

OPPORTUNITY

SCOUTING

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1. INTRODUCTION

THE NEED FOR OPPORTUNITY SCOUTING

1.1 Efficiency and quality are no longer enough

The speed and impact of change is creating increasing pressure to innovate in both our personal and professional lives. Organisations change, product life cycles are shrinking, the rate of technological development continues to accelerate, markets become saturated and new, aggressive competitors sweep local and global markets.

Cost control and quality improvements alone are no longer enough. In the battle for the future, the ability to detect and create new value added quickly is crucial.

'In 1987, products introduced in the last decade accounted for an average of 35% of sales. In 1997, businesses realised 43% of their sales and 41% of profit through products introduced in the preceding five years. Hewlett Packard and Océ van der Grinten, for example, realised 80% to 90% of their sales through new products.'

The need for new value added feeds demand for creative enterprise. This means spotting and using opportunities at an early stage, making effective use of each other's strengths, taking intelligent risks and (un-)learning faster, both as an organisation and as an individual.

WHEN TO USE OPPORTUNITY SCOUTING

- **Seeking new opportunities (market developments etc.)**
- **Finding unique and distinctive concepts**
- **Avoiding or solving problems**
- **Responding to rapid changes**
- **Developing a vision of the future**
- **Motivating and involving others**

If organisations confine themselves to addressing problems, many opportunities are missed and finding new value is problematic and slow. It is advisable to move energy input forward in time. Opportunity scouting provides a springboard for structured and creative detection of opportunities and their accelerated translation

into reality. Benefiting from each other's knowledge and ideas, the method channels inventiveness, initiative and creative enterprise, for and beyond problems.

1.2 Human thought patterns oppose change

'Inventions have long since reached their limit, and I see no hope for further development.'

Julius Sextus Frontinus, a famous engineer in 1st Century Rome

Discovering and appreciating new opportunities often contradicts the way in which our thought patterns are organised. Habits and fixed patterns ensure that we often see new opportunities only when problems force us to. Our learning capacity spontaneously gives preference to the straightjacket of (swift) responses, stereotype solutions and obvious opportunities. Although fast, reactive thinking is essential for survival, this quality is no longer enough for organisations to succeed today and in the future.

FEATURES OF HUMAN THOUGHT PATTERNS

- **Fast and repetitive**
- **Context-dependent**
- **Correct, right/wrong**
- **Problem-driven**
- **Learning capacity**

2. FUNDAMENTALS

ESCAPING THE PAST, DESIGNING THE FUTURE

'Every act of creation is first of all an act of destruction'
Pablo Picasso

Quality of thought is influenced by the quality of thinking and the climate in a team or organisation. Opportunity scouting and new initiatives require space. We must allow ourselves to explore new avenues of thought. The uncertainty of the new by definition takes us into a less comfortable, unknown situation. Freeing creativity and enterprise goes hand in hand with allowing and exploring areas that are different, nonsense or taboo.

2.1 The creative and opportunity-oriented environment

'It's easy to come up with new ideas: the hard part is letting go of what worked for you two years ago, but will soon be out of date.'
R. van Oech

A supportive and inspiring environment plays a key role in using each other's ideas and experience. Research shows that a safe (corporate) environment has a major influence on creative behaviour and divergence from the beaten track.

Exercise 1: Opportunity killers

Think of a situation in the past month in which new ideas were urgently needed, but almost none came. Make a list of the reasons.

Some conventions make it easier to discover new paths of opportunity. Through these conventions, we create a special universe and climate in which new alternatives can continually be explored.

CONVENTIONS FOR OPPORTUNITY SCOUTING

- 1. Defer judgement: the critical phase follows later**
- 2. Many alternatives**
- 3. Explore from radically different angles**

In groups, the following also applies:

- 4. Respond to other people's ideas, seek combinations**
- 5. Privacy: aim for openness within a group and protect it from the outside world**
- 6. No arrogance, showing off or pulling rank**
- 7. An opportunity is a group opportunity (ego holiday)**

2.2 Conceptual skills

'Our imaginative apparatus is like a mental muscle: the more a muscle works, the more it develops. Activity strengthens it, instead of wearing it out.'

