Front End and New Product Concept Development: An insider action research study of FMCG products in a multi-national organization

by

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Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration.

June 2008
Abstract

The aim of this study is to gain a deeper understanding on the application of the first stage of the innovation funnel and on the gaps in knowledge through an analysis and synthesis of the NPD and the Front End literature. Within this literature it has been found that different authors propose different steps for the innovation funnel. These steps are discussed and then synthesized and classified under three major stages namely: Ideas/Concepts (Stage 0), Feasibility/Capability (Stage 1), Launch (Stage 2). It is the Ideas/Concepts (Stage 0) stage that is the area of concern of this action research study. There is a general awareness of certain problems and success factors during the front end. However, this stage remains "fuzzy"; these activities of the early stage for fast consumer goods are the least explicit and a deeper understanding is needed through further research (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998).

The research explores "Front End and New Product Development: An insider action research of FMCG products in a multi-national organization". Such a research employs a constructivist approach to reveal the stages and the success factors at the international Front End, as perceived by Subject Matter Experts in international innovation, to develop a new International Product Concept Model and to apply it in a multi-national organization.

The overall aims of this inquiry are:

- To critically analyse the approaches taken at the Front End and the factors that influence the successful implementation of the Front End within the organization.
- To inductively develop a Front End product concept development model.
- To link literature and research of NPD and Front End with practical insights and perspectives.

In order to understand and recommend solution to the senior management of the European Hygiene cluster of the organization, an insider action research study has been undertaken in a spiral of planning, acting,
observing, reflecting and planning. Three key lessons are underlined regarding the successful implementation of the Front End in a multi-national FMCG organization.

Within the organizational context, approach at international Front End is a holistic and progressive framework. In the case of the international Front End, it would appear that the approach taken within the organization is not an ad hoc initiative to generate new ideas but a guiding framework for the managers involved.

The key success factors involve how not to make mistakes "en route". It is assumed that the approach at international Front End within an organization is holistic not only because it incorporates clear sequence of events, key activities and approaches but decisive factors for successful implementation.

The International Front End requires a new mindset within the organization. Organization should allow managers to step back from their everyday work and allocate time to focus on deeper understanding, observing, imagining, developing and reflecting.
Declaration of Originality

I declare that my thesis entitled "Front End and New Product Concept Development: An insider action research study of FMCG products in a multinational organization." For the degree of Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) of the University of Surrey, embodies the results of an original research programme undertaken by me. I have included specific references to my work, by me or other sources, whether published or not.

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## Abbreviations and Glossary

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<td>ACTA</td>
<td>Applied Cognitive Task Analysis (ACTA) consists of a set of methods designed to help the researcher who has not been trained in cognitive psychology to extract information about the cognitive demands and skills from experts required for the task.</td>
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<td>Action Research</td>
<td>The research method which involves a team of individuals who cycle through a spiral of stages including planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action continually monitoring the results of the activity of each stage.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Applied Ethnography</td>
<td>The qualitative research tradition of ethnography which aims at creating research skills, and methods to create deep understanding of activities and populations of interest for commercial purposes one of which is product innovation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPI</td>
<td>Computer Aided Personal Interviewing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concept Creation</td>
<td>The process of identifying product features, communications that interest consumers and to use that information in order to develop new concepts.</td>
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<td>Conjoint analysis</td>
<td>A product-oriented new concept development approach where multiple product concepts of unfamiliar nature.</td>
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are presented to the consumers to elicit their preferences. The goal in conjoint analysis is to find which attribute levels consumers prefer and how much they value these attributes. Conjoint analysis is recommended for technical-oriented product development.

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<tr>
<th>Constructivistic paradigm</th>
<th>The theoretical paradigm which suggests that the view of the world is not determined but intentional and the nature of the researcher and reality is interdependent.</th>
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<td>Consumer integration</td>
<td>Consumers' involvement into the Front End process as active participants</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
<td>A qualitative data reduction and sense making approach that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core categories or topics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical realism</td>
<td>The theoretical paradigm which accepts that the external setting can be accessed subjectively and, that the social and natural reality has an independent existence prior to human cognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathic Design</td>
<td>The observational method which aims at understanding the actual behaviour and environment of consumers. But unlike the focus group this method takes place in consumer's own environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>The study of knowledge, science and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnography</strong></td>
<td>The primary method of anthropology and involves the study of human cultures</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flexibility</strong></td>
<td>Flexibility into the NPD process allows changes and iteration into the process to adapt to changing market, political and regulatory environments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Formalization</strong></td>
<td>Formalization of idea generation activities includes the degree to which rules and procedures must be followed in an organization</td>
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<td><strong>Front End</strong></td>
<td>The early stage of the New Product Development process</td>
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<td><strong>Idea</strong></td>
<td>A mental construct, an abstraction that tells a story or suggests a capability</td>
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<td><strong>Idea Generation</strong></td>
<td>The systematic search for new product ideas</td>
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<td><strong>Implicit Consumer Needs</strong></td>
<td>Consumers' encountering problems with the product under study that they do not know can be addressed and may not even recognize them as problems</td>
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<td><strong>Inductive Evaluation Method</strong></td>
<td>Application of this method suggests the evaluation of data by patterns, themes and categories identified in the data and put into context</td>
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<td><strong>Insider Action Researcher</strong></td>
<td>The manager who undertake a project within their own organization in the framework of an executive academic program</td>
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<td><strong>International Concept Development stage</strong></td>
<td>The third stage of the IPCD model which is concerned with the birth,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>Development and definition of an idea into an international product concept in the organization</td>
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<td>International Concept Evaluation stage</td>
<td>The fourth stage of the IPCD model which involves the recycling and screening of the product concepts developed during concept development</td>
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<td>International Opportunity Identification stage</td>
<td>The first stage of the IPCD model that includes identification of the specific market opportunity at an international level that needs to be pursued. This stage is usually driven by the business goals of the organization and defines the resources that will be allocated to the new areas of market growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretivism</td>
<td>The theoretical paradigm which suggests that the nature of knowledge produced is subjective as the researcher is aiming at understanding the meanings actors give to reality</td>
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<td>Interview Guide</td>
<td>A data collection method which lists the issues to be explored in the course of an interview ensuring the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with all individuals interviewed.</td>
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<td>IPCD</td>
<td>International Product Concept Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>IQA</td>
<td>International Qualitative Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>LCA</td>
<td>Local Creative Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>Local Consumer Immersion stage</td>
<td>The second stage of the IPCD model that involves the understanding of unmet implicit consumer needs in the organization</td>
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<td><strong>target markets</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Market orientation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Market orientation for early stage of NPD process involves alignment of the product concept with market requirements principally in the form of market research activity as well as consumer integration</td>
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<td><strong>NPD</strong></td>
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<td>New Product Development</td>
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<td><strong>Nurturing Ideas</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The embracing arrows of the IPCD model which involve the re-examination, nourishment and further development of the original ideas</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Observation</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>A data collection method by which the researcher directly observes processes or behaviours in an organization over a period of time</td>
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<td><strong>Open-mindedness</strong></td>
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<td>Questioning traditional ways of looking at market phenomena.</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational climate</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The objective feature of the organization that can be measured by the aggregated perceptions of its members</td>
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<td><strong>Person success factors</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>The key success attributes of the IPCD model that make a person creative and suitable to work in projects during the early stages of NPD. The Person success factors involve open mindedness and language and writing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Place success factors</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The qualities of the environment (Organizational, social) that will enable the individual/team to work effectively in the Front End. The Place success</td>
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factors of the IPCD model involve senior management commitment and countries’ commitment and involvement

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<th>Positivism</th>
<th>The theoretical paradigm which aims to explain reality from the viewpoint that reality holds an objective truth. The positivistic stance suggests that reality exists in itself and has an objective essence that researchers seek to discover.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Process success factors</strong></td>
<td>The key success attributes of the IPCD model related to the different approaches that an individual/team has to follow in order to develop a creative outcome/concept. The Process success factors of the IPCD model involve flexibility and consumer orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product Concept</strong></td>
<td>A clearly written and possibly visual description of the new product idea that includes its primary features and consumer benefits combined with a broad understanding of the technology needed</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Product fit</strong></td>
<td>Understanding how the product under study fits the consumer’s environment by observing interactions with the user’s own environment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Product Idea</strong></td>
<td>An idea for a possible product that the company can see itself offering to the market</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Product Innovation</strong></td>
<td>An idea, service, product or</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Product success factors</strong></td>
<td>The success attributes of the IPCD model related to the elements of the product during product concept development. The Product success factors of the IPCD model involve detail and stimulation in concept development</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Senior management engagement and commitment</strong></td>
<td>Senior management resource allocation for NPD projects, defining goals, regularly monitoring the attainment of these goals and providing monetary incentives for their attainment during NPD process and active involvement during ideation process at Front End</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SME</strong></td>
<td>A subject matter expert (SME) is a person expert in a particular area. Invariably, the term is used when there are professionals with technical project knowledge but without expertise in the field of application</td>
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<td><strong>Snowball sampling strategy</strong></td>
<td>The data collection method which aims to identify information-rich cases from sampling individuals who know other individuals who know good interview participants that are information-rich</td>
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<td><strong>Task diagram</strong></td>
<td>The task diagram aims at identifying the difficult cognitive elements of the task and provides the interviewer with a guideline of questions that provide a</td>
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<td>Triggers of Use</td>
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<td>Observing prompts for new product purchase</td>
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<td>Trustworthiness of data</td>
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<td>Unarticulated consumer needs</td>
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<td>Consumers' encountering problems with the product under study that they do not know can be addressed and may not even recognize them as problems</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

"The real magic of discovery lies not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes"

M. Proust

Macro changes such as globalisation, technological developments, and market stagnation lead to intense competition in the Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry. Organizations should be able to change and innovate if they want to succeed or survive in competitive markets (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). The new core competency is creativity, which smart companies are now harnessing to create top-line growth. In the changing game, maths and science are being replaced by creativity, imagination and innovation. Creativity and innovation are the keys to success particularly when designing new products and services.

In a recent Boston Consulting Group survey (Internal data, 2006) 840 senior executives from around the world said that increasing top-line revenue through innovation had become the key to success in their industry. The survey also discovered that over half of the executives were dissatisfied with the financial returns on their investments in innovation. The New Product Development (NPD) process is costly and challenging and can often result in failure in the marketplace. It is widely acknowledged that a critical success factor lies in the activities that take place at the early part of the NPD process (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998; Knox & Mitchell, 2003).
Radnor and Robinson (2000) concluded that the first step to innovate is to conceive, collect and develop concepts into the early phase of the innovation process. Khurana & Rosenthal (1998) argued that the real keys to success can be found in the activities which take place at the early stage of the new product development (NPD) process.

However, the process through which ideas/concepts are generated operates in an "ad hoc" manner (Flynn et al., 2003). This early stage of the NPD remains unclear and it is referenced in the NPD literature as the fuzzy Front End (APQC Report, 1998; Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998; Knox & Mitchell, 2003). Research work analyzing how this stage is applied is limited and does not take the international perspective into consideration (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998, Knox & Mitchell, 2003).

