

# Creative Management Tools in an ESP Class

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**Abstract—** As a response to the need of Project Management students for an adequate ESP course, the teachers of English and Project Management at the »B. A. Krčelić« College of Business and Management developed an integrated teaching model which enables students to learn English and develop their PM competences and prepare for IPMA certification at the same time. A coursebook was written which included standard vocabulary exercises (fill-in, synonyms, antonyms, word pairs, matching terms and definitions etc.). However, students expressed a need to include examples from PM practice, such as case-studies, interviews, business cases, and, especially, creative management tools. Such exercises have been very well accepted by the students because they create a relaxed atmosphere and allow students to practice their management skills in addition to learning a foreign language (English in this case). This paper gives an overview of some creative management tools which can be used in an ESP classroom, such as brainstorming, brainwriting, six thinking hats, lateral thinking etc., while the workshop will give examples and show students' responses.

**Index Terms—** creative tools, ESP, project management.

## INTRODUCTION

Project management, a relatively new interdisciplinary area, is becoming more present in all aspects of business, but also in public administration, science, education etc. This has resulted in a need for educated PM professionals, and there are plenty formal and informal education and training options. The "B. A. Krčelić" College offers a certified PM specialist graduate programme, which was launched in 2006. Since then the students' need for an ESP course tailored according to their requirements has been detected and, as a response to this need, an integrated teaching model has been developed. English and PM teachers have worked together to find a way to help students learn English for project management, and to develop their PM competences and prepare for IPMA<sup>1</sup> certification at the same time.

## TEACHING MATERIALS

The integrated approach to teaching English and PM, which was first introduced in 2012 as an experimental course, produced good results so the next step had to be taken. Since there were no teaching materials for English for project management on the ESP course book market, new teaching materials had to be created. According to Paltridge and Starfield, key issues in the teaching of English for specific purposes are identifying student needs and the nature of the genres that learners need to be able to produce (Paltridge & Starfield, 2013). In the light of this, all the preparatory steps were taken and the students' opinion was given serious attention. Their request was to place their English course in the area of ESP with a strong emphasis on project management terminology. A language-centered approach to course design was then adopted, in order to produce an ESP course for Project management that would meet the students' needs. (See Fig. 1).

The teaching materials for the course were used to write a course book which focuses on vocabulary and therefore includes standard vocabulary exercises (fill-in, synonyms, antonyms, word pairs, matching terms and definitions etc.).

However, although the students appreciated the teaching materials and were very pleased to be learning something they perceived as useful, they expressed a need for examples from PM practice, such as case-studies, interviews, business cases, and, especially, creative management tools.

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<sup>1</sup> The International Project Management Association

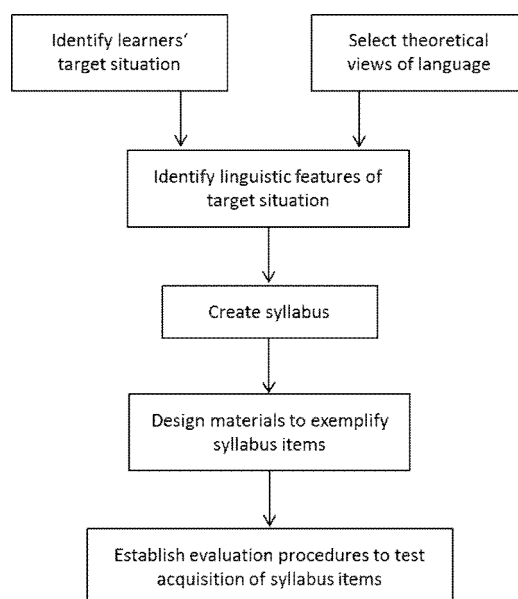


Figure 1: A language-centered approach to course design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987)

#### EMPHASIS ON CREATIVITY

Although all the requested additional activities were included in the book, the focus of this paper is on creative management tools. Creativity is defined in the ICB<sup>2</sup> as the ability to think and act in original and imaginative ways, and according to the ICB, the project manager exploits the creativity of individuals, the collective creativity of the project team and the organisation they work within to the benefit of the project (PMA ICB, 2013).

In business practice creative management tools are mainly needed to generate ideas, but they also serve to relax the team, to make the team members more connected, and to understand each other better so that the team can function as a unit in order to produce better results. Although this does not fall under the category of “learning English”, the students' request was taken into account, because it does fall under the category of ESP (and CLIL<sup>3</sup>) and is definitely relevant for the students because, according to the ICB, the project manager needs to foster processes in the team to stimulate, record, evaluate and act upon any creative ideas the team come up with which can be of benefit to the project. When problems arise in the project, the project manager needs to judge whether a creative approach is appropriate in finding a solution (IPMA ICB, 2013). Creativity in management mostly focuses on generating ideas and problem solving, and this approach has been adopted in the book and implemented in the classes.

#### CREATIVE MANAGEMENT TOOLS

Some of the techniques and tools experimented with were brainstorming, brainwriting, six thinking hats, lateral thinking and their variations.

According to the ICB, a ‘brainstorming’ session may be appropriate, where members of the project team and others in the organisation who might be able to contribute meet to have their ideas captured and subsequently evaluated. The most promising ideas are then further refined and the best chosen (IPMA ICB, 2013). However, brainstorming can be taken further – there are some variations which can help get ideas from all individuals and develop these ideas in depth. The *Stepladder Technique*, for example, improves the contribution of quieter members of the group by introducing ideas one person at a time, while *Brainwriting* uses a written approach to brainstorming to generate and develop ideas. In some specific brainstorming situations, other brainstorming techniques might be useful, such as reverse brainstorming, which is helpful for improving a product or service, *Starbursting* which helps brainstorm the questions that need to be asked to evaluate a proposal, *Round-Robin Brainstorming* (or *Roundtable Brainstorming* in its written version) that helps ensure that people will contribute great ideas without being influenced by others in the group

<sup>2</sup> IPMA International Competence Baseline

<sup>3</sup> Content and Language Integrated Learning

because it implies individual brainstorming, or *Mind-Mapping* that offers a more graphic approach to scribing responses than simply listing ideas on a flipchart.

