



# **The Management of Creativity in the Public Relations Process**



**“Man owes his success to creativity. No one doubts the need for it.”**

Edward De Bono, 1971

## **Introduction and Executive Summary**

“Creativity” is a buzzword that is thrown around the PR industry freely, with little consideration for what it really means or how one might achieve it.

Recent research discovered that 44.4 per cent of journalists felt that PR pitches were “dull” with “little spark.”<sup>i</sup> In the area of media relations at least, it seems PR officers are not as creative as they sometimes claim or want to be.

### **The objectives of this research are to:**

- Summarise the major theories of creativity and the importance of creativity for public relations (PR)
- Investigate the levels and understanding of creativity within the PR industry
- Explore how PR officers can better manage creativity in the PR process

### **The report’s leading findings include:**

- 57 per cent of PR practitioners do not risk assess creative ideas
- Half of respondents (50 per cent) stated they did not evaluate the success of the creative aspect of a campaign
- Two in five respondents (43.56 per cent) had not heard of any of the seven most famous models of creative thinking
- Almost one in five respondents (19.15 per cent) claimed to be at their most creative whilst commuting
- One twelfth of respondents (8.74 per cent) were found to use brainstorming alone as a technique to achieve creativity
- The pressure of time, noise and distractions, resistance to creativity from co-workers and client’s lack of openness to creativity were named as the biggest barriers to creativity at work



**The report's specific recommendations include:**

- **Training;** the role of creativity and its management should be specifically taught as part of the syllabus of the CIPR's post graduate qualifications (The CIPR Advanced Certificate in Public Relations and The CIPR Diploma in Public Relations). Likewise, in-house and consultancy training schemes should reflect the importance of creativity in the PR industry.
- **Culture and Environment;** Parker, Wayne & Kent's research identified the importance of culture and environment in the management of creativity. PR workplaces should be made more conducive to creativity, to improve and nurture the creative output of PROs.
- **CIPR Guides;** the CIPR's 'Guide to creative thinking' focuses solely on brainstorming techniques. While idea generation is important, the CIPR should provide a guide to creativity in general and the management of creativity.
- **PR people;** PROs have their own role to play. They should learn how to maximise their own creativity through theory and practice, and through a self-analysis of where they are most creative.
- **Risk assessment;** PROs must endeavour to risk assess their creative ideas to improve their creative PR output.



## **The Management of Creativity in the Public Relations Process**

*“Creativity is all around us and it continues to shape our world, and at a quickening pace. It is a force that impacts upon every aspect of our businesses, careers and personal lives.”*

*- Tim Bills and Chris Genasi, 2003*

Public Relations (PR) is renowned as a creative industry; supposedly staffed by creative people producing creative PR programmes.

Creativity is not as some believe a ‘divine’ or ‘natural gift’ bestowed upon fortunate “creative-types.” Creativity is a skill that is employed in our daily lives, and in every occupation - from art to accountancy. As a skill it can be trained, practised and developed.

De Bono, 1971, explains the creative process as “breaking out of

established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.” Ideas are the “spectacles” through which people look at data in order to see information. Different people will look at data in different ways, according to the ideas each develops. If old data is looked at through a new idea, it will give new information.

In seeking a definition, Green, 2001, identified four aspects of creativity. Namely;

1. as an innate individual talent.  
While a talent it may be, creativity can be attained by anyone.
2. as a process, bringing together different elements creating something new. Koestler, 1964, describes this as “two disconnected notions accidentally coming together.”
3. as a product, work of art or great achievement. This

includes creativity in problem solving.

4. and as recognition by a significant group of others.

A person’s thought process is extremely complex. For a long time it was argued that the brain’s two sides had different functions; that the right side was creative and the left was logical (Majaro, 1988). The left side of the brain was said to control logic, reasoning, language, numeracy and analysis. In contrast the right was said to control rhythm, music, imagination, images, colour, day-dreaming and creativity in general.

While the theory of a left, right split has since been discredited, its legacy is of value. It may not be a simple left-right split but the brain does have these two distinct modes.

Edward De Bono is widely regarded as the authority in teaching



thinking as a skill. He developed the Six Hats tool kit (Suzik, 1999), as a means to enable people to develop the full potential of their thinking power. The Six Hats are metaphors for the six different ingredients in thinking. By wearing one hat at a time, it allows you to focus on a single dimension of the thought process and enables the logical analysis of a problem.

All children are creative through play and fantasy. But traditional education is almost exclusively concerned with so-called vertical thinking.

Very rarely are we taught to think creatively. Creativity is based on lateral thinking which creates a discontinuity in the mind's patterning system, escaping from old ideas and generating new ideas.

This point is captured by the Financial Times: "Adults need to relearn how to turn things upside

down because they have lost that child-like approach to problems."

#### De Bono's Six Hats

- **White hat**; information, data, needs.
- **Red hat**; feelings, intuition, emotions.
- **Black hat**; risks, caution, concerns
- **Yellow hat**; benefits, value
- **Green hat**; possibility, alternatives, new ideas
- **Blue hat**; managing the thinking and process control

#### Creativity and innovation

*"Necessity is the other of invention, it is true – but its father is creativity and knowledge is the midwife."*

- Jonathan Schattke

Innovation is distinct from creativity. While creativity is a thinking process, innovation is the practical implementation of those ideas (Souder and Ziegler, 1977). Green,

2001, defines innovation as "the adoption, adaptation, or implementation by a third party of someone's creativity."

Zaltman et al., 1973, in Mayfield et al., 2004, defined innovation as an idea, practice or material artefact that is adopted in a conscious effort towards change. The focus of the effort is towards the end product – the 'change.'

It is clear that creativity and innovation are inherently connected. In a practical sense, one cannot exist without the other. Creativity alone would be useless; there would be no end product.

#### Creativity and the modern business world

Bills and Genasi, 2003, describe creativity in business as: "The capacity to challenge the existing order of things, by deliberately forcing ourselves out of our usual way of thinking, to



see the status quo from a new and enlightened perspective, to form new ideas and find practical ways to implement change in the light of fresh insights.”

De Bono, 1971, identifies creativity as the “competitive tool that matters most.”

Increasingly, competitive advantage depends on human capital and “especially on knowledge workers who innovate intellectual goods (Mayfield et al. 2004).”

The entrepreneurial success of leading businessmen such as Sir Alan Sugar and Bill Gates has been fuelled by creativity and imagination. Creativity is fundamental to long-term business success.

Cleggs and Birch, 2002, believe creativity to be more important than mere competitive advantage. They describe it as a “survival factor” - claiming that few companies in the world today will still be around

in a few years time without it.

While leading thinkers recognise that creativity is critical to business success, the evolving business world creates a barrier to creativity (Bills et al. 2003). Business people should be aware that increased global competition has shortened product cycles and developed a low-risk culture. It is clear that unless creativity is expressly sought, competitive business conditions will constrict creative expression.