1.2 Research Problem Identified

The large multi-national organization, under study, is a global player of the FMCG industry. The organization has activities in the global markets of foods, cleaning products, detergents, personal care and ice cream. Innovation is one of the main priorities of the organization. A formal computerized innovation system under the name of Innovation Process Management (IPM) is available and accessible to all its employees worldwide. Through the IPM system ideas are gathered and managed until they are transformed into the final products. Consequently, the IPM system takes the form of a funnel with four stages:

- Ideas Generation
- Ideas Feasibility
- Ideas Capability
- Product Launch Preparation

Business relevant ideas are generated during the first stage. Assignment of project team, development of the final product mix and clarification of sourcing and supply are arranged and confirmed during the second and the third stages. Fine tuning of all the product mix elements and the production pipe line filling is confirmed during the final stage of the funnel. Innovation Centres located in different parts of the world are responsible for the international new product development. More specifically, the European Hygiene cluster is located in...
Milan, Italy. However, this cluster's innovation funnel is empty of ideas and innovation projects.

The European Hygiene cluster includes three countries, namely Netherlands, Italy and Greece, with a Hygiene/Hypochlorite product portfolio under different brand names. Its low innovation rates have been one of the key concerns of the mother company. The local companies have grown their profits over the past five years, mainly by taking out costs. Growth, however, has been more difficult to achieve. Two years ago, a new senior management took over the European Hygiene cluster and is undertaking the challenge of defining a new vision, strategy and innovation roadmap for the three countries involved.

The new senior management is placing particular emphasis to the generation of stimulating new product concepts for the cluster. A common stream of innovation ideas that people involved would find interesting and worth pursuing would potentially lead to positive turnover growth and market share increase. The researcher of the study has volunteered to undertake the task of feeding the innovation funnel with new product concepts since she has acknowledged that a positive outcome of such an intervention would potentially generate growth for her brands. In addition, such an intervention would fulfil the requirements of her executive academic program (DBA, University of Surrey, UK). In order to understand and recommend solutions to the senior management of the European Hygiene cluster of the organization, an insider action research study has been undertaken.

1.3 The Research Aims & Approach

This dissertation focuses on the study of the application of the fuzzy Front End in a multi-national organization. In this study, the literature on New Product Development, Front End and Creativity are discussed in relation to the early part of the New Product Development process as applied in organizations. Based on the literature of New Product Development and Front End, and the questions which remain unanswered, the overall aims of the study have been identified as follows:
• To critically analyse the approaches taken at the Front End and the factors that influence the successful implementation of the Front End within the organization.
• To inductively develop a Front End product concept development model.
• To link literature and research of NPD and Front End with practical insights and perspectives.

These research aims call for an insider action research approach. The Eisenhardt approach of building theory from case study research (1989) into the action research model is an original contribution of the present study and aims at providing solutions to the issues identified. Consequently, each stage of the action research cycle incorporated several steps of the Eisenhardt process such as:
• Planning or getting started, and selecting cases and crafting instruments and protocols.
• Acting or entering the field, analyzing within and cross cases, and shaping hypothesis.
• Observing, or testing.
• Reflecting or enfolding literature.
• Reaching closure.

The integration of the Eisenhardt (1989) theory building process into the action research cycle provides the opportunity for iterating within the NPD and Front End literature during the course of the study, enabling the insider action researcher to unfold the research theme gradually and to continually inquire into each of the main stages of the action research cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

1.4 The Organization of the Thesis

The present thesis is divided into 8 chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the reader to the research topic. Chapter 2 critically analyzes the nature of NPD. It uncovers, describes and discusses stages, objectives and nature of approaches at Front End drawn from NPD and Front End literature. It also discusses success factors at the Front End.
Chapter 3 provides a definition and the epistemological and ontological foundations of action research and it elaborates on insider action research. It discusses the theory of the action research process and reviews the analytic approach undertaken for the action research cycle of the study. Then it discusses the application of the insider action research undertaken for the study. Finally, this chapter provides an analysis of the validity of the process, as it has been carried out, making reference to the limitations and challenges of the methodology.

Chapter 4 discusses the mix of methods of inquiry used in the planning stage of the action research cycle. Furthermore, it explains the role of the action researcher and the participants of the action research project. It describes the stages of the action research cycle and focuses on the research design adopted for each one. Finally, it discusses the approaches taken to improve the trustworthiness, reliability and validity of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the findings derived from the acting stage of the action research cycle. The fieldwork findings included approaches for the international Front End as well as key success factors. On the basis of these data a model for international product concept development (the IPCD model) is proposed.

Chapter 6 presents the observing stage of the action research. Firstly, it aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the application of the Front End and discusses, for each stage of the IPCD model, its scopes and objectives, the approaches taken, and the outcome delivered. It then discusses its perceived impact and presents the reflections of the action research team. Secondly, it evaluates the IPCD model based on the criteria set at the beginning of the action research project.

Chapter 7 discusses the reflecting stage of the action research cycle. It discusses and compares the findings drawn from the observing stage with the NPD and Front End literature. It presents the reflections of the action research team upon the completion of the project. Furthermore, it discusses the outcomes and the lessons learned. A summary of the reflective diary of the action researcher is also presented.

Chapter 8 discusses the overall conclusions of the action research project and its overall implications for management.
Chapter 2

New Product Development and

the Fuzzy Front End

2.1 Introduction

"Between the idea and the reality falls the shadow."

T. S. Elliot

The aim of this chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of the conceptual and theoretical framework of New Product Development (NPD) and Front End literature. It has been recognised, consistently, that despite the importance of the later stages, successful NPD strongly depends on the quality of this early stage (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998). This stage is considered as critical and researchers (Moskowitz et al, 2001; Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998) have made efforts to understand it, evaluate it and examine it. However, it has been recognized that there is a lack of guidelines for its practical application (Costa & Jongen, 2005). So far, only a few studies have focused solely on this early stage of the NPD process: a Master’s thesis on Engineering (Wilson Edith, 1990 referenced Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998) and a quantitative study for the food service industry (Moskowitz et al, 2001).

More recent work (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998) has tended to consider the early stage as a fuzzy activity within innovation processes, and one which requires further attention. Hence, this chapter has the following objectives:

- To understand the nature of NPD.
• To uncover, describe and discuss stages, objectives and nature of approaches at the early stage of innovation drawn from NPD and Front End literature respectively.

• To identify and discuss success factors at the Front End. Due to limited research on success factors for the Front End, relevant NPD and Front End literature is noted and discussed. Applied ethnography and its application at the Front End is also discussed since it emerged from the fieldwork findings that this is considered to be the most relevant literature to consumer immersion.

2.2 Understanding the nature of NPD and Front End

It has been argued that there is little consensus as to what constitutes a new product development (Rudder et al, 2001; Rudder, 2003). Product innovation has been defined as the process of bringing new technology into use (Lucas & Ferrell, 2000). Other authors suggest a broader scope for the definition of product innovation as an idea, service, product or technology that has been developed and marketed to customers who perceive it as novel or new. It is the process of identifying, creating and delivering new product or service values that did not previously exist in the marketplace (Kotler et al, 2000). More importantly, an innovation involves a wide range of people from designers to society (Earle, 1997).

Product innovation can be classified into three categories, namely line extensions, "me-too" products, and "new to the world" products. Line extensions are existing product modifications or improvements that are perceived as new to the market. Me-too products are products that are similar to competition and perceived as familiar to the market. "New to the world" describes products that are considered new to both the organization and the market (Kotler et al, 2000). However, a longitudinal study reported by Jaruzelski et al. (2006) demonstrates that new product launches tend to fall into one of six categories, namely:

• "New to the world" products
• New product lines: new products that, for the first time, allow a company to enter an established market
• Additions to existing product lines, new products that supplement a company's established product lines
• Improvements in / revisions to existing products: new products that provide improved performance or greater perceived value, and replace existing products
• Repositioning of existing products that are targeted to new markets or market segments
• Cost reduction: new products that provide similar performance at lower cost.

Their study also shows that truly "new to the world" products represent only 10% of all products launched, suggesting that it is very rare for an organization to launch a product that is perceived as new by consumers as well as being new for the organization itself. From the food sector, only 7-25% of launches can be categorised as "new to the world" food products (Knox & Mitchell, 2003).

Line extensions are more popular and constitute another 46% of the products launched (Jaruzelski et al, 2006). This has been acknowledged as a strategy to generate incremental turnover with less risk. Examples of such a strategy would include a new sandwich filling or new bleach perfume variant (Internal data, 2006). More benefits of this strategy include:
• limited resources and technical expertise required
• low or zero investment for additional production facilities
• short time span of the new product development process from idea generation to launch into market (Jaruzelski et al, 2006)

Me-too product launches are commonly used by manufacturers to enter a growing segment of the market with low risk and investment. This "imitators" approach is very common to retailers (Kotler et al, 2000) in both the food and the bleach sector.

2.3 Front End as drawn from NPD Literature: A fragmentary approach

Due to limited research at Front End, the NPD literature has been reviewed to understand the early part of the NPD process. In order to gain a better understanding of these theories, some related definitions for the Front End are described.
NPD literature offers a distinction among the definitions of certain elements, related to the stages of the early start, such as an idea and a product idea (Kotler et al, 2000; Morris, 2006). An idea is defined as “a mental construct, an abstraction that tells a story or suggests a capability” (Morris, 2006: p88). A product idea is “an idea for a possible product that the company can see itself offering to the market” (Kotler et al, 2000: p589). A product concept and a concept creation are two additional terms that have been encountered in the early start of the NPD process. A product concept is defined as “a clearly written and possibly visual description of the new product idea that includes its primary features and consumer benefits combined with a broad understanding of the technology needed” (Product Development & Management Association Glossary for NPD, 1998). Concept creation is to “identify hot buttons”, product features that interest consumers, and to use that information in the development of new concepts (Moskowitz et al, 2001: p149).

It is essential to discuss firstly stages identified in the NPD process and secondly, stages linked to the early start, as drawn from the NPD literature. The NPD process typically ranges between four and eight stages, including idea or concept generation and screening, research, development and product testing, and marketing launch activities. Depending on the researcher the number of stages may be condensed or allowed to overlap (Rudder et al, 2001). The view taken here is that the Front End is completed when the product concepts have been evaluated by consumers thereby enabling the organization to decide whether or not to move it to the next stage of the NPD process.

It is argued in this section that the process at the Front End, or in other words the sequence of stages as viewed by the NPD researchers, is fuzzy and remains fragmentary. Furthermore, the content of stages lacks detail and therefore practical application. The various stages of the NPD processes, as drawn from the literature have been grouped under three broad headings: The fuzzy Front End, the Development, and the Sustained Sales (Figure 1). Stevens et al. (1999) used these headings in their study on Creativity and Business Discipline.
More specifically, in their approach for NPD, researchers have described from one to three stages that are linked to the fuzzy Front End. Stages at the early start range from market or technological opportunity identification to idea generation and screening. However, the sequence of stages is not clear implying that researchers lack consensus.

For some (Graf & Saguy, 1991; MacFie, 1994) ideas generation is the initial step that an organization has to take. For others (Urban & Hauser, 1993; Fuller, 1994; Kotler et al, 2000) opportunity identification involving specification of technological and organizational opportunities that meet consumer needs precedes the ideas generation stage. Morris (2006) argues that it is insights identification that should precede the ideas generation stage. Other NPD researchers support the view that an additional stage exists between ideas generation and ideas evaluation, namely that of ideas development. These researchers add that ideas should be further developed and refined in the form of concepts (Graf & Saguy, 1991; Kotler et al, 2000; Morris, 2006). According to
these authors product concept development has the objective of producing a
detailed version of the new product idea stated in meaningful consumer terms
or a prototype in the case of foods product development. Product concepts can
be further modified and refined until they move to the development stage
(Morris, 2006).

