

Inspiration and imagination

In this issue, we unabashedly celebrate the creativity of research. "What's that" you say, "creativity and research – do they even belong in the same sentence together?"

You may be forgiven for your cynicism. Indeed, two very distinguished people interviewed in these pages would share your view. John Seely Brown, the noted Xerox PARC guru, opines that market research is a "rear view mirror", while Pieter Nota, Beiersdorf's CMO cautions us "not to expect too much" from research where creativity is concerned.

We beg to differ. Indeed, I would say that we are experiencing what is probably the most creative period in market research since the 1970s. As has been the case since the dawn of our profession, we are mostly achieving this through the cheerful plunder of disciplines other than our own. This time, we are rummaging through the toolboxes of anthropology, ethnography, behavioural economics and the neurosciences and allying what we find with new technologies to produce new methodologies that are capable of providing insights that otherwise would have remained hidden.

But, to prove our case, we need to define what we mean by creativity. Across a number of articles and a variety of authors, we can discern

some common patterns and strands of thought: creativity is curiosity that leads to innovation; it is the ability to immerse oneself outside one's comfort zone and learn from the creative tension that results; it is the product of deep listening and entrepreneurial rapid iteration and experimentation. And, critically, it is the ability to tell the story to what Gofman unflatteringly calls the "cavemen in the corner office".

This last definition of what constitutes creativity – the ability to tell stories – is increasingly becoming central to the definition of success in research. After all, if we can't tell the story, it does not matter how many shattering insights we have. Insight is not insight if it does not result in a change in behaviour. Indeed, storytelling should be considered part of our core identity. If advertising people tell the advertiser's story to the people, we are the ones who tell the people's story to the advertisers.

It is not enough, however, to know what creativity is in research. How do we apply it? How do we make it a part of the culture? There is a sneaking suspicion that the research industry has, in the past, actively suppressed creativity. As Jared Heyman puts it, "our industry attracts the curious and then tends to reward the analytical." To help us embed creativity into the fabric

of the profession, David Smith and Patrick Young lay out a very convincing framework that mates creative insight generation with scientific rigour and business pragmatism. Others, such as Vivek Banerji and Daniel Wain, urge us to reconsider what 'training' and 'learning' mean, while searching out 'Pragmatic Polymaths' in our recruitment programmes.

Contrary to popular perception, this is a highly creative industry, with innovation and creative thinking reaching heights today not seen for years. Outside of the advertising profession, I would venture to guess that we employ more creatives than any other marketing business. And I would further hazard that we are deploying our creativity more effectively and more excitingly than ever before.

Now that is something to celebrate! **RW**