### **Managing creativity**

Creativity won't just happen. It must be nurtured and encouraged wherever possible.

In a study by Mayfield et al. 2004 entitled ‘The effects of leader communication on worker innovation’, it was found that there was a positive and significant link between a leader’s communication ability

and worker innovation. Communication and fun are key to the culture of a workplace, and are directly influenced by the management.

De Bono, 1971, identifies that one of the most direct ways to increase creativity is through training of all employees. In general the creative potential of an individual is less significant than a modest rise in creativity all round. De Bono identifies that the management of creativity must develop skills in lateral thinking in individuals and as a specific group function.

Clegg et al. 2002, constructed ‘The five way course to creativity’ in which they describe the five key paths to creativity as:



1. culture
2. techniques
3. personal development, which they believe comes through practise and training
4. mental energy
5. fun.

Eskildsen, Dahlgard and Norgaard conducted a study entitled 'The impact of creativity and learning on business excellence (1999).' The study found that if an organisation wants to achieve business excellence, defined as stakeholder satisfaction and long-term business success, it must create an "environment where the creativity of employees is nurtured, developed and sustained through education and training, involvement and teamwork."

The creative organisation (Majaro, 1992) can be effectively managed with focused attention on: climate, removal of barriers, managing

innovation, idea evaluation procedures, motivational stimuli, communication procedures and development of idea sources.

To manage creativity, one must understand the dangers and the pitfalls of creativity. De Bono, 1971, identified that creativity was not a solution in itself, and contains a number of inherent dangers. For example, creativity changes direction, and if business focus changes too often, it's inefficient, costly and you don't get anywhere.

The consensus among these leading academics is that creativity is encouraged by environment and culture. But as Majaro (1988) identifies, few managers know how to enhance the level of creativity in their organisation.

## **Creativity and Public Relations**

*"The crucial variable in turning knowledge into value is creativity."*

- John Kao

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations defines public relations practice as the "planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics" (Gregory, 2000).

But where does creativity fit within Public Relations?

Creativity is that 'x-factor' which can make a PR programme sparkle.

Green, 2001, provides a definition of creativity within the PR function:

"[Creativity is] something new... bringing together two or more different elements in a new context, in order to provide added value to a task."



“It is not novelty for its own sake, but it must produce some form of value that can be recognised by a third party.”

Creativity can add something to the ‘nuts and bolts’ of a PR programme - a degree of ‘added value’ (Rawel, 2003). It is not only valuable but appropriate to its context and surroundings. The worth the added value delivers will vary depending on its context (Green, 2001).

Creativity can give businesses an edge in an increasingly competitive environment. For PR people, creativity does much the same thing. Creativity can be the extension or establishment of organisational or brand values (Green, 2001) or breathe new life and sustainability into longer-term PR programmes is (Gregory, 2000). A creatively written news release can seize a journalist’s attention or

imagination. A creative stunt or photo opportunity can gain front page coverage. A creative message can communicate with a new audience, or engage an existing audience in a new way.

Creativity is said to play a leading role in the PR industry. Public Relations consultancy websites often claim creativity as a core value.

Each edition of PR Week features campaign case studies, which are graded by seasoned PR professionals. Marks are given for creativity and delivery in equal measure. It seems the editor of this publication feels creativity is just as important as the delivery and implementation of a campaign.

**What does creativity deliver to the PR practitioner?**

Creative ideas are rarely the product of a terrific flash of inspiration. How

often does a person claim to have a “Eureka!” moment? Creative ideas are built from a series of smaller steps (Green, 2001). People are creative in their daily lives, in small and sometimes unapparent ways.

In PR, creativity is often thought of as that winning idea that can generate media coverage or a new brand value for a product. While creativity may from time to time deliver that grand idea, it is also central to the development of smaller ideas.

Creativity must be used wisely. Creative ideas, which are outside an organisation’s objectives, will add no value and may be potentially harmful to the organisation. Business and PR objectives are established as a guide for every move a business makes. The creative PR function must not depart from this. It must work to develop creative ideas in





tune with the organisation's wider PR messages and objectives. Creative ideas must be ring-fenced within, and aligned to an organisation's objectives and messages. Strategy should be used at all times to maintain focus.

### **Areas of PR Practice**

Grunig and Hunt (1992) identified four models of public relations:

- Press agency model
- Public information model
- Two-way asymmetrical model
- Two-way symmetrical model

Each body of Public Relations can be defined as one or more of the above. The 'four models of PR' acts as a spectrum of PR practice.

Models of press agency and public information are characterised as 'craft public relations'; where technique rather than strategy and professionalism will

orientate PR activity (Kitchen, 1997).

Craft PR, for example, works largely to generate publicity on behalf of people or organisations. Where strategy and even truth don't necessarily play significant roles, the opportunity for creativity and creative tactics is much greater. As Green, 2001, eloquently states; "Any fool can generate publicity." Publicists make a living out of it - keeping clients in the public eye, at times using scandal and gossip.

The real value lies in achieving creativity within an organisation's key messages, objectives and strategy.

Creativity is not just for promotion and publicity. In a study into successful internal communications, Schalachtmeyer and Caldwell (1991) assert that, "Creativity is the key to successful communication." The most successful internal communications

programmes are done with a fresh approach – confidently, resourcefully and creatively. So whatever the field of PR, creativity can play a valuable role.

### **Research methodology:**

Parker, Wayne & Kent designed a questionnaire to examine how creativity is currently managed across the PR discipline.

It was understood that the PR industry is extremely complex, with many activities across many industries. The questionnaire was completed by a cross section of the industry - 104 randomly selected members of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations ([www.ipr.org.uk](http://www.ipr.org.uk)).

Respondents represented a random sample of PROs from in-house/consultancy, male/female, across all industries and at all levels of employment.



The questionnaire consisted of eleven questions and received **104** responses from **443** sent – a response rate of 23.47 per cent.

**Findings:**

**Who and where?**

It is important to understand who is providing the data and what industries they practice in.

The respondents represented all levels of practitioner; from Managing Directors down to Account Executives. One in five (**20 per cent**) of respondents were Directors, **12 per cent**

were Heads of Communications and **eight per cent** were Communications Managers.

