

# **Fabulously Innovative Problem Solving**

Problem: How do you take a more innovative approach to problem solving?

Solution: Design a board game that manages the problem solving process and at the same time stimulates creativity and innovation.

There are several important principles that help innovation and creativity when it comes to solving problems. The board game format of Idea Navigator is an elegant design solution that brings these principles into play any time a team comes together to take on a problem.

## ***Principles of Innovative Problem Solving***

- The Problem Solving Paradox
- Random Stimulus
- Meta Cognition
- Having Fun

## ***The Problem Solving Paradox***

The problem solving paradox is that we need to be both methodical and creative to solve problems. We need to engage both our left and right brain. Typically the first stages of problem solving, defining and exploring the problem require a methodical left-brain approach. Coming up with ideas and solutions needs us to be creative and engage our right brain.

A board game format is the perfect design solution to address this paradox. Though Idea Navigator looks like a board game, it's not a game. It's a tool that guides a team methodically through problem solving. The four phases of the board keep 'players' in the right stage of a logical process. During the Define and Explore Phases of the game cards are designed to engage your analytical left-brain. Once 'players' get to the Innovate Phase of the game, the cards are designed to stimulate the creative right side of your brain.

It can be challenging for people to switch from left brain to right brain mode because we spend most of our time engaged in day to day thinking that uses the left side of the brain. Many of us use the right part of our brain less often and consequently find it a challenge

to slip into right brain mode. The right brain, like a muscle, needs to warm up before it performs well. Idea Navigator is designed to introduce a certain amount of creative stimulus throughout the game to help keep the right brain 'warmed up'. So when 'players get to the Innovate Phase switching from left to right brain is easier.

## ***Random Stimulus***

The two packs of cards in the middle of the board are designed to introduce random stimulus to our thinking. Like monopoly you pick up these cards from time to time based on the roll of the dice. One pack of cards has inspirational quotes – the 'Q' cards. The other, a random collection of words and ideas – the 'R' cards.

The game asks you to discuss how the Quote or Random card is relevant to the discussion.

When the apple fell on Issac Newton's head it was a kind of random stimulus that led to his insight on gravity. Random stimulus gets your brain working at connecting one idea with another or synthesising. Synthesising is a right brain function. In idea Navigator Random Stimulus is used to both keep the right brain warmed up during the analytical phases of the game and to spark original thoughts and ideas during the Innovate Phase of the game.

## ***Meta Cognition***

Sometimes you think. Other times you think about how you think but mostly you just think. Meta Cognition means thinking about how you think.

It is useful to think about how you think because different ways of thinking work better for different purposes. It is obvious that thinking analytically, critically, optimistically, imaginatively or pessimistically all have their uses at different stages of the problem solving process. If you think about how you think you can consciously decide how you want to think.

Typically an individual will feel comfortable in one style of thinking. We've all have experience of a Devil's Advocate or Cynic in our teams. It's a good practise for all team members to take a share of responsibility for different styles of thinking rather than individuals becoming stuck in one thinking style. This is both equitable and it promotes self-awareness and mental agility.

Many of the cards in Idea Navigator are designed to ask you to think about how you think and then consciously decide how you want to think. Meta cognition is the result.

## ***Having Fun***

Playing and having fun are important foundations to innovation. Characteristics of play include exploration, experimentation and spontaneity. The importance of exploration, experimentation and spontaneity to a creative problem solving process are obvious.

Board games are fun and for many of us they conjure memories of childhood play. In the workplace a game on the table signals that something other than work is going on - an illusion that is useful to get people to loosen up and access their inner creative being. When you invite people to attend you don't ask them to simply address a problem. You ask them to 'play a game'. Even before they arrive the anticipation of enjoyment is created predisposing them to exploration, experimentation and spontaneity.

Finally a board game works well for innovative problem solving because it's not a book. Only one person can use a book at a time and no matter how good the processes and principles contained in books, they'll still need to be interpreted so that a group working collaboratively can make use of them. When a team comes together at a table they need a resource that is convenient to be used at a table. A board game is the obvious solution!