

ANTICONVENTIONAL THINKING (ACT 2.0)

By Jeffrey Baumgartner

August 2012

INTRODUCTION

Anticonventional thinking is a new approach to solving problems and achieving goals through creativity.

Anticonventional thinking (ACT) is a new approach to creativity and innovation. It is a method to achieve goals and solve problems through creativity. ACT is based on

- The way in which highly creative people such as writers, artists and composers collaborate on creative projects. Interestingly, it breaks all the rules of brainstorming – but it works.
- The latest research into what happens in the brain when people try to solve thought-problems. Interestingly, it has nothing to do with left or right brains. The more of the brain you use, the better.
- Overcoming the proven weaknesses of brainstorming. Interestingly, brainstorming has been demonstrated to be a flawed process for years. Nevertheless, the creative community has so much invested in this method that too many people refuse to let it go.

As its name implies, ACT is about purposefully rejecting conventional thinking in favour of unconventional thinking throughout the creative process. It is not simply about trying to have unconventional ideas. It starts much earlier than that. It requires that you look at your problems and goals in unconventional ways, turn them into “sexy goals” and then build an approach to accomplish those goals.

As you may have noticed from the title, this is ACT 2.0. I wrote my first paper on ACT in summer of 2011 and presented it in workshops at the Twelfth European Conference on Creativity and Innovation that year. I have also used the method with workshops with public and private organisations in Europe, North America and the UAE in 2011 and 2012. As I have worked with ACT, I have found weaknesses in the approach – and in particular in terms of describing an easy to follow process. As a result, I have rethought the ACT process (though not the logic behind it) and simplified it. As often happens with simplification, it not only makes the process easier to follow, it also makes it more effective!

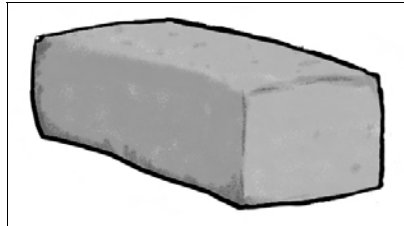
This paper will provide you with an introduction to ACT. Watch the www.jpbc.com web site for more about ACT.

AN EXAMPLE

To see how ACT compares to traditional brainstorming or creative problem solving (CPS; a formalised approach to solving problems by generating a lot of ideas, it is an extension of brainstorming)¹, try this example. It would be best to do it with a small group of people working together.

EXERCISE 1

What could you do with a brick like this?



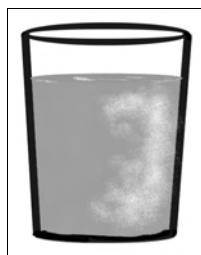
Imagine an ordinary brick of the kind used to make houses. Take 10 minutes and write down as many uses of the brick as you possibly can. Write down every idea that comes to mind no matter how silly it may be. If you are doing this with a group, there is to be no criticism whatsoever. All ideas must be written down.

Once your 10 minutes are up, select the five best ideas. If you are in a group, hold a vote in which every one chooses her five best ideas. The five ideas that win the most votes are to be considered the best.

EXERCISE 2

It would be best to wait a few hours or even a day before you do this, but if you are impatient, go ahead.

Come up with 15-20 open questions you could ask about this cup of water.



Imagine a glass of water. Now, write down 15-20 open ended questions you could ask about the glass of water. By open questions, I mean questions that cannot be answered with a “yes” or a “no”. Provocative, outrageous and weird questions are particularly desirable. Avoid boring questions. You want to understand this glass of water better, you do not want to bore it with small talk. If you are doing this in a group, you are welcome to debate and even argue about questions. However, you must follow the rules of debate (see next page).

¹ For more information on CPS, see my article on it at

Once you have your list of questions, feel free to take a short break. Ready? Good! Go through the questions and try to answer them. There is no need to come up with definitive answers or even to write your answers down. Simply think about possible answers. If there are not obvious answers, make them up! Be imaginative, be funny, be dramatic.

If you are in a group, discuss rather than think about the answers to the questions. But, again, there is no need to write anything down.

Once you have finished answering questions and discussing, you should have a much better feeling for the glass of water and its possibilities. Now, write down five really outrageous and bizarre things you could do with the glass of water. No more. No fewer. It must be five. Moreover, I do not want boring, conventional ideas at all! Don't waste your time or my time with them! I only want the most outrageous, unusual ideas you can dream up.

If you are working in a group, you should criticise and debate ideas. Indeed, you will probably have to do so in order to stick to the five outrageous ideas. However, you must follow the ACT rules of debate.

In this exercise, unlike in brainstorming, you are not only permitted to criticise ideas, you are encouraged to do so! Most of all, you should criticise boring ideas!

Rules of Debate

1. Always criticise boring ideas.
2. Criticise the idea and not the person asking it.
3. If you criticise an idea, you must allow the person who suggested it and anyone else to defend the idea.