A. Osborn

Four general conceptual skills help us to spot and develop opportunities: observation, association, imagination and synthesis.

Flexible observation: learning to look at things in a new way

Through our senses, we receive information from our environment: we observe. Our observations are not objective or neutral, but subjective. They are largely governed by our world view, our past, our thought patterns and our expectations. An Eskimo sees snow very differently from a European.

Patterns at the observational level are hard to break because they form the self-evident and inconspicuous basis for our associations, judgements and decisions. Looking the same thing from a different point of view often gives rise to the most surprising new opportunities.

How do you respond to a newspaper article on a new temperature-sensitive paint if you are a painter? What opportunities do you see? And if you are a producer? A doctor? A weatherman? A tramp? An advertising executive? An artist?

Continually changing observation patterns lures the unseen opportunity closer:

'The real voyage of discovery does not consist of searching for new landscapes but of looking with different eyes.'

Marcel Proust

Exercise 2: Observing in a new way

Choose an object or situation and look at it for two minutes. Continually try to change your point of view and look at it in a new way. What do you see? What else do you see?

Free association: many surprising alternatives

An association is a link that we make between two elements. For example: A makes me think of B, a pond makes me think of a swan, the sea makes me think of holidays. Our associations are often very rich and complex, with dominant patterns in the learned associations. One way to visualise associations is to draw a flower pattern around an important word. For example, what does an aeroplane bring to mind? Flying, holidays, tickets, airports, Da Vinci, kerosene, the sea, clouds, runways, disaster films, etc.

A continual search for opportunities forces us to go beyond the spontaneous and obvious. We quickly reach the limits of existing, common associations (frustration!) and at that point, create new space for alternatives and unusual associations.

Exercise 3: Association

Divide a square into four sections of the same shape and area. What other ways are there to do this? And another three alternatives...

Active imagination: seeking originality

Imagination is our ability to create something in our minds that is not (yet) there. For example, we can quite easily imagine Bill Clinton wearing an eye patch and a kilt. We then `see' something that does not exist. In comparison with thinking in words, thinking in images is very smooth, flexible and often very personal. We often set the limits to our imagination ourselves. One of these limits lies in the dominance of verbal logic, of thinking in words. Making conscious and provocative use of our imagination to go beyond the known is an endless source of innovation and originality.

Exercise 4: Imagination

Think of last night's dinner. How did it look on your plate, what colours do you see, exactly what kinds of foods did it consist of? Can you taste it again? Can you hear the background music? Now imagine the plate around 10 times its normal size. How does it look now? What could you do with it now?

Synthesis: purposeful design

Synthesis is a thought process that moves from far to near, from the abstract to the concrete, from the irrelevant to the relevant, from the unrealistic to the realistic.

This skill comes into play mainly in:

1. Generating a relevant idea from a surprising angle
2. Making a vague or abstract idea concrete in a clear concept
3. Designing a new vision.

Exercise 5: Synthesis

1. *Think of a striking headline, film or advertisement that you have seen recently. Recall the primary message. Look for new forms in which to present the same message.*
2. *Think of a fantastic but completely unrealistic idea that you or a colleague have had in the past year. Address this as a group and discover ways to make the idea more feasible.*

MORE OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH CONCEPTUAL SKILLS

Surprising angles: *flexible observation*

Many alternatives: *free association*

Daring originality: *active imagination*

Creative associations: *synthesis*

3. THE OPPORTUNITY SCOUTING PROCESS

BEING, DISCOVERING AND DOING

'Our deepest fear is not of our dark side, our deepest fear is of having unlimited power. You don't serve the world by keeping yourself small. You are born to demonstrate your unlimited possibilities. Let your light shine and your presence will automatically free others too.'

Nelson Mandela

The systematic use of a liberating structure makes innovation an ally. The opportunity wheel is a tool for escaping from the patterns of the past and designing the future.

3.1 Beyond established thought patterns: the Opportunity Wheel

The Opportunity Wheel helps us to start the opportunity accelerator in a specific direction. We start from our **being**: our vision, our principles, strengths, present opportunities, ambitions, present situation, trends and actions.