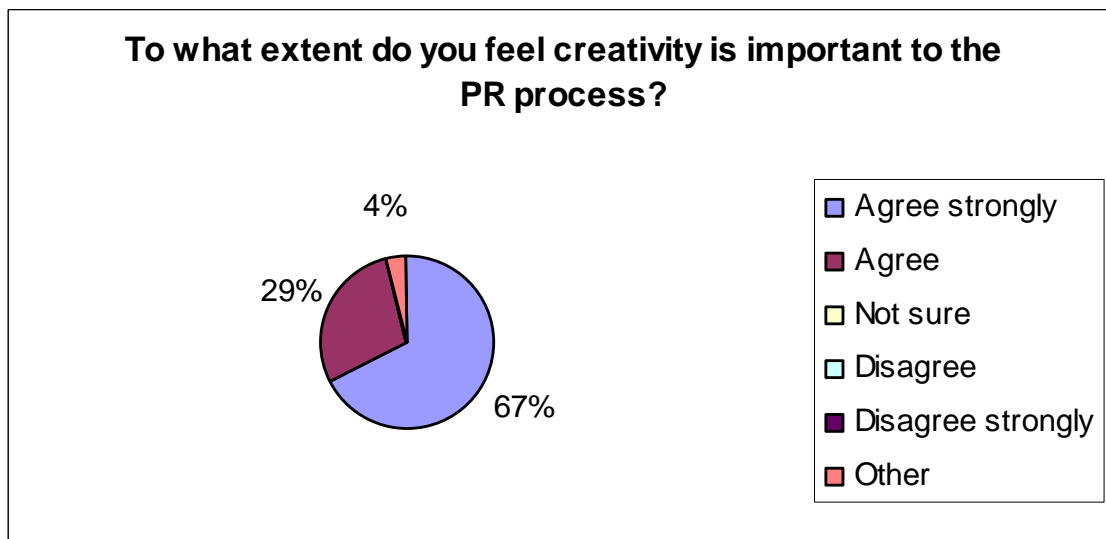
The survey was answered by representatives of both in-house and consultancy PR functions. Consultancies can often work in a number of industries, and this variety is well represented (see Appendix A).

Respondents worked in more than **43 industries**. This allows us to speak about the PR industry in general, while at the

same time understanding the constraints of the survey.

Initially, it was important to gauge attitudes towards creativity.

The survey asked respondents; “To what extent do you feel creativity is important to the PR process?” **67 per cent** of respondents ‘agreed strongly’ and **29 per cent** ‘agreed.’





It was found that **96 per cent** of respondents either agreed or agreed strongly that creativity was important to the PR process.

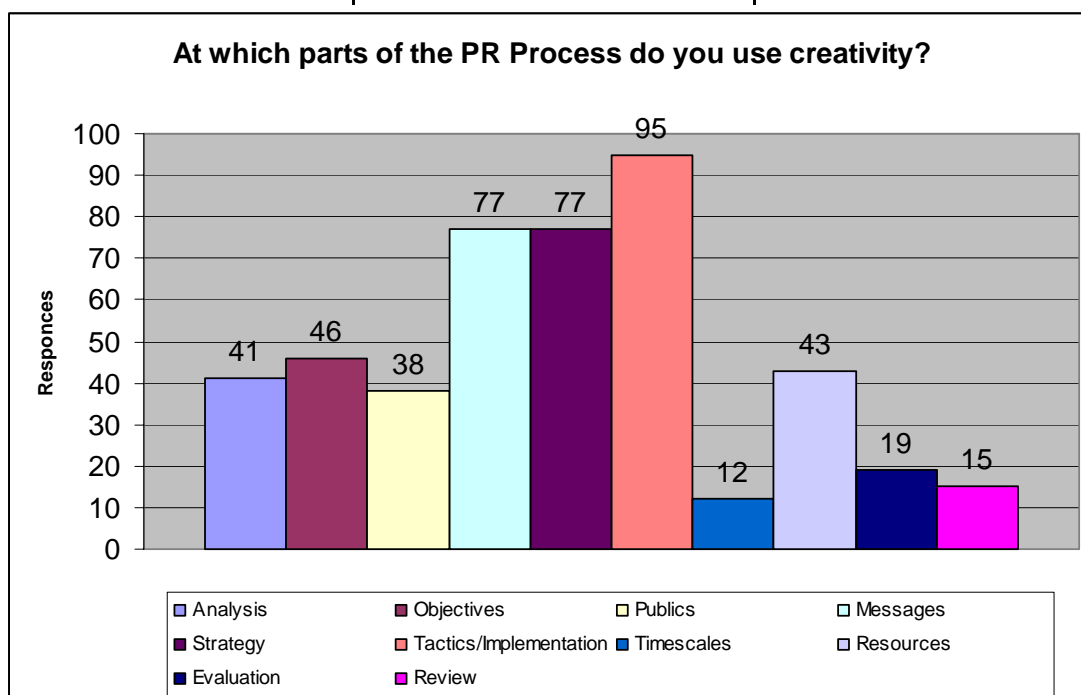
Having established the importance of creativity to

the PR process, the survey asked respondents at which parts of the PR process<sup>ii</sup> they use creativity.

While creativity can be used across the communications process,

it was hypothesised that the area of tactics would be the most popular area where creativity was used.

The findings are as follows:



It is evident that creativity was used in the area of tactics and implementation.

Creativity was also used extensively in the areas of messages and strategy. **Nine in ten respondents (91.34 per cent)** used creativity in the area of tactics and implementation, while **three quarters (74 per cent)** of respondents

used creativity in the areas of messages and strategy.

If the findings are analysed as a chronological PR process - starting with analysis and objectives and ending with evaluation and review – a significant pattern emerges. Generally speaking, creativity is used at the

start and foundations of a programme. It is utilized heavily during the mid-point of a programme - during the messages and strategy and peaking at the area of tactics. Its use then tails off towards the end of a programme.<sup>iii</sup>

Objectives must be SMART<sup>iv</sup>, not creative. Research and evaluation must be grounded and



qualified, more than creative. But it is clear that creativity is not limited to tactics alone. Powers of creativity can and should be used wherever possible to add value to PR activities. It can be as simple as the creative use of language or presentation in a release or the creative timing of an event. While creativity is at its most visible around the implementation stage, it still has a varying role to play throughout the process.

Respondents were next asked **how they encouraged or engendered creativity.**

**40.48 per cent** of respondents stated that they encouraged creativity through group working and brainstorming. It is acceptable that creativity is encouraged through group brainstorming, but it is only one technique to achieve creative idea generation. There is only so much time that a team can

devote to brainstorming per week, month or year. One can only assume that the remainder of the time spent outside of brainstorming for this 40 per cent, is spent mundanely and non-creatively.

A dependency on brainstorming is a waste of human resources and the creative potential of the team. It also suggests a lack of understanding of creative techniques and ways in which creativity can be effectively managed. While brainstorming is a very useful technique, it should not be used in isolation but as a part of a well managed approach to encourage creativity.

Three respondents answered with a cliché, including; “By taking my shoulder off the wheel, my nose off the grindstone and my ear off the ground.” The problem with this kind of answer is that it doesn’t really tell us anything.

The only information we can glean from a “Thinking outside the box” type of answer is that it demonstrates an appreciation of creativity and perhaps a desire to remove themselves from the situation to gain a fresh perspective. It is difficult to consider such clichés credibly. By its very nature, a cliché is a non-creative answer. It is a phrase or saying that was said once, but has been reused over time. It is easy to regurgitate a phrase; it is certainly not creative.