RESULTS

Compare the five best ideas from exercise one with the five ideas from exercise two. Most likely you will have found that the ideas from exercise two were not only more creative, but that it was relatively easy to come up with those ideas.

Congratulations! You have just had your first experience with anticonventional thinking!

As you may have noticed, the first exercise was essentially an example of brainstorming or CPS. The brick exercise is a common creative thinking approach and, as a result, is also frequently used to measure creativity. A highly creative person will normally come up with more ideas and more creative ideas than an averagely creative person.

The second exercise was about anticonventional thinking. Rather than ask you to come up with lots of ideas, you first had to ask questions about the problem. Moreover, you were specifically urged to ask provocative, outrageous and weird questions while rejecting boring questions. Likewise, you were specifically asked not only to reject conventional ideas, but to criticise them should they be suggested. The purpose of this was to programme your mind to think anticonventionally.

Note

I should point out the comparison you did was by no means a proper scientific comparison. Rather it was a quick and dirty comparison without any kind of control. As a result, you may not have seen the results described. If this is the case, you may wish to try it with other groups of people and see what happens.

THE METHOD

ACT is a four-step process for generating creative, unconventional ideas to accomplish goals and then defining an initial action plan to implement the ideas.

1. Deconstruct and understand the situation.
2. Create a sexy goal.
3. Devise, debate and develop ideas.
4. Outline an action plan.

The process is specifically designed to trick the mind to take an unconventional approach to the situation and make it easy to generate creative ideas. The logic behind ACT is explained in the next chapter of this paper.

STEP 1: DECONSTRUCT THE SITUATION

When faced with a problem, don't immediately look for solutions! Rather, study the problem.

ACT starts with a problem or a goal, which we will call a “situation”. As tempted as you may be to start suggesting ideas the moment you think you have a problem, don't! You will most likely only have conventional ideas. Instead, you need to deconstruct the situation in order to understand it better. You do this by asking open-ended questions. ACT provides questions in two categories. In addition, you can ask questions of your own devising.

1. **Understanding.** These questions help you understand the situation better. They include: the Five Whys (see below).
2. **Context.** These questions help you understand the context of the situation better, such as “By what criteria will we judge a potential solution?” and “Who needs to be involved in the implementation of the solution?”

The Five Whys² is a simple yet powerful way to analyse a problem. Simply ask “Why is this a problem?” or “Why do I wish to achieve this goal?” once you have an answer, ask why again. Repeat until you have asked why five times – or cannot go deeper. You should always start your deconstruction with the five whys.

In addition to asking questions, you must also find answers to them. If you are not sure of an answer to a particular question and do not know where to find it, make up an answer. That will suffice.

STEP 2: CREATE A SEXY GOAL

Once you understand your situation and its context, you should formulate a sexy goal to shoot for. A sexy goal is:

² For more about the Five Whys, see Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys v

- intriguing
- provocative
- desirable

Defining a sexy goal is important. As noted, a conventional goal encourages conventional solutions. A well framed sexy goal motivates unconventional solutions. Indeed, it makes coming up with creative ideas easy!

Sometimes sexy goals are obvious. If not, we can ask questions about the situation, questions specifically designed to help reformulate your goal into a sexy one. ACT provides a number of such questions, such as: “Can you formulate this goal using a superlative?” and “Why is this goal boring/conventional?”

STEP 3: DEVISE, DEBATE AND DEVELOP IDEAS

Definition

ACTing: *doing an anticonventional thinking session.*

Once you have your sexy goal set, the next step is to come up with creative, unconventional ideas. However, we do not want a long list of ideas or a whiteboard full of sticky-notes. Instead, the aim is to play with ideas, question them, debate them, reject ones that do not work and develop into bigger concepts the ones that do work.

In ACT you are encouraged to criticise ideas, especially boring ideas, but also ideas that you do not believe are viable. However, you must follow the rules of debate when ACTing (doing an ACT session). Indeed, I recommend you put these rules on the wall before you start.

Rules of Debate

1. Always criticise boring ideas.
2. Criticise the idea and not the person asking it.
3. If you criticise an idea, you must allow the person who suggested it and anyone else to defend the idea.

