

# GET BACK IN YOUR BOX – IT'S WHERE THE BEST INNOVATION HAPPENS



## MANGROVE

There are still people in the world of innovation who insist on peddling the notion that thinking 'outside the box' is the key to getting to a better place. This is what Harry Houdini used to think and look what happened to him. He actually died of appendicitis rather than unsafe escapology but the point remains – sometimes you need to accept the reality that you're stuck inside a box, so better to embrace the positives of the situation rather than trying to escape it.

In fact, this is something to accept not only 'sometimes', but every time you're faced with an innovation brief or a stretching growth challenge. Why?, because in my experience, there's always a box in which you need to operate. The box is defined by the restrictions that real life has a habit of throwing at us. Sometimes they're perceived rather than real so it's important to pull apart the genuine 'chains' from the 'pains'.

These restrictions can take many different forms and vary from one client challenge to the next. They can be internal restrictions – driven by the strategy, commitment, structure or capabilities of the organisation, or external factors – specific to the category or market in which you are innovating.

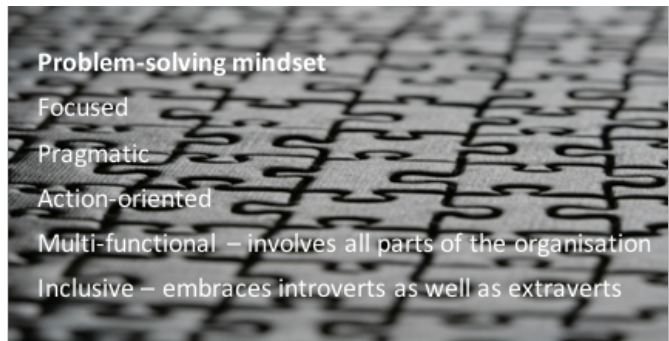
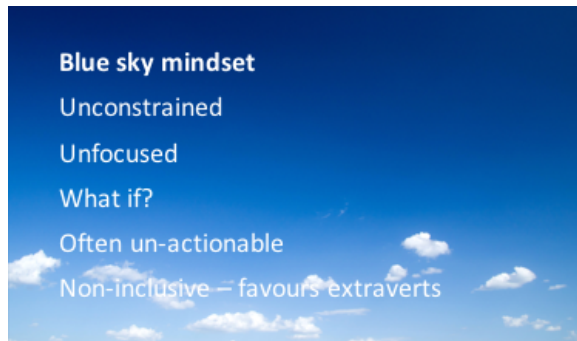


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Internal Restrictions	External Restrictions
Lack of commitment – eg absence of strategic intent	Legal or regulatory context – eg what the market permits
Limited resources – people, money, time	Consumer attitudes or behaviours – unfavourable to your brand or proposition
Imperfect business model – eg no route to market or limited supply chain	Dominance of competition – making market entry challenging
Financial parameters –high cost of goods or margin expectations	Trade expectations – eg need to hit a given price point
Incomplete knowledge – about the market or competitors	

Given these restrictions are inevitable it is far more productive to use them to define your ‘box’ and then think creatively within it, rather than to ignore them by thinking ‘outside the box’. Being consciously constrained can be a positive for innovation teams – forcing them to take a problem-solving approach to the brief rather than adopting less pragmatic and less focused ‘blue sky thinking’.

**Contrasting innovation mind sets:**



A few years back we examined the innovation success rates of different divisions within a multi-national company. We were somewhat surprised to find the business unit with the fewest resources operating in the most difficult markets where the business had limited infrastructure actually had the strongest innovation track record. The reason? They turned their constraints into a positive, embraced them, and learned to master the principles of ‘restricted innovation’.

Restricted innovation is the practice of innovating ‘within the box’. It’s more pragmatic, more productive and leads to more effective outputs. In our experience, it’s also a far more inclusive

approach that leverages the functional expertise across the organization and engages introverts as well as the 'creative butterfly' extraverts.

There are some simple guidelines to follow in order to embrace restricted innovation:

1. Define your box – identify your genuine constraints & understand the implications
2. Express your problem(s) – define your innovation brief(s) in terms of the problems to solve
3. Engage the experts – find the individuals (internal & external) with the relevant expertise
4. Seek the simple solutions – given the restraints, often simple solutions executed well are the most effective
5. Be prepared to accept the impossible – sometimes, the constraints are too significant to innovate around – so be prepared to flag it and consider relaxing one or more of the constraints or changing the brief

Importantly, the individuals that thrive in a restricted innovation environment may be different from the typical 'yellow' personality types who are usually attracted to innovation roles. Instead, more commercially astute and more functionally knowledgeable individuals have much to offer in these situations. Indeed, the composition of the project team could be shaped by the nature of the restrictions faced. We've worked with clients' technical teams when the constraints have revolved around patents and product specifications but partnered with supply chain specialists when the constraints have been linked to production capability.

Our approach to innovation and helping clients to achieve their stretching growth ambitions is grounded in the principles of restricted innovation. Our belief, based on experience, is that every innovation challenge is constrained and needs tackling from inside the box. What's more, the restrictions only seem to be increasing over time so innovation teams need to learn how to thrive under these conditions and avoid the temptation to try to escape them.

*FOR MORE DETAILS ON HOW MANGROVE CAN HELP DRIVE INNOVATION AND STEP-CHANGE GROWTH PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH JUSTIN WRIGHT OR NICK PYE ON +44 (0)20 3907 6837*