



CLOSED WORLD

The Closed World (CW) principle dictates that when innovating and solving problems we should strive to use only the type of elements that exist in the system or its environment.

Benefits:

1. It focuses the thinking process by constraining it
2. It helps break Functional Fixedness and therefore leads to new ideas that would not ordinarily surface
3. It leads to utilization of existing resources, which is usually more cost and time effective than bringing in external ones
4. It forces us to pay attention to external elements that are present and often overlooked
5. It is one of the two “Sufficient Conditions” for an innovative solution

Which World?

Mapping a system’s relevant worlds aids in identifying all resources available for finding a solution or for creating a novel offering.

There are three types of “Closed Worlds”:

1. Elements that have physical proximity are part of the system or its immediate environment. This proximity can exist at any stage in a product’s lifecycle, e.g. when it is in manufacturing, distribution, storage, usage, disposal, etc. For example, the antihistamine medication is physically close to the disposable contact lenses at the pharmacy.
2. Elements that have structural proximity are structurally similar to the system. For example, one could say that a cellular phone is structurally close to a calculator since they both have a keypad and a screen.
3. Elements that have functional proximity perform similar functions to those performed by the system. For example, a pen and a pencil have similar roles and thus one can say that the pencil is functionally close to the pen.

How closed?

The definition of the Closed World is not absolute. There are degrees of how Closed the world should be. Sometimes we will use only elements inside the system. Other times we may enlarge our “world” to elements that interact with the system. Practically speaking, we start confined and then let it grow.