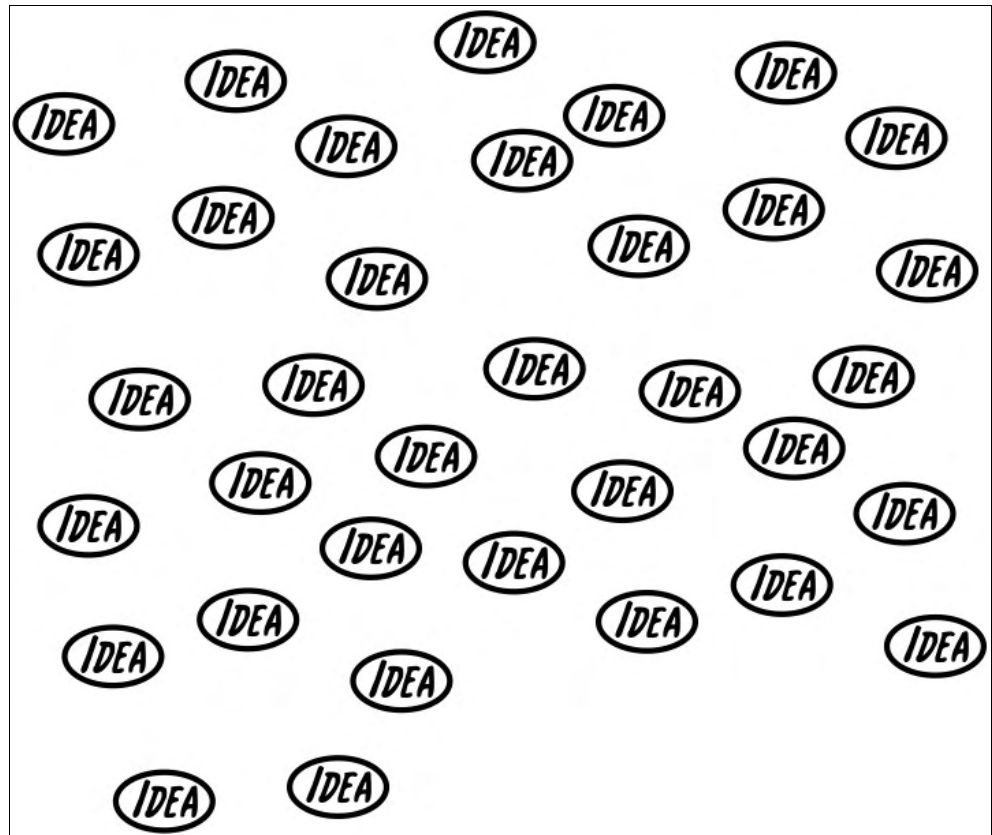
In addition, if a participant of the session is higher in the corporate hierarchy than the others, she must tell people that she expects to hear her ideas criticised and will be disappointed if this does not happen.

Continue to ask questions about the sexy goal as well as the ideas proposed during this part of the session. This helps stimulate imagination and encourages the development of ideas.

At the end of step 3, you should have very few, very strong ideas. Often, you will have focused on one idea and will have developed it in some detail with additional ideas. For instance, if you are ACTing for a new floor cleaning product your company could introduce, you might explore a few ideas, such as odours or products for special floor types before you settle on a product that includes a mild insecticide to keep bugs away. If you feel this idea has potential, you start to focus on the features of the new product, perhaps the composition, dealing with safety issues and so on. If over time, this idea seems not to work, you would reject it – or put it aside – and explore other ideas.

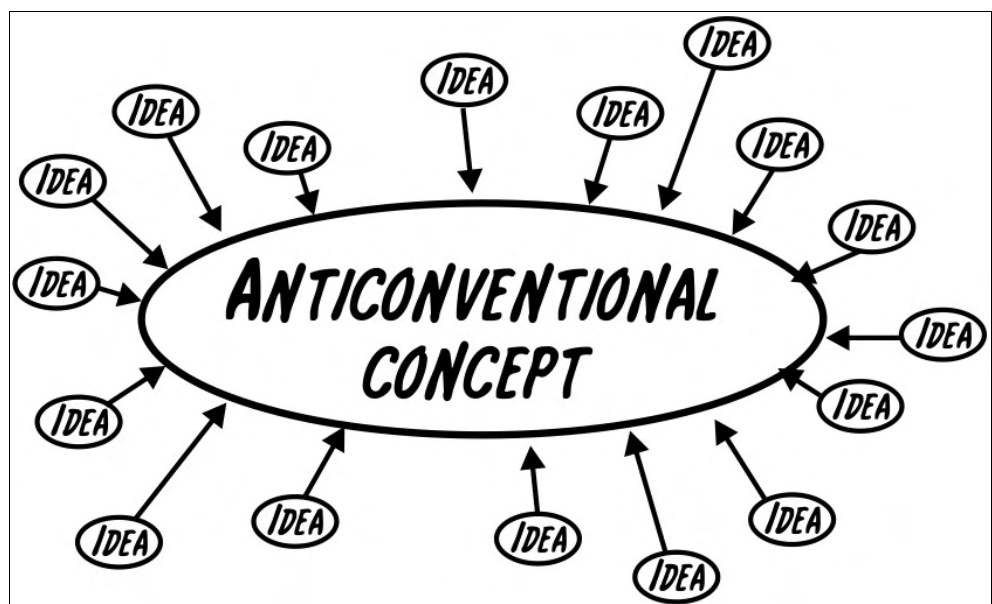
This approach is very different to brainstorming. To illustrate, this is what you can expect from a brainstorm: a lot of ideas:

The result of a brainstorm: a large number of small, disparate ideas. Eventually someone will need to sort through these ideas and try to find the gems. But with a lot of ideas and little context associated with each, it will be neither easy nor fun.



