

# QUICK AND EASY CREATIVITY TECHNIQUES TO GET UNSTUCK

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# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the concept of mental valleys
- Recognize opportunities to apply creativity techniques
- Prepare to practice creativity methods on work problems

# LOOK FOR SIGNS

- Going around and around on a challenge with little progress
- Solution inadequate to meet the need
- Resource constraints make progress feel impossible
- Skepticism high
- Falling behind with customers or competition

***How do you know you're stuck in a project or problem? What are the clues? Type examples in the chat.***



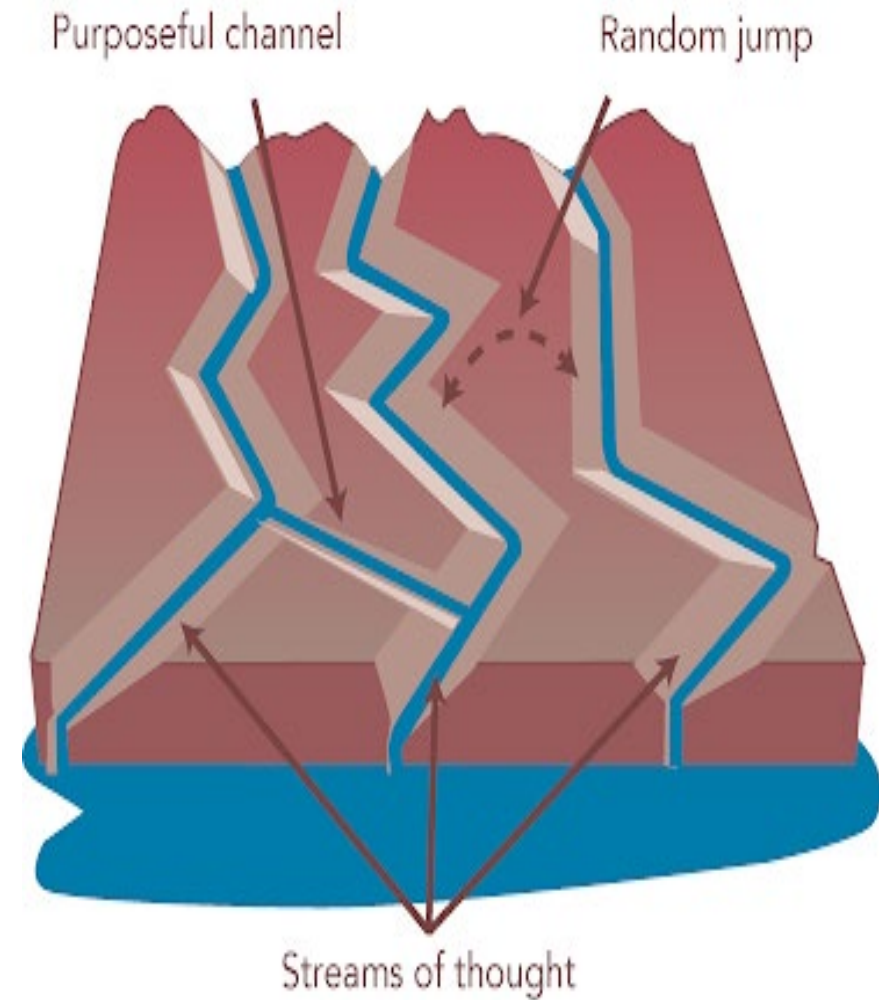
## QUICK POLL

What is your current situation?

