldn't it be cool if...? (page 79)
QI Brainstorming (page 81),
Yes, and... (page 83)

Converge:
Heat Mapping (page 109)

STUCK IN A RUT AND NEED A PUSH

Diverge:
Ideal State (page 73),
Ideal State Deconstruction (page 75),
How might we...? (page 77),
Wouldn't it be cool if...? (page 79),
Ask Nature (page 89), Random Stimulus (page 85),
Concept Idea Mapping (page 97), Sketchy 4 (page 87)

Converge:
KJ Method (page 103), Matrix Design (page 107),
Paired Comparison (page 111)

NEWLY FORMED TEAM

Diverge:
QI Brainstorming (page 81),
Brainwriting X-3-5 (page 91)
Yes and... (page 83), Random Stimulus (page 85),
Sketchy 4 (page 87)

Converge:
Heat Mapping (page 109),
Impact vs Effort (page 105)

HIGH IMPACT, TO THE POINT

Diverge:
Ideal State (page 73),
QI Brainstorming (page 81),
Random Stimulus (page 85),
Reverse Brainstorming (page 95),
Sketchy 4 (page 87)

Converge:
KJ Method (page 103), Heat Mapping (page 109),
Matrix Design (page 107)

SHAKE THINGS UP, EXPLORE, HAVE FUN!

Diverge:
Ideal State (page 73),
Ideal State Deconstruction (page 75),
QI Brainstorming (page 81),
Brainwriting X-3-5 (page 91),
Yes and...(page 83), Concept Idea Mapping (page 97),
Ask Nature (page 89), SCAMPER (page 93),
Random Stimulus (page 85)

Converge:
Matrix Design (page 107),
Heat Mapping (page 109),
Pugh Matrix (page 113)

PUSHING HARD FOR INNOVATION

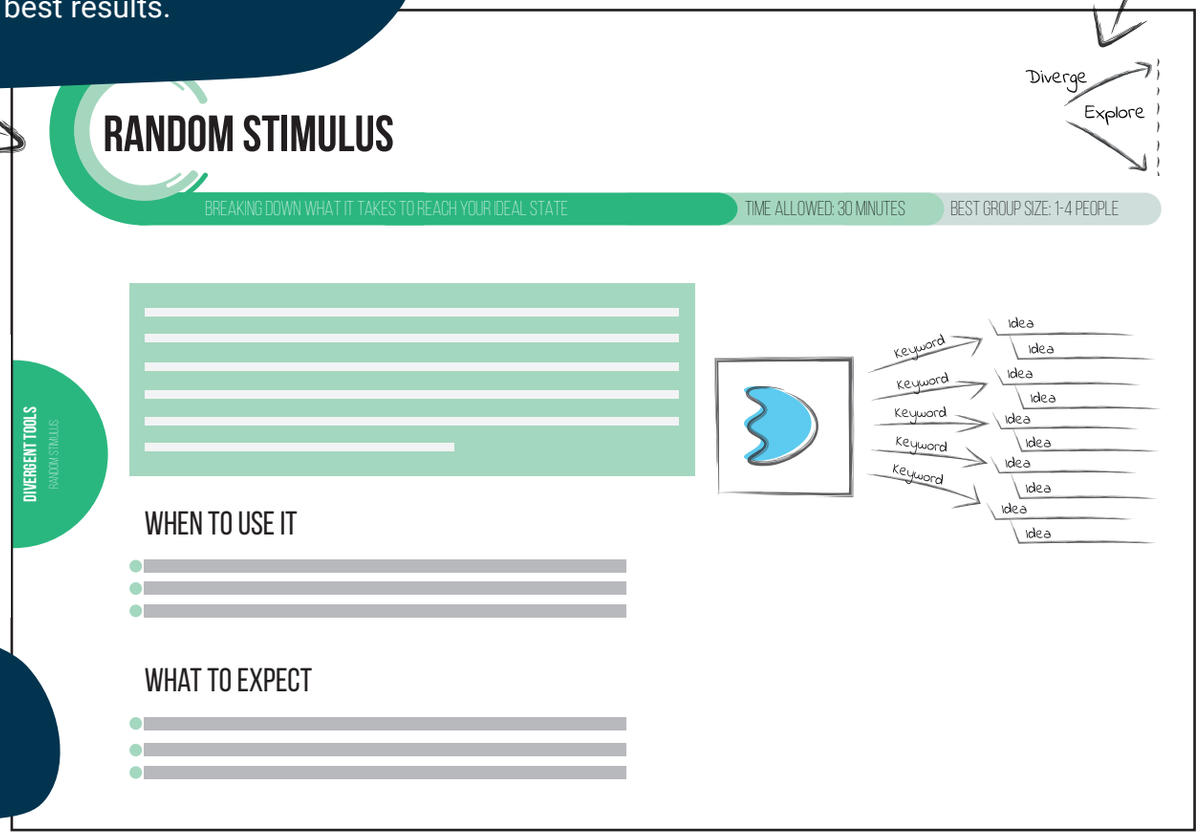
Diverge:
QI Brainstorming (page 81),
Brainwriting X-3-5 (page 91),
SCAMPER (page 93)