It is evident that there is an extensive amount of literature that focuses
directly on the Innovation and the NPD and indirectly on the Front End. For
example, a search (October, 2007) for the word “Innovation” in the EBSCO
Host, Journals Research Database resulted in 33,410 entries, and for the words
“Front End” in 2,256 entries.

However, despite the large amount spent on research, the vast majority
of new products fail. For example, it has been estimated that of the 8,077 new
products launched in the US market in 1993, 80-90% failed within a year
(Rudder et al, 2001). This is also true for the launch of new food products: 72-
88% continues to fail (Knox & Mitchell, 2003). It is apparent that the processes
described in the literature are fragmentary and disconnected from business
reality.

The required content of the Front End stages, as drawn from the NPD
literature, does not emerge with great clarity. The early stages identified by
each NPD researcher are grouped under the three headings of ideas
generation, ideas development and ideas evaluation (Montoya & Weiss, 2000).
This is shown in Figure 2 which clearly demonstrates that the chain of events of
the Front End is in common use. It has been argued that while the actual
process of NPD may contain a number of different stages and processes as
demonstrated in Figure 1, it is likely that processes within each stage are very
similar in content; it is merely the manner in which they have been named that
appears somewhat arbitrary (Rudder et al, 2001).

Yet, only the processes within the initial stage as described by the
various researchers are similar in content. Many researchers agree that stage
one at the Front End involves “the systematic search for new product ideas”
(Graf & Saguy, 1991; MacFie, 1994; Fuller 1994; Kotler et al, 2000; Morris
2006).
Approaches taken at stage one, as identified by the NPD researchers, are common and certainly not new. They include various techniques such as brainstorming, involving internal workers, employees or external sources such as agencies, suppliers, conferences, and competition (Booz et al., 1982; Urban & Hauser, 1993; MacFie, 1994; Fuller, 1994; Kotler et al., 2000; Morris, 2006).

Since the objective of stage one is quantity of ideas, as one might expect, stages two and three aim at screening of the ideas generated. However, a closer examination of the objectives and approaches of the remaining stages at the fuzzy Front End among the NPD authors reveals differences, again implying a lack of consensus.

Description of the stages as proposed by Booz et al. (1982) reveals that their exploration and screening stages involve generation and evaluation of new product ideas, following the organization's strategic objectives. For Graf & Saguy (1991) the screening stage relates to the activities of the early start of the NPD that involve idea generation and selection. Urban & Hauser (1993) argued
that the three stages of opportunity identification, design and testing involve identification of market opportunities, idea generation and selection. Following MacFie’s approach (1994), the concept generation and concept screening stages involve idea generation and selection from consumers so that the organization can decide whether or not to develop the new idea. Fuller’s (1994) approach reveals that ideas screening and ideas feasibility stages both involve screening against financial and consumer criteria. The Kotler et al. (2000) approach identifies three stages, idea generation, idea screening and concept development and testing, linked to the early start of the NPD process.

Hence, some authors hold a more straightforward view of the idea generation or exploration stages (Booz et al, 1982; Fuller, 1994). Others (Graf & Saguy, 1991; Kotler et al., 2000) go beyond the surface and discuss the development of concepts and not just ideas. More recently, Morris (2006) argues that the ideation stage includes the generation of insights that would foster ideas generation. Undoubtedly, Morris (2006) enriches the ideation stage with his emphasis on the generation of insights. However, he does not provide further detail for its practical application. The approaches to generate consumer insights are discussed in the following section.

In addition, the screening stages seem blurred since it is not clear whether the final gates of the Front End involves the screening of ideas based only on consumer criteria (Kotler et al., 2000) or a combination of consumer and financial criteria (Fuller, 1994; MacFie, 1994). Nevertheless, it is questionable whether in practice an embryonic idea can be assessed financially at such an early stage. In contrast, it is believed that during the Front End, when the idea is embryonic, it should be discussed in the context of consumer criteria whereas during the feasibility stage, when the idea has been evolved into a product mock up, it can be assessed with financial and consumer criteria.

It is evident that organizations who seek to “give life” to their Front End would find only few new insights from the NPD literature. NPD researchers, being influenced by the stance of the NPD process, fail to acknowledge the different nature of the Front End. Their findings lack the detail that is highly critical for those who wish to practice the Front End. Consequently, their approaches have little practical relevance. The need for a Front End sequence of events that bridges theory with practice is apparent. Such a process has to
integrate the views of the Front End expert practitioners with the views of the researchers and to propose an unambiguous result with practical relevance to the Front End process.

To provide further understanding, the following section discusses the views of the Front End researchers who have focused their attention solely on the Front End.

2.4 Front End as drawn from Front End literature: A holistic yet generic approach

Unfortunately, only a limited number of purely Front End approaches have been identified within the literature. Taking an exploratory approach Khurana & Rosenthal (1998) have made an attempt to describe, but not extensively, the early stages of the Front End (Figure 3).

**Figure 3**

STAGES AT FRONT END DRAWN FROM FRONT END LITERATURE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Phase Zero</th>
<th>Phase Zero</th>
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<td>Preliminary Opportunity</td>
<td>Product Concept</td>
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<td>Identification</td>
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<td>Idea Generation</td>
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<td>Market and Technology</td>
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<td>Analysis</td>
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<td>Product and Portfolio</td>
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<td>Strategy</td>
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According to Khurana & Rosenthal (1998), the Front End includes two stages:
- Pre-Phase Zero
- Phase Zero
The authors argue that prior to the start of any NPD project a set of activities have to be undertaken - idea generation, market analysis, and technology appraisal. These activities support subsequent phases of the NPD execution. In their study, the authors have researched the success factors of the Front End, but they have not included them into their model. Even these authors do not try to uncover the practical issues. They acknowledge that these phases remain fuzzy and discuss that an important question for future research is how idea generation can be an integral part of the Front End.

Most recently, Koen et al. (2001), who draw attention solely to the Front End, propose the New Concept Development model (NCD) which has a circular shape and consists of three key parts: the engine, the five identifiable elements and the influencing factors. The engine that drives the five elements consists of the leadership, culture, and business strategy. The influencing factors include the organization’s policy, external environment and enabling technology, which affect the entire process. The five elements are controllable activities: opportunity identification, opportunity analysis, idea generation and enrichment, idea selection and concept definition.

This model, having a common language and terminology, allows organizations to be aware of the activities in the Front End. In addition, it articulates the factors influencing the Front End, thus providing a holistic approach. However, the model does not attempt to define any relationships between its stages and factors and therefore the overall level of detail of the process described is so vague that it does not have any applicable value. Moreover, it does not provide any insights into the issue of flexibility versus structure of the process at the Front End. Finally, its circular shape suggests a continuous iteration and not a continuous progress and transformation that targets towards launch.

A review of NPD and Front End literature suggests that the field of Front End and New Product Development is common to all viable businesses and certainly not new. The models described provide a vocabulary and a conceptual framework and therefore make the Front End real within the organizational context. More recent models (Koen et al, 2001; Morris, 2006) seem to understand the nature of the Front End better because they underline the importance of flexibility and iteration and the nourishment of ideas. Front End
researchers Koen et al. (2001) propose a relationship approach that takes into account the more fluid nature of the Front End compared to the more rigid and structured nature of the NPD. Such approaches emphasize flexibility and experimentation since they suggest iteration among different stages and repeated evaluation throughout the process. Morris (2006) presents a more holistic approach to the NPD process, taking the view that the stages at the Front End are iterative. The author advocates the use of creativity and therefore experimentation during the ideation stage and he links insights with ideas. However, the detail of how stages and factors iterate and interrelate is limited and therefore more practical evidence is called for.

Drawn from the NPD and the Front End literature, the early start of the NPD process remains fuzzy. The question remains: How can the organizations successfully construct new product concepts and “feed” their innovation funnel? In the context of the organization under study, the question that needs to be tackled is how to “feed” the innovation funnel of the European Living Hygiene cluster with new product concepts. The quest for clarity at the early start is pressing. “One of the major and most obvious gaps...is the lack of clear and concrete guidelines for its (Front End) effective implementation in everyday company practices” (Costa & Jongen, 2005: p3). Hence, it is worthwhile to examine and analyze the perceptions of experts in the international Front End (Subject Matter Experts), internal and external to the organization under study, regarding the approach undertaken for the development of the FMCG new product concepts.

Consequently, it is imperative to understand new emerging opportunities for improvement at the Front End as well as the critical success factors that prevent organizations from making mistakes “en route”.

2.5 Applied Ethnography and the Front End: An emerging opportunity to construct new product concepts

More recent NPD literature (Morris, 2006) has introduced the role of the generation of insights into the ideation stage of the early stage of the NPD process. Market insights could contribute to the success of innovation: “In the era of mass customisation, listening to the voice of the customer becomes the prime driver of NPD” (Poolton & Ismail, 2000: p803), “the rewards can be great
when product innovation takes inspiration from deep insights on how consumers experience the product and improvise to create a new solution" (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006: p215). In the food industry, deep consumer knowledge and consumer involvement at the first stages of the NPD process have long been recognized as important factors at the Front End (Knox & Mitchell, 2003).

In this section, it is argued that, firstly applied ethnography is the most appropriate method to integrate the consumer's voice into the Front End. Secondly, that such an inclusion signals constructivist underpinnings into the Front End - and thirdly, despite recent literature on ethnography, guidelines on how to incorporate applied ethnography into the Front End remain somewhat ambiguous.

There is the belief amongst some NPD researchers (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Poolton & Ismail, 2000; Morris, 2006), that traditional qualitative approaches cannot reveal the consumers' implicit needs. Consumers may have a difficulty in expressing their needs when they are influenced by their habits and by their own experience. Consumers may be afraid to reveal what they consider inappropriate. Inquirers may also introduce their own bias in questioning. For example, when asked about an editing function on a software package, a customer revealed no complaints. When she sat down to use the program, however, she realized that her work was disrupted when the program did not automatically wrap text around graphics. Having become accustomed to the problem, she did not mention it during the interviews (Leonard & Rayport, 1997).

Recent publications in managerial psychology stress the importance of qualitative-based approaches to tap into latent and unmet consumer needs: "Qualitative-based approaches, with their emphasis on immersion in the consumption experience would appear to be appropriate to this task “(Poolton & Ismail, 2000: p803). From the NDP and Front End approaches reviewed, Koen et al. (2001) and Morris (2006) have proposed applied ethnography as an emerging technique to enhance the generation of new product concepts at the Front End. Adopting the stance of Koen et al. and Morris, it is argued that applied ethnography at the Front End is the most relevant literature to the
generation of consumer insights compared to other techniques such as conjoint analysis:

- Firstly, applied ethnography approaches are consumer-need oriented; consumers can construct their own meaning of the reality during a real life experience with the product under study (Kleef et al, 2005). The consumers are liberated to demonstrate their deeper needs based on their experiences.
- Secondly, applied ethnography approaches are highly recommended for consumer-oriented product innovation, the focus of this study (Kleef et al, 2005).
- Thirdly, stimuli are not presented to the participating consumers. Applied ethnography is based on observation, so that consumer needs are indirectly derived. As a result, the data collection is highly unstructured requiring further interpretation by the researcher. The process is of an exploratory nature, resembling a "journey" of immersion. There is not a uniquely true or valid interpretation. Knowledge has to be co-constructed between the researcher and the consumer through a dialectic process (Leonard & Rayport, 1992).

