Creative Research Techniques: Developing New Insights

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Introductions
What is research?

Do we uncover research findings
or
Do we create research outcomes?

...... or both?
Exercise 1
My position is.....

Research outcomes are created, but they have to be grounded in shared 'reality'

Research and creativity are part of the same process
and...

The ultimate role of research is to help clients make business/organisational decisions using whatever research methodologies are appropriate and justifiable
Traditional research focuses on:

- Gathering data
- Testing hypotheses
- Rational, verbal responses
- Collating findings
- Drawing conclusions
- Implementing results
This assumes that:

• People are conscious of, and in control of, their thoughts and actions
• They can adequately express and explain their behaviour
• Emotions/feeling/physiology have little impact
In reality

- As human beings we are complex, contradictory, often unfathomable
- Influenced by context, mood, conflicting needs, hormones etc
- Largely unaware of what drives and motivates us
Recent research emphasises this...

• We cannot make rational decisions without emotional input; we react and then think (Damasio)

• Low level processing (Earls)

• “We think in the cognitive unconscious 95% of the time” (Zaltsman)

etc., etc.
So

Given this, how can we even attempt to understand people’s drives and needs and make sense of them in a way that is of use to our clients?
...The elephant in the dark!!

.... The iceberg
Exercise 2
We need to start from where people are...

- Accept the messiness & contradiction
- Understand that emotion plays a large part in thinking/behaviour
- Go beyond the verbal
- Acknowledge that the researcher is integral; the 'creative director'
Where to then?
Creative Research exists on many levels:

1. A way of thinking and ‘being’
2. How we define the research ‘problem’
3. Methodological approaches
4. Enabling and psychographic techniques
5. How we communicate the outcomes
But......

Unless the methodology and techniques are adopted within a creative orientation to research, the outcome is likely to be mechanistic

“What psycho-graphic techniques do you use, then?”
A creative way of being

“Creative behaviour is that which demonstrates uniqueness and value in its product. Creativity is thus a function of knowledge, imagination and evaluation. Without knowledge there obviously can be no productive creativity.”

Sidney Parnes
A creative way of 'being'

• Curiosity, awareness
• Reflection, reflexivity; challenging self
• Openness to other ideas
• Deferred judgement (incubation)
• Making connections, using ‘knowledge filters’
• Tolerating ambiguity and diversity
• Working with imperfect ‘data’, developing knowledge
Exercise 3
A creative way of ‘being’

“In modern commercial research, the mind of the researcher has finally been acknowledged as admissible data. Prior knowledge, pragmatism, experience are all robust grist to the ‘holistic’ research”

Virginia Valentine
Semiotic Solutions
A creative way of being

This means developing self awareness, emotional intelligence, critical faculties, creative discipline as essential research skills
A creative way of being

“When someone once asked Leonardo da Vinci what his greatest accomplishment was, he replied, “Leonardo da Vinci!”

Sidney Parnes
How we define the problem

"The mere formulation of a problem is far more often essential than its solution, which may be merely a matter of mathematical or experimental skill. To raise new questions, new possibilities, to regard old problems from a new angle requires creative imagination and marks real advances in science."

Albert Einstein
How we define the problem

- Too often we accept the client’s definition of the problem
- But it is difficult to see clearly from ‘inside’
- We have a useful research role in helping our clients to explore and then decide on problem definition
How we define the problem

Re-defining by:
- Asking “Why?”
- By a broader restatement
- Changing the verb
- Broadening the problem
- Wording the problem more effectively
Exercise 4
Methodological Approaches

Starting afresh:

- Who do we need to talk to? Talk to first?
- Where do we find them? Convene them?
- What might we need to understand?
- What environment/s are we most likely to develop this understand?
Methodological Approaches

• All methodologies can be used/interpreted creatively
• None are ‘better’ than others - they just differ in appropriateness
• Beware of fashion! Lots of really good work has been achieved in focus groups
Methodological approaches

• But, context is important - what context/s are most likely to give you the understanding you need?
• How best to relate to your research participants?
• Can you develop material which will help your client understand their market?
• Should you involve clients in the research process?
Exercise 6
Methodological approaches

• I will concentrate on two approaches

• The creative content can be adapted to most other methodologies
Methodological Approaches

• Creative Workshops

• Breakthrough Events
Creative Workshops

- Forum specifically for developing new ideas and directions
- May be a mix of 'consumers', clients, 'creatives'
- Positioned as 'creative session' not research
Creative Workshops

- Recruitment is key
- Heterogeneity is usually best
- Participants screening for 'creativity'
- Prepare people for creative participation
- It needs time and space (3+ hours)
- Structure is paramount
Creative Workshops

Conditions for the Workshop:

- Psychological Safety
- Psychological Freedom
- Changing the frame of reference
- Incubation; deferred judgement
- Clear structure
Creative Workshops

Structure:

- Getting to know you
- Finding a voice
- Defining the problem
- Generating as many ideas as possible
- Building on other peoples ideas
- Developing, screening, short-listing
Breakthrough Events

• Day long events
• More psychologically demanding
• Team of facilitators
• Environment is critical
• Participants often emotionally challenged
• Usually need psychological expertise
Breakthrough Events

- Preparatory activities, pre-event
- More thorough screening
- Recognise that this will affect people
- Structure and flexibility essential
- Importance of satisfactory closure for participants
Enabling & Psycho-graphic Techniques

• Getting beyond the rational
• Accessing the less accessible
• Expressing embarrassing or anti-social views
• Exploring the personal in a social context
• Offering a structure to make it easier
When are they useful?