Converge:
Matrix Design (page 107),
Pugh Matrix (page 113)

HOW TO USE THE TOOL PAGES

What phase of the Creative Diamond you are playing in

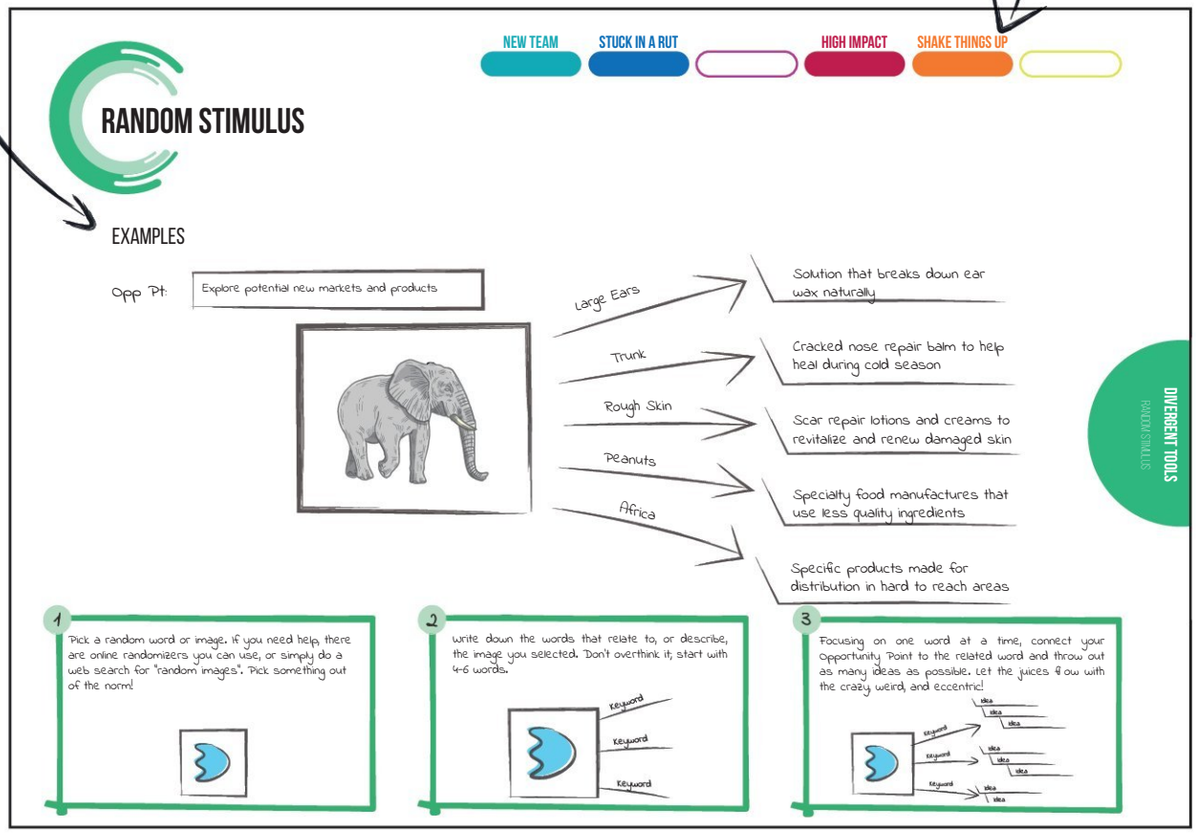
Title, description, what size group may work best, and how long you should budget to get the best results.



Tool name and Creative Diamond phase tabs for easy navigation.

A visual example using the tool with a relevant Opportunity Point.

Track color tabs that map to the tools outlined in the Track options on page 66. If the tab is highlighted, that tool is on that track.



Idea Exploration

The path to unlimited ideas that drive innovation forward.

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Learn what drives innovation, how people actually internalize creativity, and how to cultivate it successfully.