In contrast, conjoint analysis is a product-oriented approach where multiple product concepts of an unfamiliar nature are presented to the consumers to elicit their preferences and not to generate insights. Influenced by a post-positivist stance, the goal in conjoint analysis is to find which attribute levels consumers prefer and how much they value these attributes. Conjoint analysis is recommended for technical-oriented product development (Kleef et al, 2005), which is not the focus of this study.

To gain a better understanding of how ethnography shapes research methodology it is meaningful to shed light on the origins of this approach. It draws on the qualitative research traditions of ethnography to create deep understanding of activities and populations of interest for commercial purposes one of which is product innovation (Sanders, 2002; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006: p217).

Ethnography is the primary method of anthropology and involves the study of human cultures (Patton, 2002). The power of ethnography lies in the fact that conscious awareness brings to the individual's attention only a tiny fraction of his experiences and what his senses perceive. It is argued that the human brain filters reality into patterns and concepts, a lot of which is eliminated
from the individual's awareness. In the field of anthropology, ethnographic inquiry emphasizes insightful accounts of behaviours that an outsider can develop when accepted as an observer (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). Therefore, meanings of reality are constructed from the dialectic process between the observer and individual under study.

Anthropologists apply ethnographic techniques in modern societies to the study of contemporary social problems such as globalisation, technological diffusion and others (Patton, 2002). For NPD practitioners, applied ethnography has a more exploratory approach than evaluative. It takes place in natural surroundings, is flexible to change and aims at revealing the local consumer's or end user's point of view or consumer insights. Hence, NPD practitioners do not build hypotheses but they construct meanings of reality through their insightful interaction with the consumers. In fact, this is one of the major strengths of this approach compared to other qualitative research methods; it elicits unconscious knowledge. Indeed, unconscious knowledge, which is also referred to as tacit knowledge, can be shared through feelings, experiences and beliefs, and cannot be expressed while conscious knowledge can be shared through verbal and written expressions (Morris, 2006).

Applied ethnographic research offers some additional advantages over the traditional ethnographic approach, as it is quicker, less expensive, and less intrusive to the lives of the individuals being studied. When compared to other qualitative research methods, it can prove to be more expensive and time consuming, but may provide deeper insight about the consumer's unmet or latent needs (Sanders 2002; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006).

An example of a successful implementation of the applied ethnographic approach using the observation technique is that of the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center (Sanders, 2002). In 1979, an anthropologist, hired by the company, created a videotape showing the office workers struggling to operate their Xerox machine. This observation led to the installation of the green button on all Xerox machines.

Another example (Leonard & Rayport, 1997), which is closely linked to this study, related to the implementation of empathic design in revealing new product usages of a USA company of Household cleaning products. Video cameras were given to family members to record how the products were really
used in people's basements. The recording revealed that people were creating their own recipes for particular household chores such as washing white curtains ("I add one cap of baking soda in the dosage of my detergent").

Applied ethnography usually involves small carefully screened samples of the potential target consumer group. Whereas the selected sample might be drawn based on socioeconomic or ethnic criteria, the results of the inquiry are presented in such a way as to reflect similarities that are based on product related attitudes, values and needs. The various examples of application of applied ethnographic approaches illustrate how the integration of ethnography into the NPD process signals a shift in consumer research from a positivist or post-positivist to a constructivist stance. Findings of applied ethnography are usually not proven by statistical inference because the samples are often too small but instead on the intuition of the participants in the ethnographies (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). Furthermore, in applied ethnography the researcher seeks to comprehend the interaction of the subject with the object not on the basis of her perspective, but from those of the participants in the situation studied. The consumers construct their own perception of their reality as they interact with the products under study.

It has been recognized (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Sanders, 2002; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006) that the rewards of such an approach can be great since product innovation takes inspiration from deep consumer insights that feed the creative seed of really new ideas. These deep consumer insights are the consumers' and the researchers' interpretations that are not considered to be oppressive but rewarding and useful for the early start of the NPD process. It is therefore advocated that knowledge, interpretation and action is thus the outcome of a collective process, as shaped by the constructivist paradigm. However, there are no clear guidelines in the literature on how to incorporate the applied ethnography into the Front End within the organizational context.

Morris (2006) introduces the use of ethnographic approaches, among others, for the generation of new insights and ideas in his holistic model to the Front End. Yet, this model is not explicit as to how applied ethnography may generate new insights and how these insights can be translated into product concepts.
There is no single best practice to conduct applied ethnography in the Front End but rather a set of techniques from which to select given the project objectives, the timing and budget constraints, and the target consumers being investigated. Drawn from Brewer (2000) and Rosenthal & Capper (2006) these techniques involve:

- Passive field observation (written field notes, full video recording, disguised field observation)
- Active Ethnographic interview (Observation and Interview of individuals, spontaneous intercept interviews)
- On site observation (Interviews of affinity groups)
- Participant observation (Direct involvement in events)

Observation refers to the clarification of the target group who should be observed, the observer who should do the observation and what the observer should be watching. Because observational or empathic design techniques aim to elicit tacit knowledge and therefore stress observation over inquiry, relatively few data can be gathered through responses to questions. Instead, video or photographs can be used to convey information that can be lost in verbal descriptions (Sanders, 2002). More specifically, passive field observation may produce various types of data such as written field notes or recorded media, using video cameras, webcam technology or traditional photography.

Participant ethnographic observation (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006) requires that the observer acquires first hand experience of a target culture by joining consumers in a relevant activity. This approach is limited to respondents who are open-minded and not likely to be disturbed by such close-in participation and observation by an outsider. Hence, the researchers are required to leave their office environment and observe, question and/or videotape a small number of consumers while those individuals perform the everyday chores related to the product under study.

As far as the observer or the group of observers is concerned, it is proposed (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Sanders, 2002) that at least one member of the team should have experience in behavioural observation and personal characteristics such as open-mindedness, observational skills and curiosity. Yet, in everyday business practice, it is debatable if managers have the experience or the time to perform such tasks. In such cases, literature suggests
that an external expert can be called upon to design and conduct the fieldwork of an ethnographic inquiry. This view is strongly supported especially because the skills of the ethnographic observer and the chosen analytic technique are critical for the results of the ethnographic inquiry (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006).

Despite all the recent literature on applied ethnography, this new emerging opportunity remains ambiguous and adds fuzziness to the fuzzy Front End. It remains an issue how such an approach can be integrated into the Front End. Leonard & Rayport (1997) propose that the ethnographies can be leveraged in formal innovation activities where findings are presented and where their significance is discussed. It is then that decision makers may understand the implications of these findings and probe for redesign solutions. However, this is not enough. It is not yet clear how applied ethnography should be incorporated in the Front End process and what its role is in the context of the stages of such process.

It has been emphasized that the application of ethnography as a method for constructing consumer-oriented perspectives early in the product innovation process is relatively recent and needs further study (Sanders, 2002; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). Hence, the application and evaluation of ethnography as applied to the Front End by the action researcher and her team is one of the unique contributions of the present study. It has to be clarified how the generation of insights is integrated into the Front End and how the applied ethnography is linked in practice with consumer insights that will generate new ideas. Such an understanding has to bridge theory with practice in the organizations. This poses challenges to the researcher because it is likely that applied ethnography will be rejected (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006) when an organization believes it is already immersed in the culture of its consumers. It may also lack the resources to invest in a formal ethnographic inquiry and decide to simulate this research at low cost by using employees as surrogate consumers.

Hence, the issue is to gain a deeper understanding of the application of ethnography at the Front End within a real-life organizational context such as the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study. Consequently, the adoption of such an approach shapes the methodological approach of the study towards a constructivist stance (Chapter 3).
2.6 Success Factors and the Front End: Application within the organizational setting

Due to the high failure rates of new products, organizations are not only interested in the NPD processes and research approaches but in learning about the factors which influence the success of new products (Holger, 2002). The literature still contains some gaps that include a lack of research into the success factors at each stage of the NPD process (Szymanski & Varadarajan, 2001) and more specifically the Front End. Therefore the NPD literature is relevant in gaining a deeper understanding. However, the literature on factors impacting NPD in total is large and fragmented and has not been organized together to create deeper understanding (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). Consequently, the focus of the literature review is on covering only the success factors which relate to the findings of the study (Chapter 4).

The success factors identified have been grouped into four categories (Table 1) drawn from Rhodes (1961) who suggests four strands that are important for the creativity construct including Process, Place, Person and Product. These four categories aim at providing answers to the following questions:

1. **Process:** What are the key success factors related to the different approaches that an individual/team has to follow in order to develop a creative outcome/concept?
2. **Place:** What are the qualities of the environment (organizational, social) that will enable the individual/team to work effectively in the Front End?
3. **Person:** What is it that makes a person creative and suitable to work in projects during the early stages of NPD?
4. **Product:** What are the success factors related to the elements of the product during product concept development?

Process includes flexibility and market orientation, as identified from NPD literature (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Urban & Hauser, 1993; Earle, 1997; Hoban, 1998; Koen et al., 2001; Ernst, 2002; Kleef et al., 2004; Costa &
Jongen, 2005; Morris, 2006) relevant to the findings of adaptability and consumer orientation that emerged from the fieldwork findings (Chapter 4).

Place refers to organizational climate (Amabile, 1998; Ekvall, 1997; Koen et al., 2001; Kirby, 2003; Earle, 2007), senior management engagement and commitment (Amabile, 1998; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Swink, 2000; Koen et al., 2001; Brentani & Kleinschmidt, 2004), and external and internal sources involvement (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Hoban, 1998; Ernst, 2002; Alam, 2003; Knox & Mitchell 2003). These success factors are linked respectively to nurturing ideas, senior management engagement and commitment, and early and consistent involvement success factors of the fieldwork findings (Chapter 4).

Person includes open-mindedness (Amabile, 1998; Troy et al., 2001). Finally, Product involves definition of new product concepts in detail (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Poolton & Ismail, 2000) linked directly with the fieldwork findings (Chapter 4).

2.6.1 Process

Structure versus Flexibility

Flexibility into the Front End process allows for a degree of freedom the managers may have around the process itself (Amabile, 1998) to adapt to changing market, political and regulatory environments. However, the issue is how organizations can apply the Front End taking into account the need for control to ensure profits.