And this is what you can expect from ACTing, a big idea (or two or three) that incorporates many smaller ideas.

In an ACT session, you focus on developing a concept, then add ideas to it in order to build the concept into something incredible!



If you are familiar with brainstorming or working with people who are, you will need to stress the differences between brainstorming and ACT. However,

when people get used to ACT, it will become very natural.

NON-STEP: EVALUATION

ACT aims to forgo evaluation. Ideally the devise, debate and develop ideas step will leave you with a concept to work with. However, in some cases you may have several ideas or an external committee which must review ideas. In this case, ideas are best evaluated by a pre-established criteria set. Moreover, these criteria should be communicated to the participants of the ACTing in advance so they can be considered throughout the process.

STEP 4: ACTION PLAN

The problem with many ideation activities is that they are strong on ideation but weak on follow-up, let alone implementation. Hence ACT includes defining a preliminary action plan as a key step.

With any luck you will now have a creative, unconventional idea that you expect will enable you to achieve your sexy goal. It would be very easy to stop here and bask in the glory of your creativity! Don't! You need to outline an action plan that can bring your brilliant idea to fruition.

My friend and creativity expert Fernando Cardoso de Sousa has developed a wonderful and simple approach to outlining a preliminary action plan. Simply ask the ASKing team to to prepare a WASNT (What Are the Steps Needed To)³ document for the idea. For example, let us imagine that the sexy new product solution is to build a mobile telephone into a pair of rings, one worn on the thumb and the other on the pinky so that people can make phone calls using only their hands. You would then ask: "What are the steps needed to realise our dual-ring-phone?" Then you would build a list of steps that might include:

1. Build a mock-up to sell internally
2. Build a prototype to test technically
3. Present prototype to marketing
4. And so on...

However, in real life the list would be more detailed. Assigning people to take charge of each task is also important. The WASNT document is not a project outline. It is simply a proposed action plan to get started. Indeed, in many cases, the first step will be to prepare a detailed project outline.

Innovation and Risk

In the corporate world, highly creative ideas suffer several handicaps. Two of them should concern you while drafting the action plan. Firstly, highly creative ideas are risky. Secondly, as a result of that riskiness, they can often be difficult to sell to decision makers be they individuals or committees.

A breakthrough innovation could transform your company. It could turn a floundering company into a market leader; it could turn an annual loss into an annual profit. But it could also fail miserably. There are all kinds of reasons for this. The technology may be more complex than you realise, the

³ See "What if you change IWWMI into WASNT?"
<http://www.jpbc.com/creative/wasnt.php>

need may not exist in the marketplace. You may be too far ahead of your time. Your customers may simply be too conservative in their preferences. For example, from a technical perspective, probably the most innovative American car manufacturer ever was Cord Automobile. In the 1930s, Cord's strategy was to build unique, innovative cars. And they did! But, before the 1930s was out, the company was out of business. It seems that people did not want such innovative cars at the time.⁴

Decision makers tend to be risk adverse and, as a result, may be quick to try and kill off a very creative idea in spite of its potential for innovation. Worse, in most organisations, there are far more people with the power to kill an idea than there are with the power to authorise one.

In most organisations, there are far more people with the power to kill an idea than there are with the power to authorise one.

You need to bear this in mind when drawing up an action plan. Think about who needs to buy into an idea, who might kill an idea, who could help and what obstacles you might face. ACT provides a number of questions (you've probably noticed by now that ACT is big on questions!) that can help groups plan for the challenges of implementing a highly creative idea. In addition, you can look at my Creative Idea Implementation Plan (CIIP)⁵ which addresses many of these challenges.

DO IT!

If you've followed the process, you will now have an incredible, creative idea to achieve your goal and a plan to get started on it. So, what are you waiting for? Get started! In my experience, the number one reason innovations do not happen is inaction on creative ideas. That's one reason why the action plan is a critical part of ACT.

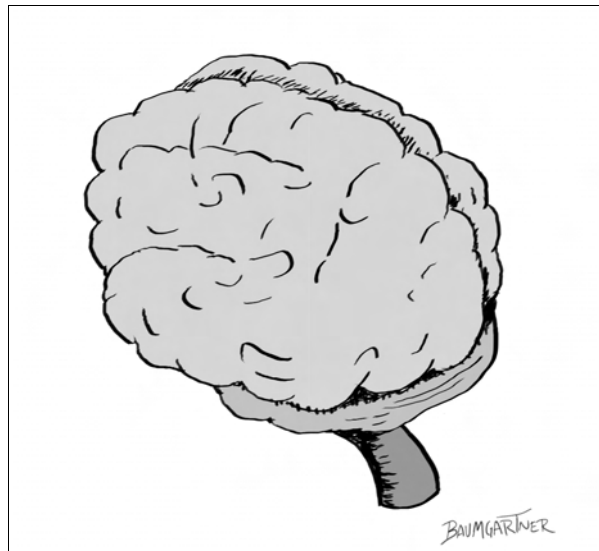
⁴ See Wikipedia for more information: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cord_Automobile