2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

Define and clarify the opportunity at hand, so you have focus and direction.

3 IDEA EXPLORATION

Explore all possibilities, every idea, and every path, especially the ones that seem distant or hidden.

4 SOLUTION DETERMINATION

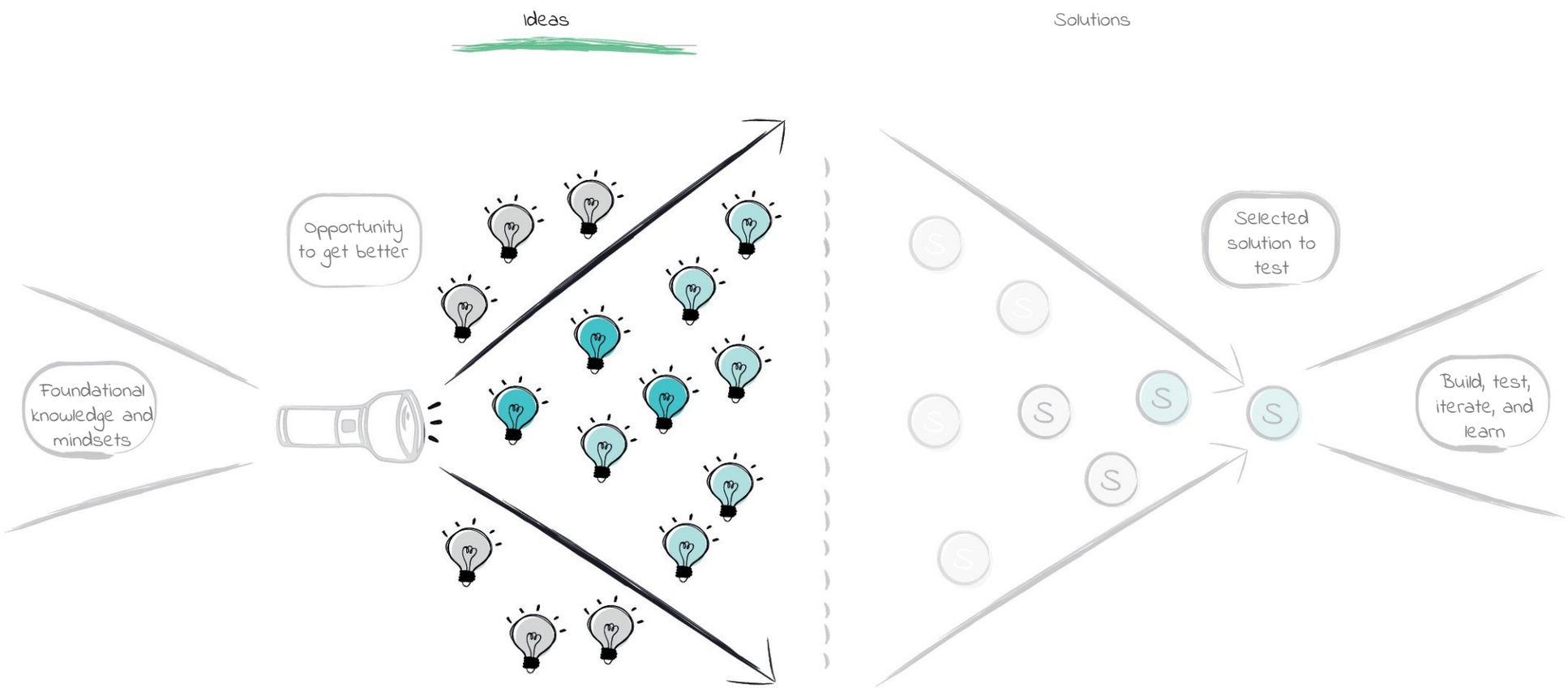
Create a clear path forward by deciding on the right solution with confidence.

5 DECISION POINT

Decide which solution to act on and assess success.

6 RAPID PROTOTYPING

Gain valuable insight into your solution by testing important assumptions and answering critical questions.

