



Making Creativity Stick (Part 2)

By Paul Wright

This is the second of two articles describing the experiences of Bull Information Systems in implementing and sustaining an 'Innovation Initiative' based on CPS principles. The first part appeared in the previous issue of the Communiqué

In the first part of this article, I described how Bull Information Systems, a UK-based IT company, set about encouraging creativity within its organisation. It showed how, since 1993, we have implemented an approach based on encouraging creativity in the areas of people, processes, and climate.

Seven years later, we **run** all our internal courses ourselves, **under license from CPS-B**, and have trained over 60 facilitators. We use CPS both internally and with customers, and the **Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI)** has been widely used, including the **assessment and debriefing of** most of the senior management team of 80 people.

What benefits have we had from all this activity? We set out to measure success in a structured way.

Measures of success

We measured the impact of CPS on three levels:

1. *End of course assessment* Participants rate the CPS course at the end of the last day
2. *Post-course follow-up* Individuals trained in CPS rate its usefulness and range of application some time after the course (9-18 months)
3. *Business impact* An in-depth impact study was conducted with senior management to assess the business results from using CPS

1. End of course assessment

Participants rate the course both overall and on several dimensions such as quality of presenters and course materials. They do this both by giving a numeric score (from 1=poor, to 5=excellent) and making **written** comments. In response to the question "Overall, how would you rate this programme?", the average score for all CPS courses is 4.7 out of 5.

However, course ratings should be treated with caution. Good trainers can fairly easily generate enthusiasm, high spirits, team bonding, etc., especially when the

subject is interesting and relates to personal development. What is important is that behavioural changes persist well beyond the end of the course.

2. Post-course follow-up

To test this, we conducted follow-up reviews with course participants a year or so after their courses. This follow-up is in the form of a short questionnaire, asking participants to rate the impact of CPS on their performance in a number of areas. These areas include, among others, analysing and solving business problems, working with colleagues and teams, and running meetings.

Respondents give numeric ratings for impact, ranging from 1 (no **improvement**) to 4 (major improvement). For most areas covered by the questionnaire, around 40% of respondents rate the impact of CPS as 4. **Details are shown below.**

Self-Ratings of Improvements in Performance following CPS Training

The figures are the percentages of all participants giving each rating.

	No improvement	A little improvement	Moderate improvement	Major improvement
Solving business problems	3	19	29	48
Teamworking	16	13	32	39
Sense of achievement	10	20	32	39
Running meetings	13	13	32	39
Overall productivity	13	32	39	13

3. Business impact

The results from the post-course follow-up are encouraging, but are nevertheless subjective. Course participants may *feel* they are doing better, but objective observers may disagree.

To test this, we arranged for a full-scale impact study to be conducted. This was based on interviews with directors and senior managers about the perceived business benefits from the use of CPS. These were users of CPS as *clients* rather than *facilitators*, so they could take an objective view.

The findings of the impact study were very encouraging. Directors and managers identified instances where business success had followed CPS-based interventions. Among others, these included developing a services business for desktop computers, integrating a newly acquired company into the business and setting up a new business unit addressing Year 2000 compliance. The total value of these businesses was several million pounds per year.

Naturally, there are many steps in setting up and running businesses, and a creative process can only contribute to some of them. Nevertheless, it was heartening that senior management recognised its key contribution to our success.

Keeping the Initiative Going

Over the past six years, we've found that our 'innovation initiative' has followed a similar pattern to many corporate change programmes. This is illustrated by the Enthusiasm Decay Curve shown below.

(INSERT DECAY CURVE PICTURE)

Without careful management, most people in the organisation tend to revert to their old ways of doing things, while a band of dedicated enthusiasts press on towards the original vision. Every now and then, an enthusiast notices the yawning gap between him/her and the rest of the population, and decides to bale out of the project. Unless action is taken, this process of natural selection leads to a shrinking and isolated group of 'believers' who eventually leave the organisation, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Fighting the decay curve demands action before and during the 'innovation initiative'. Before starting, the standard change management guidelines apply: get a powerful sponsor and be clear on what you are trying to achieve. In Bull, we did well with the first of these, since our sponsor was the Human Resources Director. He attended CPS training and was a supporter of the programme for over four years, before he eventually moved to another company.

Unfortunately, we didn't do so well on the second guideline. We acted on the principle that 'innovation is a good thing' and set targets for how many people we would train. We also encouraged maximum use of the CPS process in facilitated sessions. But we never addressed the question of what exactly we expected to be different in Bull in 3 months, 6 months, **or** a year from the start of the programme. This made it more difficult to prove it was a success and why we had to put in place a special project to measure business impact, as described above.

Revitalising Old Initiatives

Eventually, all new initiatives become old initiatives. Sponsors and enthusiasts may move on and soon everyone is into the next big thing: TQM, ERP, NLP, or some other TLA (three-letter acronym). How do you keep the interest alive? In Bull we have tried two approaches with CPS with some success: embedding in other processes and re-branding/re-targeting.

Embedding in other processes can be particularly useful in extending the application of CPS and overcoming resistance to its use. Most larger organisations have several processes and methodologies in place at any one time. When a wide-ranging approach like CPS is introduced, it can cause resentment and resistance by individuals who 'own' the other processes. This can be overcome if you can show that elements of CPS will enhance existing processes rather than replacing them.

For instance, in the mid 1990s we had an account planning process called *Spotlight*. This provided a good framework for understanding customer needs and working out **plans** to satisfy them. The trouble was that it provided little guidance on exactly how to run account planning meetings. By introducing simple

CPS tools, like brainstorming with Post its®, into these meetings we were able to improve the *Spotlight* process to everyone's satisfaction.

Finally, re-branding/re-targeting can get everything off to a fresh start. This can be as simple as re-naming the training to incorporate current vogue words like 'leadership' or 'innovation' rather than 'creativity', which I think has rather poor connotations for many business people. It is also important to ensure that the training and approach is adapted by key people in the organisation. This means packaging and promoting training to suit your target audience, and seeking opportunities to work with them on problems where CPS can be a help.

And finally ...

I started this article in the last issue of *Communique* by saying that I can only fully believe in approaches like CPS when I act on them and experience them as real. So am I a believer? I'm afraid the answer is both yes and no. Certainly, CPS is immensely powerful in helping teams work together by allowing everyone to be heard and by building consensus. Meeting times can easily be halved and, sometimes, genuinely novel ideas are generated.

On the other hand, as the economist Joseph Schumpeter said "innovation is less an act of intellect than an act of will" and it is the underlying motivation of teams that determines whether innovation actually occurs. Which brings us back to climate, leadership, and all the rest of it. You start with having fun with Post its® and end up trying to fix the whole system! But I guess that's what makes it all so very interesting.