

It's a kind of magic Creativity in music and business

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The Academy of Rock

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This article explores the connections between acts of creation in rock music with creativity strategies in business. Although these are often expressed differently, the underlying principles are the same. In spite of the article title, creativity at work is certainly not a matter of magic or mysticism and there are a number of strategies and techniques that increase the probability and frequency of coming up with ingenious ideas that are the realm of the Google's, 3M's and Toyota's of the world. If you enjoy this article, you will love our seminars based on the book '[Sex, Leadership and Rock'n'Roll](#)', acclaimed by Tom Peters. Let us begin with a paradigm rock classic and explore its origins and linkages with creativity at work.

Smoke on the water

The Deep Purple classic 'Smoke on the water' has been the staple diet of testosterone filled boys (some old boys and a few girls) in music shops trying to play the classic riff for several decades, since 1972. If you are unfamiliar with this song, take a listen at [Deep Purple](#). However, it is the story of the song's creation and the linkages to how creativity works at work that we are more concerned with here. Smoke on the water was written about Deep Purple's ill-fated attempt to record their classic "Machine Head" album in Switzerland. The band lost the recording venue after it burned down at a Frank Zappa concert the day before recording was due to start. A few days after the fire, the bass player Roger Glover claims to have woken up hearing the phrase 'Smoke on the Water'. Having mentioned it to the band's singer Ian Gillan at breakfast, he came upon the idea of writing a song about their experience of recording the album against all the odds. Ian Paice, the band's drummer, points out that Roger Glover's primary songwriting skill is that of creating the 'endpoint' or 'headline', after which, the writing of the song becomes easy.

The transferable business lesson here is the importance of starting with the end in mind or having a goal for creativity. All too often I have witnessed people in brainstorming sessions wasting huge amounts of time and energy brainstorming to a poorly specified or completely unspecified goal. Leaders are responsible for setting a direction into which other's ideas and energy can flow and it is an abdication of the leader's role to fudge the issue by saying things like 'be creative'. That is not to say that a SMART objective is

needed, but the overall goal and any constraints which a solution must meet are often useful to provide some dimensions to the 'box' which people are trying to escape from and how far outside the box people need to be. When we've worked with companies like Pfizer and BT, I've found this to be an essential precursor to successful idea generation and development which leads to the ultimate goal of innovation rather than just bright ideas. It also leads to much more efficient and effective brainstorming. Whenever brainstorming is done badly at work, it is most often because it is done badly.

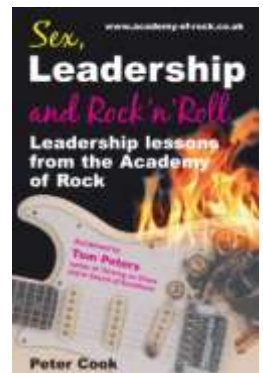
Black Night

Roger Glover recounts the situation when Deep Purple wrote their number one single [Black Night](#). The band had spent all day working in the studio under pressure to produce a single and produced nothing. They decided to write the day off and went to the pub. On returning, Ritchie Blackmore struck up a riff, Ian Gillan came up with a 'semi-nonsense' lyric about the day (Black Night) and Ian Paice tried to put the most unlikely drum fills into the song. Blackmore says that the whole thing came together in minutes and ended up going to number 1 in the charts. Trying too hard can be just as unproductive in business as it is in musical composition although it is desperately difficult to stop under pressure in a work situation. It may however be very wise. This is a point echoed by the enigmatic musician and artist Bill Nelson, of Be-Bop Deluxe and Red Noise. Bill's advice is plain and simple: 'Don't be afraid to push the off button'.

Creativity lessons from music	Creativity lessons in business
Start with the end in mind	Specify to some degree the goal for brainstorming and any essential constraints that a solution must meet. Woolly goals produce woolly results
Be prepared to stop and regroup	If what you are doing isn't working, stop and do something different

Whilst most people feel they can conduct a brainstorming session, our experience is that, by paying attention to the processes behind brainstorming, much better results can be achieved, both in terms of effectiveness i.e. the degree of novelty and fit and efficiency i.e. how many good ideas come out of a given amount of time.

For more of this, do take a look at our book 'Sex, Leadership and Rock'n'Roll' on Amazon or via the [Academy of Rock Website](#). Contact us to discuss your next corporate event or a much better way to conduct innovation events.



About the authors

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Peter Cook is a business academic, author of 3 books on creativity and innovation, acclaimed by Professor Charles Handy and Tom Peters. He is an established business consultant of 17 years' experience across a wide range of industries and an MBA tutor / author on Creativity, Innovation and Change MBA programmes. Peter is also an accomplished rock, pop and jazz musician, having performed with John Otway, Wilco Johnson, and Altered Images.

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John has worked as a university lecturer, a school teacher, a private tutor and as a live musician for BBC TV and Radio. John currently divides his time between recording professional soundtrack music for independent Hollywood movies, music demonstrations around the world, session music and live performance. In his career, he has performed with Anastasia, Celine Dion, Cyndi Lauper and Shirley Bassey. John has also managed artists and worked as a freelance producer.

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