From this point of departure, we **scout** for new opportunities. We select promising opportunities, strengthen the fragile ingredients and make them resistant to criticism.

Finally, the method is designed to release energy and motivation for action: for **doing**. Overcome obstacles within and outside the organisation and transform a robust, promising opportunity into tomorrow's profitable reality.

Figure: The Opportunity Wheel



OPPORTUNITY SCOUTING SCENARIO

Being

Define the point of departure (who we are, the environment, and our position in relation to the outside world).

Scouting

Determine the opportunity domain

- **Review promising opportunity directions and fields**
- **Select three directions or fields**
- **Make specific and choose**
- **Describe domain**

Generate opportunities

- **Initial opportunities**
- **Apply techniques**
- **Select opportunities with the V box**
- **Imagination, initial development and creation of concept**
- **Strengthen concept (PPC)**

Doing

- **Search for energisers and hot spots**
- **Visualise successful implementation**
- **Buddy check**
- **Complete opportunity chart**
- **Opportunity contracting**
- **Fill and manage opportunity portfolio**

3.2 Techniques and tools for Being

I. Being:

Determine the point of departure.

For Being, we first consider the organisation (ourselves), then the outside world, and then the relationship between the two. This positioning focuses attention on promising new opportunities for us (and not for someone else).

Exercise 6: Defining `Being`

- 1. What information do we have on the existing situation in our own organisation? First review figures and other objective information. Then consider intuitive elements concerning the existing context.*
- 2. Consider the outside world. What objective information is available on the market, the market players, suppliers, environmental factors, etc.? Which trends can be identified? What is our vision of the future?*
- 3. What is the organisation's (our) position in relation to the outside world? What is our feeling about this? What does this mean for the opportunity scouting process?*

3.3 Techniques and tools for Scouting

`Only bad explorers think that there is no land when they can see nothing but sea.'

Francis Bacon

II. Scouting

First we review fields and opportunity directions that we think could conceal good opportunities. We select the best of all the promising domains, which we then describe and make concrete. From this domain, we generate opportunities: spontaneous and hidden opportunities that we detect through conceptual techniques. Via the V box, we filter the entire set of opportunities and then make the selected concepts robust.

**** *Basis scouting techniques***

1. Assumptions

Detecting and then temporarily overturning or provocatively questioning assumptions that everyone takes for granted creates new opportunities or original angles.

1. Determine the opportunity domain.
2. Think of the initial ideas
3. Make a list of assumptions
4. Challenge the assumptions
5. Generate new ideas.

Exercise 7: Assumptions

Search for new target groups for universities, with the aid of assumptions.

2. Analogy

We refer to analogy when two different objects, situations or ideas have things in common. For example, a chair can be analogous to a

sofa: both are made of wood and are intended for sitting on. They share a number of features (basis for analogy) but each one also has specific features of its own. In scouting for new opportunities, we use provocative analogy. This means that we force analogies, search for ties that are not apparently logical, not evident, or are not known today. We consciously step into an apparent breach and so generate new opportunities.

1. Determine opportunity domain
2. Think of the initial ideas
3. Select analogies
4. Describe the features of the analogies
5. Generate new ideas based on these features.

Exercise 8: Analogy

With the aid of the analogy technique seek a new form for a mailing.

3. Right/wrong

This technique helps us to abandon standard patterns through provocative errors. From the wrong situation, improvement and innovation come in through the back door.

1. Determine opportunity domain
2. Think of the initial ideas
3. What can really go wrong in this opportunity domain
4. Turn this around
5. Generate new ideas from this.

Exercise 9: Right/wrong

Using the right/wrong technique, generate new activities around cinemas.

**** V box: Select the most promising opportunities**

Once we have identified many opportunities, we make an initial selection. Choose the opportunities that appeal to you most (and not those that you object to). The V box is an evaluation technique that works very well in groups. Thanks to this method, not only the obvious opportunities, but also the innovative and risky ones are chosen. The technique involves ordering the opportunities in the following matrix, in four steps. Each person chooses.

