

Ipsos Marketing

The Innovation and Brand Research Specialists



CREATIVITY IN QUAL:

having fun with Morrissey

(and Einstein and Jennifer Aniston)

Point of View

September 2009

Simon Riley, Research Director at Ipsos MORI, talks about the Creativity in Qual and presents a personal list of forms of creative collaboration.

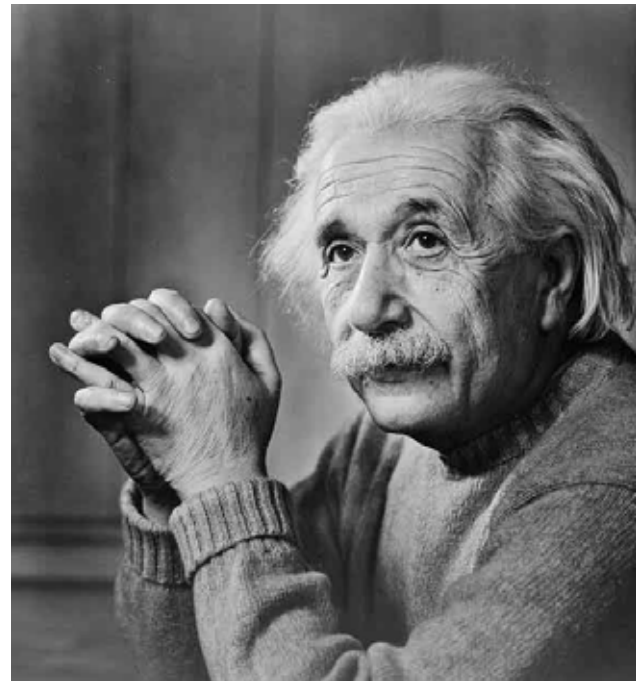
A lot of not so interesting debates have been bouncing around on whether groups can be 'really' creative: whether all really creative people are in fact of the stropky, eccentric loner variety who don't work well in groups. The truth is there are lots of different ways of being creative. The trick is to work out what type of creativity is needed when – and what kind of participant you should be asking to produce this.

Qual researchers need to be alive to as many different creative behaviours as possible, not least when thinking about recruitment. You can't expect a room full of Paul Wellers to make great music together or Syd Little to be funny on his own. Or with Eddie Large.

We all recognise that most "creative people" are not creative all the time. Their creativity needs certain conditions to be in place before it can flourish. It's true for those people we label as 'consumers' (that is all of us) too. So what gets the creative 'mojo' working?

If we qualitative researchers want to get the best out of our "creative consumers", it's worth working out what kind of creativity works for them. A list of the different forms of creative collaboration could fill a telephone directory. But for starters, in no particular order, here's a very personal list of some of the ones I think about when working with consumer creativity:

- **The Einstein** – the solo worker who drives him or herself on through some internal dynamo and needs very little external stimulus. Just don't ask him to play centre-midfield. So you wouldn't put this person in a group, you'd give them some homework with a clear objective, then debrief with them at the end.



- **The Lennon and McCartney** – for the best songs, one of them (generally Lennon, for my money) would come up with three quarters of a song idea, then give it to the other one, who would add to it, fiddle with it, then they'd both finish it off together. This worked very well until a period of excessive hair growth, much of it from Yoko Ono, caused their instruments to become entangled and they had to down tools. So here, look out for those who like to have the idea but don't always finish them and pair them up with someone who's a good adapter or other people's work.
- **The Clement and LaFrenais** – the writers of Porridge, The Likely Lads and Auf Wiedersehen Pet had a more evenly balanced partnership, bouncing ideas off each other from the character development stage right through to the script edits. This partnership in creative research terms means pairing up similarly confident but not overbearing people, who can work together without either one trying to take over.
- **The US sitcom** – the writing team of Friends was bigger than the population of Bangladesh, yet they fashioned a particularly tightly written series. And this is quite common for the most successful of the big US sitcom series. Sometimes having a big crowd of people in a room together - with a very clear idea of what is required of them – works. The funny crowd can rattle out the stories and the lines if you give them the characters and the scenario. In qual, groups of eight people can be creative together, where clearly tasked, empowered and not overburdened with big egos.
- **The Sex Pistols at the Free Trade Hall** – it was a poorly attended gig in Manchester in the late 70s, but a huge proportion of the tiny crowd went on to found the future music scene in the city, including members of The Buzzcocks, The Smiths, Joy Division and, yes, Mick Hucknall.



It's an example of how creative people (and Mick Hucknall) sometimes just need the spark of an idea to then go off and do their own thing in their own way. In our own co-creation sessions, we use a micro form of the same idea – come together at the start to share and get fired up, then diverge to create, before coming back together again.

- **The Jazz Improv** – musicians coming together with no set plan but a jazz sensibility, so they can riff off each other's meanderings. Some bits will be a wailing noise but some of it works, I am assured. Here is a team effort that segues into individual brilliance, then back and forth in and around different combinations of individuals and the team. This is how a lot of our longer creative mini-groups work. The key is to keep some kind of structure there, albeit loose, in the background, so that people can wander off with an idea while still knowing where they have to get back to.
- Not to be advised: **Shaun Ryder in the Caribbean**. Sent by Factory Records to a Caribbean island to make a new album, the Happy Mondays frontman locked himself in the loo for hours at a time to focus on his writing. Unfortunately, he also took large amounts

of crack cocaine in with him and ended up not writing anything much. Lesson: complete isolation rarely works – and don't indulge participants too much, they are there to produce. Factory Records went bust. And the list goes on. The point is, if you're serious about getting creative outputs from participants in workshops or group discussions, have a think about what creative approach is needed for what you want to achieve - and recruit participants who can be creative in that particular way. Of course there are the Stephen Fry's of this world who can turn their hand to anything. But for the rest of us, a little thought about how to get the best out of each individual goes a long way.

You also need to ask a more fundamental question: is what you need from consumers really a "creative" activity at all? Or **is it really critical analysis of other people's creative work** you need? Quite often researchers think, "We need creative respondents for this!" when actually, they need creatively aware respondents who may not be "creative" as such themselves – rather they are good critics (albeit constructive ones). The skills of a good critic are quite different from the "artist" and use different parts of the brain. Again, some people can do both; but don't rule out someone for evaluative work who's a good critic, just because they can't think of ten uses for a brick.

This is about who we recruit for creative qual. But it's also about how we go about designing our creative qual studies. In Ipsos MORI Hothouse we're looking a lot more at friendship pairs and triads as vehicles for creative development work, as well as tasking people individually. But we do think there are

creative tasks that go well with bigger groups and we do often interweave these with individual and small group creativity.

If you want to use creativity, you need to understand how to spark it, nurture it and sharpen it. And it can make the difference between our clients having a *Sgt. Pepper* of an innovation on their hands, or a *Frog Chorus* to put in the bargain bin.



About Ipsos MORI

Ipsos MORI is one of the largest and best known research companies in the UK and a key part of the Ipsos Group, a leading global research company. With a direct presence in 60 countries, our clients benefit from specialist knowledge drawn from our five global practices: public affairs research, advertising testing and tracking, media evaluation, marketing research and consultancy, customer satisfaction and loyalty.

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