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Harnessing innovation potential by leveraging creativity from constraints

It sounds counterintuitive, but creativity from constraints is a thing.

Have you ever wondered why large corporates with apparently unlimited resources still struggle to innovate effectively? Meanwhile, smaller businesses with minimal resources are often more innovative.



Often this is due to creativity from constraints – the boost to creativity that comes from limiting choice. Large corporates don't have all the advantages when it comes to innovation, especially if they don't understand how to derive creativity from constraints.

Limitations are an essential means of boosting creativity. And learning to extract more creativity from constraints is a powerful driver of innovation!

Creative freedom vs creativity from constraints

When faced with a creative challenge, we typically seek to avoid creative constraints. Instead, we want complete creative freedom – that is, maximum choice in the creative inputs available to us.

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If you're like most people, you'll likely feel less frustrated and more creative when you have unconstrained freedom of input choice. It's natural to want unlimited choice and resources at your disposal to give you the best chance of success.

The idea of creativity from constraints seems to go against your natural intuition. However, the reality in many situations is that **more choice leads to lower creativity and innovation potential**.

Creative constraints – less choice, more creativity!

Research shows that fewer choices (or imposing creative constraints) are very beneficial for boosting creativity and innovation.



Though limited choice may feel frustrating, providing too much choice creates cognitive overload and an inability to focus. Excessive choice delivers too many potential options, making your task overly complex and lowering enjoyment (positive affect). Interestingly, research also demonstrates that enjoyment (positive affect) is central to boosting creativity. For more information about this read our other blog, [The Science of Creativity](#).

Cognitive overload from too much choice lowers positive affect, creativity and innovation potential. Instead, we often derive increased creativity from constraints.

Is creativity from constraints a given?

Using creative constraints comes with one important caveat.

Too much choice only applies to those who have domain knowledge relevant to the creative task. Only those with sufficiently deep subject knowledge drown in excessive creative possibilities.

Those without this depth of knowledge don't have the expertise to explore many alternatives and, therefore, don't suffer the same level of cognitive overload. For the less experienced, neither the use of creative constraints nor complete creative freedom matters for creativity.

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Naturally, you can't limit choice so far that it becomes impossibly constraining. However, having limited choice (e.g., limited resources) is often a blessing in disguise, especially when you're working on creative tasks with experienced people.

Often, constraints are your friend, not your enemy!

The practice of deriving creativity from constraints

To effectively use constraints to boost creativity and improve your innovation capability, you need to consider the level of choice provided for each creative task you engage in.

Extracting creativity from constraints means overcoming your natural tendency to seek maximum choice and **matching the amount of choice to the level of experience and domain knowledge of those engaged in the task.**



The level of constraints best used varies from person to person. Some thrive with the bare minimum of choice, and others need a few more options. In seeking maximum creativity from constraints, the key to success is finding the relative sweet spot for yourself and your team.

Practising and perfecting creative constraints

Establishing the most appropriate level constraints means:

1. Knowing yourself and your team
2. Experimenting with a range of creative constraints
3. Applying and practising these until you find your sweet spot.

You have to practice using constraints to discover that sweet spot. When you find it, you can maximise creativity from constraints, accelerate idea development, and secure fresh ideas to fuel your innovation portfolio.

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Don't drown yourself and others in choice, resources and options – constraints are your friend. Use them wisely, and they'll become part of your competitive advantage.

If you'd like to learn how to derive increased creativity from constraints and enhance your innovation outcomes, call [Fortitude Business Consulting](https://www.fortitudebusinessconsulting.com.au) on **1300 551 040**.

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