

Important insights from speeches at recent MR & Intelligence conferences

MRS

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Bringing Co-Creative Research Into Perspective

Main Point: Co-creation is a hot emerging research area, but it requires skill, structure and experience to do it well. MR fundamentals and critical skills are easily overlooked in the excitement of a new approach. Before clients adopt these techniques en masse, the research industry needs to explore their strengths and weaknesses, and establish guidelines and definitions for conducting co-creative projects.

RCR impressions of content: **Freshness: A**
Relevance: A
Practicality: B

Sheila Keegan, Ph.D., Co-Founder, **Campbell Keegan Ltd.** (London, UK), said she advocates co-creative research because, when done correctly, it provides an exciting forum for generating new ideas and strategies.

But she expressed concern over the increasing, almost faddish, popularity of techniques that imply “direct experience with consumers—often unmediated by a researcher—is superior to traditional methods.” At the same time, approaches that require a trained research professional (e.g., focus groups and depth interviews) are being rejected as dated and irrelevant. “We need a wide range of research techniques for different perspectives; it’s not an either-or scenario,” she said.



Sheila Keegan

Keegan noted Web 2.0’s democratization of many socio-cultural institutions—journalism, publishing, broadcasting, film, music, etc.—is enabling amateurs and professionals to operate in spaces formerly reserved for experts. “MR may be added to that list,” she stated with apprehension.

“This is a dangerous course,” Keegan continued. “Clients who attend focus groups don’t make decisions solely from their observations from behind the mirror.

They rely on the researcher’s experience and expertise to help guide them and transform data into strategy. ‘Democratizing’ research risks devaluing this capability.”

Keegan described the three most common collaborative research approaches (aside from online communities):

1) Creative forums of hand-picked individuals (sometimes organizational teams), who work together to generate new thinking. These are set up and managed by qual research teams, and can last a few hours or several days.

2) Consumer panels in which participants are selected, trained and given the tools to develop, create and innovate. They may be re-convened over months.

3) Co-creation as iterative learning, where clients, researchers and consumers “work together in various combinations on research issues. Objectives, methodologies and hypotheses evolve as the project progresses and new understanding develops.”

“Advancing from creative forums to co-creation as iterative learning,” she outlined, “moves us further

Co-Creative Perceptions Vs Reality

- No professional researcher required
- Groups are more creative than individuals
- “Democratizing” research is ideal

away from the external structures and protocols that traditionally contain and control research. Many researchers have already evolved into this emergent way of working, however, there is little theory to fall back on and few ground rules.”

Keegan added that traditional methodologies have built-in controls to minimize bias. “As an iterative process, co-creative has fewer external constraints to neutralize these biasing factors because there is little theory in qualitative

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RCR Ratings Explanation: “Freshness” - Based on whether this content has previously been covered by any RFL newsletters; “Relevance” - The current importance of this content to the research industry; “Practicality” - The ease of implementation of suggestions expressed in this presentation.

research that directly addresses this type of co-creation.

“In many co-creation teams,” Keegan continued, “individual members work at cross-purposes, with differing degrees of personal power and different agendas. Achieving true synergy and alignment around a common goal and shared vision is elusive. It is assumed—or hoped—that ideas will emerge spontaneously through participants’ interactions,” she observed.

“But lack of external structure or leadership is as likely to lead to chaos as to creativity,” she insisted. “We need to develop a theory of what happens when *teams*—as opposed to individuals—learn through discussion and dialogue, so we can distinguish group intelligence from groupthink.”

“Co-creation as iterative learning is not easy,” she said. “Discipline and control comes less from external constraints and more from the personal and shared awareness, qualities, skills and diverse experiences of individual participants—and how they interact with one another and form a team.

“We need a new research model,” asserted Keegan, “in which all processes of inquiry, evaluation, development, testing of hypotheses and formulation of ideas and concepts happen *at the same time*.” To achieve this end, Keegan suggested focusing on four key areas:

- Structure: Building an appropriate environment for creativity to flourish (e.g., psychological safety and freedom)
- Fostering diversity and independence of thought to reduce groupthink
- “Reflection-in-action”: Using past knowledge and expertise, experimentation, reflection, theorizing and hypothesis generation in the current situation
- Having the “leader” act as designer of the creative process (e.g., introducing creative tasks, working on problem definition and fostering incubation of ideas). ☉

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