Strategy Needs Creativity*

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* Based on article forthcoming in *Harvard Business Review*, March-April 2019
“Competition existed long before strategy. It began with life itself.”

-- Bruce Henderson, founder of the Boston Consulting Group

Sabi Sabi Game Reserve, South Africa, August 2017 (photo by Adam Brandenburger)
“The differences between you and your competitors are the basis of your advantage.”

-- Bruce Henderson, founder of the Boston Consulting Group
“Creativity is seeing what everyone else has seen, and thinking what no one else has thought”
From shop-then-ship to ship-then-shop

Think different.

... literally
LIFE PAINT

**CHALLENGE**
Every year in the UK more than 19,000 cyclists are killed or injured. Accidents in the dark are more likely to be fatal.

**SOLUTION**
Life Paint. An innovative reflective spray turning ordinary items into high-visibility safety gear in the glare of headlights. Aimed at the cycling community and distributed through women’s most influential bike shops, the spray turns everything white; the best way to survive a crash, is not to crash.

**RESULTS**
- UK project seen in every country in the world.
- 8 million YouTube and Facebook views. £2 million.
- 120 million impressions with no media spend.
- 30,000 cases ordered in two weeks.
- Production increased tenfold to meet global demand.

*THE BEST WAY TO SURVIVE A CRASH IS NOT TO CRASH*

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https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/campaign-big-awards-2015-gold-automotive-integrated/1369188; my thanks to Ida Li for this example
Unbundling

https://www.ignant.com/2013/08/19/spaghetti-bench/ (Pablo Reinoso)
How to begin:

Precisely identify the assumptions that underlie conventional thinking in your industry

Think about what might be gained by proving one or more of them false

Deliberately disturb an aspect of your normal work pattern to break up ingrained assumptions

What to watch out for:

Because the assumptions underlying your business model are embedded in all of your processes — and because stable businesses need predictability — it won’t be easy to change course

Organizations are very good at resisting change
contrast

combination

collection

context
“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.”

-- Steve Jobs
The Enterprise

- Customers
- Competitors
- Suppliers
- Complementors

*Co-opetition*, by Adam Brandenburger and Barry Nalebuff, Doubleday 1996
“Daimler announced today that it intends to enter into a joint venture with BMW to create a mobility powerhouse. With this move, two arch-rivals leverage competition and cooperation --- at the same time.”
How to begin:

Form groups with diverse expertise and experience; brainstorm new combinations of products and services.

Looks for ways to coordinate with providers of complementary products (who may even be competitors).

What to watch out for:

Businesses often manage for and measure profits at the individual product or activity level.

But combinations require system-level thinking and measurements.
“Creativity loves constraints”
-- Marissa Mayer at Google
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**Old SWOT**

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**New SWOT**
Columbia University

New York University

Shanghai

Abu Dhabi

http://commonedge.org/looking-desperately-for-urbanism-in-shanghais-pudong-district/;
http://bahealthcare.ae/newsletter/
shanzhai in Shenzhen
How to begin:

List the ‘incompetencies’ (rather than competencies) of your organization — and test whether they can in fact be turned into strengths.

Consider deliberately imposing some constraints to encourage people to find new ways of thinking and acting.

What to watch out for:

Successful businesses face fewer obvious constraints; people may feel no need to explore how new ones might create new opportunities.
contrast

combination

constraint

context

https://www.regencychess.co.uk/the-red-and-black-broadbase-chess-set-p-1395.html
How to begin:

Explain your business to an outsider in another industry. Fresh eyes from a different context can help uncover new answers and opportunities.

Engage with lead users, extreme users, and innovation hotspots.

What to watch out for:

Businesses need to focus on internal processes to deliver on their current value propositions — but the pressure to focus internally can get in the way of learning from the different contexts in which other players operate.
contrast
combination
constraint
context

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