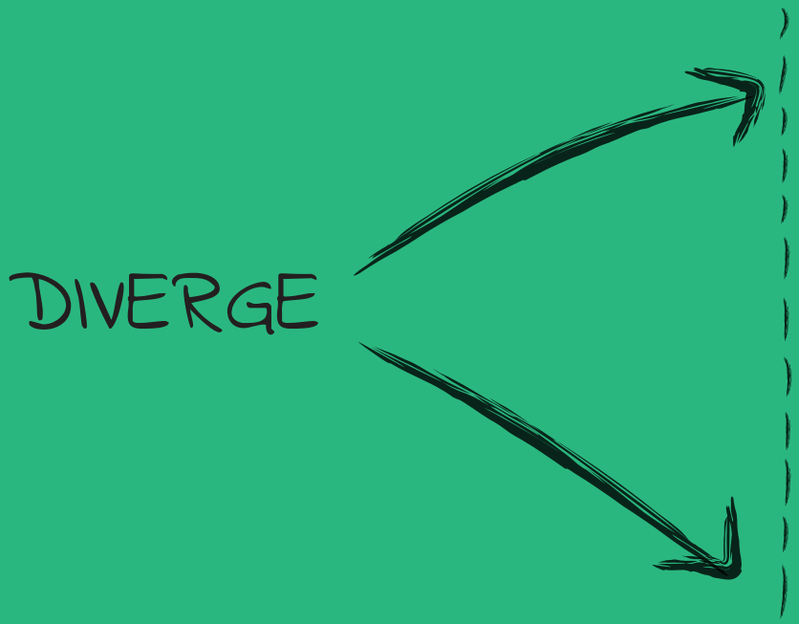


GREAT IDEATION RULES AND GUIDELINES

- Use sticky notes and dry erase markers.
- Allow the crazy, far off, and weird.
- Don't be afraid of the seemingly impossible.
- Defer judgement until later!
- NO IDEA KILLERS – this is not the time.
- Illustrate and draw whenever possible!
- One idea, insight, or thought per sticky note.
- Have fun!

TIPS TO GET THE CREATIVE JUICES FLOWING:

- Drink lots of water! Look it up if you don't believe me.
- Accept and employ the Creative Process: let people prepare, incubate, and illuminate extensively!
- Time is your ally; don't rush creativity.

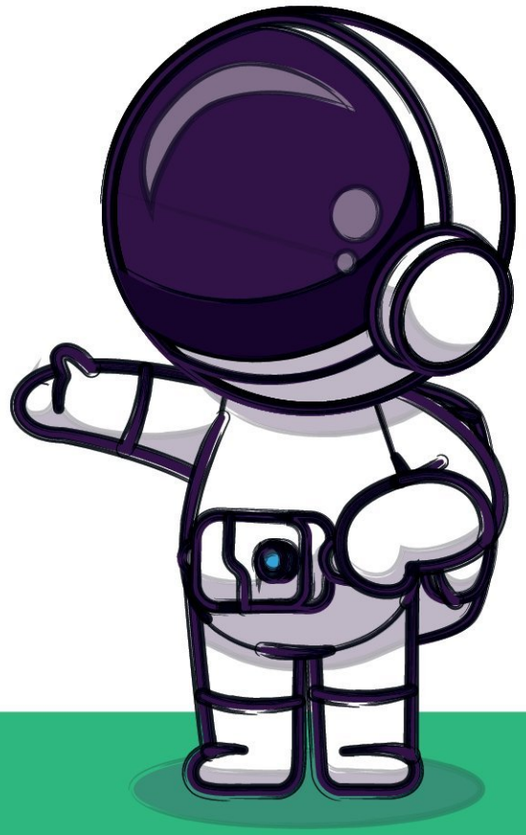


STEP 3

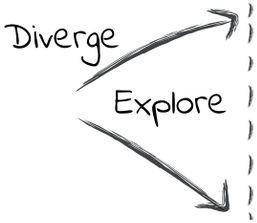
DIVERGENT THINKING:

EXPLORING THE WORLD OF POSSIBILITY

1 Ideal State
2 Ideal State Deconstruction
3 How might we...?
4 Wouldn’t it be cool if...?
5 QI Storming
6 Yes, and...
7 Random Stimulus
8 Sketchy 4
9 Ask Nature
10 Brainwriting X-3-5
11 SCAMPER
12 Reverse Brainstorming
13 Concept Idea Mapping



HOW MIGHT WE...?



ASK QUESTIONS FIRST, THEN DIVE INTO IDEAS | TIME ALLOWED: 10 MINUTES | BEST GROUP SIZE: 2-4 PEOPLE

As humans, we are really good at giving answers, yet we struggle to ask questions (unless you are a kid!). When we do ask questions, our mindset shifts, and we become much more exploratory and curious. Think of it as question storming vs idea storming. Instead of creating ideas, we are asking questions.

The purpose of How Might We...? (HMW) question storming is to shift your attention away from ideas and focus on asking questions. The nature of the question "How might we...?" promotes a barrier busting mentality and focuses your creative juices on finding a way around it or through it.

