Four steps to stimulate the creative spark

The challenge

"Eureka moments" are times when we suddenly find the solution to a complex problem. We feel we are at an impasse and are about to give up, when suddenly an original solution pops into our mind and seems crystal clear and perfectly obvious. These insights seem to come out of the blue. In reality, they result from a four-step process which we can try to reproduce when we are confronted with new problems.

Follow a step-by-step process



In this phase, you must immerse yourself in the subject matter and thoroughly explore existing research and studies. Accumulate and integrate as much information as you can: read, ask experts, go into the field, be curious—absorb everything you can. Also condition yourself to combine this information together and to manipulate it constantly. This will give your brain material with which to work.



This phase is thankless, but necessary. This is when we feel we have tried everything and are ready to give up. Yet, this is the sign that we have done our share of active work! Don't try to skip this phase by forcing yourself to adopt straight away the solution that seems the most acceptable. Feeling stuck in a stalemate sets the stage for the subsequent steps of the process.



Stop thinking about the problem! Doing something else is particularly recommended at this stage—go for a walk, take a nap, take a shower, sleep on it, etc. These activities require little of the brain and thus allow the right hemisphere to work on associating ideas. At the office, take a short break, take care of another task, get up from your seat, etc.



Whether in a dream, just after waking, or when you are doing something that has nothing to do with the problem, a solution emerges suddenly and with great clarity. It may appear in the form of an image, especially in dreams. Be sure to note down the idea rapidly while it is still fresh in your mind, because it may be fleeting. This is not actually the last step of the process, because you'll then need to test the validity of the idea!

Based on The Eureka Factor, John Kounios, Mark Beeman, Random House, 2015.