

Innovation Sandpit

Case Study of the 5 day event run for the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) to generate innovative ideas

The Challenge

This 5 Day EPSRC Sandpit addressed the connections between WATER, ENERGY and FOOD with the purpose of defining and agreeing funded research projects to:

- Explore all three issues together
- Explore the impact of bringing these issues together to make a real difference in the UK and globally
- Recognise the value of working in interdisciplinary teams
- Generate innovative ideas and connections

What we did:

Facilitated a five day process that concentrated on enabling a wide spectrum of different disciplines to effectively communicate about the breadth of this challenge. Our process engaged effectively and deeply with a range of very knowledgeable stakeholders and it freed the mental shackles of traditional thinking to enable transdisciplinary* research

* A research strategy that crosses many disciplinary boundaries to create a holistic approach

STEP ONE: Connect the People

Using our Datawall space, populated by pre-work, crowd –sourcing, reflective thinking, numerous dialogue provoking exercises, connections, we enabled the 26 participants to uncover predictable and unpredicted linkages between themselves which were very relevant to researching the Water, Energy, Food Nexus.



STEP TWO: Engage with the Topic

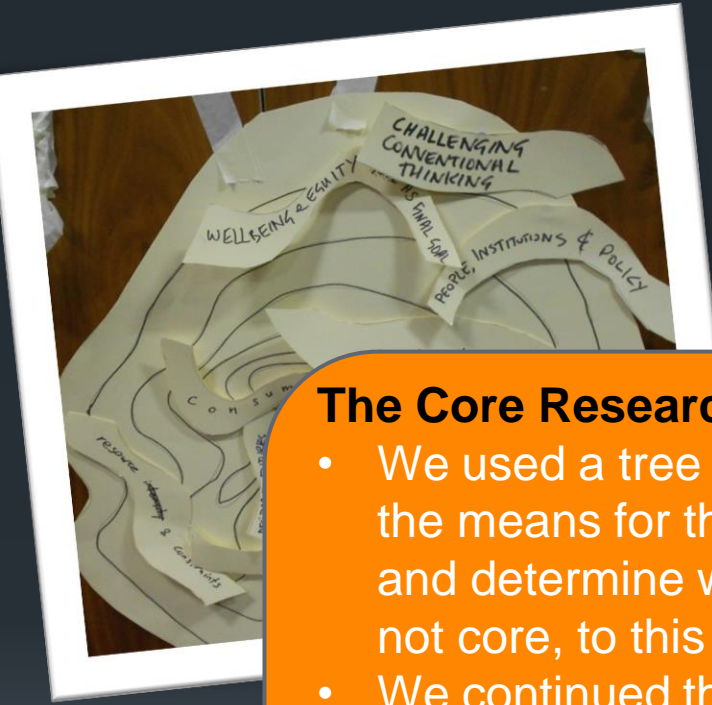


Stakeholders

We engaged with a very knowledgeable group of Stakeholders, each with a perspective on the topic, water, energy, food, policy, regulation and research;

The process enabled the participants to engage with the various views, the ambiguity and the breadth of the topic.

STEP THREE: Define the Research



The Core Research Themes

- We used a tree / forest metaphor as the means for the group to discuss and determine what was core, and not core, to this Nexus sandpit.
- We continued the metaphor to articulate themes and questions that could be investigated, thereafter a web of ideas emerged as a result of our river jumping stimuli to creative thinking.



STEP FOUR: Transdisciplinary Groups



To maximise the possibility of transdisciplinary research projects emerging, the Facilitators maintained a high degree of fluidity within the group.

We encouraged the participants to retain ambition, embrace risk and to challenge themselves to create holistic approaches that spanned disciplinary boundaries.

The Results: Successful Projects



The Results

- A range of exciting, relevant projects were developed and the evaluation panel decided to commit the funding to a number of these.
- In addition all attendees recognised that there is further potential to research the critically important and intriguing Nexus of Water, Energy and Food.

What did they say?



Truly amazing organisation for a type of event that is not easy to manage with such precision

Jean-Francois Mercure; University of Cambridge

Excellent facilitation! Skilful use of activities to involve all participants and shepherd us towards a successful conclusion

David Howard, NERC Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

The facilitators put in a huge amount of effort and worked so hard. You really made this Sandpit work.

Paul Kemp: University of Southampton

Very professional organisation, facilitators very helpful. The events and activities they devised did push the participants.

Marian Scott; University of Glasgow

Facilitators did an amazing job, true professionals

Shaun Larcom, University of London

The facilitation was excellent and imaginative. It gave me many ideas to try to incorporate in my own work

Markus Owen, University of Nottingham

This is the perfect Sandpit approach! Friendly, continuous but discreet support really makes for a smooth week

Michele Acuto, UCL

“It was an excellent week and I was very pleased with the effort you and the team put in. I can honestly say we couldn’t have done it without you.”

Rob Felstead, EPSRC



If you would like to discuss ways of generating innovative research or product ideas with diverse teams of people in your organisation then please do get in touch, we would love to talk!

Ring: 08456 210008 (this will take you to a voice mail box if we are all out at an event so please just leave a message and we will respond in 24 hours)

Email: christinebell@centreforfacilitation.co.uk