



A CROSS-CULTURAL PROGRAM IN CPS

By Luc DeSchryver

The Creativity and Innovation Center - Europe (CIC) and the Creative Problem Solving Group - Buffalo (CPS-B) have been working together for over five years to bring current thinking and best practice in Creative Problem Solving (CPS) to countries throughout Europe. During the past five years, our two organizations have collaborated on a number of programs and projects to make CPS available in Europe. The first facilitating CPS program took place in May, 1996. We are pleased to report that, on May 23, 1997, CIC and CPS-B collaborated on our second European five-day CPS Facilitator training program at the Castle of Bokrijk in Genk, Belgium.

The focus of the 1997 five-day program was to explore the full spectrum of creativity talent and to provide participants with training in the CPS framework, language and tools as a method for unleashing individual and small-group creativity. Specifically, during the first two days of the event, participants examined their personal approach to creativity, decision making and problem solving and its impact on personal and group productivity. They also spent most of their time learning and using the CPS framework, language and 16 tools to understand and clarify problems, generate ideas and transform promising ideas into effective action. On Day Three, participants examined the roles and responsibilities associated with best practice application of CPS. They explored Task Appraisal and Process Planning as an approach for ensuring the appropriate and effective application of CPS. On Days Four and Five, participants applied their learning about CPS in the context of real small-group facilitation - receiving feedback and suggestions for improving their CPS facilitation effectiveness.

We were very pleased about the attendance for the program. It grew from six participants in 1995 to nineteen in 1997. We had a diverse representation of participants from for-profit and not-for-profit organizations, both large and small. These included such organizations as the Belgian Army, Phillips, the South African Police Service, Helvoet Pharma, Duracell, Center for Total Quality Management Limburg (CKZ) and British American Tobacco.

What was most exciting about the attendance was that we had participants from three countries on two different continents representing South Africa, The Netherlands and Belgium. Each participant spoke at least four different languages - one individual was fluent in 11 different languages. This became evident as early as the introductions the morning of Day One when we asked them and training team to introduce themselves in a language that was not their

native one. The only trouble most of the participants had was choosing in which language to introduce themselves!

Given this level of diversity, there were a number of issues we needed to consider when planning and delivering the event. For example, although the “official” language of the program was English, we structured activities that invited participants to use their native languages, including English, Dutch, French and various forms of Afrikaans. This helped increase the intensity and richness of the interactions throughout the week. Participants also interacted with trainers and facilitators in different languages to prepare for their practice sessions. However, the practice sessions themselves were facilitated in English.

The cross-cultural delivery team we put together for the event worked well. Having representatives from the French-speaking part of Belgium (Léon-Philippe Perez), Flanders (Jacques Philippaerts and myself) and the US (Scott Isaksen and Brian Dorval) provided us with a greater ability to meet the needs of a wider range of participants. We gathered the day prior to the program start to examine the unique challenges and opportunities associated with the event. Part of our discussion naturally centered around the cultural and language diversity that we knew existed in the group. We built the participants groupings and structured activities in a way that helped ensure participants had the opportunity to work in their native languages as much as possible. We also teamed participants with delivery team members who spoke the same language. We met as a training team at the end of each day to see how our plans were working and to make adjustments based on participant feedback collected daily.

In preparation for the program, participants were asked to complete the Kirton Adaption-Innovation Inventory (KAI). This was one of the few times that we were able to provide prework to participants using multiple language versions of the KAI - in this case French, English and Dutch versions of the inventory were used.

Finally, one of the issues we needed to address was the timing of the program itself. We received feedback from previous programs that a full week out of the office was difficult. Therefore, we shifted the program from a Monday through Friday schedule to Friday through Tuesday. Special thanks to the participants and trainers for taking personal time over the weekend to participate in the program.

We took the opportunity to schedule a variety of special events and visitors during the week. On Sunday (Day Three of the program) we closed the “formal” training early so that participants could take a guided tour of the Open Air Museum of Bokrijk Castle. The tour, organized by the Belgian Rijkswacht, was

interesting and important because it gave participants a deeper look into how people living in Belgium around the 15-17th centuries approached creativity and innovation.

On Monday evening, Day Four, we hosted a special event for a more general audience. This event included a dinner causerie where Scott Isaksen provided a one and one-half hour presentation on the question: "Innovation: What does it mean for the 21st Century?" We had individuals from a variety of organizations including: Philips Industrial Activities, Kredietbank, Huron Valley Europe and Rank Xerox. We were pleased to have government official député Piet Schiepers, president of the Regional Development Society (GOM Limburg), and Prof. Emeritus Pros Van Osmael attend the evening.

Days Four and Five included visitations from Pros Van Osmael, Prof. Emeritus from UFSIA (Universitaire Faculteiten Sint-Ignatius Antwerpen) and co-founder of the Center for the Development of Creative Thinking (COCD) in Antwerp and Alex Britz certified CPS-B facilitator from Munich, Germany. Pros was invited by one of the participants to introduce his view and experience with the tool "forced fit". He also provided participants feedback during their facilitation session. Being immersed in a group of "creative problem solvers," it didn't take long before he got actively engaged. Alex joined us on Friday as a member of the facilitation practice sessions resource groups. Both were able to provide their unique perspectives to support the delivery of the program.

The program ended on Tuesday afternoon, May 27. We gathered for one last time socially in the bar of the Castle. From the feedback, both formally and informally, we could see that the participants found the week-long experience both enjoyable and informative - giving the program an overall rating a 4.2 out of 5. They particularly liked the diversity of participants, the small-group work, interactions with the training team, and the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Some of the participants' commented, "I have learned that there are cultural differences in fulfilling the role of a facilitator," I had an open mind, no doubts. The outcome was, however, even more surprising." "I learned a new problem-solving process and new tools. This definitely will help me in my work as a facilitator"

What is truly telling about the effectiveness of a program is what participants do with the training when they return to work. In following up with participants three weeks after the training, they told us they have already started to implement their learning. Their applications range from using specific tools such as the Ladder of Abstraction to facilitating their bosses' meetings, to integrating pieces of the training into internal quality courses.

One participant explained that: "I went to another three-day course on creative thinking about a year ago. To be honest, three weeks after the training there was not much left. The course was too theoretical. This course was very different. I learned a lot and at this moment I am using at least twenty different things from this course. I got a lot of energy from this course because it was a good one. I love facilitating."

What we re-learned from this experience

Three weeks after the training people from industry, services and the not-for profit sector are implementing their learnings. The content of the training program is sector-independent and everybody is able to introduce it in his/her work environment.

Having materials in their own language is helpful to help transfer their learnings to their organization. As a follow-up we have sent the participants the worksheets translated in their own language.

Follow-up with the participants has indicated an immediate benefit from the training. We are looking forward to the next time!