

Letter to the Editor from Brian Campbell

TRIZ User Groups

This article is based mainly on my experiences with Ian Mitchell's NW TRIZ Group and is prompted by my helping to set up a SW TRIZ Group at present. It would be interesting to hear from other people's experience – particularly user groups within organisations.

The NW TRIZ Users Group has been running for a number of years now. It was set up and still run by Ian Mitchell of Ilford Imaging. The group tends to meet twice a year on a very informal basis. Members of the group take it in turns to act as host and meetings last a few hours. The agenda tends to be determined by the requests of members. Subjects ranged from software to ASIT, from problem definition to case studies; although the key benefit (to me at least) was to be able to meet and talk to fellow practitioners. Membership is free as the costs are minimal; all communication is by e-mail and Ian acts willingly as unpaid secretary, mentor, adviser and generally inspiring figure head.

The membership is mainly from industry, but with one university involved and also a local Business Link adviser.

So what are the benefits?

Learning from others – I found it very useful particularly in the early days to talk to people actually using TRIZ. It speeded up the learning process dramatically for me. It is also rewarding to now give advice to others just starting on the TRIZ journey.

Case studies – the very act of just having someone describe how they had solved a real problem using TRIZ was invaluable. Being able to question a problem solver directly was much more useful than countless text book examples. It can also help to bridge the credibility gap with a sceptical boss or manager. To be able to point out that companies X, Y and Z use TRIZ **and these are the contacts** is very useful.

Comparing differing approaches – it is always illuminating to see how others approach a problem. What may appear to be a 40 principles type of problem might be seen by another to be a trends problem. Others might even see S-fields as the way forward.

Networking – it improves ones contacts in other technical fields or businesses.

By way of concluding this note, let me give you an example which neatly encapsulates the benefits.

When we (glassmakers) first met with Ian's team (Photographic products) we talked through a glass making problem – how to detect a faulty roller on our float lines. With ~100 rollers at temperatures ranging from 600 to 200 centigrade this was a major headache. On setting out the problem to Ian's team and being told the line ran continuously for in excess of 10 years the team as one asked "how do you change a roller if you don't stop the line". We were able to provide them information on this. They also had a solution of how they detected a faulty roller on their production line. An excellent example of how progress is made exploiting techniques from other fields.

So make contact with your local group. If there isn't one, set one up and keep us all informed on how you progress.

Inaugural Meeting of the SW TRIZ Users Forum will take place on Wednesday 3rd December at 18:30 at Plymouth University (Yealm Room, Babbage Building). Dr. Paul Filmore is running a TRIZ course at the same venue during the day. For more information:
www.plymouth.ac.uk/triz

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