One respondent admitted frankly; “We don’t [encourage creativity].” This respondent is doing themselves and their organisations a large disservice by overlooking the creative potential of their PR function. The respondent needs to recognise the fundamental value of creativity and creative ideas.

Two respondents identified creativity as a



corporate value of their organisation. But PR companies should be creative as a matter of course; demonstrated by 96 per cent of PROs surveyed believing creativity to be important to the PR process. Creativity should be delivered by PROs in their daily tasks, to add greater value to their clients or organisations. Preaching creativity is not enough.

Clegg and Birch, 2002 identify that three things can stimulate the brain; physical movement, fun and spatial thinking, music and art. Relaxation is also of great value. **15 per cent** of respondents encouraged creativity through the generation of an open, positive and relaxed environment. One in which the overriding culture accepted risk as part of the creative process. One respondent stated that creativity was encouraged through “Good internal comms between PR Group.”

While PROs provide communications services for a living, it is important that the free-flow of communication and ideas is practiced within the agency or PR department. There is no such thing as a bad idea is a good rule to follow.

Other environmental qualities given include; “fun,” “freedom of ideas and discussion,” “non-stressed environment”, “positivity,” “rewards (i.e. internal awards)” and an environment where “creative contributions are valued and essential.”

Other given methods by which creativity is encouraged by respondents include:

- The use of “stimuli.”
- The use of careful “planning” and “research” in order to gain a full understanding of the proposition or problem being faced. Chesterton said, “It isn’t that they can’t see the solution. It is

that they can’t see the problem.”

Research and gaining a greater understanding of the problem or situation was favoured by seven per cent of respondents.

Clegg and Birch, 2002, identify that creativity can result from one or more teams of people working in an environment and culture that encourages and fosters creative thinking. It is this environment that managers should seek to create with their departments and wider-organisations.

The survey asked **if the atmosphere at work, in particular, encourages creativity.**

The first answer received was a startling admission: “Absolutely not. It crushes it.” These are strong words. If this is the case, then the management must reassess the atmosphere in their workplace.



Contributory factors to a work atmosphere which encourages creativity were given as:

- “Quiet spaces”
- “People from different press desks get together in small teams to discuss new ideas”
- “Training”
- “Open-plan [office]”
- “Relaxed”
- “Freedom”
- “Yes, open dialogue and laughter!”
- “The social atmosphere contributes to creativity”
- “People are encouraged to ask others for help and ideas” – i.e. open channels of communication.
- “Support for creativity as one of core company values”

While a good number of respondents indicated that creativity was being encouraged through some of the methods outlined above, there were an alarming number

of “no” and negative answers:

- “Sometimes I feel that you don’t get enough time to be creative as you get bogged down with the day to day”
- “I am too busy to give enough time to really think about creativity... I would like to have more time to review creativity.”
- “No, it can be quite restricting, both physically and mentally”
- “A bit too noisy and busy to concentrate”
- “Risk-averse culture”

Time, pressure and a negative and distracting atmosphere are harming the potential for these respondents to think creatively.

While it was encouraging that **51.65 per cent** of respondents felt that the atmosphere at work encouraged creativity, a significant number of respondents felt that it

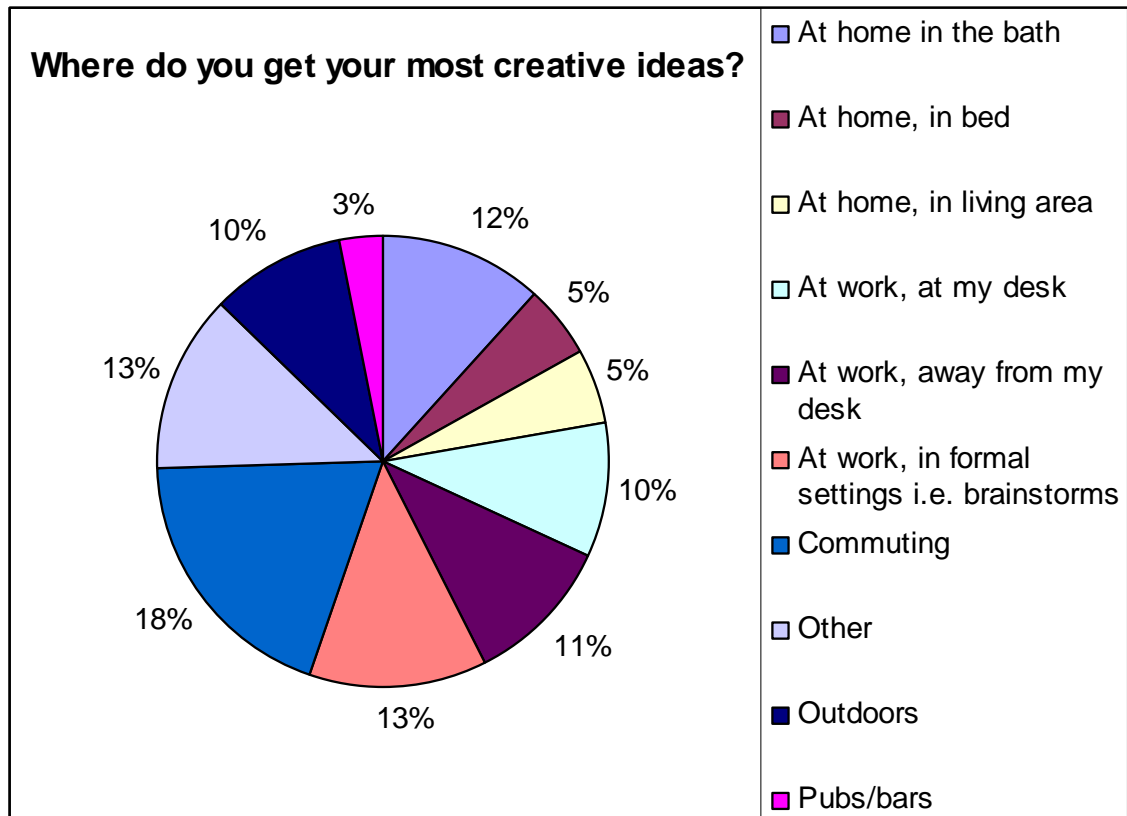
did not - **34.07 per cent**. If roughly one in three PROs are feeling that the atmosphere at work prevents creative thinking, then there is a serious problem. More effective management of creativity would correct this.

One respondent made an interesting point saying, “often the person being creative is not credited with the idea further down the line.” This raises an interesting point. It is rare that ideas are solely the product of a single person. Often an idea requires a ‘champion’ to endorse it, and others become involved in its development. It is important however that credit and reward is given where due to encourage creativity. If no recognition is made or a supervisor takes the credit for the idea, it acts as a great disincentive to be creative. In this case, creativity is the victim of poor management.