WHEN TO USE IT

- When everyone starts to jump to solutions
- When ideas dry up or you want to establish a new area of focus
- When you want to create a massive amount of new triggers for ideas

WHAT TO EXPECT

- A little difficulty with the question storming vs idea storming change
- A tendency to tap out after a few questions – just keep going
- If nothing is emerging, you may want to revisit the Opportunity Point

HOW MIGHT WE...?

EXAMPLES

Opp Pt: Increase customer satisfaction in the waiting room

HMW use technology in a fun way for parents and kids?

HMW use our wall space for learning or communication?

Opp Pt: Decrease returns due to packaging errors

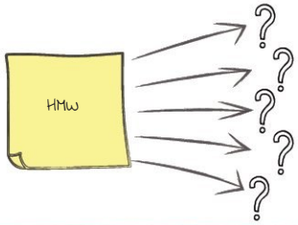
HMW send sample packages to test the process?

HMW use AI to spot issues proactively?

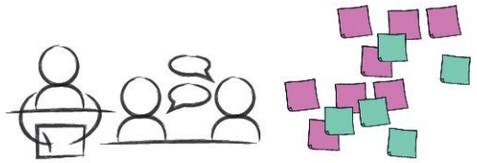
STEPS

1. Provide everyone with large sticky notes and write "HMW" (How Might we) at the top to track them.

2. Individually, brainstorm all the HMW questions you can in 5 minutes.



3. Then in small groups, share, discuss, and capture any more that come to mind.



Solution Determination

The path to finding focus and clarity on the best solutions.

1 CREATIVE FOUNDATIONS

Learn what drives innovation, how people actually internalize creativity, and how to cultivate it successfully.

2 OPPORTUNITY POINT

Define and clarify the opportunity at hand, so you have focus and direction.