- To give a fresh perspective on heavily researched areas
- Looking for new directions/ideas
- When there’s limited time/access
- To provide more holistic understanding for client
Range of techniques

• Enormous
• Can be very simple or very complex
• Usage should be dictated by the research situation, i.e. not prescriptive
• Work best when participants interpret/work with them
Projective Questioning

Taking the focus off:
- 'Me'
- The present
- Rational explanations
Projective Questioning

- What would X think of that?
- What do you think it will be like in 10 years time?
- What would your ideal be?
Word Association

Disrupting causal associations:
- Encourages spontaneity
- Silliness promotes creativity
- Introduces emotion, non-obvious links
- e.g. ‘forced coupling’
Exercise 7
Word Association

- List ten uses of a brick in 1 minute
- How are a banana and a nail similar?
- Round Robin associations to 'bread'
- Card sort product attributes
- Colour/smell/taste etc associated with X
Sentence Completion
Sentence completion

If I had a million pounds........
When I stop work........
By the end of this year I want......
The best thing about Smarties......
I hate/love washing up because....
Brand Personalities
Brand Personalities

What would an X car/man/dog be like?
What would they wear?
What job would he/she do?
So, why do you say this?
What does this mean?
Brand Mapping
Brand Mapping

• How can different brands be positioned in relation to each other?
• What do they share/how do they differ?
• What are the attributes by which they are measured?
Thought Bubbles
END OF CONFERENCE
C Vs/Obituaries
Exercise 8
C. U. Guardian

Name

Tristan Goodstock

Age / Sex / Status

26: Male: Single

Job

Lecturer in Social Sciences

Car

2cv

Hobbies / Interests

Football

Food

Italian

Holiday

Scandinavia
C.U.  PUNCH

Name  SIDNEY

Age/sex/status  57½  MALE  UNSURE

Job  EARLY RETIRED LECTURER
     FROM P.E. COLLEGE

Car  SMALL RED ONE

Hobbies/interests  BEER - WINE - SPIRITS

Food  'PLAIN' DURING WEEK
       SPLASHES OUT OVER W/E
Life Graphs
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Start Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reminders for this week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Psycho-Drawing
Exercise 9
Psycho-Drawing

- You need to be confident and reassuring
- Only ask people to do things you would do yourself
- Stress artistic ability is not relevant
- Get people to explain their drawings
Bank Manager: You swine overdraft again.

Building Society: "Come on in."

Large smile "7½% interest"
With + Without a Headscarf

Without

"I equate not having any on as being Hamish - my husband won't wear them and by the end of the day, he starts to smell - it's very sexist, macho."
"This cone has been made into an animal. There's another animal chasing it and trying to get all the ice cream out of it, but it keeps running away and it can't... he keeps hitting it and more ice-cream comes out of it and he keeps running away"
SCHOOL FEES

UNIVERSITY

COST OF LIVING

NOW

1 YR

FREE 0 LAST.
IF IT ALL WENT WRONG 4 ME

P.S. (Note: Reflections on the drawing suggest it might be 4 ME.)

WIFE  OTHER  KIDS

$  £  $
Mood Boards/Picture Sorts
Mood boards/picture sorts

• Best if people do it in groups
• Monitor; make sure people are engaged. If not, encourage/join in
• Keep up the pace; don’t allow too long
• Have a spokesperson, but allow others to add alternative interpretations
MULTI-FACETED

"different foods, different shoes..... it's about moods"

"variety"

"tempting offering"

"different offers in different circumstances"
TRUST AND SUPPORT

8 hours

you trust with your life

"cared for"

"secure and warm"

"no worries"

"provide comfort"

"plan for the future"

"will mature"

"complete trust"

"warm feeling"
What we want in next 10 years

1. Health
2. Solvent
3. Retired
4. Contentment
5. Happiness
6. Travel
7. Moved location
8. Help others
9. Job satisfaction - change career
10. Long term illness
11. Investment in future
12. Life insurance cover
13. Secure income

Fresh 'n'

Star of the seas
Role Playing
Exercise 10
Role Play

- Only to be used when people are comfortable/relaxed
- Be precise about what you want them to do, e.g. you are bank manager and you are customer, discussing loans
- Make sure spectators contribute, encourage, take turns

Use role play as prelude to discussion
Health Warning

• It’s easy to get carried away with projectives; they are only tools to aid understanding and communication

• Sometimes they ‘work’, sometimes they don’t. If they don’t, change tack

• The facilitator needs to decide whether to use them, in situ
How we communicate the outcomes?

• Unless we can communicate our thinking, feeling and experience to our clients in a way that they can 'own' and carry on developing, we have not done our job.

• It is not easy!
How we communicate the outcomes

• ‘Presentation’ is about weaving a story which is engaging, relevant, plausible and leads somewhere...

• The researcher is the actor

• The research materials help illustrate and build the plot – and the denouement
How we communicate the outcomes
How we communicate the outcomes:
How we communicate the outcomes

- Think beyond ‘presentation’
- Is a Workshop more appropriate?
- How can you engage/involve clients?
- Can you work with them in developing the strategy?
- Can you snowball the research within the organisation?
And finally....

Don’t forget that creative research involves hard work, structure, reflection, connection, collaboration & intellectual rigour as a bedrock. Insight is (maybe) the final reward.
Further reading

Damasio, A.
De Bono, E.
Earls, M.
Ereaut, G.

Gordon, W.
Gordon, W. & Langmaid, R
Heath, R.

Holmes, C. & Keegan S.

Langmaid R. & Andrews
Parnes, S.J/

The feeling of what happens
Lateral Thinking
Welcome to the Creative Age
Analysis & interpretation in qualitative market research
Good thinking: a guide to qualitative research
Qualitative Market Research
The Hidden Power of Advertising
Current & Developing Creative Research Methods in NPD
Breakthrough Zone
Creative Behaviour Guidebook

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