Related to the environment and atmosphere at work is

the question: **Where do you get your most creative ideas?**



Commuting to and from work was found to be the most common situation for generating creative ideas. This echoes the findings of Nick Fitzherbert in November 2003, who discovered that travelling was the best opportunity for idea generation (Smith, 2005). Commuting is often a time of quiet reflection on the day ahead or the day that has just finished. The mind doesn't stop work at

5.30pm, and will continue to generate thoughts and ideas throughout the journey to/from work and beyond.

"At home" scored one in five responses (**20.83 per cent**). Interestingly, "at work" proved significantly more popular at **33.33 per cent**. This is significant as it shows that work is conducive to creative thinking for

almost one in every three PROs surveyed.

A useful personal exercise is to ask yourself where you are your most creative. If you can identify the reasons why that situation works best for you, then you may be able to embrace the positive characteristics in other areas of your work or home life. It may also be possible to harness your



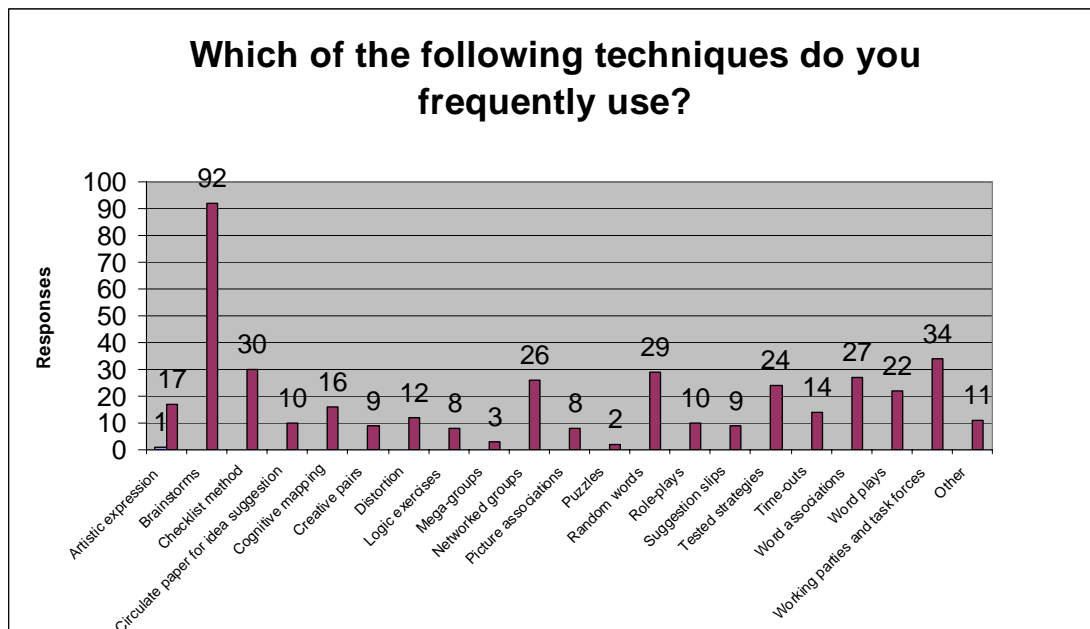
creativity in these places more effectively. If you are your most creative on the bus or train to work, arm yourself with a pen and pad to jot down ideas as they come to you.

Respondents were provided with a

comprehensive selection of creativity techniques, and were asked: **Which of the following techniques do you frequently use?**

It was no surprise that the most favoured technique was the

brainstorm. **89.32 per cent** of respondents stated that they frequently used the brainstorm technique. This was more than twice as popular as the next most popular technique – working parties and task forces (**33 per cent**).



In total, only eleven respondents stated that they did not use brainstorms frequently, confirming earlier indications that brainstorms are the most popular techniques for idea generation.

Clegg and Birch, 2002 correctly identify the added value a team can offer. Through 'synergy,' a team brings individuals together to produce more than simply the sum of their parts i.e. as individuals. Ideas will be generated from outside one's own way of looking

at a problem, and that is the value of group work.

As brainstorming has proved such an important tool for the generation of ideas, Parker, Wayne & Kent have compiled a number of short tips for successful sessions (see Appendix E).





While brainstorming is a useful tool, De Bono, 1971, asserts that formal settings are no substitute for individual skill in lateral thinking. A formal setting will aid the process of creativity, but it is not the process itself. In addition, Majaro 1988 identified that certain topics are unsuitable for brainstorming and should be considered using more appropriate techniques.<sup>v</sup>

Respondents frequently used an average of **4.01** techniques each. While it is encouraging that respondents are using more than simple brainstorming to fuel their creativity, four techniques out of a potential twenty is just scraping the surface of the most common techniques available. PROs with a desire to become more creative should learn and practice as many techniques as possible in their working day.

Brainstorming is not the only formal structure that

can be used by managers of creativity.

Consider the following (see Appendix B for a summary of these techniques):

- Artistic expression
- Brainstorms
- Checklist method
- A circulated sheet from one person to another around the office.
- Cognitive mapping
- Creative pairs
- Distortion - modifying the nature of the problem
- Logic exercises
- Mega-groups
- Networked groups
- Picture associations
- Puzzles
- Random words
- Role-plays
- Suggestion slips
- Tested strategies
- Time-outs
- Word associations
- Word plays
- Working parties and task forces

PROs should use as many techniques as possible and appropriate to encourage personal or team creativity.

It is accepted that creativity is a good thing, and that creativity can add value to the PR process; but not all creativity adds value.

How do you know a creative idea will work well enough? Who decides whether an idea will/did work?

It is in the selection of creative ideas that value is won or lost.

Each idea should be **risk assessed**.

Each creative idea must be gauged for its relative impact and level of success.

The survey next asked, **Do you conduct a risk assessment for each creative idea?**

**57.45 per cent** of respondents stated that they did not conduct a risk assessment for each creative idea. So more than half of PROs surveyed do not risk assess their creatives. Of the **36 per cent** of PROs



who claimed to risk assess ideas, the quality and method of risk assessment varied enormously.

One responded: "No. Should I?!!!" In reply, it should be stated that any action undertaken should be risk assessed. Efforts must be made to understand the consequences of every action that impact on your organisation. This is especially true for creative ideas which may be new and may not have been tested before.

Another responded: "No. All creative ideas are risky." If all creative ideas are risky, then the answer should be a resounding "YES."

Respondents offered non-structured risk assessments, such as "discussion, gut reaction, previous experience" and general cost analysis.

Few discussed the specifics of how an idea should be risk assessed.

Those that did offered the following criteria against which creative ideas are assessed:

- "health and safety legislation"
- "practicality, performance, effectiveness and success rate"
- Ask the question: "could this idea be misrepresented in the press?"

