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## Spotlight on UK/Ireland

# PDMA affiliate holds workshop on creativity in product development

## Attendees discuss a variety of challenges

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*Creativity is assumed to be critical to the field of New Product Development (NPD). However, few understand its role well enough to improve the creative process or foster creativity in development teams. In a workshop early this year, the members of PDMA's UK/Ireland affiliate debated this question. The discussion centered around the findings of recent research on NPD creativity.*

—Tricia Sutton, Chapter Editor

Each year the PDMA UK/Ireland affiliate holds a workshop to receive the benefit of research done by its academic membership. The affiliate held its fourth workshop, “Researching and Making Sense of Creativity,” on January 18, 2007, at the Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, Manchester, U.K. Aimed at examining the role of creativity in collaborative New Product Development, the workshop was co-funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC).

Drs. Helen Perks and Pammi Sinha, co-chairs of the workshop, welcomed 39 delegates from a variety of disciplines and institutions across the United Kingdom, Ireland, and

Europe. The universities included Manchester, London, Westminster, Cranfield, Salford, Nottingham, and Groningen. This thought-provoking and lively event focused on current methods used to research creatively. A major theme running through the discussion was that there is a need for a multi-disciplined and collaborative approach to researching creativity.

### Methods and approaches in the psychology of creativity

Professor Ken Gilhooly of the School of Psychology, University of Hertfordshire, Hatfield, U.K., began the workshop by discussing three main psychological approaches and methods used in the study of creativity. He noted that there were many ways to research creativity; each approach focused on a different aspect and used different methods for different problems.

Evaluating cognitive processes typically involves experiments with verbal protocols and think-aloud tasks. These methods may interfere with a person's insight, which requires unconscious thought processes that cannot be verbalized. Assessing individual differences involves the use of psychometric tests and the ‘big five’ personality factors (neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness); and those methods can result in over-generalizations about the study population.

Gilhooly concluded with the analogy of the “blind men and the elephant problem” based on an old Indian fable where each

person comes up with a different understanding because each contacts only one part of the elephant. The story reflects the need for a combination of approaches in order to obtain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding.

### Methodology selection in design studies

Dr. Claudia Eckert of the Engineering Design Center, Department of Engineering, The University of Cambridge, Cambridge, U.K., discussed her personal experience in examining the design process in general and creativity in particular with designers of knitwear and helicopters.

Eckert noted differences in creativity between experts and novices. She also discussed her observation that design behavior remained similar across disciplines, even though the actual activities and complexities of the projects differed.

Eckert concluded by discussing her rationale for selection of research methods. The method selected depends upon the situation and research question, the expectations of the research peer groups, and the researcher's self-awareness (e.g., how easily you build relationships with people, how well you pick up on cultural references, how much you enjoy detailed analysis), and the expectations of the research peer group.

Dr. Martin Stacey, School of Computing, De Montfort University, Leicester, U.K., described the complexity of researching the design process as a “multilevel process.” He identified a number of ways of looking at design and creativity, such as cognitive psychology, artificial intelligence, sociology, soft systems, and ethnography. Stacey argued that the main problem with researching creativity currently is that there are no set criteria across disciplines to judge which theories and models are supported or refuted. Additionally, comparisons between conceptual frameworks have focused on criticisms rather than synthesis.

Stacey discussed work that he and Eckert conducted about the fashion industry. Designers work in the continuously shifting context of current trends. A fundamental question was where the context originates. In the fashion industry, trends can come from the designers, magazines, forecasting bureaus, retailers, and consumers. Although consumers do not directly influence trends, sales figures will direct companies. Designers, however,

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primarily follow each other, which raises questions about the roles of individuality and collective creative processes in commercial design.

### Creativity in engineering design teams

Dr. Jan Kratzer, Assistant Professor for Business Development and Strategy, Department of Business Development, School of Management & Organization, University of Groningen, Groningen, The Netherlands, explained that as project or team autonomy increases, one needs to examine creativity within a team context and the network of knowledge exchange. Kratzer's research looked at team leaders and the social structure of leadership.

Kratzer described the role of the team leader on a continuum between peripheral (not very hands-on) to central to the team's activities, engaged in the minutiae of the team's activities. He examined measures of creativity and interviewed teams and their team leaders about issues, such as how they communicated and their perspectives on creativity within teams.

Kratzer defined some general guidance on the role of team leader. Team members should be promoted to team leader roles based on their managerial capabilities rather than on professional expertise. The ability to span boundaries was very important at all levels, and the team leader needs to make sure that all members are involved with external networks. A team leader's involvement in problem-solving should be kept to a minimum, and the leader's involvement in the day-to-day activities of the team should be moderate.

### Why brilliant ideas trigger illegitimate acts

Dr. Babis Mainemelis, Assistant Professor of Organisational Behaviour, London Business School, London, U.K., discussed how creativity research has focused on idea generation—not social evaluation. Noting that creativity literature often examines climates that promote creativity, he pointed out that creative ideas emerge even in unsupportive climates. The reasons for why and how this happens within organizations may be explained by a number of factors: intrinsic motivation, a love of the work itself; persistence; nonconformity; openness; and the individual's creative identity (the creative adventure). Organizations may respond to this rule-breaking behavior in a number of ways, from fundamentally shifting their perspective to organizational tolerance of creative deviance.



Some of the implications of Mainemelis' research were that social evaluation is an integral part of creativity; the idea originator is part of the social evaluation process, which is a fluid, unpredictable, and unfolds over time; work climates that promote autonomy and diversity also promote rule-breaking behavior; and creativity-relevant traits influence creativity through social behavior. Creativity-relevant traits are traits commonly found in persons acknowledged to be creative.

### Implications for product development

After the individual presentations, the delegates and speakers discussed the many issues that were raised. While the need for a combination of research methods was acknowledged, the question remained of how to obtain cross-disciplinary agreement on the criteria for rigor. Although there is no objective measurement for creativity, there are methods used to quantify it (e.g. counting the number of new ideas).

Dr. Kratzer's research did not find significant differences between team members' and team leaders' perspectives on creativity. Gender differences in creativity and complex technical teams were difficult to comment on, though, because the teams investigated were mainly composed of men.

An overarching question also remains: If management style has an effect on creativity in a team, does creativity in teams also have an effect on the manager's style?

While there are still many questions and opportunities for further research, the delegates came away with a better understanding of factors that may influence creativity and methods to further understand creativity. They also came away with recommendations to focus future research as well as some early results to build their teams' creativity.

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## Hats Off to UK/Ireland Chapter—PDMA's First International Affiliate

The UK/Ireland affiliate is unique in many ways. For one, it has the honor of being the Product Development and Management Association's first international affiliate, founded in the late 1990s. Second, it encompasses two countries divided by the Irish Sea.

The large area and geographic constraint add interesting challenges and opportunities, as well as provide a diverse set of interests. The affiliate's steering committee is spread across the two islands. Obviously, it is easier for the committees to organize events in their local areas; but the affiliate has consistently sponsored affiliate-wide conferences and events each year.

Over the past 15 years, affiliate membership has grown to over

500. Most practitioner members are industry-based, but the affiliate also has a healthy academic membership of over 100 people who come together at an annual workshop, typically held in January. The theme of the annual workshop varies and provides members an opportunity to present their current research and share it with others in the field. Many collaborative papers have resulted from this networking opportunity.

The chapter also hosted two successful international conferences in London in 2001 and 2002 and continues to hold workshops and events throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. The affiliate's Web site is [www.pdma.org/uk](http://www.pdma.org/uk).