

PGR Tips on creativity in research

This month Vitae organised a one day 'Creativity in research' workshop, facilitated by Dr Kevin Byron. He introduced a lot of different tools to unlock creativity, many of which we already use subconsciously. Kevin argues that being aware of and able to use more of these techniques will increase the chance of hitting on that unique idea....

Define your challenge

Remember that brainstorming the nature of a challenge or problem is just as important as brainstorming for new ideas.

Widen your interests

The more different ideas there are in your head, the more chance of unique combinations. Browse journals that are completely unrelated to your field. Network with other researchers and meet different people. Are there any ideas for your own work?

Visualisation

By drawing instead of writing you may come up with new ideas. Try describing your research to a non-specialist as a metaphorical story and see if that inspires you.

ENTRE

Familiarise yourself with the ENTRE framework for creative problem solving. It consists of three stages: enquire, transform, realise. Each stage has two steps: divergent followed by convergent thinking. In divergent thinking you come up with as many ideas as possible, which you only narrow down in the convergent phase.

SCAMPER

SCAMPER is the acronym for the different transformations you can use to galvanise creative ideas: Substitute, Combine, Adapt, Modify (ie Magnify, Minify, Multiply), Put to other uses, Eliminate and Reverse. Practice using it and use it to decode creative ideas in, for example, advertising.

Take a break

Creative ideas often occur when you are outside your working environment after an incubation period. Take regular short breaks. Make sure you use your holiday allocation (enjoy the Christmas break for example), but do not be caught off guard – take a notebook with you to record your Eureka moments!

The creative researcher booklet

The event also launched a new booklet in the Vitae Researcher series '[the creative researcher](#)' which is available to download. In it you will find an expansion of these tips, exercises and lots more.

Access this issue online at <http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/61811/Current-issue-of-PGR-Tips.html>