- Limp : Low value, known (blue stickers)
- Step : Low value, new (red stickers)
- Sprint : High value, known (green stickers)
- Leap : High value, new (yellow stickers)

The V box (figure)

High	3 SPRINT	4 LEAP
Low	1 LIMP	2 STEP
	Known	New

Exercise 10: V box

Categorise opportunities from an earlier session in the V box and investigate the pros and cons.

**** Enhancing concepts**

We take the top of each opportunity type for the initial development. For this, we investigate the different directions found and consider their good points. We try to apply the valuable elements in the development of the top concepts.

Exercise 11: Enhancing concepts

Describe how a new type of coffee, 'the traffic jam coffee' could appear. List the strengths and weaknesses.

Love unltd.

You can also declare your love for some concepts or ingredients. Dr. Love, the attractiveness thermometer, serves to show which concepts have a special attraction, sparkle or inspire direct action. Together with the dimensions of feasibility and value, personal attraction is a key convergence element.

**** Strengthening concepts: PPC**

We can use the PPC to further strengthen the concepts found. The `cons' are relevant only in as far as they prevent you from taking action.

Exercise 12: Strengthening concepts

Pros, Potential and Cons (PPC)

Pros

List at least three pros or specific strengths of the concept. What is good about the opportunity?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Potential

Now list three ideas on the potential or possible returns of the opportunity. What could be possible if the opportunity becomes a reality? Start with `it would' or `it could'.

1. *It would:*
2. *It would:*
3. *It would:*
4. *It would:*

Cons

Finally, describe your concerns about the concept, or the shortcomings you see. Describe the cons as a problem that you can solve for the action plan.

1. *How can we...?*
2. *How can we...?*
3. *How can we...?*
4. *How can we...?*

We now look at all the selected concepts again. In this phase, an idea can also be voted out, or at least a veto can be imposed and explained.

3.4 Techniques and tools for Doing

The road to rigidity is paved with good intentions

III. *Doing*

The daily flow of urgent and/or important concerns keeps us from putting the necessary effort into new developments. The best opportunities therefore often remain on the shelf. The techniques for doing bring the future forward. Realisation starts now, today.

ACTIVITIES

- **Visualise the concept, load up your own energy**
- **Identify energisers and obstacles**
- **Buddy check**
- **Fill in the opportunity chart**

REALISATION

- **Visualise successful implementation**
- **Opportunity contracting**
- **Fill and manage opportunity portfolio**

**** Visualise the concept**

Exercise 13: Visualising the concept

For visualisation, sit down quietly. Relax and shut your eyes. Breathe deeply and slowly. We are going to explore the opportunity you have chosen together. This will take a little time, so take the time to relax completely and concentrate on yourself. Watch your breathing...

Now think of the opportunity you have selected. Can you form an image of it? Try to form an image of it. Try to gain a sense of the final result of this opportunity. What does it look like? Examine it in detail. Do you see all the details? Are there points that still have to be worked out? Let your imagination work out the opportunity in more detail. Watch what happens, let it unfold before your and watch it as you would a film. If any points are not yet concrete, make them concrete. If they remain a question, then leave them as a question and focus on the next point. The opportunity unfolds before you in its various aspects. Concentrate on looking.

You now come back to yourself and consider the opportunity again, from the point of view of your feelings. Concentrate on your emotions. What do you feel when you look at this opportunity? What do your feelings say about this opportunity? If your feelings say something good about it, listen to them. Do any words come into your mind? Listen to these words. What do they say about this opportunity?

Still concentrating on your emotions, ask yourself whether you should continue with this opportunity. Try to form an opinion for yourself. Is the opportunity still attractive? Will you go ahead with it? As it is now, or do you need to make some adjustments? Or will you abandon it? Form your own opinion, then open your eyes.

Write down for yourself what you have seen. Make a sketch of the opportunity, or write it down in words. Describe it in the most concrete terms possible, knowing that words can never describe an image completely. Write down your feelings about this opportunity too: describe it. Now add your opinion on whether you should go ahead with it or not, and why.

Close your eyes again for the next phase. We now continue with action relating to this opportunity. We are going to think about the various steps we shall take to realise the opportunity.

Think of what still separates you from the final result and try to visualise these steps in very concrete terms. What is the first thing you will need to do? And what will be the next step? Try to see these actions in your mind, step by step. This will take a little time. Take your time.