# MENTAL VALLEYS

- Autopilot thinking patterns
- Language based
- Can be hard to recognize, imagine any other way
- Helpful for everyday communications
- Not helpful when we are stuck or need innovation

***Type in chat: What attributes come to mind when thinking about a library?***



Dr. Edward de Bono's Model for Thinking



# THESE LIBRARIES MADE LEAPS



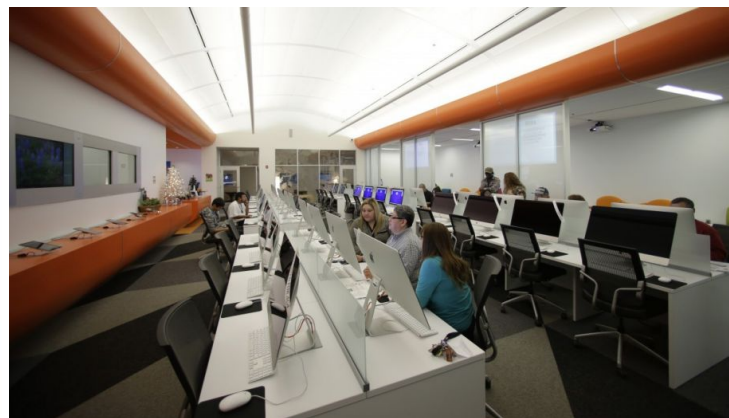
Who says a library needs a building?



Who says a library only loans books, movies and music?



Who says we go to the library vs. it comes to us (and not in a motor vehicle?)



Who says a library always has physical books? (*all-digital library in Texas*)



Who says book shelving is always the same? (*Japanese library with book covers facing out*)

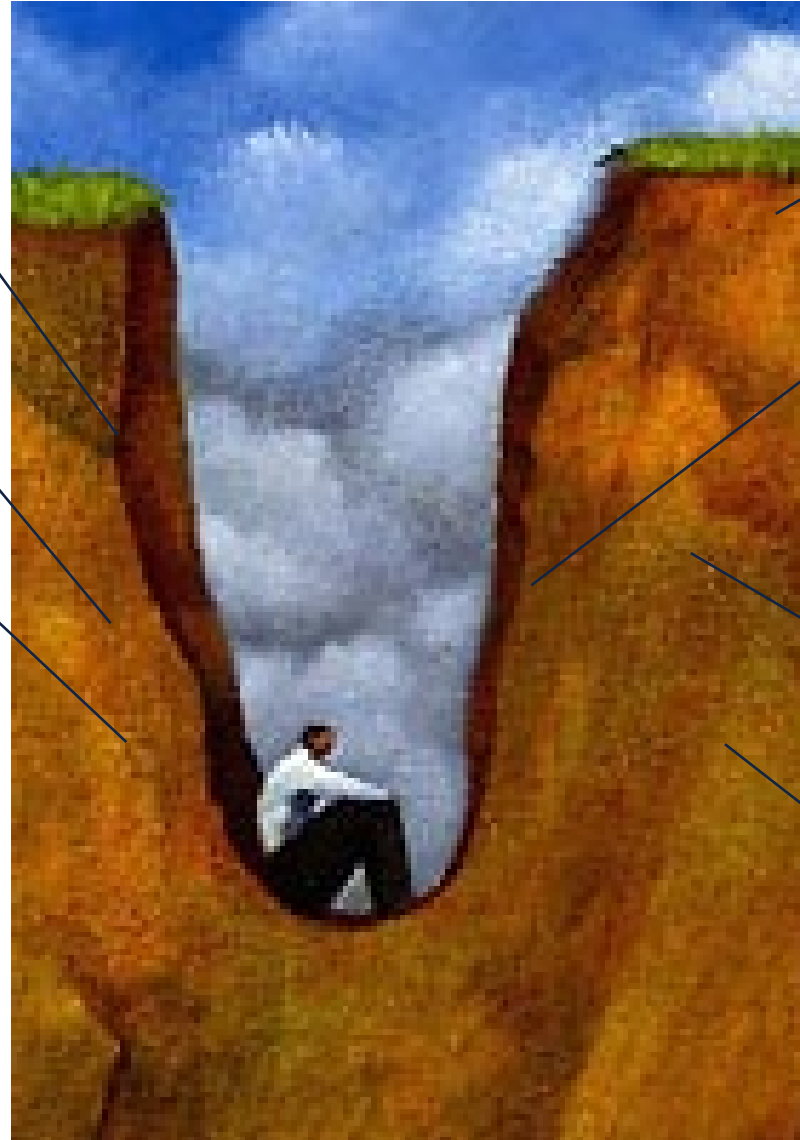
# EXAMPLES OF MENTAL VALLEYS IN OUR WORK?