⁵ <http://www.jpbc.com/creative/ciip.php>

EXPLANATION

In order to understand why ACT is a better approach to creative thinking than is brainstorming and other creative problem solving (CPS) approaches, it helps to understand how the brain solves problems. Thanks to the availability of magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scanners, it is now possible to see what happens inside the brain when people solve problems creatively. Interestingly, there is a clear difference between the way highly creative people and averagely creative people solve problems and this appears to be hard-wired into the brain. Unfortunately, this means that an averagely creative adult cannot magically become a highly creative adult. However, an averagely creative adult can learn tricks that enable her to emulate a highly creative thinker to some degree. Indeed, this is what ACT aims to do.

An unscientific sketch of a brain.

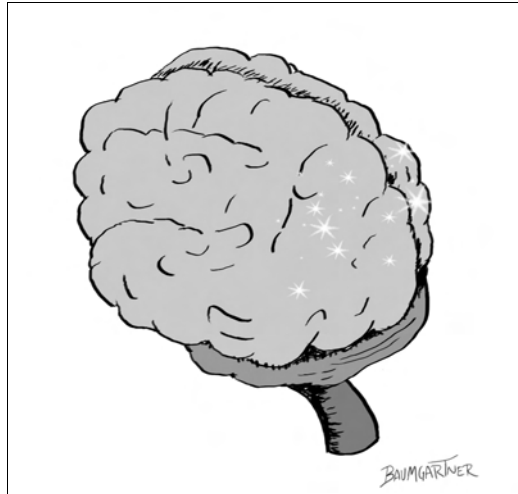


So let us start with an average human brain. Here is my sketch of one. In terms of scientific accuracy, the sketch is appalling. But it should serve to illustrate how the brain solves problems through creativity⁶. See the reference in the footnote below for better illustrations and a more comprehensive explanation of the process described here.

If you pop a person into an MRI scanner and ask her to solve a problem, you can see which bits of her brain light up on the screen. These represent areas where blood is flowing, which are active.

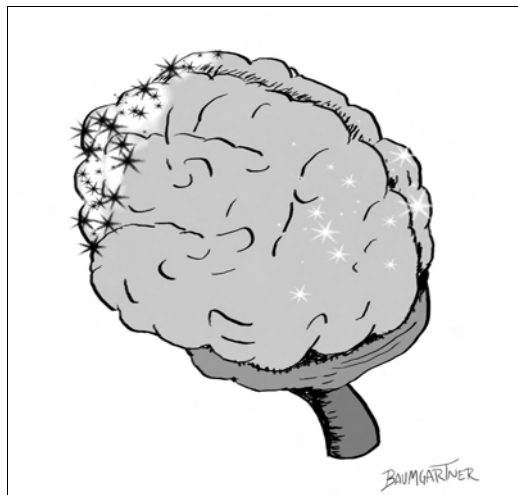
⁶ Limb CJ, Braun AR (2008) "Neural Substrates of Spontaneous Musical Performance: An fMRI Study of Jazz Improvisation." PLoS ONE 3(2): e1679;
<http://www.plosone.org/article/info:doi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0001679>

An averagely creative brain generating ideas to solve a challenge. Brain activity is focused in one area of the brain, suggesting little divergent or original thinking.



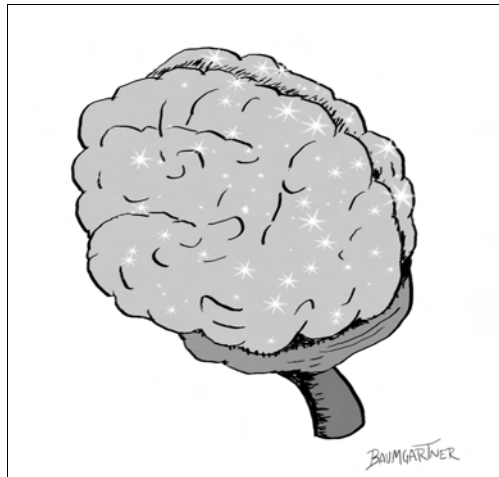
If you take someone of average creativity, put him in the MRI scanner and pose a thought-challenge to him, you will see that a relatively localised part of his brain lights up. This suggests he is only using the bit of his brain which stores memories (which could be any information: facts, opinions, fanciful ideas) relevant to the challenge.

The dorsolateral prefrontal and lateral orbital regions of the brain act as the brain's censorship bureau. Really weird ideas do not normally get through here.