More formal methods are also used. Namely;

- "Use the project management risk template (Prince 2). It is key to our planning process."
- "The NHS uses a standard risk assessment template."
- "We have a standard form which we adapt accordingly."

A single respondent stated that they used creative theory to risk assess a creative idea:

"Mostly by 'black hatting', taking a look at an idea out of brainstorm

and seeing if it can work."

'Black hatting' refers to De Bono's Six Hats model. The black hat focuses the mind on potential risks and concerns, stressing a cautionary approach.

The response to this question varied remarkably across the sample. It is enough to say that some handle this situation better than others. Informal risk assessment is better than nothing, but not as effective as the use of formal methods or theory.

Each idea must be risk assessed. While Gregory, 2000, recognises the need to "test feasibility as far as possible," she does not offer a guide or method for a risk assessment.

De Bono, 1971, suggests you can find usable ideas by rejecting others in a process he calls 'selection by exclusion' where ideas are struck off a list one by one,



eventually leaving only one.

It is important to consider an idea on its merits as well as its shortcomings. A formal risk assessment would promote standards and transparency and may prevent subjective decisions from senior players. Formal risk assessment would benefit creativity.

A formal tool could be as simple as a set criteria against which each idea is assessed, perhaps:

- Would it work?
- Would it be practical?
- What is the total cost of implementation?
- Is the idea new?
- How could it go wrong?

Majaro, 1988, provides a screening procedure which encompasses the various questions against which each idea must be screened.

- Is the idea compatible with corporate objectives?
  - Profit objectives?
  - Stability objectives?
  - Growth objectives?

- Image objectives?
- HR objectives?
- Is the idea compatible with the organisation's resources?
  - Human resources?
  - Financial resources?
  - Physical resources?
  - Do you have the know how?

An industry-agreed toolkit for risk assessment would benefit the PR industry and the levels of creativity therein. If creative ideas could be more effectively risk assessed, it is likely that creativity would be more universally embraced in Public Relations.

Responses were even less encouraging to the question: **Do you evaluate the success of the creative aspect of a programme?**

Half of PR's (50 per cent) admitted said they did not. This echoes the findings of Majaro (1988) who states that few companies audit their

own creativity and innovation.

A handful admitted that what passed for general evaluation was the inaccurate counting of column inches and the discredited advertising value equivalent (AVE) methods.

The survey found that in general, when an accurate evaluation was said to take place, it was an evaluation of the programme as a whole with no appreciation for the impact a creative idea had on the outcome. When a respondent states: [We evaluate] "against campaign objectives" or "whole programmes are evaluated and creativity is part of it," there is no attempt to ask to what degree is the outcome due to the creative idea(s).

A number of respondents said that feedback was sought through dialogue with key publics and further research. This



could be very effective *if* targeted with creativity in mind.

From all the answers, only a handful of respondents gave answers that suggested creativity in particular, was being evaluated.

- “For press releases - yes. We look at the media pick-up compared with other types of press releases to compare which ones work and why.”
- “I evaluate the overall success of the creative aspect and how it could be developed to be more successful in the future”

These individuals are exceptional; making efforts to understand how and why a creative idea worked and are crucially feeding this back into future activities. This will deliver great value for their future activities and should be taken as an example of best practice.

Respondents were given a selection of creative models and were asked:

**Do you know about and use the following models of creativity?**

The intention was to see how educated PR practitioners were in the theories behind creative practice.

While the concept of creativity is alien to many people, it was concerning to see the number of respondents who had never heard a selection of theories pertaining to creativity.

De Bono's Six Hats theory was the most popular theory that respondents claimed to have heard of. It was also the most commonly utilised theory.

The levels of knowledge were concerning. Two in five respondents (**43.56 per cent**) hadn't heard of any of the seven given models of creativity.

**One in three respondents (32.67 per**

**cent)** had heard of De Bono's Six Hats, which was roughly twice as popular as the next most popular theory – the CPS model (**18.81 per cent**).

Not only was the lack of knowledge concerning, so too was the degree to which the theoretical knowledge was being put into practice and used.

Only **21.21 per cent** of those who had heard of De Bono's Six Hats claimed to use it, while four of the theories had a conversion rate of **zero**.

Furthermore, the list of theories provided was by no means comprehensive and only two respondents were able to offer any alternative models which was concerning.

The survey questioned 101 members of the CIPR, a body whose members are claimed to “form a cadre of outstanding expertise in our profession.”<sup>vi</sup> While understanding the limitations of the survey,



the levels of knowledge of creative theory is concerning. It is questionable whether in terms of academic knowledge at least, the CIPR's members are

exhibiting "outstanding expertise" in the area of creativity as it claims.

To increase personal and team creativity, PROs should be well versed in

the various theories of creativity, and they should use this knowledge in their every day work.



**Review:**

A longer and more explorative questionnaire would have yielded greater and possibly more far-reaching results. The research would have benefited from a wider survey of around 500 people.

The survey would have benefited from asking whether respondents were currently working in-house or consultancy, enabling Parker, Wayne & Kent to compare the answers for both. The survey would also have benefited from asking questions with more concrete answers i.e. 11. Do you feel the atmosphere at your work encourages creativity? Yes or No? Please explain your answer.

The sample was solely based on members of the CIPR; professionals who should arguably be the leading practitioners in the industry. However this is only one end of the spectrum. There are many PR practitioners

employed in the industry without membership of a professional association. A wider sample should include non-CIPR members to gain a more accurate impression of levels of, and attitudes towards creativity.

**Raising the issue:**

The survey received a great deal of positive feedback from respondents. 19 respondents asked to receive an update of Parker, Wayne & Kent's findings, demonstrating that creativity is of serious interest to these individuals. It also served to raise the issues surrounding creativity in the minds of respondents. One quipped: "I have filed out your survey...I think I need a creativity course!"

**Recommendations:**

It was found that while the need and value of creativity was understood, the levels of understanding of theory and techniques to

achieve it were generally disappointing.

Despite 96 per cent of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that creativity is important to the PR process, **43.56 per cent** of respondents had not heard of any of the seven models of creativity provided and only **32.67 per cent** knew about the most popular Six Hats theory (De Bono). Furthermore, many of those that did know about a theory were not putting this knowledge into practice. The industry must address this lack of knowledge as a matter of urgency.

The CIPR provides is a body which has played a leading role in the growth of the PR industry in the UK. It provides advice, training, education, and membership is increasingly seen as an endorsement of best business practice. However, its advice on creativity is extremely limited. What little advice



it does offer in a document entitled '*Guide to creative thinking*' focuses solely on brainstorming techniques. While idea generation is important, the CIPR does not provide a guide to creative thinking.

The CIPR's 8000 members would benefit greatly from advice explaining the ways in which one can achieve and manage creativity. Such advice could have a very positive impact on the industry in general.

