Reversals

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Managing Innovation

Reversals

A useful technique in creative problem solving. Instead of asking a question like 'how can we persuade more customers to come into our shop?' we could reverse the question and frame it as 'how can we guarantee that no customers will every come into the shop?' This has the effect of changing the direction of thinking and helping to reframe the problem, focusing on different angles and elements within it. We can generate a list of answers to this question – and then explore whether reversing any of them adds to our list of possible solutions to the original problem.

For example if we'd asked how to prevent customers coming in we might have come up with a wild idea of 'make the place smell so bad they'll be driven away!' Reverse that and maybe there are ideas for using attractive scents and smells – maybe fresh ground coffee or hot baked bread – which might entice people in.

One value of the technique is that it can help a group which ahs become stuck and also serves to lighten the mood, often generating wild ideas which open up the thinking process.