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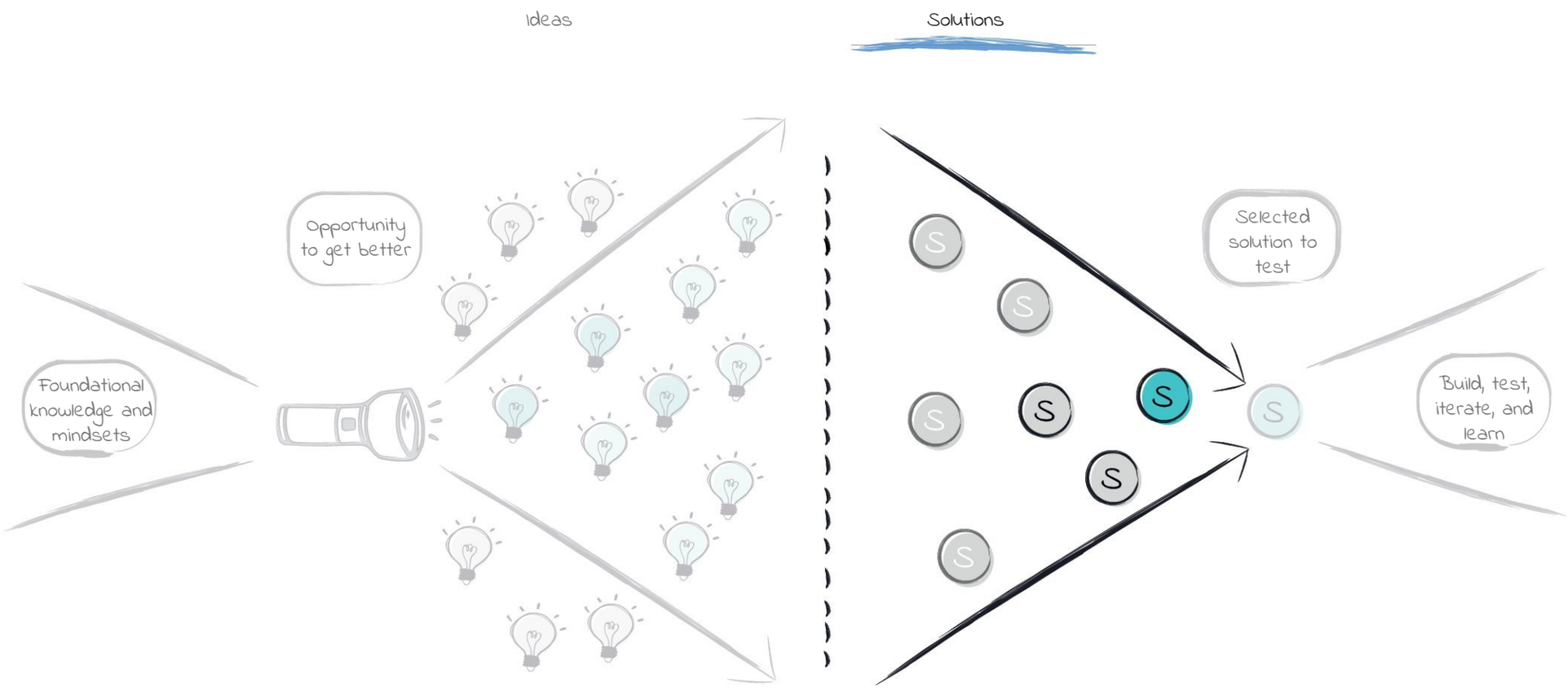
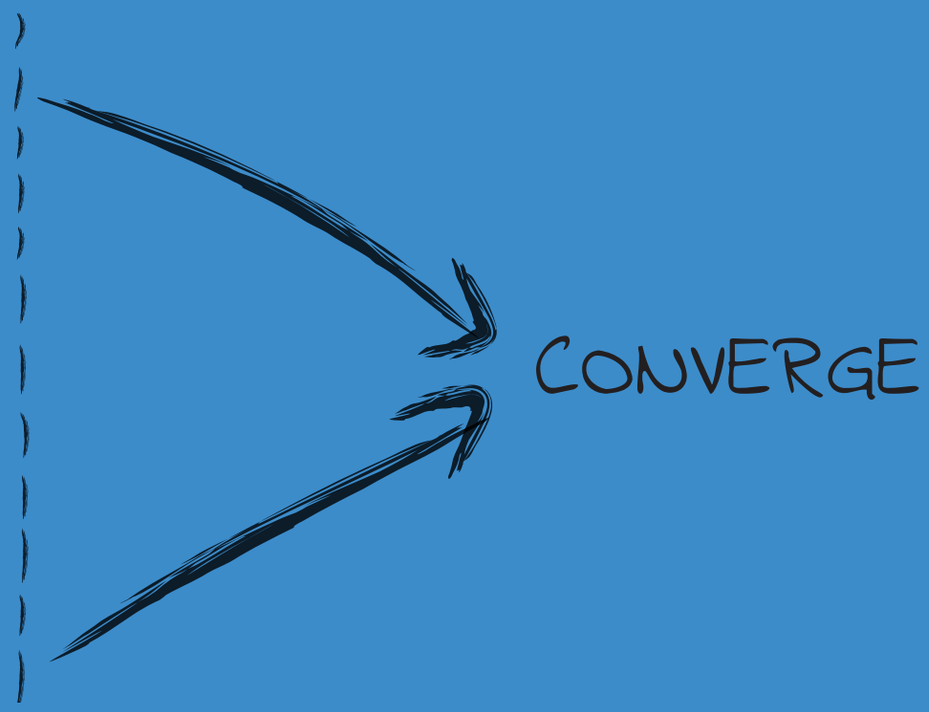


GOOD RULES AND GUIDELINES TO CONSIDER:

- Be very thoughtful and specific and ask why a lot.
- Do not get too much into the weeds that you cannot see daylight anymore.
- Stay focused on the good stuff - don't let all the reasons why something cannot work bury the solution too early!

TIPS TO HELP UNCOVER THE MOST IDEAL SOLUTION:

- Make a habit of asking "What needs and expectations of our customer are most important and unmet?"
- Consider how you can refine and improve the solutions to best meet these needs and expectations.
- Make sure you stay true to serving your customer first; however, start considering what is important to the business.
- True innovations create value for everyone!

