

A methodology for inspiring innovation

Activity:

This activity involves telling a story about a well-known South Yorkshire Company – Gripple Ltd – and its founder Hugh Facey. The company’s values are identified, including the ambition that every year new ideas are created to help the business grow and provide more employment for more people in the region. The company’s three step innovation methodology is introduced. The innovation methodology can then be applied to a real life situation.

Purpose:

- To identify a founder’s journey and values.
- To identify a south Yorkshire company and a specific methodology it uses to grow its business.
- To practice the innovation methodology.
- To plan how to use and apply the innovation methodology in different contexts.

Slide 1 – a founder’s journey and values.

Gripple Ltd is a manufacturing company based in South Yorkshire in England. Its story starts with a wire fence salesman, Hugh Facey, who used to have a business selling wire to agricultural businesses and farmers. Once, during a delivery, he was stood in a damp, Welsh field chatting to the farmer and got this feedback: ‘The wire is great Hugh. That’s not my problem, the problem is how to join rolls when the wire only goes halfway between the posts.’ The farmer’s problem was that in an effort to not waste the wire he was trying to join it together by hand and lacerating his fingers in the process. Hugh took that problem away and thought hard on it, and over time, developed a metal fastener that simultaneously ‘grips and pulls’ to join wire together – the ‘Gripple’ was born.¹ The company Hugh has developed since that time has become an award winning global business, turning over £39 million a year. It is also employee owned, which means that everyone who works at Gripple Ltd buys a stake in the company and is personally invested in its success. Hugh’s philosophy is about developing a business that will provide more employment for south Yorkshire over the long term, rather than maximizing profit in the short term. Gripple Ltd² has an ambition at least 25% of their turnover every year comes from new innovations (products that are less than four years old).³

Everyone talks about being creative or developing new innovations, but *how* do you actually do it? Gripple Ltd has a simple methodology that involved three steps - observe, find problems and innovate. And they have developed a practical activity to help communicate what it means in practice – and we’re going to do that now.

¹ You can read more about Hugh’s start up story here - <http://www.managementtoday.co.uk/features/1167159/is-hugh-facey-britains-best-boss/>

² Gripple Ltd – Ideas and Innovation - <http://www.gripple.com/gb/en/about-us#add3>

³ See the company’s timeline which highlights new products and innovations which have driven the company’s growth - http://www.gripple.com/gb/en/about-us#company_timeline

Slide 2 – The innovation process

Resources needed:

- Yoghurts (enough for one per table or team).
- Cheap plastic spoons

GripplE Ltd has developed a way of developing new ideas that is based on a simple three step process:

- Observing
- Finding Problems.....and.....
- Innovating – thinking of new ideas to solve the problems.

Now let pupils learn about this process in practice with a fun activity:

Slide 3 – A practical application of the three step innovation process

1) Ask for one volunteer per table to be a ‘yoghurt eater’ (check for any lactose allergies beforehand!) and all other team members to be observers.

2) Whilst the yoghurt eaters eat the yoghurt, the observers must meticulously record everything that they do – writing will help them remember. In particular, ask observers to watch out for any problems they spot in the process – it might be how the eaters take off the lid, what they do with it, how they hold the yoghurt, how well the spoon gets out the product, anything they spot or that the yoghurt eater seems to have trouble with.

3) Once the yoghurt eaters have finished, appreciate their effort with a quick clap and then ask the observers to share any problems they noted. Get feedback on common problems (including what to do with the lid, watery product, cheap/badly shaped spoon etc).

4) Now, ask the teams to think and discuss for one minute to come up with an idea which would address one of those problems.

5) Get feedback on their ideas – it might be a better designed spoon, a way of concealing the lid, a completely different shaped pot.

Slide 4 – Innovation from the extremes.... What would Lego do?

6) Say that one of the ways that GripplE Ltd comes up with new ideas is by looking at their product from very different perspectives, or from extremes. They might ask ‘What could we do with a giant GripplE?’ or ‘What could we do with a tiny GripplE?’ This means that there are now giant GripplE’s holding up bridges, and small GripplE’s holding up lights in kitchens.

7) Now you are going to apply this approach – looking at something from a different perspective – to develop a new yoghurt product. You are going to create a yoghurt product, from the perspective of one of these famous brands, which addresses one or more of the problems you identified.

8) The idea is to challenge pupils to think from a different perspective. Really put themselves in the mind-set of that brand and ask– if Disney did yoghurts, or if Lego did yoghurts, what would they do?

Depending on the age and skill of the pupils, the time available, and the number of iterations/quality desired, this part of the activity might take anything from 20 minutes to two hours.

Set learners some parameters about what you want them to produce – according to the time available. You could ask them to produce some or all of the following:

- A new concept for a new yoghurt product from the point of view of one of the companies.
- A sketch with labels.
- A logo and strapline.
- A jingle or advert.
- A short ‘pitch’ to the rest of the group.

Do not make this a competitive process – **that is not the point of the activity** – the point is to develop everyone’s innovation capacity, rather than selecting ‘winners’ (which has the side effect of creating ‘losers’).

9) Ask learners to share their ideas/pitch and highlight the learning point – that by following a simple process of observing and finding problems, they have come up with new ideas - new innovations. The observation was the crucial part – it was really looking at what was going on, carefully, intentionally, that led to new ideas for doing things differently by identifying things that could be improved.

Slide 5 – Where can we apply this thinking?

Ask learners to apply this thinking to a real situation or opportunity.

For example, if you are doing this activity with teaching colleagues, you would ask them to apply this thinking to curriculum design, or a specific learning activity or lesson. You could say – play a movie in your head about the beginning of that topic/aspect of planning/design of learning – observe what’s happening, who’s doing and saying what and find problems. Your ‘perspective’ is your areas for development of the three strands of enterprise. For example, if you notice that all the decisions have been made by adults, how can that dynamic change or appear different to learners? How could more questions be asked at the beginning of topics in order that children feel a sense of ownership over the direction of the topic? Or if an area for development is economic and business understanding, look in detail at the subject matter of the topic and the third strand of enterprise education and think and google hard in order to develop new ideas to make links between classroom learning and ‘what’s out there.’

Or, if you are doing this activity with children, ask them to identify a familiar school activity which would benefit from being improved. Long list problems – these are common ones:

- Stressful playtimes, requiring more structured friendship building activities.
- Encouraging reading.
- Practice with maths.
- Increase sales at book fair.
- Increase parent volunteers.
- Improve Christmas Fair (less individually made items that are bought by individual parents).
- Improve summer Fair (more links with business and the community, less ‘same fair, different year’).

Thinking like this is part of the DNA of an entrepreneurial school. Imagine taking colleagues and learners through this process and throwing out the call: ‘innovations welcome.’ How could it empower new ideas and involvement? How could it develop a mindset where things aren’t ‘fixed’ or ‘done’, but can always be improved?