Where do you foresee the greatest difficulties in realising this opportunity? Where do the biggest obstacles appear? Try to describe them for yourself and look at them.

Now return to your emotions and consider the various steps and any obstacles to them. What are your feelings about these? Is it feasible? What do your feelings say? Do you still have a good feeling, or do your feelings say something different? Try to describe it for yourself.

If you now consider the actions and your feelings about them, what is the position of the opportunity now? What is your feeling about this? Will you continue with the actions? Try to form an opinion, to put it into words, then open your eyes.

Write down what you have seen, heard and felt about the various actions. Take your time. Draw a conclusion about whether you will turn this concept into action.

**** *Energisers and obstacles***

If the concept itself is robust and promising, attention turns in the next step to the support for action within the organisation. We determine which actions are needed to turn the opportunity into a success. What will you do? What needs to happen? In other words, how can this interesting opportunity be implemented?

Exercise 14: Identifying energisers and obstacles

*** You seek energisers (such as people, presentations, praise, resources, encouragement, enthusiastic co-actors, rewards, process sponsors) to support you, to keep the process moving and to provide assistance when things become difficult. Who is keen to help? Who is enthusiastic?*

***** Obstacles***

Review your list of activities. Where do the main obstacles lie? Who will work against the plans? What worries you most? Write these things down. The obstacles you encounter, the hurdles you have to take, the resistance and conflicting interests that you anticipate. Formulate the obstacles as 'How can we...?' questions. Try to stay a step ahead of the main ones. For example, how can you anticipate resistance from the financial manager? Put yourself in his shoes? What is he sensitive to? How can you make him a co-owner of the opportunity? How do signs of resistance indicate ways to improve the concept? How can you use the tendency to cling to the status quo to realise your opportunity?

It could be interesting to consider the concepts/ingredients that you 'hate'. Strong emotions mean that these points generate something, set something in motion, evoke resistance or fall far beyond the existing patterns. A brief exploration can therefore be useful, because negative emotions probably mean an excess of a particular quality or a deep-rooted resistance to action.

**** Buddy check**

Literally work through these obstacles with a buddy. Play the role, and overcome them. Do it!

Exercise 15: Buddy check (in pairs)

Choose a buddy for the next step and for the realisation of the chosen opportunity/ opportunities. The choice of buddy is important. Work on your opportunity in turns, alternately playing the `buddy`. You have 45 minutes each, so 90 minutes in total.

The buddy asks the following questions:

- *Have you chosen the opportunity you want to go on with? Have you filled in the opportunity chart? Tell me about the opportunity. Describe it in your own words. Why are you going to do this? What's your feeling about it?*

- *You are now going to realise this opportunity, and my questions are designed to help you. Tell me what could stop you from putting this opportunity into practice. What are the main obstacles? I'll describe them for you.*

- *Have we looked at everything? Obstacles relating to yourself, to other people, the organisation, the budget, structures, the outside world, information etc.? Have we forgotten anything?*

- *OK. Then lets look at which of these obstacles are the most important. And how you're going to deal with them. We'll do a short role-play for this. Use me as your sparring partner to practice how to realise this opportunity. Be honest, because that's the only way I can help. First tell me about the obstacle, and about yourself, so that I understand the problem better. Then I'll play the obstacle, you be yourself, and we'll look at how you're going to overcome the obstacle. We'll play it now, so that it'll be easier in practice later.*

e.g.

- *Convincing people in a meeting (role play)*
- *Contributing ideas (gaining an insight, thinking of solutions)*
- *Providing energy (emotional support)*
- *Helping to design, visualise (drawing)*
- *Thinking of sales arguments (soncas)*
- *Complete change matrix.*

**** Opportunity chart**

At the end of the development process, we summarise the promising opportunity together in an opportunity chart.

Exercise 16: Opportunity chart

Opportunity chart

Who/team:

Date:

Last change:

Opportunity No.:

V box position:

Opportunity

Domain:

Title:

Description of opportunity:

Pros and potential:

Cons:

Action

Energisers:

Obstacles + how to anticipate them:

Activities (who, what, when) and action within 24 hours:

**** *Visualisation***

We start by visualising the successful final outcome. What does a realised opportunity look like? What impact will it have on the group/organisation/position? What is the atmosphere among those involved and senior management?

