Attribute Listing – A Creativity Technique

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Creativity is defined as the habit to generate useful ideas, and alternatives, to solve problems, and re-engineer products and services useful to the stakeholders. Thus, we require various creativity techniques which should enable us to generate useful and new ideas. By and large creativity tools enable us to think divergently and out of box. The creativity techniques can be grouped in divergence and convergence techniques, product and service situations, individual and group techniques. Some of the divergence creativity techniques are attribute listing, biomimicry, brainwriting 6-3-5, osborn checklist, reverse brainstorming, etc. In this article we will discuss about attribute listing which is one of the divergence creativity technique. What is Attribute Listing? In 1931 Robert Platt Crawford pioneered/ used attribute listing in his course on creative thinking. Attribute Listing is suitable for situations which can be decomposed into attributes. The technique takes an idea from one thing and applies it to another. As defined by Crawford "Each time we take a step we do it by changing an attribute or a quality of something else, or else by applying the same quality to some other thing. The pattern of great pieces of creation may involve hundreds of successive changes. The creative step is the same, but it is repeated many times with many variations." [1] Often it is observed that we have preconceived ideas about a particular situation or people. This limits our thinking as our mind is pre-conditioned to certain standard expectations and characteristics related to that particular situation or person. For example, if we have a meeting with a CEO of a big Company, by default we expect the CEO to come in a luxury car. While we wait at the entrance to welcome the CEO to come in a luxury car instead we find a person coming in a motorbike who is none other than the CEO. In this situation our mind is pre-conditioned to expect that a CEO is attributed to luxury cars. In attribute listening, we have to question "normal" characteristics. Attribute listing is a creative technique that can assist you to expand and diversify your product and service range. While using the technique of attribute listing we break a problem down into smaller and smaller parts or attributes and look at alternative solutions to these parts. The technique lets you focus on as many attributes of a product or problem as possible with different perspectives like physical attributes, social attributes, process attributes, psychological attributes and financial attributes. Steps of attribute listing Step 1 : Identify a product, or process which you want to improve. For example if you want to improve learners' helpdesk. Step 2 : List its attributes by breaking it into key attributes or stages or sections. For example, attributes of a learner helpdesk includes opening hours, learner friendly services, availability information material on various programmes, etc. Step 3 : Choose the attributes which are important and improvement in them may lead to improvement in the entire process or product. Look at each attribute individually and identify variations so that it can be improved. For example, look for alternative solutions for better serving the learners as per their timings. Like decide the opening and closing hours in weekdays and weekends depending on the learners' convenience, keeping record of visitors, their feedback about the services provided and following up and so on. Step 4 : Combine one or more of these alternative ways of improving the identified attribute and look if you have come up with some improved process or product. Attribute listing is one of the quick creativity techniques which when performed in small groups results in diverse combination of interesting ideas which provide solution to a tangible problem.

Source : Crawford, R. P. (1964), The Techniques of Creative Thinking : How to Use your Idea to Achieve Success. Virginia, USA : Fraser Publishing Co.