Documentation (forms, tools, manuals, etc.)

Laws, policies, rules, requirements

Office hours

*Type in chat: What are autopilot ways of thinking about government operations?*



Public funding

Committees, task forces, project teams

Civil servants

Government buildings

Complex projects

# VALUE OF CREATIVITY METHODS

- Give people permission to think differently
- Draw out diverse experiences and perspectives
- Quick, easy, flexible
- In-person or virtual
- Can be done individually, with small or big groups
- No fancy materials
- Don't typically take much prep



# STARTER KIT

- Mental Benchmarking
- 7 Ways
- Block a "Must Have"
- Play "That's Impossible"
- Create Mash-Ups

# MENTAL BENCHMARKING

## When to Use

- Reluctance to try something new
- Getting unstuck feels impossible
- Fresh perspectives are needed

## How It Helps

- Encourages “innovation by imitation”

## Steps

1. We need creative thinking about . . .
2. Identify a few industries, settings or roles to explore
3. Brainstorm/research their mental valleys and how they might (or already do) handle the specific issue
4. Guard against instant rejection of “how that won’t work here”
5. Harvest useful pieces and concepts you can try

# EXAMPLES OF MENTAL BENCHMARKING



Virginia Mason Medical Center

## **Problem**

Low flu vaccination rate - patients not wanting to park and come inside a clinic

## **Solution**

Drive-through flu clinic inspired by studying industries that make services really convenient for their customers (e.g., fast food chains)

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Sprinkles Cupcakes

## **Opportunity**

How to meet off-hours customer demand and simplify selling their dog treats (animals not allowed inside the bakery)

## **Solution**

24x7 cupcake ATMs inspired by studying banking and vending systems

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**Are there settings, roles or industries you've studied for ideas, or innovations by imitation you've encountered?**

# 7 WAYS

## When to Use

- Leap out of a mental valley
- Focus in on a particular need or concept
- Generate a lot of ideas rapidly

## How It Helps

- First few ideas typically represent usual solutions, then we have to get creative
- Time pressure helps us stop self-editing

## Steps

1. Identify the underlying function, concept or keyword you need creative thinking about
2. Work individually or in pairs
3. Allot a few minutes max
4. Come up with 7 or more ideas each
5. Practical not required; go wild, have fun
6. Do more ideas on same topic or related topics as needed
7. Share, group similar ideas, look for new possibilities to develop further

