

Got a brain wave? For firms, creativity and innovation mean different things

Over the past week, I met an old good buddy of mine who counts as both a pseudo mentor and sounding board on business issues and opportunities. Having previously been an entrepreneur and currently in a high flying public sector job, he reminisced that he felt that his creative juices were ebbing away due to what he termed as the drudgery and clock-watching that some jobs in the public sector relegated otherwise ambitious people towards. This got us both thinking as to whether creativity can be applied to different environments despite differences in circumstances.

According to some, creativity is defined as the ability to develop something new. It relates specifically to the art of being creative, that is, seeing things in a new and different way.

Innovation on the other hand, is often described as the end result of being creative. When creative ideas are implemented, this results in innovation. I guess the challenge here is



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that application of the words creativity and innovation are more often than not used interchangeably in business. In this regard, companies that launch new products in the market are sometimes referred to as being creative. However, based on who is reading the script of the moment, they are also termed as innovative.

Without necessarily going into semantics and academic discourses, it would be interesting to find out what people think about the M-pesa product that has caused significant ripples in the money transfer market. Is it a creative idea or innovation? Apparently,

when a creative idea becomes useful and makes money for a business, it becomes an innovation. At this juncture, we shall leave it to the prescribed pundits to advise!

From a business point of view, the biggest challenge that entrepreneurial people have, whether they are in the private or public sector, is how to unlock creativity and innovation in their teams. This is more so of a challenge when most people think of creativity as specifically being applied to fields like painting, drawing, composing music, literature or inventions. According to some business gurus, creativity and in-

novation can be described as the ability to introduce different procedures in a department, introduction of different processes to improve work methods, or introduction of different products to a new area of business.

This sounds all straight forward. However, the entrepreneur will then ask the quintessential question – what determines whether employees or business partners are creative? According to some experts more inclined to explaining the complexities of the world in psychological terms, the way our brain operates makes us either creative or innovative.

What is referred as our “brain wave” or “brain state” determines how creative we are. According to leading experts on the matter, there are apparently four brain waves which are used as a guide to determine our brain states. These include beta waves, alpha waves, theta waves and delta waves.

Beta waves are the fastest and give peak concentration and alertness. They are characteristic in individuals who have intense attention skills, visual acuity and concentration. Betas are evident in times of stress and pressure, such as during demanding driving, analysing statistics, working with numbers, or working with deadlines. Caffeine is used to boost beta waves.

Alpha waves signify deep relaxation and reflection, but not meditation. From this state, it is possible to access subconscious creativity. Individuals are awake but relaxed. Alpha waves are vital for peak performance in sport. Sport scientists have discovered that golfers and basketball players have a surge of alpha waves before their best shot. Alphas are evident at times of relaxation, brainstorming ideas, walking or taking time to reflect.

Drift off

Theta waves are referred to as the “twilight state” which is entered briefly as people wake or drift off to sleep. Individuals are receptive to information below the conscious level. This state is also referred to as the gateway to learning and memory. Theta meditation increases creativity, enhances learning, reduces stress and boosts intuition.

Theta waves are apparently evident during repetitious driving, running outdoors, or during performance of tasks such as showering, bathing, shaving or drying your hair.

Finally, delta waves are associated with deep sleep and not relevant to conscious creativity. In this regard, your business associates will be most creative if they are in alpha and theta states.