



a creative
momentum
project

CREATIVE2CREATIVE MATCHING

A MODEL FOR TRANSNATIONAL PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING

SUMMARY

MAY 2018


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SUMMARY & KEY LESSONS

Creative2Creative Matching is a peer-to-peer mentoring process developed under 'a creative momentum project'. The process pairs creative entrepreneurs from the Arts, Crafts, Design, and Media & Technology sectors from different countries. The process is based on a set of guidelines proposing that each matched pair should work together online over a six-month period (approx. two hours a month) to share their knowledge and experiences of working in different countries.

The Creative2Creative Matching process was led by Lapland University of Applied Sciences (Lapland UAS). The regions who participated in the process were:

- Northern Finland
- Mid-Sweden
- South East of Northern Ireland
- West of Ireland

The project partner organisations implementing the process were:

- Lapland UAS
- Technichus Mid-Sweden Ltd
- Armagh City, Banbridge, and Craigavon Borough Council (ACBC) on behalf of South East Economic Development
- Western Development Commission (WDC)

STARTING THE PROCESS

From preliminary investigations led by Lapland UAS, it emerged that mentoring is mainly provided for students, start-ups or well developed businesses (generation replacement, growing businesses or new innovative enterprises). There were no region or industry-specific programmes available; multiple methodologies existed and there did not seem to be a methodology specifically tailored to the creative industries sector.

Given the transnational focus of 'a creative momentum project', project partners agreed to develop an activity centred on *peer-to-peer mentoring* which matched two creative entrepreneurs from different countries as a way of growing international links and facilitating knowledge transfer across partner regions. A Model and set of implementation guidelines were developed by Lapland UAS offering information about the step-by-step process and some do's and don'ts. Guidelines included templates for each matched pair to set objectives, end the process and information about digital tools for collaboration.

It was agreed that each matched pair would be assigned a regional co-ordinator:

- Lapland UAS: Saira Puukko
- Technichus: Kristina Jeppson
- SEED: Niall Drew

- WDC: Silvia Guglielmini

MATCH-MAKING

Creative entrepreneurs were selected to participate through four open calls for applications. The project received 57 applications and matched 48 creative entrepreneurs (23 pairs). The majority of applications came from the West of Ireland (42%) and SEED (29%).

Creative entrepreneurs applied via Google Forms. The application form was designed to collect details about each entrepreneur and better understand their 1) key strengths 2) development needs and 3) overall motivation/objectives. Creative entrepreneurs also had the opportunity to indicate whether they wanted to be matched with someone from a particular *creative field* or *region*. More than half of applicants respondents (57%) did not express any particular preference with regard to the creative field of their potential match. The majority (70%) did not have any specific requirements concerning the geographical location of their 'match'. Twelve applicants indicated 'Mid-Sweden' as their preferred region.

The matching process was challenging because of the imbalance in the number of applications from different regions. Due to a lack of suitable candidates, it was impossible to find a match for all applicants. Once a match was made, regional co-ordinators emailed each entrepreneur separately, to seek approval. If both entrepreneurs approved the proposed 'match', regional co-ordinators sent an introductory email to connect the two entrepreneurs.

FACILITATION

When submitting an application for the Creative2Creative Matching programme, creative entrepreneurs agreed to carry out the process independently, i.e. without the support of a third party. Regional co-ordinators were to be seen as the first point of contact for a 'match', should issues emerge. However in January 2017, due to a lack of progress with many matches, partners agreed to contract one external consultant for each region to facilitate communication and collaboration between the matched creatives. 'a creative momentum project' recruited the following consultants:

- Northern Finland: Oulu Business Networks (OBN)
- SEED: Brilliant Red
- West of Ireland: SCCUL Enterprises CLG (SCCUL) through a network of mentors called *Bizmentors*.

Due to budget issues, Techichus did not contract any external consultant. As Swedish creatives were paired with professionals from the West of Ireland, the WDC and SCCUL Enterprises CLG were responsible for facilitating these matches.

Ultimately half of the 'matched pairs' – 12 of the 23 – completed the Creative2Creative Matching programme, most of them thanks to the input of external consultants.

FEEDBACK FROM CREATIVE ENTREPRENEURS

To collect feedback on the process, 'a creative momentum project' developed an online survey. Participants were asked to complete this survey and submit a final report on their overall experience with Creative2Creative Matching. The project received twelve (12) responses to the online survey, nine (9) written reports and two (2) participants were also interviewed about their experiences. In addition, conversations between regional co-ordinators and applicants have been a further source of feedback for the project.

The results of the feedback survey are given in Section 6. From the feedback gathered, it emerged that changes in personal and professional schedules often prevented creatives from establishing connections. Sometimes one party was unresponsive, causing the other party to lose motivation. Most participants were comfortable with digital tools such as Google Hangouts, Skype, What's App, Facebook and emails. Digital tools were important for creatives to establish and manage their connection. Language constituted a barrier for some.

Establishing a common set of goals was a necessary condition for collaboration. Participant feedback was broadly positive in saying that pairs formulated common objectives. Most (83%) agreed that the objectives set were realistic and that they were revised as necessary (75%). The majority of participants were also satisfied about the participation of their match. At the same time, pressures created by wider demands of their business impacted on their own ability to participate in the process effectively, but that adaptations were made to maintain communication.

A similar professional background was an important condition for the establishment of durable connections. Involving creatives working in the same creative field, but through different styles and with different business models, can be beneficial.

External consultants were seen as a positive addition by the majority of creatives (75%) who completed the online survey. The feedback survey also assessed if the external consultant helped set common objectives and review outcomes. The majority of feedback was good, however some (25%) were unhappy with this part of the process.

According to survey respondents, the top five achievements of the Creative2Creative Matching process for them were:

1. New contacts (83%)
2. Connections with like-minded entrepreneurs, on an international scale (83%)
3. Exploration of joint projects (75%)
4. Learning from someone else who is running a business (75%)
5. Time to reflect on own business and its future (67%)

Creative2Creative Matching was also effective in creating connections that should sustain beyond 'a creative momentum project's' funded lifetime. According to the online survey, most participants (92%) intend to stay in touch with their 'match'. Some mentioned specific plans including face-to-face meetings or ideas for joint projects, though no timeline has been provided yet.

Funding represented an issue for creatives who would like to further explore their connection and eventually work on a joint project.

IMPROVING THE MODEL

Developing a Model for peer-to-peer mentoring was one of the objectives of the Creative2Creative Matching activity. Peer-to-peer mentoring has proven a useful concept. However, lack of time can affect the way in which entrepreneurs (especially sole traders) engage with the activity. Creating compatible 'matches' is crucial: participants must feel that the time spent together is worthwhile and that they are involved in a mutually beneficial knowledge exchange.

To create the 'perfect' match, regional co-ordinators must set aside time to thoroughly analyse all applications and, sometimes, set up face-to-face meetings. It would be good if applicants could select their own 'match' from the outset. For example, online application forms could include public lists of participants (anonymous profiles with skills) and tools for quick conversations (e.g. chat).

The Model should consider face-to-face meetings as a crucial next step to evolve the online Creative2Creative Matching process to stronger collaboration and knowledge transfer. It may be good to 'reward' successful matches by providing an opportunity to meet in person to develop a joint project, especially if this project is listed as one of the objectives shared by the 'match'.







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