

Pottinger

PERSPECTIVES

Bringing ideas, people and data together to change the world

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COOKING UP CREATIVITY

**Three ingredients to
refresh your strategy**

Photo: nel. restaurant by Cole Bennetts



Photo: Le Gavroche by Issy Croker

There is about half a cup of flour on the kitchen floor. It's thinly spread and has the distinct markings of tiny footprints. My two-year old daughter is nowhere to be seen. Until moments ago we were making 'rainbow biscuits' – biscuits covered in colourful, sugary '100s and 1000s'.



Michel Roux Jr, Le Gavroche by Issy Crocker

Scarlett peeks her head around the corner of the kitchen. She is wearing the mixing bowl as a hat. 'Daddy – I have hat. For rainbows.'

And the *rainbow hat* is born.

The creative adult is the child who survived, said Ursula Le Guin. At times, as a parent, it seems there are no limits to the creative engine of children. The power of pure, unconstrained thinking fuels their inventive experience of reality day-to-day.

Some of the other great creators come from the cooking world. And just like my daughter in our little kitchen in Sydney, great cooks and chefs around the world bridge the worlds of play and performance every day to create delight for their patrons.

What does the world of top tier cooking have to teach us about creativity in the corporate world? How can companies ensure that creativity finds a place in their strategic thinking and planning processes? More precisely, how is creativity not just mustered, but ensured, as companies face new and increasing challenges and must design

strategies that are as outside the box as the operating conditions they find themselves in?

1. Perspective – The first thing you need to become conscious of is the perspective you are bringing to the table. Is it limited by what has come before you, what has worked in the past, or any other trappings of the status quo?

Le Gavroche is located in London, just off Grosvenor Square in Mayfair. It has been serving its customers classical French cuisine since 1967 and was the first restaurant in London to be awarded a Michelin star. For more than half a century it has remained a beacon of consistency in fine dining globally.

When I asked him about his creativity in the kitchen, proprietor Michel Roux Jr stresses that *'[given] Le Gavroche has been open for 53 years now, we do take a long-term view when it comes to the creative process. We are regarded as something of an institution, so we're not trends-led, but we apply a forward-thinking perspective,*



involving the whole restaurant team, seeking out new ingredients to use, taking inspiration from seasonal produce, and also ensuring that our team approaches each service with enthusiasm and pride.'

In the world of corporate strategy, one consistent failing of internal and external teams is taking a short-term view. If you are only looking a few months or years in front of you – constrained, for example, by the relentless cycle of quarterly reporting – then you are not giving yourself the space to let creativity bubble to the surface. Companies must take a long-term perspective when designing strategy. And that strategy must be destination-led. From this vantage point, strategies can be fed by the creative forces of innovation and insight. From this angle, creativity is not only permitted, but encouraged.

2. Process – Be better than butchers' paper. Your company deserves it. That is why the next thing you need is a process that delivers creative results. Any process that makes you look through the prism of the known is not what's needed by companies looking to innovate or find a step-change in growth. Conversely, spit-balling in dinner party

conversation format makes for a sporadic and ill-disciplined concoction – corporate strategy that stretches from dream to disaster. While this kind of boardroom chatter can be enriching for those involved, it is often unanchored and lofty – and rather than being creative, is just a form of intellectual self-stimulation.

Descending into the moody, subterranean surrounds of Sydney's *nel*, fires up the senses for a journey to a faraway place.

Spit-balling in dinner party conversation format makes for a sporadic and ill-disciplined concoction – corporate strategy that stretches from dream to disaster.

Proprietor and head chef Nelly Robinson has created an environment and experience that is as evocative as the food he serves. Speaking to me about his method, Nelly says *'the process to create a dish starts with creating a theme. Say, land & sea. From here I think about the ways in my life I have enjoyed the land and sea. Be this ice creams on the beach or bread cooked over a campfire. We borrow these memories as inspiration to create a unique dish. Through this process, our dishes*

have elements that a guest can relate to but are presented in an inventive way, that taste familiar yet different, that leaves the customer wowed and intrigued for more'.

Thus, process is intimately intertwined with the creative result. Nelly has created a system that links food with memories and emotions and the result is utterly compelling.

Thinking in systems – now popularised as systems thinking* – is a powerful tool in various forms of analysis, and the

development of corporate strategy is no exception. In strategy, the process involves the extrapolation of different opportunities or pathways for growth in a way which not only unveils, through design, logical adjacencies and left-field ideas, but also shows the rich fields where such opportunities bump into each other. These interdependencies are particularly useful in exposing areas of significant value or upside for companies, but also significant risk, whilst removing the natural human tendency to think in siloes.

*One of the most popular academic approaches to systems thinking was developed at MIT, where Professor Jay Forrester developed system dynamics in the 1950s



Photo: Xixa by Steve Hellerstein

3. People – Have you ever stood in front of an abstract painting and overheard someone say that ‘they could have done that’? It’s one of the great joys of communal consumption of modern art. Next time that happens, feel free to turn to the person and ask to see their latest work.