Brainstorming, or some of its variations, is a good starting point for problem solving. Bouncing ideas back and forth with the team can result in a number of good solutions. However, the team members may still be constrained by the images they have of the current problem, or by their preconceived notions about the potential solutions. In this case some other techniques can be useful.

*Six thinking hats*, the term introduced by Edward De Bono, refers to a tool for both group discussion and individual thinking (comp. de Bono, 2000). The premise is that the human brain, when thinking, works in a number of distinct ways which can be deliberately challenged, and there are six distinct directions in which this can be done. The six directions have each been assigned a color. White refers to information and is focused on determining what the facts are. Red stands for emotions, intuitive or instinctive reactions or feelings; black is for discernment and implies caution and being conservative. Yellow represents optimistic response and refers to identifying benefits and seeking harmony. Green is the colour of creativity and blue stands for meta-thinking (thinking about thinking). Putting on a hat means choosing a thinking direction. This technique can be used to indicate problems and solutions.

*Lateral thinking* is another term coined by Edward de Bono, and refers to finding solutions through an indirect and creative process (comp. de Bono, 1970), and generating ideas that may not be reached by using only traditional approaches. According to de Bono, lateral thinking deliberately distances itself from standard creativity techniques, such as "vertical" logic (reaching the solution step-by-step from the given data) or "horizontal" imagination (having numerous ideas but not being concerned with the implementation).

*Attribute listing*, *morphological analysis* and *matrix analysis* are good techniques for finding new combinations of products or services. *Attribute listing* focuses on the attributes of an object, seeing how each attribute could be improved. *Morphological analysis* is a similar technique, but is used to create a new product by mixing components in a new way. *Matrix analysis* usually focuses on businesses and it is used to generate new approaches. These tools imply identifying the attributes of the product, service or strategy you are examining, such as components, dimensions, color, weight, style, service, skills available, etc. which are inserted in the so-called "morphological box" or "idea box". The problem is broken down into smaller elements (see Fig. 2). In the ESP context, they are a great way to practice vocabulary.

Parameters	Configurations			
	COOKIE A	COOKIE B	COOKIE C	COOKIE D
Texture	Smooth	Soft	Chunky	Soft
Consistency	Chewy	Gooey	Crunchy	Crisp
Size	Medium	Small	Large	Huge
Base	Plain	Wholemeal	Chocolate	Oatmeal
Topping	Sugar	None	Icing	Chocolate
Stuffing	Chocolate	Dates	Macadamia	Berries

Figure 2: An example of a morphological box (comp. Krogerus, Tschäppeler, 2012)

*Metaphorical thinking* means using comparisons to express ideas and solve problems. A direct comparison between two unrelated or indirectly connected notions is called a metaphor. Metaphors can create strong images that can be used to make an impact in communication. The English language is rich in metaphors and they can be used to improve communication, since they can add impact or help explain a difficult concept by associating it with a familiar one. It can also be used as a problem-solving technique because extending metaphors can help generate ideas.

When using a metaphor to link two ideas, elements that have little or no logical connection are combined. This means breaking the rules of logic, and similarly to de Bono's *six thinking hats*, metaphors can stimulate creativity because they evoke images and can put things in a new perspective. Therefore, they are useful tools for creative problem solving. In an ESP classroom, they

can be used to explain complex ideas, create impact in presentations, or just to encourage students to think outside the box.

*Provocation* is another lateral thinking technique. It involves breaking the established patterns of thinking which result from experience. It is hard to think outside these patterns so the brain needs to be provoked to think in a different and original way. This is achieved by making a shocking or outrageous statement about the problem that needs to be solved and this serves as a starting point to generate original and creative ideas. Of course, like in brainstorming, not all ideas are going to be good or feasible, but they can serve as the first step. This technique is relevant for the ESP teacher because it can be used for extending or consolidating vocabulary or practicing certain grammatical structures.

There are some other techniques that can be used to break established thought patterns, such as *challenging assumptions* (challenging an existing set of assumptions about a situation can result in a new perspective); *rewording the problem* (using different words to describe the problem can lead to new ideas because it usually implies a new perspective); *thinking in reverse* (trying to turn things upside-down, zarez e.g. instead of focusing on solving a problem, considering how a problem could be created, zarez which can bring up interesting ideas); *shifting perspective* (trying to answer a question such as "If I were ... how would I address this challenge? "); *connecting the unconnected* (randomness can provide a stimulus to the thinking process and this can be enhanced by consciously trying to connect the unconnected).

#### CONCLUSION

The ability to generate new ideas is an essential work skill. It can be learned and improved by practicing techniques that force the mind to break old thought patterns and find new angles, because whatever method is used in finding a creative solution, it involves looking at the issue from different perspectives, combining tools, knowledge, common sense, intuition and experience and applying them (IPMA ICB, 2013).

Students get a double benefit from the use of such exercises in an ESP course – they acquire a very useful business skill and practice certain language structures at the same time since these techniques can easily be adapted to fit the needs of an ESP programme. In our case, such exercises and/or experiments have been accepted very well by the students because they create a relaxed atmosphere in which students acquire language more easily, and their creativity is unlocked. According to the ICB, creativity can be summed up as: "Reach for the impossible and achieve the unlikely!" (IPMA ICB, 2013) and this attitude is very welcome in an ESP classroom.

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Published as submitted by the authors.