Most of the NPD and Front End researchers (Booz et al., 1982; Graf & Saguy, 1991; MacFie, 1994; Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998; Kotler et al., 2000) take the view that the NPD process, including the early stage, is a more structured process. This type of process calls for a gate-stage keeping approach in which ideas need to be screened at the gate stage meetings before they can be refined or modified to progress to the feasibility stage. Hence, the process is proscribed and autonomy for the managers involved is limited. Until recently a stepwise approach to new product process was reportedly more successful (Booz et al., 1982; Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987).
Table 1
THE SUCCESS FACTORS OF FRONT END

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<td>Ernst, 2002</td>
<td>Nambisan, 2002</td>
<td>Kleef et al., 2004</td>
<td>Costa &amp; Jongen, 2005</td>
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<tr>
<td>Place</td>
<td>Organizational Climate</td>
<td>Amabile, 1998</td>
<td>Ekvall, 1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Open-mindedness</td>
<td>Amabile, 1998</td>
<td>Troy et al., 2001</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product</td>
<td>Detail in new product concepts</td>
<td>Cooper &amp; Kleinschmidt, 1987</td>
<td>Poolton &amp; Ismail, 2000</td>
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Source: A synthesis of NPD, Front End and Creativity literature

However, it is now generally accepted that these approaches have several weaknesses. Firstly, adopting a more structured process approach in the NPD development can be proven to be a slow process for the organization (Kotler et al, 2000) since iterations within stages result in delays and additional costs (Urban & Hauser, 1993; Koen et al, 2001). Secondly, within a structured and controlled process, creativity may be killed (Amabile, 1988). The idea has to prove to the gate-keepers its financial and market potential to receive funding and resources; if this cannot be done, it is rejected. Thirdly, this stream of
processes could be over-simplistic and inflexible because it does not take into account the experimental and fluid nature of the Front End (Koen et al, 2001).

Formalization of the process is another construct closely linked with structure. Formalization of idea generation activities is defined as the degree to which rules and procedures must be followed in an organization. Instead of having an ad hoc approach to idea generation, the organization would benefit from a formalised process for the Front End stage. Graf & Saguy (1991) argue about the importance of using documentation at each stage of the process and the presence of a project leader to manage the process and the team in order to achieve successful results. MacFie (1994) holds the view that the NPD process can be further facilitated and improved by the use of computer software at each stage. Thus, most NPD researchers, who built their early start approaches from the viewpoint of the NPD process, argue that formalization and control should also be imposed at the early start. One perspective is that formalization of the process increases the rates of success (Cooper & Kleinschmidt 1987; Poolton & Ismail, 2000). In contrast, other views suggest that formalization hinders idea generation due to the inflexibility that constrains creativity (Troy et al, 2001).

More recent approaches for the Front End advocate a more flexible and experimental process view (Urban & Hauser, 1993; Koen et al, 2001; Ernst, 2002; Morris, 2006) taking into consideration the more exploratory and experimental nature of the Front End. These views are supported since in practice resources at the early stage are variable; in contrast, resources for the NPD process are determined. Commercialisation date at the early stage is often uncertain or unpredictable; only when the later stages of the NPD process have been entered, does the launch date have a higher degree of certainty. The predictions of revenues at the early stage are often uncertain. However, revenue expectations during the NPD process are predictable, especially as the launch date approaches.

Furthermore, other views bridge the dichotomy between flexibility and formalization and define the nature of the Front End as “explicit, widely known, and characterised by clear decision making responsibilities and specific performance metrics” (Poolton & Ismail, 2000: p798). This stance suggests that organised NPD processes can be flexible, allowing autonomy but within a formal framework set by the senior management, so that an appropriate
balance between order and freedom may be maintained (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Poolton & Ismail, 2000; Koen et al, 2001; Nambisan, 2002).

In conclusion, the influence of flexibility in the NPD process is still under debate. Hence, the purpose of this study is to add a practical perspective to such debate and gain a deeper understanding of the balance between flexibility and structure, control and freedom, nurture and efficiency as applied in the real business world, such as the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study.

**Market orientation**

Differences between market orientation of the NPD process and consumer integration into new product development has not been clarified within the respective literature. One definition of market orientation for early stages of the NPD process involves alignment of the product concept with market requirements principally in the form of market research activity (Earle, 1997; Ernst, 2002; Kleef et al, 2004). This refers to the quality of the research in relation to the understanding and evaluation of the consumers' needs. Another definition relates to consumer-led product development as a market oriented innovation concept development, focusing on the consumers' current and future needs (Urban & Hauser, 1993). Nambisan (2002) proposes three customer NPD roles, those of the resource, the co-creator of new product design and the product tester. “Customer as a resource” suggests the usage of customers as a source of new product ideas in a spontaneous and active manner. However, as Nambisan (2002) admits, such an approach faces the challenge of the customers' willingness and knowledge to contribute new ideas. “Customer as co-creator and co-producer” suggests his participation from product design activities to product development activities (Nambisan, 2002). This a approach is clearly linked to the Development stage of the NPD process and not the Front End which is the focus of this study (Figure 1). Finally, “customer as a user” involves involvement in product testing and in product support (Nambisan, 2002).

NPD researchers have debated whether market orientation fosters or stifles innovation. There seems to be adequate evidence from the NPD researchers (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Hoban, 1998; Ernst, 2002;
Jaruzelski et al, 2006) that market orientation has a positive influence on new product success. Taking a different position, other authors suggest that a strong market orientation may lead to imitations and marginally new products (Bennet & Cooper, 1979). Furthermore, it is argued (Thomke & von Hippel, 2002) that a consumer led product development process may be costly and inexact because consumers do not always know what they want and how to transfer this information to the manufacturers.

This is why some organizations try to find new ways to enhance market orientation by engaging consumers in a collaborative way at the Front End. These organizations are tapping into consumers' minds and implicit needs to construct new product concepts. Applied ethnography, discussed in the previous section, is one technique to meet such objectives (Kleef et al, 2005).

In this section it emerges that the connection the organizations make with their consumers is vital in the early stage of the NPD process: "an emotional state in which consumers respond through feelings, rather through cold hard facts" (Poolton & Ismail, 2000: p804). Accordingly, market orientation at the NPD process that is related to consumer-led new product concept development focuses on end users and it concerns the development of innovative products. Such an orientation underlines the focus behind the consumer needs and not behind the enabling technologies (Thomke & von Hippel, 2002; Costa & Jongen, 2005).

Another technique related to market orientation is consumer integration i.e. the involvement of consumers into the process as active participants. More recent findings imply that creative consumer integration at the Front End, as an expression of market orientation, could positively influence the generation of new ideas at the Front End (Roberts et al, 2005). Such findings advocate the active engagement of the consumers through the NPD process stages as an innovative method of integrating consumer insight and co-developing new concepts/products with the consumers. The view taken in this study is that the market orientation includes not only consumer understanding but also consumer integration as active participants into the process. Von-Hippel (1986) suggests that the organization possesses the knowledge of the solution possibilities while the consumers possess the knowledge about their needs. This information can be transferred between the consumer and the
manufacturer through the usage of computer packages such as the lead user toolkit. This process assumes activities such as learning by trial and error, flexibility of the manufacturing process, and the availability of the process to the consumers who can use the skills and languages they already know. However, such an approach assumes that the consumers know exactly what they want and does not take into consideration that they may not be able to articulate or in some cases recognize their needs.

Furthermore, Roberts et al. (2005: p424) recognized the need for a redefinition of the consumer-manufacturer relationship and suggest: “this is not a panacea for all innovation tasks and there remain a number of issues not to be addressed fully”. It is evident that different views exist among authors as to whether market orientation influences the development of breakthrough products positively or not. It may be concluded that there is not adequate evidence in the literature related to the market orientation at the Front End to consolidate its theoretical foundations with concrete methodological guidelines for practical application (Lukas & Ferrel, 2000; Costa & Jongen, 2005). Hence, this study examines the application of market orientation with the integration of applied ethnography in the real business environment.

2.6.2 Place

Organizational Climate

It has been recognized that the working environment seems to play a significant role in generating and nurturing ideas for the Front End. An innovation and globalisation-friendly climate in a firm is identified (Brentani & Kleinschmidt, 2004) as key to the positive outcome of international NPD programs. It is argued that the organization has to make a choice that is related to its climate: to be an innovator; an improver “getting involved once the initial products have been developed”; a me-too, copying what is already available in the market-place or die-hard and ignore the innovation completely (Earle, 2007). Such a choice determines the organizational climate that may cultivate or kill innovation. Furthermore, it has been argued (Ekvall, 1997) that the climate aspect engenders creativity but creative outcomes may influence the climate as well. Such a creative climate stimulates employees to spend
unscheduled time testing, validating and nurturing their own and others ideas (Koen et al, 2001; Kirby, 2003).

Research reports and management text books on creativity and innovation (Amabile, 1988; Earle 1997) support the view that rigid bureaucratic rules and instructions, conservative rules and values, time pressure, heavy work load and stress all block creativity. Such conditions imply blocking of nurturing of new ideas and concepts. In contrast, time to reflect, an organizational culture that makes risk-taking and failure acceptable all encourage creative behaviour and the modification and building of original ideas.

In conclusion, the overview of NPD literature on organizational climate demonstrates that similar views exist among authors who involve the positive influence of a risk taking, tolerance for failure and time-to-reflect climate within the organization in the process of fostering success and nurturing ideas at the Front End. However, it has to be acknowledged that these views focus mainly on discovering which of many independent variables of the organizational climate are correlated with the product success. There is a gap in the literature related to the study of the organizational climate at the Front End as it is perceived and constructed by those involved at the Front End. Therefore, it is proposed to gain a deeper understanding of the organizational climate at the early stage as perceived by the expert practitioners in innovation.

**Senior management engagement and commitment**

NPD literature describes various definitions of senior management engagement and commitment. Some researchers support the view that senior management engagement and commitment involves resource allocation for NPD projects (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Brentani & Kleinschmidt, 2004), defining goals, and regularly monitoring the attainment of these goals (Ernst, 2002). Furthermore, it is advocated that senior management can demonstrate engagement and commitment by providing the teams with communication sharing and collaboration and by ensuring that political problems are solved quickly (Amabile, 1998). Another definition (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987) involves not only the support of senior management but also its daily involvement direction of the project. However, the quantitative findings of Cooper & Kleinschmidt (1987) demonstrate this construct as a relatively weak
success factor related to the positive outcome of international NPD programs. Failed projects had almost as much senior management support as did the successes. This could be explained by the selection of the items comprising the construct. Indeed, a daily intervention into an NPD project may not be beneficial because senior managers may exercise more control and leave less autonomy for creativity among the team members (Swink, 2000).

Amabile (1998) indicates how management can damage the climate for creativity by constantly changing goals. On the contrary, whenever leaders show a constancy of purpose results of innovation projects proved to be highly successful (Koen et al, 2001).

More recent views (Jaruzelski et al, 2006) suggest a definition of senior management engagement and commitment as top management involvement during the ideation process at the Front End. More specifically, for the Front End, it has been concluded that there are examples of companies such as Apple, Caterpillar and Toyota that have systematic ideation processes including the involvement of senior management in the conception and definition of new ideas.

Thus it is a consistent finding that senior management commitment and engagement is an important success factor for NPD projects. However, there is disagreement on the degree to which the intervention and engagement of senior management determines success in product innovation (Knox & Mitchell, 2003). It has been indicated that the high intervention of management may not be beneficial for highly innovative projects because constantly changing roles may damage creativity. Front End literature suggests that senior management has a role in empowering innovation teams by being positively involved in creative activities. It is evident that there is lack of clarity in the role of senior management at the Front End in a real life context, especially related to the level of control given to the ideation teams (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). Hence, this study examines in practice how senior management affects product concept development into the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study.
External and Internal sources' involvement

External and internal sources' involvement refers to cross-functional teams as well as external participants' involvement during the NPD process. A cross-functional team involves marketing, supply chain, research and development (Alam, 2003). A number of studies verify that an NPD project team should consist of cross-functional members from several areas of expertise within the organization (Imao et al, 1983; Knox & Mitchell, 2003). It has been indicated that the cross-functional teams foster cross-functional communication and co-operation that, in turn, speeds up the process and promotes the success of new products. The importance of the association of the external networks or sources with the internal knowledge base of the organization as a mean to generate new business opportunities has also been recognized (Trott, 1998). As a result, the cross-functional teams promote the success of new products (Ernst, 2002).