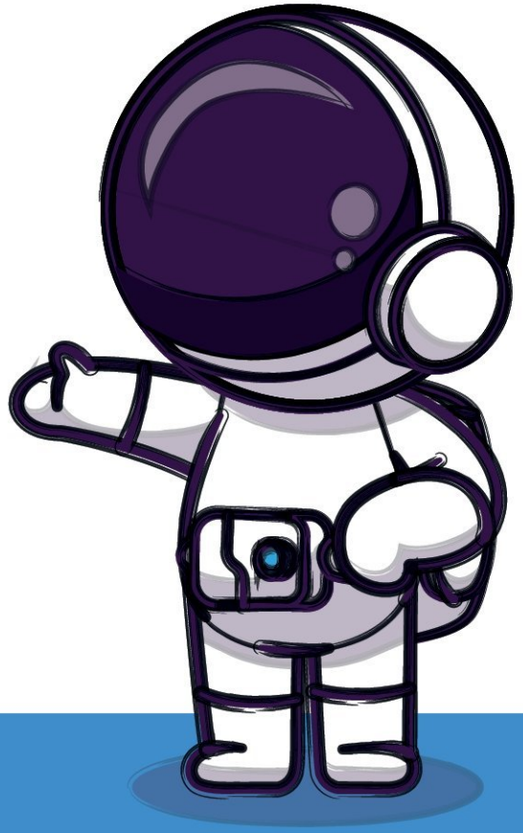


STEP 4

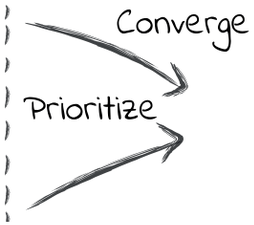
CONVERGENT THINKING:

SORT AND PRIORITIZE TO FIND ACTION

1. KJ Method
2. Impact vs Effort
3. Matrix Design
4. Heat Mapping
5. Paired Comparison
6. Pugh Matrix



IMPACT VS EFFORT



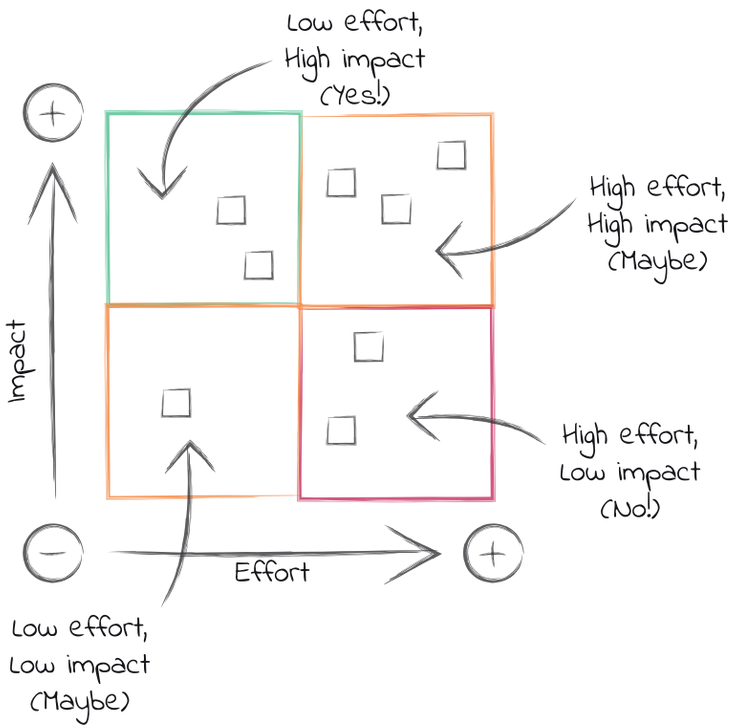
SIMPLE ORGANIZATION LEADS TO EFFECTIVE PRIORITIZATION

TIME ALLOWED: 10-30 MINUTES

The Effort vs Impact matrix is a tried-and-true effective method for organizing and prioritizing solutions. The primary goal is to quickly assess all solutions based on two dimensions. In this case, impact to the business and effort to get it done. Each dimension is then rated from low to high (you can also try a 3x3 matrix using low-medium-high ratings).

Keep in mind that regardless of whether you are using Impact vs Effort, or another set of dimensions, they need to be clearly defined by your team. General definitions will only encourage assumptions and interpretation, which inevitably leads to sub-par results.

For more options on using different dimensions, see Matrix Design on the next page.



WHEN TO USE IT

- You need a quick assessment and have a lot to go through
- You want to get a clear picture of what you do now vs later
- You need to get your team working on valuable work quickly