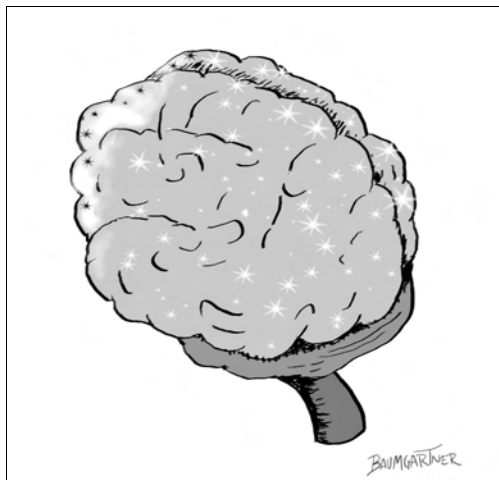
However, another bit of his brain, the dorsolateral prefrontal and lateral orbital region, becomes very active. This part of the brain is essentially the brain's censorship bureau. It monitors thinking and rejects ideas which it determines are inappropriate. In most people, these would be ideas that are too divergent from the focus of thinking: weird, bizarre and unconventional ideas. This is not surprising, for most people, it is safer to follow conventions in behaviour and thinking. Moreover, from an evolutionary perspective, it was presumably safer for prehistoric humans to follow the conventions of the tribe in order to survive.

When a highly creative individual solves a problem, she looks all over her mind for inspiration and ideas. This provides her with lots of material for creativity.



If you put a highly creative person in an MRI scanner and pose a thought-challenge to her, much more of her brain lights up. This indicates that her brain is searching through all kinds of memories for the raw material for ideas. This makes sense. Creative ideas are basically the combination of disparate notions in novel, new ways. In order to make creative ideas, you need diverse raw material.

The highly creative brain's "censorship bureau" is far less active than in the averagely creative brain.



Meanwhile, her brain's censorship bureau is far less active than is the case with the averagely creative thinker. As a result, she can and does suggest outrageous, weird and unconventional ideas.

To Illustrate

To illustrate, let us imagine that we put someone of average creativity into the MRI scanner put to him the challenge of our first exercise in this paper: "Come up with as many uses of this brick as you possibly can." His brain would most likely retrieve memories associated with bricks, combine them in various ways and propose them as ideas. They would pass through the censorship bureau without a problem; they are safe, conventional and non-provocative. No one will laugh at him for suggesting you use a brick to start the con-

struction of a house or hold a door open.

Moreover, should his mind start to wander, for instance, if he starts thinking about ice cream or that cute woman in accounting, his censorship bureau will promptly reject such thoughts – at least in terms of solving the thought-challenge. As a result, his suggestions will tend to be conventional and predictable but perfectly acceptable.

If we pull our averagely creative man out of the scanner and pop our highly creative woman in and pose the same thought-challenge, we would see much more of her brain light up. She would not limit her thoughts to bricks. Rather, she would look all over her mind. If her mind thinks about ice-cream or the cute guy in marketing, she will use them in suggesting uses for the brick. For instance, she might suggest that you could freeze the brick, then use it as an unusual ice-cream serving dish that would keep the ice-cream cool on a hot day; or that you could accidentally drop it on a cute guy's toe in order to get his attention; or that you could carve a love note into it and give it as a gift to a potential sweetheart.

At the same time, her censorship bureau will keep relatively quiet and let just about every idea through. It might only limit itself to censoring socially unacceptable ideas or highly personal ideas.

Cannot Radically Change How the Brain Thinks

This difference in thinking between these two types appears to be hard-wired in our brains and cannot be radically changed after we pass adolescence. At least as far as we can tell. Moreover, even if it could be changed, we would have to question whether or not it would be wise to do so. The mental profile of the highly creative mind at work is disturbingly similar to the profile of the insane mind at work. And, indeed, mental illness is far too common among artists, writers, composers and other creative professions. Moreover, radically changing the way your mind processes information would doubtless have all kinds of consequences to your cognitive process! That said, if you would like to raise your children to be more creative, there are a few things you can do to help hard-wire their minds to think more creatively. (See: *Five Suggestions for Raising Creative Kids*⁷ and *Five More Suggestions for Raising Creative Kids*⁸.)

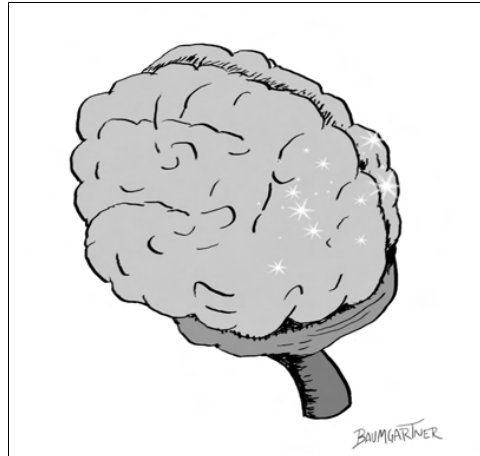
However, it should be possible to trick the mind into functioning differently when you need to be creative; to emulate the results a highly creative person enjoys. That is the premise behind ACT.

Let's see how it works.