Furthermore, the NPD literature has gone to some length to emphasise the importance of the involvement of external sources for new ideas generation. The nature of these sources can be distributors, suppliers, competitors and government departments, university research centres or outside agencies (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Hoban, 1998; Knox & Mitchell 2003). It is argued that early and extensive involvement of external experts into the NPD process may reduce complexity and accelerate product concept development (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995).

However, it is not clear in the literature how or when external sources for ideas generation are involved in the process. Thus, even if it is implied that the participation of external sources in the NPD process and potentially in the Front End could have a positive effect on new product development, the empirical literature is fuzzy (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995). Hence, this study examines how the external and internal sources are involved in the Front End in the real life context of the European Hygiene cluster of the organization.

2.6.3 Person

Open-mindedness refers to questioning traditional ways of looking at market phenomena. When group members are encouraged to think in new ways about the information they gather, they are more likely to detect new
aspects of the information given, new market opportunities, new product concept ideas (Troy et al, 2001). Gardner (1997) provided a definition for the creative person as a person who regularly solves problems, produces fashions, products, or defines new questions in a domain in a way that is initially considered novel but that ultimately becomes accepted in a particular cultural setting. Flexibility, openness and tolerance for ambiguity are some of the traits of a creative personality (Amabile, 1998). Furthermore, it has been discussed (Trott, 1998) that research managers need to have the skills that make them receptive to fresh, new ideas. A survey in American House-wares Manufacturers Association has indicated that open-mindedness increases the number of new product ideas generated by a cross-functional team (Troy et al, 2001).

Provided that the Front End involves creative activities such as ideas generation, this will support open-mindedness as an individual characteristic to foster creativity and inspiration at the Front End. However, since research evidence is limited, it is proposed to examine further the success factors related to the Person at the Front End during its application in the business environment under study.

2.6.4 Product

NPD literature has recognized that when the ideas are generated and translated into concepts, attention to detail is another factor for success during the NPD process. Indeed, empirical research (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987) has demonstrated that one of the aspects of the market success for new product development is the clear and sharp definition of the product at the very first stage of the process. Prototyping or the assembly of an idea into a working part is not discussed in this review since it did not emerge from the fieldwork findings (Chapter 4).

Attention to refined elements of the marketing mix as well as the way in which the concept itself is presented to the consumer may indeed produce a winning concept and subsequently a winning product in the marketplace. It has also been recognized that paying greater attention to detail engenders higher rates of success during the NPD process (Poolton & Ismail, 2000). In conclusion, there are similar viewpoints among researchers as to the positive
influence of detail in product concept development at the Front End. Nevertheless, the evidence is limited. Hence, this study examines the success factors related to the Product at the Front End during its application in the business environment of the European Hygiene cluster.

2.7 Conclusions

The present chapter examines the two main theoretical perspectives on the early stages of innovation, namely the NPD and the Front End. The analysis of the existing analytical framework has indicated that NPD researchers share similar views as to the basic stages of the Front End. In their approach for NPD, the researchers have described from one to three stages that are linked to the early start including the ideas generation, the ideas development and the ideas evaluation. However, being influenced by the stance of the NPD process, the NPD authors fail to acknowledge the different nature of the Front End: the proposed stages are fragmentary, the approaches lack detail, the nature of the process is unclear.

A review of NPD literature concludes that there seems to be a general awareness of certain problems and success factors during this early stage of the NPD process. These success factors can be grouped in four main categories, namely Process, Place, Person and Product. By fulfilling the requirements posed by these categories, one can ensure better achievement of the organizational goals. Furthermore, a review of the Front End literature has indicated that the level of detail is vague and that practical application is of limited value. An early start seems to operate in an ad hoc manner and there is limited understanding of how it is managed within the organization.

However a deeper understanding is needed through further research. A vital part of this research is a comparison between the views of the authors of the NPD and the Front End literature with the views of the experts in innovation interviewed during fieldwork. This enhances understanding, being, as it is, a middle ground between a theoretical and a practical perspective and sheds light on the shadow between idea and reality.

In order to reveal emerging opportunities at the Front End, applied ethnography is described and discussed with respect to consumer immersion.
Recent literature advocates that traditional research is no longer enough to generate powerful consumer insight. Applied ethnography is proposed as a new approach to gain deeper understanding of the consumer's latent needs and foster generation of new ideas at the Front End. Hence, the application of the ethnography in the Front End by the action researcher and her team is one of the unique contributions of the present study.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”

Henry David Thoreau

The aim of this action research study was to explore the early stage of the NPD process within an organization. More specifically, it was intended to propose a solution to the problem of lack of new product concepts in the innovation funnel of the European Hygiene cluster of Greece, Italy and the Netherlands, apply changes in real life setting and recommend action for future research. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the early stage of the NPD process or the Front End by assessing best practices as perceived by Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) in international innovation. Next, this action research study intended to develop and propose a new model for the application of the Front End in the European Hygiene cluster as it emerged from the fieldwork findings. Last, this study aimed to apply, in a participative manner, the new model in the organizational setting, draw key lessons and conclude implications for management and directions for future research.

Hence, the aim of this inquiry was to feed the funnel of the European Living Hygiene cluster of the organization under study with new product concepts. The objectives of the inquiry were:

• To critically examine and analyze the perceptions of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), internal and external to the organization under study, regarding the
approach undertaken for the development of the FMCG new product concepts.

- To critically discuss the success factors which enable the organization to avoid making mistakes "en route" during the early stage of NPD process and determine the key lessons learned for the application of a new Front End model.
- To develop and apply a new product concept development model.

Firstly, this chapter aims to situate the inquiry under the action research umbrella and provide an overview of the practices undertaken for the action research cycle of this study. Secondly, it elaborates on the ontological and epistemological traditions adopted for the action research study. Finally, this chapter provides an appraisal of the validity of the process as it has been carried out, making reference to the limitations and challenges of the methodology.

3.2 Definition of Action Research

It has been recognized that different sets of research questions or problems lend themselves to different research approaches (Patton, 2002). The research question and objectives of this study frame a business problem that needs a practical solution to be implemented by the individuals employed in the organization. It is advocated that the research question and objectives posed for this study call for an action research approach.

The first distinction that needs to be made is between applied and action research. Applied research aims to illuminate a societal concern and hence enable people to understand the problem in order to intervene (Patton, 2002). The research inquiry takes place on people and in real time. Applied research has demonstrated strengths in studies of innovation particularly when it aims to fill gaps in the literature and generalize its findings. For example, an applied research study on managers of small American biotechnology firms resulted in a theoretical innovation model with a view to providing direction to such firms in understanding how to move products and inventions along the pipeline (Khilji et al, 2006).

However, there is a weakness of applied research in relation to its practical application. A problem is the lack of collaboration between
practitioners and researchers. Without collaboration, practitioners produce action without scientific value and researchers produce theory without practical application (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). In the example mentioned earlier (Khilji et al, 2006) the innovation model developed produced only theoretical knowledge and not practical insights because it was not applied in the firm under study. Consequently, the model's real value and areas of improvement as perceived by the managers involved could not be examined.

Action research was introduced to bridge the gap and combine theory-building with research in real life situations. Action research in its traditional sense comes from the work of Lewin (1946). His action research theory stemmed from his belief that knowledge should be created from problem-solving in real life situations. He recognised that a process was required by a committed group of people to effect change. Among the problems he studied were work teams and site based management.

His action research model was aimed at bridging the gap between practitioners and researchers. Lewin's model involved a “spiral of circles,” a continuous loop between “planning, action and fact finding about the results of the action” (Lewin, 1946) and aimed to address three questions:

- What is the present situation?
- What are the dangers?
- What shall the people involved in the situation do?

Examples of the early action research experiments that strongly influenced the links between action research and social democracy took place in Scandinavia where pioneering work with Volvo, Saab-Scania and Alfa Laval helped changed the understanding of industrial organization away from Taylorist approaches to work design and toward a more flexible form of semi autonomous work organization (Reason, 2006).

In the organization under study the problem of lack of new product concepts into the innovation funnel called not only for a theoretical approach but for useful, practical new knowledge that the managers involved could apply in
the every day conduct of their work. Embarking upon the research journey, the traditional definition of action research seemed the most appropriate to adopt: 'an approach to research that is based on a collaborative problem-solving relationship between the researcher and client, which aims at both solving a problem and generating new knowledge' (Coghlan, 2003: p452).

This seemingly straightforward definition soon started to raise two specific questions, each coming at different stages of the study:

- How can we simultaneously generate new knowledge and solve a problem?
- What does a "collaborative problem-solving relationship" mean?

Other definitions of action research shed some light to these questions. New knowledge and new solutions arise from a repetitive process of research, planning, theorizing, learning and development throughout the long-term
relationship of the practitioner with the problem (Cunningham, 1993: p3). In other words, action research (Figure 4) involves a cyclical process of steps such as planning, action, observing and evaluating the effects of said action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001) or as a continuous process of analysis, fact-finding, conceptualization, planning, execution and evaluation (Dickens & Watkins, 1999: p129). Furthermore, collaborative relationships are built on participative actions and research that occur simultaneously across the steps of the action research cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

In the course of the study, the action research process was revealed as a process of defining the problems, cues or questions from the perceptions of the participants (the subject matter experts or experts in international innovation and the managers of the organization), theorizing a model and testing it through empirical evaluation in the real life setting. Such an approach provided knowledge and learning through democratic reflection:

“Action research takes its cues - its questions, puzzles and problems - from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts. It bounds episodes of research according to the boundaries of the local context. It builds descriptions and theories within the practice context itself, and tests them there through intervention experiments - that is, through experiments that bear the double burden of testing hypothesis and effecting some (putatively) desired change in the situation” (Argyris & Schon, 1991: p86).

In the end, the action research experience proved to be far more rewarding in terms of acquiring new individual skills and competencies, fresh team lessons and new solutions and mindset with the organization cluster. Living such an experience was much more than just conducting a “sanitized” business intervention experiment. This is illustrated in Shani & Pasmore’s definition of action research in management (1985):

“Action research can be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems.

It is simultaneously concerned with bringing change in organizations, with developing self-help competencies in organizational members, and with adding to scientific knowledge” (Shani & Pasmore, 1985: p439).
Overall, despite the different approaches to action research, the action research study encountered all the common elements identified in the action research and management literature (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Coghlan, 2001; Gray, 2004; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005):

- Research in action rather than about action;
- Involvement of research subjects in a "democratic manner" with the researcher;
- Research concurrent with action;
- Perception of research as an agent of change or action and an approach to problem solving.

The action research study was focused on research in action. It aimed at resolving the organizational issue of lack of new product concepts into the innovation funnel in co-operation with a wide range of individuals. It took place in real time with people. These individuals were either the co-subjects or the co-researchers of the study (Chapter 4). The co-researchers of the study formed the action research team that was making decisions and implementing action. The members who were involved as co-subjects or co-researchers of the study were in a democratic dialogue with the researcher through informal discussions, formal meetings, exchange of e-mails (Chapter 7). Furthermore, the outcome of the study supplemented existing NPD and Front End literature and provided new insights to the early and fuzzy start of the NPD process within an organizational context.

