



Making Creativity Stick (Part 1)

By Paul Wright

This is the first of two articles describing the experiences of Bull Information Systems in implementing and sustaining an 'Innovation Initiative' based on CPS principles. The first part describes what we did, and the second part, to be published in the next issue of the Communiqué, will describe how we measured success and kept things going over the past 6 years.

Knowing and Doing

A few years ago I attended a 'self-development' course. The program leader introduced the course with these words: "Everything I'm going to tell you is rubbish. It will be of value to you only when it becomes YOUR truth."

This rang a bell with me and has stayed with me as a guiding principal. I can learn all sorts of things by reading books, attending seminars and courses, or talking to experts. However, so long as these things remain as intellectually known facts and theories, they are not working for me in my life. They can do this only when I act on them and experience them as real.

The work of encouraging creativity in Bull Information Systems has followed this path. The initial CPS courses made a deep impression and I was inspired to get more involved, but much of CPS was still 'just theory'. This article tracks my progress from intellectual awareness to personal belief in the approach, while identifying a few areas where I still have my doubts. Embedding a creative approach in a large organization isn't easy, so I've also included tips from my own experience about what seems to work and what may give you problems.

Our Approach

We started to deliberately encourage creativity in Bull Information Systems in July 1993, with the first of many CPS Foundations courses. This course provides people with skills in the use of the CPS framework, language and tools. Bull is an international IT company, with annual revenues of about \$4.5 billion, and Bull Information Systems is its subsidiary in the UK and Ireland, employing around 2,500 people.

From the beginning, our 'Innovation Initiative' was aimed at everyone who was interested, not just at a particular department like R&D. We started from the simple proposition that creativity is a good thing, both

for the individual and for business, and we'd like to help our people be more creative in their working lives. Selected staff members were trained both to facilitate groups and to deliver CPS training courses.

Actions were taken in the three areas of People, Process, and Climate so as to get maximum impact.

Creativity in People

We measured the individual's creativity style with the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI) developed by Michael Kirton. These courses provided a great instrument to use – it's quick to complete, fairly simple to explain, and most people feel it describes them accurately. My belief in the KAI's validity was raised when we looked at the scores on our CPS courses. Who do you think will volunteer to attend a brand-new course on creativity? Why, Innovators of course. Participants in our first CPS course had an average KAI score of 120, and this average score has moved steadily toward the general population mean of 96 for each succeeding course as it became an accepted part of the training schedule (it's near 105 now).

About 450 people in Bull have taken the KAI in the past 6 years, including all CPS course members, the board and their direct reports, selected high fliers, and various interested volunteers. Many people are naturally wary of personality tests, so my recommendation is to make confidentiality and voluntary participation your guiding principles. We publish ethical guidelines, which protect the privacy of individuals – the KAI is for *them*, not for their boss or their personnel file. The aim is to develop trust. When people know that the KAI is solely for their own information and benefit, they are more willing to collaborate in using it.

The Climate for Creativity and Change

This is an area where we've done less detailed work. We measured the climate for creativity and change using CPS-B's Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ). We found ourselves to be fairly average overall on the nine dimensions of climate assessed, with some strengths and weaknesses. The problem then arises: what to do next? For instance, we scored a bit low on Idea Time (no great surprise!), but I haven't found any specific recommendations for what to do about this.

What we did was to cut the "Gordian knot" by working on leadership as the main determinant of climate. We used the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) developed by Kouses and Posner to measure the leadership performance of senior management and have since instituted a leadership development program, which has been running and evolving for over three years now.

The Creative Process

This area includes having both a framework for creativity and a set of tools. It was the tools that excited us most, and we novice facilitators rushed out after our

training and were soon covering walls with Post-its®. We had some fun sessions but achieved very little in those first months. We had to learn from experience that working hard on the wrong problem is counterproductive. Now the framework, starting with Task Appraisal, seems more important than individual tools. If you can get a committed client and a well-defined task, you're already half way to a solution.

Another thing we have learned is that the three components of problem solving have characteristic emotions associated with them, at least in groups with which I have worked. They are:

- *Understanding the Problem*: IMPATIENCE. "We know what the problem is, so let's get on with it".
- *Generating Ideas*: EXCITEMENT. "This is fun, we can have a laugh and there is no commitment".
- *Planning for Action*: DEPRESSION. "Here come another ten actions to add to my 'top priority' list; it's time to back off".

This is why the committed client is so important. If there is no one to inspire and drive participants to take action, all that effort and creativity can go to waste. Running great CPS sessions without considering the overall project is like introducing a wonderful new machine tool into an outdated factory. Ideas and action plans (work in progress) just pile up after the sessions (machine tool), but little is done to turn them into reality.