7 http://www.jpbc.com/creative/creative_kids_1.php

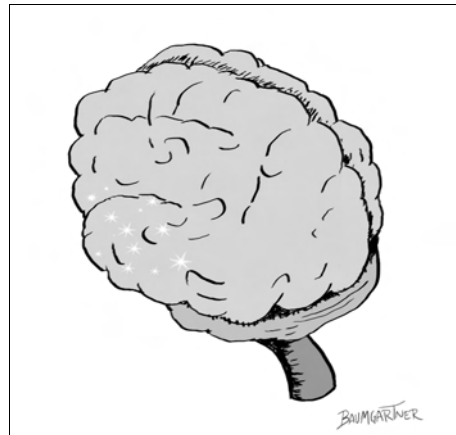
8 http://www.jpbc.com/creative/creative_kids_2.php

ACT recognises that the averagely creative brain solving a problem focuses thinking in one region. So...



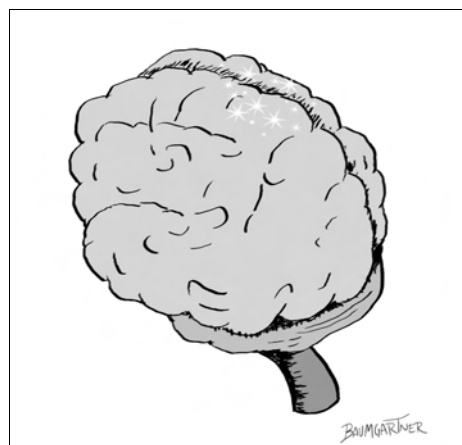
As you will recall, when trying to solve a thought-challenge about bricks, the averagely creative man used a small part of his brain, associated with bricks, to come up with ideas.

ACT provokes the brain to look for ideas in other areas...



But what about if we provoke his brain to think about the challenge from another perspective. For example, we push him to think of bricks as weapons. We would expect a different area of his brain to light up. We have provided him with new raw material for ideas; and it is material that is not about bricks.

... and again in other areas.



And then we provoke him to think about the challenge from yet another perspective, we make him think about the inside of his house with respect to the brick. Each time we provoke thinking about the challenge differently, we force the averagely creative man to use different parts of his brain to solve the problem, providing new raw material for creativity. Ideally, the cumulative effect for the averagely creative thinker would be the same as for the highly creative thinker.

Indeed, it is my belief (and as far as I know, this has not been tested) that this is what highly creative people do. But they do it fast and they do it subconsciously. When faced with a problem or a goal, they move it around in their minds, looking at it from different perspectives, in different environments and in association with seemingly dissimilar concepts. They do this before they start coming up with ideas.

However, the averagely creative thinker does not seem to do this. We need to provoke him to think about the problem or goal in varying ways. We do that by asking questions, especially provocative ones. Moreover, we formulate sexy goals that also push him to think about the problem differently than he would if it was formulated as a typical, conventional problem of the sort that is the focus of most brainstorming sessions.

Trick the Censorship Bureau

A key aspect of ACT is tricking the brain into rejecting boring, conventional ideas and embracing unconventional ideas

So, we now have the averagely creative thinker using more of his brain to solve a thought challenge. But we are stuck with the problematic censorship bureau of the brain. The ACT manner of dealing with it is simple: change the instructions. The bureau wants to censor your ideas. That is its purpose. It will do this whether you like it or not. However, it normally censors unconventional, unusual and bizarre ideas. These are the kinds of ideas that people are afraid could embarrass them or even cause trouble. And, indeed, in many organisations where failure is not tolerated, questioning management is fatal to the career and company politics ensures that any gaff will be abused, being unconventional in thought is a dangerous career move. Likewise, most social groups encourage members to behave and think similarly (just look at comment strings in Facebook). Divergent thinking can get you in trouble.

As a result, it is hardly surprising that in most of us, the brain's censorship bureau works hard to eliminate unconventional thought. But, I believe you can temporarily make the bureau do the opposite of what it usually does. You can tell it that the rules for the remainder of the day are to censor and reject boring, obvious and conventional ideas and accept the ludicrous, outrageous and unconventional.

And this is a crucial difference between brainstorming, where every idea is acceptable, but criticism is not and ACT in which only unconventional ideas are accepted and criticism, especially of conventional ideas, is welcome. Aside from the fact that debate is good for creativity (I'll get to this in a moment), knowing that conventional ideas will be criticised should train your brain's censor to reject temporarily such ideas.

DEBATE IS GOOD FOR CREATIVITY

One of the core assumptions of brainstorming has always been that it is best to withhold judgement on ideas; that you should not criticise ideas. If you do, brainstorming asserts, you will inhibit people from being creative and they will not be so creative in their ideas. It makes jolly good sense, doesn't it? However, it seems to be wrong!

It seems the biggest assumption of brainstorming, that it is better to reserve judgement on ideas makes people more likely to have creative ideas, is wrong! Criticism is actually better for creativity.