### 3.3 Insider Action Research

The type of action research strategy followed for this study was insider action research. The insider action researchers can be managers who undertake a project within their own organization in the framework of an executive academic program (Coghlan, 2001). Adopting the insider action research strategy has been a straightforward choice for the following reasons:

- The initial assignment has been identified by the senior management of the organization,
- The intervention aimed at increasing turnover and profit growth for the European Hygiene cluster,
• The requirement of the duality of roles as practitioner and researcher allowed
the action researcher to conduct this study as part of her normal activity as a
full-time member of the organization and a part-time student of an executive
academic program (DBA, University of Surrey, UK) while being partly
sponsored by the organization under study,

• Feedback sessions were integrated into the work day.

However, it has to be noted that the assignment was not part of the
action researcher's job description. On the contrary, the action researcher
volunteered to undertake such an assignment with the objective of improving
the performance of the brands of her responsibility since she acknowledged that
a positive outcome of such an intervention would potentially generate growth
and profits for her brands. With reference to the action research literature, it was
found that there are several action research projects that refer to a variety of
situations and settings such as to provide organizational learning, to manage
change (Gray, 2004), to create innovation (Dickens & Watkins, 1999) or to fulfil
an executive academic degree requirement being a manager of the
organization. Krim (1988) was Director of Personnel for Human Resource
Development when he undertook a labour management participation
programme for his degree. Waterson's action research project (2000) has some
similarities with the action research project under study. Waterson's project
outcome risked being disappointing since the client challenged the findings
during the latter phases of the project because of multiple agendas of those
involved into the project.

In this action research project, the two individuals who represented the
senior management of the European Hygiene cluster left the organization. They
were replaced by other individuals with different agendas, only two months
before the completion of the project. Despite this sudden mutation, the action
research team was fully empowered and implemented the change, which were
appreciated by the new senior management.

It has been acknowledged that the action research cyclical process
poses several challenges which have been encountered in the study, such as
pre-understanding, role duality and organizational politics (Coghlan, 2001: p51):
• "Pre-understanding" refers to the previous knowledge that the action researcher has built up within the organization while being engaged in this repetitive process of planning, acting, evaluating, reflecting and acting.
• "Role duality" refers to the organizational and the researcher role that the individual possesses. This may create confusion for the individuals themselves but also conflict with the other members of the organization.
• An important issue for managers (Coghlan, 2001: p50) is that of "organizational politics". The action researchers have to pursue their task of implementing change while managing situations accordingly, in order to gain support and minimize resistance.

The action researcher's pre-understanding due to her long experience within the organization under study proved to be an excellent opportunity since it provided her with intimate knowledge of the organization, access to information and people in different functions, and in different countries. Due to the various roles the action researcher had undertaken in different categories and different countries she had the opportunity to build excellent business relationships with colleagues around the organizations and thereby access to the required information.

Role duality has been a true challenge during the course of the study. The main concern of her line and other senior managers, not involved in the project, was whether she could successfully administer her managerial role and achieve her business targets while at the same time having to accomplish the new task of action researcher and academic student. Such concerns were addressed through additional consistent effort and delivery of excellent results; in other words, the action researcher tried to exceed expectations as far as her managerial role was concerned. Another challenge related to role duality was to be able to follow up all the cyclical phases of action research within a short time span due to the limited time frame of the executive academic program involved.

Organizational politics have played an influential role in this project such as the political agenda of the three countries' representatives involved in the European Hygiene cluster of the organization. Moreover, the sponsors/senior management's unexpected departure from the organization, momentarily put the project under risk. Due to the empowerment of the action research
participants and the positive outcome from the application of the Ideas Product Concept Development model, the project ended successfully.

Despite all the challenges, action research was considered as the most appropriate choice for this study, as it meets both research and action requirements whereby its flexibility is responsive to the changes of a complex setting, such as a multi-national organization. The qualitative approach selected provides detail and understanding to recommend the appropriate changes to the international Front End.

3.4 Constructivist Paradigm and Action Research

The conscious choice of the action research approach called for a decision on the epistemological basis for this research approach. It is believed that no single methodology is superior to any other methodology in action research (Gray, 2004). However, it is argued that the issues which need to be tackled by the action research project borrow most from the constructivist paradigm that it is positioned under the umbrella of qualitative research. In contrast it is quantitative research that dominates management and organizational studies (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). These streams differ in the approach they use to creating knowledge and the criteria they adopt to validate findings. Therefore, it is worth elaborating on some of the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative research.

The knowledge generated by supporters of the quantitative approach claims to be objective and it relates to revising existing laws (Silverman, 2000). Consequently, ontologically quantitative research tends to take an objectivist view of the world. An objectivist view of ontology assumes that the world is independent of human cognition (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Reality consists of what is available to the senses and inquiry should be based on a technical and organizational reality that is independent of the researchers themselves (Thietart et al, 2001). Such an approach can exhibit strengths in studies of management, particularly when focusing at questions of aggregate groups. However, it is argued that truth and reality cannot be objectively separated from the mind and consciousness that observe or test them (Thietart et al, 2001; Gray, 2004). Meaning is arrived at by the subject and through his interactions
with the outside world. For example, it is impossible to know whether a respondent understands a certain word or statement as the researcher does or a respondent may report desirable behaviours or avoid reporting undesirable behaviours (Patton, 2002). In addition, “statistical correlations may be based upon variables that, in the context of naturally occurring interaction, may be arbitrarily defined” (Silverman, 2000: p.7). Consequently, quantitative research may run the danger of missing some details or interesting insights, whereas qualitative research may provide some more depth (Remenyi et al, 2002).

A review of the NPD literature has demonstrated (Chapter 2) that most NPD researchers have employed quantitative approaches and therefore they risked seriously limiting the utility of the knowledge produced (Reason & Torbert, 2001). Hence issues arose concerning a deeper understanding of the Front End for managers who wish to practice it in a real life setting: the proposed Front End stages are fragmentary; the approaches described lack detail; the nature of the Front End process is fuzzy.

The practical management question of the present study, namely how to “feed” the innovation funnel of the European Living Hygiene cluster with new product concepts, called for an action research approach. Action research focuses on knowledge in action and it can be both quantitative and qualitative (Gray, 2004).

This action research study was future oriented, collaborative, generated a theoretical model grounded in action and was agnostic and situational (Susman & Evered, 1978; Coglan & Brannick, 2005). However, the focus of the quantitative approach lies entirely on truths in the external objective world rather than on awareness and inquiry into the present relationships between the subjective world of the “out there”, and the interactive world of the “among us” (Reason & Torbert, 2001). While quantitative research aims mainly at “universalizable, valid certainty in reflection about particular pre-designated questions”, action research is claimed to aim at “timely, voluntary, mutual, validity testing, transformative action at all moments of living” (Reason & Torbert, 2001). Furthermore, the quantitative researcher is detached from the data while the qualitative researcher is close to the data (Coglan & Brannick, 2005), as was the case with the action researcher of the present study. With
this in mind, it was evident that adopting a quantitative approach for the action research project of the study would be misleading (Reason & Torbert, 2001).

Opposite to the approach of quantitative research stands the qualitative research that is closely linked to interpretivism and constructivism. The purpose of inquiry in qualitative research is in understanding the world from the viewpoint of those who live in it. For the interpretivists, the vision of the world is intentional as it exists only as a pattern of symbolic relationships and meanings sustained through the continued processes of human interaction (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). The nature of knowledge produced is subjective because the researcher is aiming at understanding the meanings actors give to reality (Thietart et al, 2001; Remenyi, 2002). Qualitative research takes a subjective view of epistemology and assumes that the external world can only be assessed subjectively. Subjectivist ontology assumes that social reality is an output of human cognitive process (Johnson & Duberley, 2000).

Indeed, a qualitative emphasis on the data selection and analysis of the acting stage underpinned the need for in-depth understanding of the Front End in the complex environment of the organization. It has been acknowledged that a qualitative methodological approach offers depth, openness and detail and it is suitable to real life complex settings whilst offering the researcher a holistic overview of the study (Gray, 2004: p320). Moreover, the qualitative method has been recommended (Patton, 2001: p159) as a suitable approach to study processes, as in the Front End process under study, for the following reasons:

- the experience of idea-generating processes varies among people, and their experiences have to be captured in their own words
- the ideas generating process is fluid and dynamic and cannot be summarized on a rating scale and,
- the participants' perceptions are a key process consideration

However, in the course of the study Crotty's (1998) statement that "the world cannot be described simply as subjective" neither as objective became apparent. The enactment of the action research cycle enfolded from a “dialogue” between reality and reflection, truth and perception. Meanings were constructed with rather than on co-subjects and co-researchers. As Crotty (1998: p44) suggested “objectivity and subjectivity need to be brought together and held together indissolubly... constructivism does precisely that...” and adds
that “We construct meaning. We have something to work with. What we have to work with is the world and objects in the world”.

Epistemologically and not just methodologically, it was assumed that only by understanding other people’s perspectives, such as the co-subjects and the co-researchers, valuable knowledge in relation to influential success factors and new approaches at the Front End can be generated at a personal level. In terms of the issue of human nature, it was assumed that meanings are arrived at by human beings as they interact and reflect in a real business setting. On the basis of these assumptions, what seemed most appropriate was the definition of constructivism as “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998: p42). This then is adopted for meeting the research objectives of the study and issues that emerged from the literature review.

The knowledge that emerged from the examination of the perceptions of Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) regarding the approach undertaken for the development of the FMCG new product concepts was in part constructed, and not discovered by the action researcher. Instead, the elicitation of knowledge that was tacit since it referred to past experiences of the SMEs was the outcome of a collective process suggested by the constructivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998).

Furthermore, the integration of applied ethnography into the IPCD model and its application into the real life setting of the organization under study called for the adoption of the constructivist paradigm. Application of ethnography implied that knowledge was co-created with the consumer. For instance, in the current study the in-home observations and the diaries’ entries uncovered unexpected usages of the bleach product that gave inspiration to the action research team for new product and advertising ideas (Chapter 6).

Accordingly, the constructivist epistemological foundation of the action research cycle of the study allowed for collaboration and reflection. Indeed, it has been acknowledged that there are engaging sympathies between constructivism and action research to the extent that they remain reflective (Reason & Torbert, 2001). In addition, the adoption of the constructivist
paradigm revealed opportunities to improve and change. There is the view (Reason & Torbert, 2001; Coghlan, 2001) that both positivist and hermeneutic research are separate from practice (however they may be perceived as applicable to practice). Whereas the primary purpose of academic research is to contribute to the body of knowledge, the primary purpose of action research is “a practical knowing embodied in the moment to moment action of the action researcher in the service of human flourishing (Reason & Torbert, 2001: p5).

In the study, the interpretations of the co-subjects and the co-researchers of the study were worthwhile but not necessarily final or complete. These interpretations were not only liberating and challenging but encouraged further questions that initiated investigation in a second spiral of the action research cycle (Chapter 4). This lends support to the views of action researchers who work on the epistemological assumption that the purpose of academic research and discourse is not only to understand, describe and explain the world but also to learn from it and change it (Reason & Torbert, 2001).

