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# Strategic thinking doesn't mean stifling creativity

BBC is right to analyse daily ratings in detail to help with commissioning, says Ally Castle



**House Of Cards:** exception to the rule on creating a perfect show by formula



**T**he BBC's plan to provide more detailed daily ratings reports raises the question of if and

how the magic of creativity can be shaped by rational thinking and objective information.

The ambition to embed the new data in regular editorial conversations will be a relief to some, and anathema to others.

French designer Nelly Ben Hayoun said recently that artists, unlike designers, have no need to be responsible towards fact. So is the artist free to create in a vacuum? And would that be any good for them?

I don't think so. I believe in what I've termed 'transactional creativity': in broadcasting especially, our ideas are not our own but are validated only when they reach an audience and tell a story. An exchange has to happen for them to reach their full potential. It's the tree in the forest: if you create a show worthy of a *Broadcast Digital Award*, but nobody sees it...

Being strategic about creativity doesn't mean abandoning instinct or carefully crafted skill, nor creating by committee. Become too robotic about the creative process and employ big data algorithms for the formula for the perfect show and you miss the point (though

**'In broadcasting, our ideas are validated only when they reach an audience'**

*House Of Cards* is said to have deployed some of these tactics).

But having ideas is hard. Creativity needs the right environment and some carefully chosen prompts. Strategic thinking is at its best when it produces conditions for creative accidents to happen. It can, and should, be seen as another tool to prompt, direct and challenge inspiration.

I've seen it happen: flashes of inspiration, existing ideas fused in new ways, giant leaps made or a slight twist of perspective on a story or format, brought about by an understanding of the audience or an honest market evaluation.

So, have no fear. Art doesn't have to be responsible towards, or limited by, fact. But ideas can resonate with their audience all the more if they are rooted in truth.

The BBC is to be applauded for its attempts not to leave creative genius entirely to chance, but to provide input so that it can be prompted and nurtured.

➤ *Ally Castle is a creative strategist and director of Ideally Consulting @Ally\_Ideally*