Exercise 17: Visualisation of actions

We now know that we are going to turn this opportunity into a reality. We shall now visualise the concrete actions that we are going to take. Close your eyes again and concentrate on yourself. Think of the opportunity you visualised in the first exercise, and the actions that presented themselves in the second. Concentrate on your feelings about these elements. Now look at the actions that you are about to take. Look at the step you are taking, and the result of that step. Do this for each phase that still lies between you and the final outcome. Review the actions step by step, visualise them, consider the people you will involve, the forms you will fill in and the meetings you will hold. Concentrate on your own feelings while you are realising all this. Each step may involve a different feeling.

In this way, you progress step by step, drawing closer all the time to the final result. Now that you are there, look at it again. Does it still take the same form? Study it thoroughly and enjoy it. Enjoy the success of realising and designing this opportunity. Then open your eyes.

**** Opportunity contract**

Fill in an opportunity contract. Sign it to confirm your commitment. Watch out if you fail to comply with it.

Exercise 18: Opportunity contract

Opportunity contract

Place:

Date:

I,

hereby undertake to realise the following opportunity:

Title:

Opportunity chart No.:

I regard this opportunity as important because...

I shall take the following actions for this purpose, on the dates shown:

Action:

Date:

Action:

Date:

Action:

Date:

If I fail to implement the foregoing by ... (date),

I shall impose the following (absurd) sanction upon myself:

The witness undersigned, and may hold me to my pledge and I hereby grant them my permission to execute the sanction should the case arise.

Opportunity scout

Witness:

**** Opportunity image**

We take a photograph or make a drawing to capture the atmosphere of the moment. This can help to overcome difficulties during the realisation.

Exercise 19: Visual reinforcement

Produce an image (drawing) of the opportunity you are going to realise, depicting as many elements as possible that you foresee in relation to this opportunity. Use the opportunity chart as your starting point. A visualisation exercise can be a good tool.

Photograph as support

We take a photograph of you with the drawing, in order to reinforce this moment, and your conviction that you will realise this opportunity. You set your own deadline for realisation of the opportunity. Then we can send you this photograph as a reminder and energiser.

5. OPPORTUNITY PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

Every team and every department should have an opportunity portfolio. This portfolio contains all the opportunities developed, and the opportunity charts that groups have conceived together. One person keeps the portfolio up to date and maintains its quality. The portfolio is consulted at management meetings. If the portfolio becomes too empty, an opportunity session is organised. In some cases, active opportunity management is applied and an Opportunity Day is organised.

THE PORTFOLIO HAS THE FOLLOWING STRUCTURE:

Type	Action
1. Sprint now	Urgent implementation
2. Leap now	Urgent implementation
3. Step now	Implement or integrate in sprint or leap
4. Limp now	Implement or integrate in sprint or leap
5. Leap later	Develop and monitor
6. Sprint later	Plan and reserve, with implementation schedule
7. Step later	Implement, suspend or integrate in sprint or leap
8. Limp later	Implement, suspend or integrate in sprint or leap

Exercise 20: Opportunity portfolio

Compile the opportunity portfolio for yourself, your team or organisation and update it regularly.

CONCLUSION

Opportunity Scouting is both a technique, a conceptual skill, an awareness and a philosophy (there is more than enough and one need not be at the expense of another: they can be mutually reinforcing). Promising opportunities are easier to detect and use from a flexible ability to empathise, a surfeit of alternatives and an exploring, liberated mind.

SIX PRINCIPLES FOR A PROMISING FUTURE

What you focus your energy on grows and becomes stronger

Focus your energy and deliberately cross the boundaries of known opportunities

Allow yourself to think in terms of opportunities instead of in terms of problems

Organise your thinking

Use your own and other people's resistance

Seeing and realising opportunities is normal: everyone is responsible for opportunities

Thinking together leads to co-operation

Create the vision, mobilise your creative powers and enjoy the realisation.

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