# EXAMPLES OF 7 WAYS

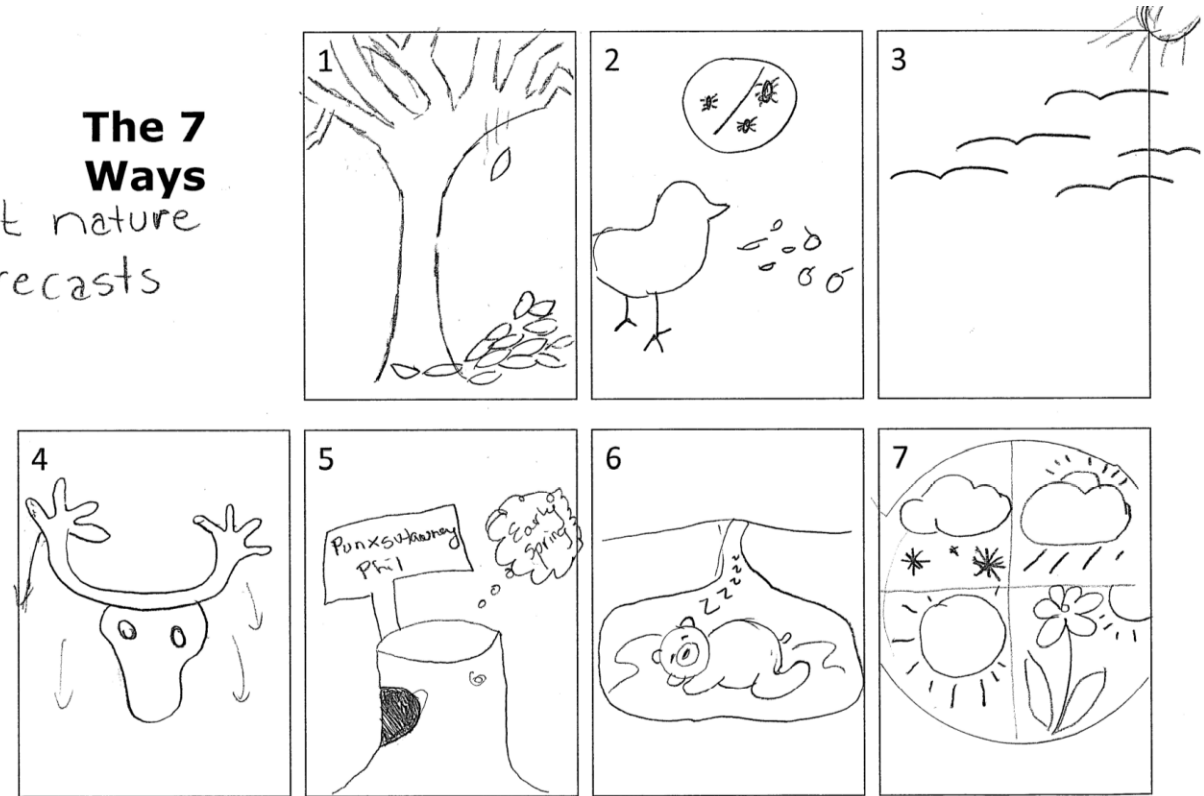
**Problem:** Training video and handouts not reducing help desk calls about certain functionality

**We need creative thinking about** how to increase user proficiency, reduce need to seek help

## 7+ Ways (raw ideas)

- Super users as first line of contact
- Ask users how to improve materials
- Require training – no opting out
- Offer drop-in labs
- Make functionality more intuitive
- Force function to learn – can't contact help desk for this topic anymore
- Charge fee for help requests
- Identify patterns (certain users, teams, system set-ups, etc.) to target solutions
- And so on ....

**The 7 Ways**  
That nature forecasts



Sample from 3P Process at Virginia Mason Medical Center



**Maybe you have used this idea  
technique or something similar?**

# BLOCK SOMETHING

## When to Use

- Stuck on idea of needing a particular element
- Feels impossible to tackle any other way

## How It Helps

- Provokes a leap over a deep mental rut
- Can create movement toward new possibilities

## Steps

1. Identify something considered a “must have”
2. Pretend you no longer have it – how will you cope?
3. Identify alternatives (7 ways, other idea generation methods)
4. Practical not required; go wild, have fun
5. Share, group similar ideas, look for new possibilities to develop further

# EXAMPLES OF BLOCKING SOMETHING



## **Must-have**

We need a new report

## **Provocation**

There's a new computer virus that activates when detecting a new report. It's been disrupting government operations around the world. We can't have that. Let's revisit what we need to accomplish. What are alternative ideas we could try?

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Lush Cosmetics

## **Must-have**

Product packaging

## **Provocation**

Eco-conscious customers; let's look beyond reducing packaging to having no packaging at all

## **Result**

Options to buy "naked products"

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**Have you tried using this idea technique or something similar?**  
**Did it help?**



# THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE!

## When to Use

- Past attempts to change have failed; still feels impossible
- Reluctance to pursue an ambitious goal

## How It Helps

- Provokes us to scrutinize constraints that may no longer be relevant
- Prompts us to discover disruptive innovations

## Steps

1. Brainstorm solutions that feel ridiculous or impossible
2. Explore the “why” behind each idea and the “why not?” barriers, see what you uncover
3. Dig into ways you might be able to do some of these, if even a little bit
4. Guard against instant rejection of everything
5. Save other outrageous ideas for later

# EXAMPLES OF THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE



Bogota, Colombia

## **Impossible Problem**

High rate of traffic fatalities,  
despite much effort to reduce

## **Impossible Solution**

Traffic cops retrained as mimes who regulate  
traffic while parodying offending drivers  
(resulting in large incident decrease)

