

Make Innovation HAPPEN

**MIH Knowledge Article:
Propelling Creativity: How Food & Drink
Companies Can Become Future Fit**

Scotland
A LAND OF
food and drink

SCOTLAND
IT'S TIME TO INSPIRE

The logo consists of the word 'CAN DO' in a stylized font. 'CAN' is written vertically in white on a teal background, and 'DO' is written vertically in white on a yellow background.

There are many aspects of running a food or drink business that may not seem to earn the moniker “creative” yet fundamentally demand creativity to properly address. It takes a creative person to conceive an idea for a food or drink product, refine a business model that works from a blank canvas, develop branding to communicate their business’ value and actually make a defensibly unique product that solves a real or perceived consumer need.

Figuring out the best way to finance a business is an undervalued creative exercise and the myriad challenges that confront companies, from finding the right suppliers, co-packers, distributors, target shoppers and sales channels, also demand high degrees of imaginative thinking.

A previous post, [Houston: We Have a Solution](#), described some of the ways that food and drink success stories were born out of the creative thinking needed to solve an urgent problem – usually, starvation. Thankfully most challenges aren’t quite that urgent. However, one of the essentials in running a successful company is still about finding ways to create and claim value through differentiation. That’s a complicated, difficult job. It requires tools that can help identify surprising, creative breaks from the conventional. But it also requires ways of analysing the competitive landscape, the dynamics threatening that landscape, and a company’s resources and competencies. In short, creative thinking.

But what happens when the creative juices aren’t flowing or the pressure to focus on sales or reducing costs gets in the way of considering different approaches?

Research suggests that when people are stressed, they are more likely to stick to addressing problems as they always have.

However, in their book [A Beautiful Constraint](#), Adam Morgan and Mark Barden suggest that by actually making challenges more demanding for ourselves (hence the Constraint in their title) we give ourselves the opportunity to think more creatively or differently. “How we frame the question is critical to making a constraint beautiful because it forces us to think and behave in a different way”, the authors explain.

As an example, they describe the efforts of the Audi racing team in the early 2000s to win Le Mans under the assumption that its cars couldn’t go faster than the competition’s. Audi developed diesel-powered racers, which required fewer fuel stops than petrol-powered cars, and won Le Mans three years in succession (2004–2006).

In 2017 Audi set itself a new constraint—and a new ambition: to build winning all-electric racers for the new Formula E championship.

A key part of this solution was the “Propelling Question”. This type of question is not merely a difficult question such as “How to double turnover in five years”. Audi’s question was, “How can we win the Le Mans if our car can go no faster than anyone else’s?” Propelling Questions contain a “directional tension” that retains the “can” while looking for the “if”.

The authors identify three generic reactions to constraints.

The first group the “Victims” who lower their ambition when faced with a constraint. “Since I cannot achieve what I desire because of the constraint, I will settle for less.”

The second group the “Neutralisers” refuse to lower the ambition but find an alternative way to deliver the ambition. “If I cannot double turnover in five years, I will exit this business and invest elsewhere.”

The third group, the “Transformers” who finds a way to use a constraint as an opportunity, and even heighten their ambition in the process.

The difficulty is that our habitual ways of responding to constraints prevent us from finding new ways to solve new problems. If the first step to correcting this is acknowledging the problem, the second is finding effective remedies.

According to research findings, in the [Harvard Business Review](#), “being creative and innovative are the top critical success factors – not only for companies, but for leaders and their teams. Creativity, indeed, is identified as the top leadership competency for enterprises.”

Experience amongst the fastest growing businesses in this research tells us that innovation is driven neither by processes nor systems; it’s generated by human talent.

“No matter what procedures you have in place, it’s only the creative confidence and drive of individuals – and the collective intelligence of teams – that takes companies to new frontiers, revealing a better world and boosting an organisation’s bottom-line performance.”

It’s important to approach making this happen just as we would any other business obstacle; creatively, of course.

Innovation support for Scottish food and drink companies

If you're a food or drink business in Scotland that's looking for support to become more creative and innovative the [Make Innovation Happen](#) Service can help you explore your ideas and develop them all the way through to market.

Initial advice and support from expert Connectors is free, confidential and simple.

You can make a quick enquiry by clicking [here](#) or ring on 0300 013 3385

Looking for some inspiration? Dive into our free-to-access insights [articles](#) to see how companies round the world are turning incredible ideas into profitable business.

To find out more about the support available, please get in touch with the Make Innovation Happen team:

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