Whilst the CIPR takes a leading role in education and training for the communication industry, neither of its post graduate qualifications (The CIPR Advanced Certificate in Public Relations and The CIPR Diploma in Public

Relations) provide any instruction on creativity for students. Parker, Wayne & Kent believes the role of creativity and its management should be included as part of the syllabus of both qualifications. Likewise, inhouse and consultancy training schemes should recognise the importance of creativity in the PR industry.

Parker, Wayne & Kent's research identified the importance of culture and environment in the management of creativity. PR workplaces should be made more conducive to creativity, to improve and nurture the creative output of PROs.

PR people have their own role to play. They should learn how to maximise their own creativity through theory

and practice, and through a self-analysis of where they are most creative.

The research showed that areas of risk assessment and the evaluation of creativity is often overlooked. It is difficult to make a strong case for investing in the management of creativity when little is known about what impact a creative idea can have on a campaign. The difficulty is that this is a new question, which is still to be answered. In order to make creativity a 'must have,' its true value must be known.

Future research in this area should concentrate on these risk assessment and the evaluation of creativity, in an attempt to better understand the creative process.

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**Creativity is within us all.**

**It's just a matter of the right encouragement.**

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## **Appendix A**

### **Models of and theories associated with creativity.**

#### **The Wallas Model** (Wallas, 1926):

The Wallas Model - one of the earliest models of the creative process - states that creative thinking proceeds through four phases.

1. Preparation
2. Incubation
3. Illumination
4. Verification

#### **Barron's Psychic Creation Model:**

Henri Barron (1988)

1. Conception (in a prepared mind)
2. Gestation (time, intricately coordinated)
3. Parturation (suffering to be born, emergence into light)
4. Bringing up the baby (further development)

The tone of Barron's model supports the popular belief that creativity is a mysterious process involving subconscious thoughts.

#### **Rossman's Creativity Model** (Rossman, 1931):

Rossman expanded Wallas' model. He took the model to seven steps:

1. Observation of a need or difficulty
2. Analysis of the need
3. A survey of all available information
4. A formulation of all objective solutions
5. A critical analysis of these solutions for their advantages and disadvantages
6. The birth of the new idea -- the invention
7. Experimentation to test out the most promising solution, and the selection and perfection of the final embodiment





Rossmann's steps leading up to and following this moment of illumination are clearly analytical. Creativity is not a magical process. Ideas emerge from the conscious effort to balance analysis and imagination.

**Conceptual Spaces** (Boden, 1994):

Conceptual spaces are established styles of thinking.

Creativity is a matter of exploring and mapping conceptual spaces and combining familiar ideas.

Different conceptual spaces have distinct structures, each with its own dimensions, pathways, and boundaries.

Conceptual spaces can be mapped, explored, and transformed in various ways. In the same way that a map will help a traveller find and modify his route from A to B, mental maps enable us to explore and transform our conceptual spaces in imaginative ways.

Through the exploration of conceptual spaces ideas may be generated which could not have been generated before.

**Osborn's Seven-Step Model** (Alex Osborn, 1953):

The Seven-Step Model was put forward by Alex Osborne in the early 1950s. Osborne's theory balances analysis and imagination:

1. Orientation (identifying the problem)
2. Preparation (gathering data)
3. Analysis
4. Ideation (generate alternatives)
5. Incubation
6. Synthesis (putting the pieces together)
7. Evaluation

Alex Osborn is also credited with coming up with the brainstorm technique.

**Six Hats** (De Bono, 1971):



Edward De Bono (1971) described the creative process as, “Breaking out of established patterns in order to look at things in a different way.” He developed the Six Hats theory to enable thinkers to concentrate on one aspect of a problem at any one time.

The Six Hats are metaphors for the six different ingredients in thinking. Each colour of hat has a specific focus, allowing a person to explore one thinking ingredient at a time, so you can logically analyse a problem.

The six hats are as follows:

- **White hat;** known or needed information and data.
- **Red hat;** feelings, intuition and emotions. When using this hat you can express emotions and feelings and share fears, likes, dislikes, loves, and hates.
- **Black hat;** risks, caution and concerns. The Black Hat is judgment spots the difficulties and dangers. It identifies where things might go wrong.
- **Yellow hat;** benefits and value.
- **Green hat;** possibility, alternatives and new ideas. The Green Hat focuses on creativity.
- **Blue hat;** managing the thinking and process control. The Blue Hat ensures the rules and guidelines above are followed.

### **The Creative Problem Solving (CPS) Model:**

The very popular CPS model requires a mix of traditional and analytical thinking skills.

1. Objective finding
2. Fact finding
3. Problem finding
4. Idea finding
5. Solution finding
6. Acceptance finding

The CPS model is a popular way to explore and define problems, generate ideas and solutions, and planning for their implementation.



## Appendix B

### Creative Techniques

Apply the following creative techniques in your own work or across your team function to engender creativity.

