Attribute Listing

JOHN BESSANT

Managing Innovation

Attribute Listing

This is a powerful technique for creating new concepts for products, services or processes. Attributes are particular characteristics of something – its size, shape, constituent material, etc. So to begin using the technique let's take an example – how to come up with a new writing device.

We could begin with an existing one – a pen – and list all the different attributes we can think of. Do this in the form of a table with the attributes in columns – e.g.

Made of ……	Ink colour	Writing tip	Retractable	Size	Weight
Metal	Blue	Fibre	Yes	6 inches	Light
Plastic	Red	Ball point	No	Mini 2 inch	Medium
Wood	Black	Rollerball		4 inch	Heavy
Rolled paper	Gold	Stylus		8 inch	

We can add as many as we like; the more we use the more options we can create. The next part of the technique is to choose one entry from each column and look at the emerging combination. This represents a possible new product which we can explore, refine or reject.

For example we could think of a heavy wooden (perhaps using mahogany) pen with gold ink delivered via a sophisticated roller ball to give a smooth flow writing experience. We might think of that as a luxury pen which people might use to sign important documents; it might compete with prestige pens like the Mont Blanc range. Or we could come up with a mini paper roll pen with a simple ballpoint to give away in a promotion package at an exhibition.

The idea is to use the attributes list to set up interesting new combinations. This approach also underpins Morphological Analysis and enables recombinant innovation.