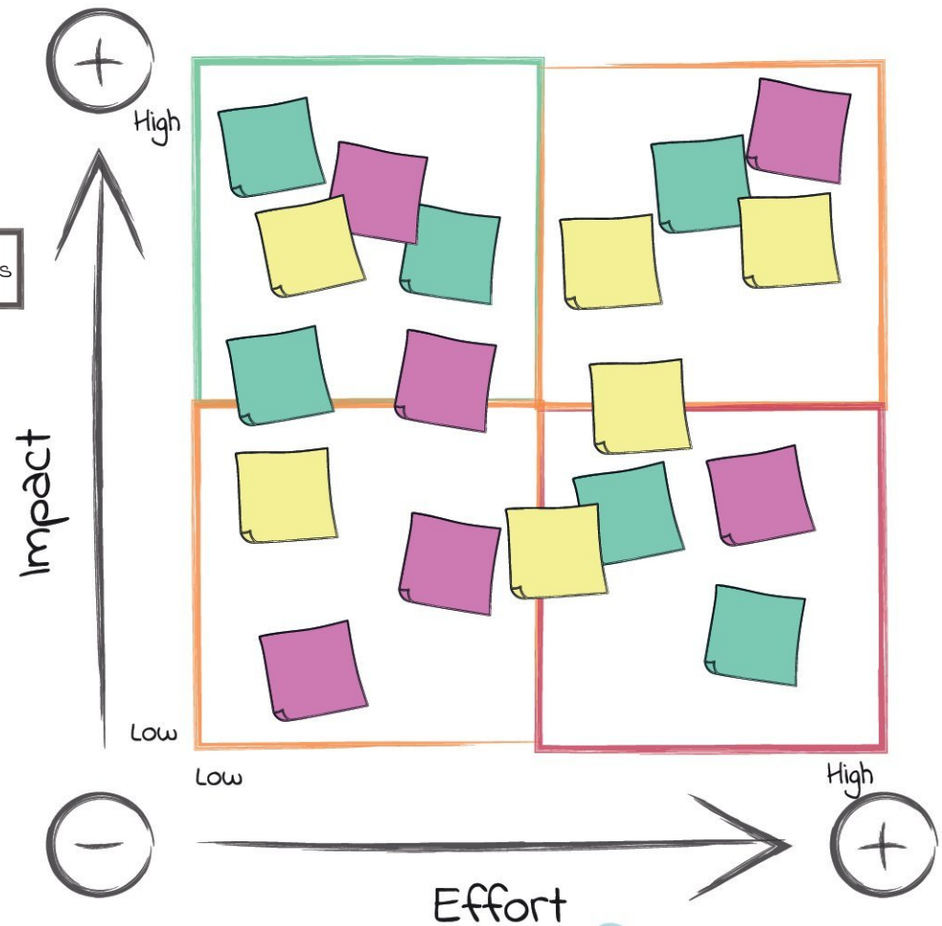
WHAT TO EXPECT

- Confusion if the dimensions are not clearly defined from the start
- Some argument or disagreement - encourage it if it has positive impact on the final output
- Don't take it at face value - be sure the assessment is sound and meaningful

IMPACT VS EFFORT

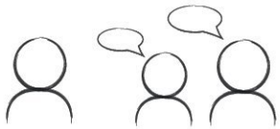
EXAMPLE

Opp Pt: Supplement our recruiting efforts with new methods

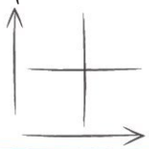


STEPS

1. Define Effort and Impact clearly with the team, and determine if you will use a 2x2 Low-High matrix, or a 3x3 Low-Med-High matrix.



2. Using a whiteboard, tape, etc., create your matrix on a large surface. Stay away from pieces of paper. You need people to talk, move things around, and be able to step back and see the full picture.



3. One solution at a time, discuss and place it on the matrix.

   A helpful tip: rate the solutions along a single dimension first, relative to each other. Then move them according to the second dimension rating. It can be very hard for our brains to keep up while rating across multiple dimensions and relative to each other at the same time.

GREAT TO MEET YOU, I'M DEREK

Derek's drive and passion stems from a love of teaching and facilitation. His relentless dedication to empowering others through innovation is evident with everyone he works with, from university students, startup owners, and executive teams. He strives to create an unforgettable experience that changes how people view the world, and how they will continue to operate within it.

Derek has over 20 years of business experience and has spent the past decade in corporate consulting focused on human-centered design, innovation, lean strategy, and creative problem solving. He is an expert in finding the synergy between strategy, strategic planning, operations, and human-centric solutions. Derek is also an adjunct professor at the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business focused on teaching creativity and innovation.

Derek holds an MBA with concentrations in innovation and statistical analysis from the University of Denver and a Bachelor of Science in Architectural Engineering from the University of Colorado Boulder.

INDUSTRIES I HAVE WORKED WITHIN

- Manufacturing
- Military product development
- Healthcare
- Public utility and broadband
- Roofing and construction
- Startup and innovation incubation
- Hospitality and food manufacturing
- Beverage distribution
- University and higher education
- Residential and commercial real estate

"Innovation can take you places that you never thought possible. Believe, commit, and enjoy the ride!"

IGNITE CHANGE THAT MATTERS

DEREK BENNINGTON

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