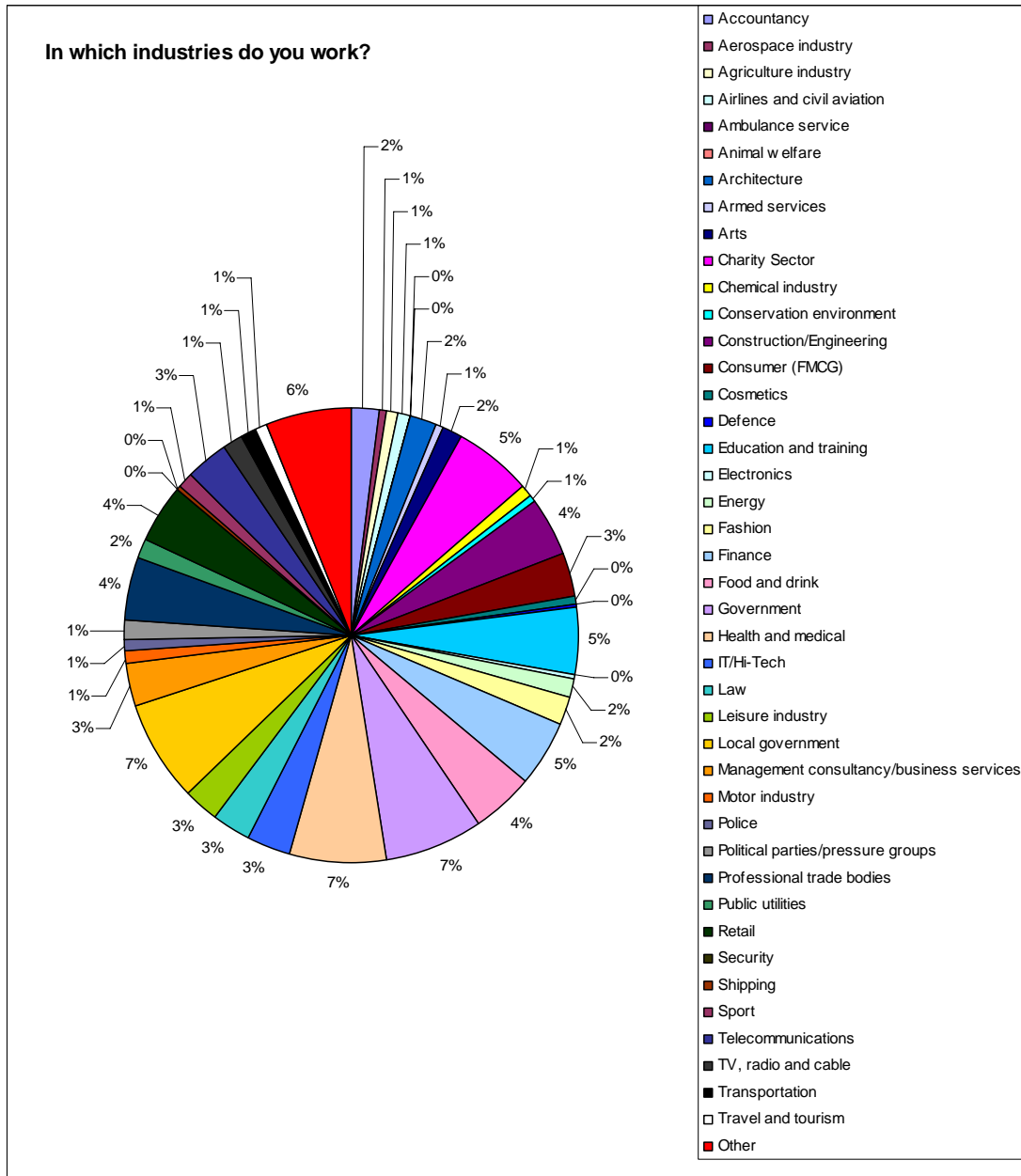
- **Artistic expression:** drawing the problem will help you think about it in a fresh way.
- **Brainstorms:** group working with ideally between six and 12 participants from various functions for the mass generation of ideas.
- **Checklist method:** work individually or collectively through a predetermined list of criterion.
- **An ideas sheet:** circulated around the office with each person adding their own ideas and solution to a problem listed at the top of the page. Anonymity is a must to allow the free flow of ideas.
- **Cognitive mapping:** one or more people produce a diagram of their ideas, showing how these are interrelated.
- **Creative pairs:** group working with between two people harnesses synergy for the creative process.
- **Distortion:** assumptions can limit the solutions we generate. Distortion modifies the nature of the problem to begin to find new solutions. What is your prime assumption in your problem and what would happen if this weren't the case?
- **Logic exercises:** to get a group to think in a logical way. For example: you are in a dark room with a candle, a stove and a gas lamp but you only have one match. What do you light first? [www.brainbashers.com]
- **Mega-groups:** utilize the creative potential of a large group working over time to answer a predefined problem or issue.
- **Networked groups:** a team meeting regularly over the course of six months or a year to overcome a problem. Often the individuals involved in the networked groups will come from different functions of the company.
- **Picture associations:** generate ideas through the engaging 'right-brain' activities.
- **Puzzles:** challenge your brain to think around a problem and generate creative a solution. For example, the 9 dots puzzle or the Rorschach Ink Blot.
- **Random words:** random stimuli - in this case words - can kick-start the brain's thought processes. Take a look at the Random Word Generator listed on Parker, Wayne & Kent's **online PR toolkit**.



- **Role-plays:** one of the best ways to generate new ideas is to develop solutions by seeing the problem through fresh eyes and someone else's perspective. E.g. What would Napoleon, a surgeon or Superman do faced with the same problem?
- **Suggestion slips:** allows the free and anonymous suggestion of ideas.
- **Tested strategies:** What has worked before, why did it work and can you improve it in any way? Apply previous ideas/solutions in a new way perhaps.
- **Time-outs:** relaxation and time away from the task will help the thought process.
- **Word associations/word plays:** words are powerful and can stimulate the thought process. Take a look at the RhymeZone listed on Parker, Wayne & Kent's **online PR toolkit**.
- **Working parties and task forces:** team working with a clearly expressed aim.



**Appendix C**





## Appendix D

### Dangers of creativity

De Bono, 1971.

- Creativity changes direction. If you change direction too often, you are inefficient, costly and you don't get anywhere.
- Ideas can have a chain reaction. If you pursue one idea for a time, then abandon it for another you don't see any ideas through to their conclusion.
- People own their creative ideas, and may be unwilling to give them up.
- If you focus too greatly on creativity, the danger is that you will undervalue a solid idea.
- Time may be wasted looking for that *ultimate* creative idea.



## **Appendix E**

### **Tips for a successful brainstorm**

A successful brainstorm must be governed by the following rules:

- There is no such thing as a bad idea. All ideas are valuable.
- The evaluation of ideas (at this stage) is forbidden. The task of the brainstorm is the generation of ideas. Some ideas will be useable, some won't. Some will be implemented, some won't. People have a natural tendency to evaluate, which must be avoided at all costs.

#### **Some tips for a successful brainstorm:**

- Games
- Ice breakers
- Warm ups – i.e. solve a simple problem to get the creative juices flowing
- Timeouts
- Fun
- Timing – 30 minutes is ideal
- Participants – there should be no less than six and no more than twelve participants. (Too many people will stifle the communication of ideas and too few will not provided enough stimulation for idea generation). There should also be a wide variety of personnel, with no seniority in evidence.
- Follow up. The brain doesn't stop working when the brainstorm finishes. Circulate a blank sheet of paper after the brainstorm has concluded for new ideas to be added.

De Bono, 1971, recommends that the brainstorm should be followed up with an evaluation session where ideas are evaluated by a mixture of the same and different people, on basic criteria such as practicality and cost. Following this evaluation session, a list of ideas can be drawn up for immediate use, for further exploration and as a list of alternative ideas.



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<sup>i</sup> 2004 Journalist/PR Study, [http://www.rainierpr.co.uk/home\\_pages/white\\_paper\\_018.html](http://www.rainierpr.co.uk/home_pages/white_paper_018.html)

<sup>ii</sup> Analysis, Objectives, Publics, Messages, Strategy, Tactics/implementation, Timescales, Resources, Evaluation, and Review. (Gregory, 2000)

<sup>iii</sup> It should be noted that the PR process is cyclical, with the evaluation and reviews feeding into and informing future programmes.

<sup>iv</sup> Specific, Measurable, Agreed, Realistic and Time bound.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to be published in July 2005



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<sup>v</sup> Topics unsuitable for brainstorming include:

- Problems with a single, or very few answers.
- Problems which need a higher authority for adjudication.
- Subjects which require technological or professional expertise.

<sup>vi</sup> [www.ipr.org.uk](http://www.ipr.org.uk)