

# Procter & Gamble, Cranfield University

A digital tool that manages ideas and helps large companies to support smaller ones

## About the Project

What is an idea? On the surface it's a simple question, but dig a little deeper and the complexities soon become apparent. This question is the basis of a collaboration between Procter & Gamble and Cranfield University. They are examining the whole concept of managing ideas, what a good idea is, where it comes from and how to develop it more successfully. How can a big company support small companies to grow through innovation and knowledge transfer, and subsequently grow new opportunities?



Over the last 20 years, organisations have been moving away from a system that saw innovation embedded within their business, and are starting to look to external sources. How to best use those resources is a challenge. While there are pockets of good practice, there has been an ever-present need for an effective way of managing them. By exploring the interrelationship between

external and internal innovation capability technology, this collaboration will develop a digital tool to help people connect and pull together best practice in this area.

Procter & Gamble is a world leader in developing better interaction with external capabilities. They have worked with the Centre for Competitive Creative Design (C4D) at Cranfield University for over three years. Recently, they supported the creation of a global design research lab, and so working on this project together seemed a natural extension.

## Benefits of Funding

Professor Simon Bolton, Creative Director of C4D at Cranfield University, saw the funding call advertised in the Creative Industries KTN's newsletter and knew it would be a perfect match for this project. EPSRC's funding has created a different type of PhD experience which is both industrially and academically focused. Even though the work on idea management is highly theoretical, having an industry link gives it a solid 'real world' grounding and provides an opportunity for case study and experiment where many academic studies often struggle.

## Results

The project is now coming towards the end of the first year. The time spent in researching existing idea management techniques has

“Funding is a critical concern for UK students and makes supporting them very difficult. What's brilliant about the ICASE Awards is that they give home students access to funding.”

Professor Simon Bolton, Director,  
Centre for Competitive Creative Design,  
Cranfield University

shown confusion in one key area: people have different interpretations about what an idea is and articulate it in different ways, even within the same organisation. From realising this basic issue, the researchers have found that successful long-term relationships evolve thanks to an understanding of culture and language, and that therefore their digital tool needs to facilitate a faster evolution of these insights.

There are two projected outcomes to the research. Firstly, a stronger knowledge of how organisations can better integrate external capabilities into their own idea generation processes. Secondly, developing ways in which organisations can be more involved in front-end activities.

A pilot study will be the next major step, seeing how trends actually take place in practice and watching the interrelationship between businesses. Although seemingly an esoteric subject, by streamlining the process whereby big companies support smaller companies, the market for this project is vast, potentially encompassing anyone working in a business.

## Fast Facts

**Sector:** Software

**Funding Source:** EPSRC ICASE Awards

**Total Project Value:** £88,000

**Duration:** Sep 2011 - April 2015

**Market Impact:** By streamlining how big companies support SMEs, the market for this project is vast, potentially encompassing anyone working in a business.

**Creative Industries KTN input:** CIKTN was allocated studentships by EPSRC, and shortlisted the six successful applications.