In a series of experiments⁹ by Matthew Feinberg and Charlan Nemeth at the University of California, Berkeley, it was found that when comparing brainstorming groups in which debate was allowed versus those where it was not allowed, the former groups had more creative results. In other words, withholding criticism actually seems to inhibit, or at least reduce creativity!

When I first read this report, it resounded deeply within me. It just made so much sense. As a writer and artist, my experience of collaborating with other highly creative people is that we tend not to do anything like brainstorming. We tend to argue, try out ideas and reject the non-viable ones. By the end of a collaboration, we do not have a long list of ideas to evaluate. We have a concept to get started with. But it is usually very creative!

The paper cited in the footnote gives the authors' thoughts on the reasons why criticism is good, including "the benefits of dissent stem from the cognitive conflict it generates; the dissent compels those in the majority to search for possible explanations as to why the dissenter is willing to openly disagree and suffer the rejection that often accompanies such disagreement." The authors also argue that allowing people to criticise is liberating, whereas prohibiting it is inhibiting, thus criticism actually makes people feel more free.

My feeling, and observation, is that criticism strengthens the appeal of creative ideas. Imagine we are ACTing and you propose an idea. I criticise it. Now you must either agree with my criticism, in which case we dispose of the idea immediately, or you defend your idea. In this case, you must strengthen the idea so that I can understand its value better. In addition, the other participants of the ACTing can also participate in this discussion. Those who agree with the idea owner can also explain the ideas's strengths which strengthen it further.

If you were to suggest the same idea in a brainstorm, neither I nor anyone else would criticise it – even if we fail to understand it. It simply would be added to the list of 100 ideas generated in the brainstorm. However, without the additional information to strengthen the idea, it will surely be rejected during the evaluation that comes after the brainstorm.

Because highly creative ideas can often seem silly initially and particularly out of context, this process of debating and strengthening them makes them more likely to come to fruition in ACT. But even if you do not like the ACT process, I recommend you try running a brainstorm where ideas may be criticised.

9 Matthew Feinberg, Charlan Nemeth (2008) "The 'Rules' of Brainstorming: An Impediment to Creativity?", Institute for Research on Labor and Employment Working Paper Series (University of California, Berkeley) Paper iirwps-167-08; <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/69j9g0cg>

CONCLUSION

ACT is a new approach to achieving goals, and hence solving problems, through creativity. However, unlike other creativity methods which focus on idea generation, ACT focuses on asking questions in order to understand the underlying problem and formulate it into a sexy goal. And it is about continuing to ask questions, even during the idea generation phase. It is also about consciously rejecting conventional ideas in favour of unconventional ideas during the idea generation phase.

ACT welcomes debate for three reasons. Firstly, it allows you to reject boring, conventional ideas immediately, rather than save them for later. Secondly, it allows you to strengthen weak ideas, which otherwise might be rejected, in order to turn them into viable ideas. Finally, debate forces you to look at the sexy goal and the ideas from different perspectives and this, in turn, enables you to come up with unique, anticonventional solutions.

Brainstorming Still Has Its Place

In this paper, I have compared ACT to brainstorming and the latter has come out the poorer for the comparison. I have done this because brainstorming has become the default creative idea generation method for most people. It is widely known and so serves as a good way to explain ACT.

While I believe that ACT is a far better approach when you are looking to develop a strong, creative concept for a project, a product or an action; brainstorming still has its place. In particular, because brainstorming is about generating a lot of ideas, it is most useful when you need a lot of ideas. For instance, you might use ACT to devise a new product concept and its key features. But then you might brainstorm additional functionality you wish to add. In such a scenario, you will want a lot of small ideas that contribute to a big creative concept.

It is also worth bearing in mind that brainstorming, with its easily measured results (number of ideas), focus on positive reinforcement and prohibition of criticism feels good. If you are looking for an activity that makes people feel good and generates quantifiable (if not necessarily useful) results, brainstorming can be useful.

Give It a Go

The best way to experience ACT and its effectiveness is to give it a try. This paper gives a broad introduction to the approach. Over the next few months, I will focus on ACT on the www.jpbc.com web site and the Report 103 Newsletter (also on www.jpbc.com). Check both out for more information.

In addition, please contact me about running an ACT workshop or facilitating an ACT session in your organisation. This is ultimately the best way to experience the power of ACT as well as to introduce the method to your team. In 2012, I am facilitating workshops and sessions in companies, government bodies and European projects in the USA, Europe and UAE.

ACT is best when you need big, creative solutions. Brainstorming may be more effective when you need numerous ideas where creativity is not so important.

That's me, the chap who wrote this paper. I can also train you and your team to use ACT effectively as well as facilitate ACT sessions in your organisation. Contact me to discuss your needs.



Jeffrey Baumgartner
J P B . C O M
Diestbrugstraat 45
3071 Erps-Kwerps
Belgium

Email: jeffreyb@jpb.com
Tel +32 2 305 6591
Web www.jpb.com

© 2012 Jeffrey Baumgartner