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Inventor Muhammad Yunus

## **Impossible Problem**

Cycle of poverty in Bangladesh, hard  
to secure bank loans, predatory  
money lending practices

## **Impossible Solution**

Microloans – people can borrow tiny sums of  
money to start businesses

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**Consider examples you have encountered of impossible  
problems being helped by impossible solutions**

# MASH-UPS

## When to Use

- Need fun ways to stimulate creativity and paradigm shifts
- You want to find ways to combine different functions and features

## How It Helps

- Helps us break out of logic ruts and make unexpected connections
- Can spark new ideas

## Steps

1. Identify the problem and underlying function, concept or keyword that you need creative thinking about
2. List elements involved (supplies, materials, equipment, expertise, etc.)
3. Do idea rounds where you come up with ways to combine 2-3 elements at a time into something new
4. Explore benefits from each mash-up and useful ideas for your issue

# EXAMPLES OF MASH-UPS



## **Need**

Easy alternatives to in-person monitoring of biometrics for medical care and fitness

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## **Solution**

Biosensors + textiles = smart clothes



## **Need**

More support options for people with dementia

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## **Solution**

Dementia specialists + dog trainers = dementia service dogs



**You probably have some favorite examples of mash-up inventions!**

# QUICK PRACTICE SCENARIO

**Issue:** Hard to communicate agency news with staff whose jobs don't involve much PC time – so much is digital these days

**Underlying Needs:**

- Staff don't miss important developments
- Staff feel connected and contribute to agency happenings
- Staff have a sense of community

# QUICK PRACTICE: MENTAL BENCHMARKING

- Let's take a brief mental valleys leap over to . . . bookstores
- What attributes & practices do bookstores have?
  - **Type anything that comes to mind in chat**
- How do they communicate with customers?
  - **Type in chat**

Random Roles, Settings, and Industries for Mental Benchmarking

Roles	Settings	Industries
Analyst	Bookstores	Accounting
Entrepreneur	Camping sites	Airlines
Flight Attendant	Farm	Banking
Firefighter	Movie theater	Education
Gardener	Online retail site	Federal government
Librarian	Parks	Funeral Homes
Mechanic	Pharmacy	Healthcare
Musician	Rural	Journalism
Nutritionist	Sports arena	Law enforcement
Nurse	Supermarket	Local government
Scientist	Tall buildings	Restaurants
Teacher	Urban	State government
Teen-ager	Vacation rental	Travel
Young Child	Zoo	Waste management

# QUICK PRACTICE: SEVEN WAYS

- Now, let's quickly capture at least seven ideas about how we might address our project need
  - Staff don't miss important developments
  - Staff feel connected and contribute to agency happenings
  - Staff have a sense of community
- Type ideas in chat
- Remember: practical not needed at this stage!



# MY POST-IT NOTE OF SEVEN+ WAYS

1. Post on bulletin board
2. Ask supervisors to share in huddles
3. Printed alerts or fliers walked around to hand out
4. Printouts posted in bathrooms, on poles, etc.
5. Communications binders for review/signature at start/stop shift locations
6. Text alerts to mobile work phones
7. "Tell-a-friend phone tree" approach
8. "Read me" alerts hanging from a string in doorways
9. Weekly protected time briefings for these staff groups
10. Print a community newspaper
11. Magnetic placards on car doors
12. Graffiti messaging
13. Podcast
14. Radio/TV public service announcements

# CREATIVITY PRACTICE TIPS

## Considerations

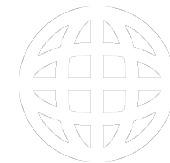
- Know thy customers and their underlying needs (opportunities to innovate and not miss the mark)
- Bring diversity into the work to gain insights about disparate experiences, perspectives and knowledge

## General Practice

- Start paying attention to mental valleys around you
- Stop before you start a new effort
  - Be on guard for autopilot
  - Spend time understanding the problem, need or opportunity
- Give a method more than one shot

**Q&A**

# THANK YOU



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