EXCURSIONS

The concept of an *excursion* was developed by W.J.J.Gordon and G.M.Prince as an important element of the *Synectics* (q.v.) method that they developed. Indeed Prince (1970) defines 'excursion' as: 'The development of metaphorical material during a Synectics session'. However, the idea is now very widely used, and as Prince's definition suggests, is really an attempt to use metaphor as an aid to creativity in a systematic way.

Excursions can be used in solo or group work. The core procedure is simple:

1. *Problem statement* Develop or select an agreed and understood problem statement by any suitable method.

2. *Select trigger object or situation* Set the problem aside, and select some different (perhaps related) stimulus object or situation that shifts the focus away from the problem. The intention is to create a context very different from the problem, so that it is less likely to share the mental sets that you have about the problem. There are many different ways to do this (see below).

3. *Examination* Start writing down all you know about the trigger – still without any regard to the problem. As well as factual information about it, it can often help to record subjective things about it – personal reaction and memories, stories you have heard about it, etc. Aim for interesting or intriguing information.

4. *Force fit* Now remind yourself of the original problem, and begin to make connections from the information about the trigger back to the problem. Prince suggests four ways to do this in a group setting:

   • Ideas may just emerge, they may seem to come from nowhere specific, just from the general stimulation of the examination. See *Free association*.

   • If the group members are slow to respond, the facilitator may suggest one or two deliberately weak solutions, to break the ice and to encourage the contributors to feel that they can do better!

   • There may be a more or less direct parallel, or it may be possible to force one.

   • If the group is really stuck, the facilitator may propose some 'solution' that, though suggested by the examination is nevertheless absolutely outrageous (in the general spirit of *Bunch of bananas* – q.v.).

FUNCTION
Exploring
Defining
Gathering
Generating
Grouping
Screening
Prioritising
Planning
Full process

RESOURCES
1(–2) people
Large group
Brief
Extended
Facilitation skills
Special setting
Computing

PROBLEM
Personal
Multiple issues
Stakeholders
New product
Futures/plans

ANALYTIC MODE
Categorising
Causality
Checklist/table
Combinatorial
Mapping
Numerical
Questioning
Reframing
Scanning
Scenarios/views
Surveys, etc.
Uses experts
Voting

INTUITIVE MODE
Analogy
Distortion
Excursion
Hitch-hiking
Imagery
Kinaesthetic
Listening
Pictures
Relaxation
Role-play/empathy
Subconscious
Values
Verbal
Wishing

SOCIAL MODE
Ad hoc/covert
Anything goes!
Debate/dialogue
Game
Interactive events
Moving about
Networking
Nominal
Starter's kit

Types of excursion

Almost anything can be used to provide material that can in principle be interpreted metaphorically. Some useful possibilities include:

- *Examples* Think of examples of similar situations.

- *Analogies* (q.v.)

- *Career excursion* Imagine you are in a totally different job. *Rolestorming* (q.v.) and *Super-heroes* (q.v.) are variants on this.

- *Representation in other media* For example*, Sculptures* (q.v.), *Pictures as idea triggers* (q.v.), *Greetings cards* (q.v.). You could even just let yourself doodle for a while, and use the result as the trigger material.

- *Random stimuli of various kinds* (q.v.)

- *Street excursion* Go for a walk, and find something that captures your interest. This combines elements of 'other media' and 'random stimuli'.

- *Essential paradox or book title* The tensions contained in a paradox can often be creative and attention grabbing. Often the essence of a trigger situation can be captured in a two-word paradox, e.g. 'dependable intermittency' for a ratchet, or 'plentiful scarcity' for a staff recruitment problem.

You can, of course, stack several excursions, perhaps each of a different kind, one on top of the other – so that items from the Examination of the first trigger are used to generate another trigger with its own examination, and so on.

Prince, G.M. (1970) *The Practice of Creativity*, New York, Collier Macmillan, Chapter 5

Nolan, V. (1989) *The Innovator's Handbook*, London, Sphere

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