Because that should reveal one of the truths of creativity – that creative people actually create, they don’t just talk about it.

Let’s face it. Some people are capable of original thinking and others are good mirrors of others’ opinions, at best. This is why the third and final ingredient of ensuring creativity is the essential human element – incorporation and celebration of those people for whom creation is a natural or learned gift. Those intangible, brilliant sparks of the mind created in the real world.

When I asked Jason and Heather about the role of people in creating food, Jason comments that *‘food turns people back into people. It’s a conduit to bring people together. When travelling with Heather in Europe before we opened the restaurant, one commonality we witnessed continuously was people at the table. Food gives us the opportunity to be with people – even when they are not really there. When I am cooking, I am sometimes with my grandmother, because of the memories I have of her being in the kitchen. Creatively, cooking is a service to the cook and the eater, and in both cases, people come first.’*

Millions can learn a method, but only a very small handful ever create their own. In the corporate world, you can teach smart

external strategy consultant, ‘but how can I be sure I will get something new?’

The other two Ps – So there you have it – perspective, process and people are the ingredients to ensuring a fresh and creative corporate strategy. But that’s not the full story. Because who says creativity means success? What do we even mean by success?

For companies, two everlasting challenges of corporate strategy are how to ensure you act on the agreed plan and how can you be sure that it will create lasting commercial advantage or financial success?

In walk *persuasion* and *profit*.

You can have all the creativity in the world but if you don’t have the skills or the team (internal and external) to drive action, then the strategy can be worth no more than perfectly folded linen napkins that give you the impression, but not the guarantee, of a truly great meal. On the other hand, if you have all creativity and no commerce, your business is likely to fail. You need strategy with numbers.

Pottinger’s long term perspective, Destination-led Strategy® process and multidisciplinary people are designed to stimulate creativity and original ideas, and simultaneously filter that thinking with commercial rigour to ensure our strategic advice is practical and complete.

If you have a strategic challenge that needs a creative solution, grab your rainbow hat and give us a call. **P**

By John Sheehy, Scarlett’s dad and CEO of Pottinger.

You can have all the creativity in the world but if you cannot drive action, then the strategy is worth no more than perfectly folded linen napkins that give the impression, but not the guarantee, of a truly great meal.

At sunset, smack bang in the middle of Williamsburg, NYC, just over the bridge from lower Manhattan, you can experience one of the great joys of contemporary cooking. Husband and wife team Jason Marcus and Heather Heuser have created Xixa, a spin on Mexican cooking with an elevated, Brooklyn twist and an eye-wateringly expansive wine list to boot – not your classic tacos and tequila (not that there’s anything wrong with that).

and adaptable people to believe in your point of view, and to follow a clever process, but you cannot machine a creative soul. These people must be found, listened to and nurtured. They will not always be the first people to speak and they will sometimes be slow to put themselves on the pedestal of corporate success. But they are the people who are the one in a million – the people who are the answer to any CEO who asks an

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From COVID to Catastrophe

Too much attention has been focused on filling the income gap that many people and companies now face and too little on reducing expenses and liabilities. As a result, there is a growing risk that the current health crisis and economic downturn turns into a massive liability crisis, triggering a Second Great Depression in many developed economies. There are, however, practical ways to address this threat.

By Nigel Lake

https://www.pottinger.com/uploads/1/9/5/1/19512909/pottinger_-_from_covid_to_catastrophe.pdf

About Pottinger

Pottinger is a global advisory firm headquartered in Sydney and New York. We combine strategic, commercial, financial and transaction perspectives, and focus first on long term outcomes, to deliver commercial advice that is practical and complete. We navigate the uncertainty inherent in commercial decisions, helping our clients to identify value overlooked by others, and to avoid risks which others may not see.

Pottinger helps organisations to adapt, innovate and transform, by providing insight and advice on strategy and public policy matters, as well as the negotiation and execution of M&A and financing transactions. Our combination of strategic thinking, M&A advice and financing capabilities allow us to find innovative solutions to the challenges arising in industries facing dynamic change and disruption.

Our team has exceptionally broad and deep strategic advisory and transaction execution experience, encompassing all of the world's top thirty countries. Examples include:

- Advice on market entry, strategic repositioning, identification of new growth opportunities, spin-outs and other forms of restructuring and advice on strategic investments, using our proprietary Destination-led Strategy® methodology, together with analogous advice to governments on public policy;
- Advice in relation to large and small-scale acquisitions, divestments and takeover responses for both publicly listed and private companies;
- Capital optimisation and financing advice for large enterprises, together with advice on commercialisation planning, capital strategy and capital raising for emerging companies;
- Specialist input in relation to the design, formation, restructuring, sale and dissolution of large scale joint ventures and partnerships; and
- Identification and quantification of risk, by applying advanced statistical techniques to relevant data pools, thus simplifying decisions impacted by significant uncertainty.

Pottinger is 100% independent, owned by its employees and operates a completely conflict-free business model.



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