It is concluded that the epistemological and ontological approach adopted in the study was the primary step which was critical for the overall coherence of the project because it influenced the selection of the research design.

3.5 Theoretical Perspective of the Action Research Cycle

Despite the different articulations of the action research steps most authors agree that action research consists of a team of individuals who cycle through a spiral of stages including planning, acting, observing and evaluating the result of the action (Figure 5). In parallel, the action research team is continually monitoring the results of the activity of each stage (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Gray, 2004; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).
Drawing to the action research literature in order to design the stages of the project's cycle, seemed rather uncomplicated. Planning referred to the agreement of an overall plan and a decision as to what the first action was. It had also to take account of the organizational environment, including the relationship and targets agreed between the action researcher and the client (Gummesson, 2000). Acting referred to implementation of the agreed plan. Observing referred to the analysis of the impact of the action (Lewin, 1946) and experimentation (Gray, 2004: p381). The sources for the evaluation of the implementation of the action could include, among others, interviewing other people, observing a particular situation or keeping a diary. Appropriate action
assumed analysing data, identifying all possible alternatives and selecting the most suitable. Reflecting referred to the evaluation of impact of the project. It was argued (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005: p23) that the outcomes of the actions taken should be examined to evaluate the following:

- if the original identification of the problem was correct
- if the actions taken were appropriate
- if the actions taken were carried out in an appropriate manner
- what outcomes should feed into the next action research cycle

In this study, the cycle began by identifying the problem of lack of international new ideas for the European Hygiene cluster of the organization. A formal action document was prepared to clarify and gain agreement for the common objectives and criteria of success (Mumford, 2001). Such a problem definition did not seem to encounter issues identified at the action research literature. For instance, problems that have too broad a definition, that were too complicated or not particularly interesting for the researcher could create difficulties during the process. Literature clearly suggested that it is critical that the problem should be considered important but it should also be practically addressed (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

However, in the course of the study the issue that was raised was how to develop and apply a Front End model within the action research framework. The action research process lacked sufficient specificity especially because it was enfolding within a complex organizational context. It has been argued that the organization could be viewed as “a messy one rather than a series of neat hermetic stages” (Brewer, 2000: p5). In order to solve such an issue the Eisenhardt approach of building theory from case study research (1989) was integrated into the action research cycle.

3.6 Theoretical Perspective of the Eisenhardt Process

The Eisenhardt (1989) approach is a highly iterative process of inducting theory tightly linked to data. This research approach claims to be especially appropriate in new topic areas resulting in novel, testable and empirically valid theory. Some features of the process, such as problem definition is similar to hypothesis-testing research. Others, such as within-case analysis is unique to
The inductive process. Induction is defined as “the inference of a generic or
generalized conclusion from the observation of particular instances” and it is
used mainly in qualitative research (Remenyi, 2002). The induction methods
may prove to be very valuable because:

- The research question may be generated from the working experience of the
  sample,
- They encourage creativity and a different level of consciousness and,
- They facilitate the assembly of large amounts of data (Baker, 2003).

The Eisenhardt roadmap aims at synthesizing previous work on
qualitative methods such as Miles and Huberman (1984), and grounded theory-
building such as Glasser and Strauss (1967). The process is described in nine
steps:

- Getting started involves the formulation of the research problem and possibly
  the specification of some potentially important variables with some reference
to the existing literature.
- Selecting cases to fill theoretical categories is the second step of the process.
- Crafting instruments and protocols involves the combination of multiple data
  collection methods to achieve triangulation.
- Entering the field is what follows. A striking feature when entering the field is
  the potential overlap of data analysis with data collection methods which
  Eisenhardt supports as a controlled opportunity for providing the researcher
  with flexibility to take advantage of the uniqueness of a specific case and the
  emergence of new themes to improve any resultant theory. For example,
  analysis of the initial interviews may take place simultaneously with the
  collection of the remaining number of interviews. Drawn upon the same
  literature, field notes play an important role of accomplishing this overlap.
- Analyzing within case study is the fifth step. This typically involves detailed
  case study write-ups for each site. The overall idea is to become intimately
  familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity.
- Searching for cross-case patterns involves firstly the selection of categories
  and secondly the searching for within-group similarities coupled with inter-
group differences.
• Shaping propositions signifies the inductive development of propositions or concepts drawn from the analysis of data.
• Enfolding literature is an essential feature of the roadmap and involves the comparison of the emerging constructs with similar and contradictory findings of the existing broad range of literature.
• When saturation is achieved, it is time for the researcher to reach closure and stop adding more cases and iterating between theory and data.

A major strength of building theory using case studies is its likelihood of novel, testable and empirically valid theory especially in situations where little is known about a phenomenon. However, some characteristics that lead to its strengths can also lead to weaknesses. Building theory from case studies may yield in overly complex or very narrow and idiosyncratic theories applied only to specific phenomena (Eisenhardt, 1989). However, the requirement of the action research project under study was primarily the development of a theory in a situation where little was known about the Front End (it remained fuzzy), and secondly, the application of the theory in the specific setting of the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study.

Within the inductive paradigm, the integration of the Eisenhardt (1989) roadmap of building theory from case studies into the action research cycle led to the generation of an inductively derived theoretical construct under the name of International Product Concept model (IPCD). Furthermore, it provided the opportunity of applying the IPCD model in a real setting and proved that it was empirically valid (Eisenhardt, 1989). Overall, the strengths of this approach outweigh its limitations as it provided, within the action research framework, the development of a model for a specific phenomenon or phenomena that can be further extended by multiple studies in following cycles. The integration of the Eisenhardt (1989) roadmap into the action research cycle constitutes an original contribution of the present study.
3.7 Action Research Cycle and Eisenhardt Process: A new integrated approach

All the steps of the Eisenhardt process were integrated in the preparation and execution of this action research study. Consequently, each stage of the action research cycle incorporated several steps of the Eisenhardt process. More specifically, the action research cycle involved the following:

- Planning or Getting Started, Selecting Cases and Crafting Instruments and Protocols.
- Acting or Entering the Field, Analyzing within and cross cases, and Shaping Propositions.
- Observing or Testing.
- Reflecting or Enfolding Literature and Reaching Closure.

The discussion of the instrument is presented in detail in Chapter 4. Figure 6 is a diagrammatic representation of the action research methodology undertaken for this study:
3.7.1 Planning or Getting started, Selecting Cases and Crafting Instruments and Protocols

In this study, the first three steps coincide with the planning stage of the action research cycle. Planning involved the identification of the need for change and the agreement between the participants of the objectives and the actions to be taken (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). In other words, it was the formulation of the research problem and possibly the specification of some potentially important variables with some reference to the existing literature. In
the action research project under study, the research problem emerged from the review of the internal secondary data sources while the research question and objectives emerged from the review of the NPD and the Front End literature.

Furthermore, planning involved the selection of cases of extreme situations. In the action research study, the cases described in the Eisenhardt roadmap were represented by the subject matter experts who were information- and experience-rich individuals in international innovation.

At this point it is important to shed some light on the definition of the subject matter expert. A subject matter expert (SME) is a person expert in a particular area. Examples of subject matter experts consulted in surveys are provided by Ramirez (2002) and, among others, these include Consultants to programs, Program Directors from accrediting bodies, Executives, former members of the population under study who have above average expertise and experience.

The SMEs were identified by a snowball sampling strategy. This aims at identifying information-rich cases by sampling individuals who know other individuals who are information-rich (Patton, 2002: p243). In qualitative research, a recommended sample size is five to fifteen participants (Tesch, 1994) or until saturation is achieved. It is suggested (Patton, 2002) that qualitative inquiry focuses in depth on small samples (even n=1), selected to generate information-rich cases/individuals that produce insights and in-depth understanding, rather than empirical generalisations.

Because planning involved gaining agreement on the actions to be taken, the step related to crafting instruments and protocols of the Eisenhardt roadmap was integrated into the first stage of the action research cycle. Drawn from the constructivist paradigm, a mix of qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and documentation was used to provide stronger substantiation of the theoretical construct of the IPCD model. The perceptions of the SMEs in relation to the international Front End were identified by means of a qualitative approach of in-depth interviews. The in-depth interview collection method was used because it met the following conditions:

- In this particular setting, the SMEs' thoughts regarding past experiences in the Front End, that could not be observed, needed to be explored.
• There was a need for probing to gain deeper understanding of the SMEs' different perspectives.
• The SMEs belonged to competitive agencies and therefore they needed to maintain confidentiality.

Triangulation was achieved with the use of internal documentation and books that the SMEs made available to the action researcher. The in-depth interview technique and the internal documentation are described in detail in Chapter 4.

3.7.2 Acting or Entering the Field, Analyzing within and cross cases, and Shaping Propositions.

Literature suggests (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) that the second stage of the action research cycle refers to taking action towards the solution of the problem identified within the organization. However, in the course of the study, the acting stage proved to be far more complicated and challenging. In the action research project, taking action involved entering the field to collect data from the SMEs, analyzing the data and deriving a new theoretical construct.

The case study analysis typically involved detailed case study write-ups for each site. The overall idea was to become intimately familiar with each case as a stand-alone entity. According to Eisenhardt (1989) this process allowed for specific themes to emerge before the researcher generalized patterns across cases.

In this action research project, each SME was treated, and therefore analyzed, as a case study. According to Yin (2003: p.13) a case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context", or in other words, a case study is used when the research wants to cover contextual conditions-believing that they might highly pertinent to the phenomenon of study. The same author argues that a single case design is justifiable if it represents a representative case or a rare or unique circumstance. Yin (2003) also suggests that it is often that the unit of analysis can be one individual, such as an individual expert in a specific field and may represent a single case itself, as the subject matter expert used in the present study.
At first, each interview with the SMEs was tape-recorded. Secondly, detailed accounts of each interview were transcribed and translated into English, where appropriate. Thirdly, each transcript was analyzed separately. Due to the small number of transcripts, the thematic analysis approach was followed. Thematic analysis is defined as "any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core categories or topics" (Patton, 2002: p453). The core categories found through thematic analysis are called themes. Thematic analysis involved reading carefully every transcript, manually coding relevant information and drawing to the NPD and Front End literature for grouping the coded information, developing a cross-classification table (Patton, 2002) and labelling the emerging themes. The data were manually coded by labelling concepts within the text throughout the interview period, an approach that can be used when the interviews are conducted by the same researcher and within a short period of time (Bradley et al, 1989).

The next step, in the Eisenhardt roadmap, involved the cross case search for patterns. In the analysis of the interviews the key themes identified from every single "case" or interview with an SME were compared across "cases" or interviews with the SMEs. Such an analysis went beyond initial impressions and captured the novel findings that existed in the data. Hence, not only existing but also new patterns emerged (Chapter 4). To improve validity of the data the findings of the analysis were sent by e-mail to all the SMEs interviewed.

Following the within-case study analysis and the emerging themes from the cross-case analysis, the next step was to compare the emergent frame systematically with the evidence from each case. In the study, emerging findings have been compared with other sources of evidence, made available by the SMEs, such as books, written documents and presentations to shape the initial propositions and develop the IPCD model.

3.7.3 Observing or Testing

This step is not described into detail since it is elaborated further in the next chapter. During the observing stage of the action research project the IPCD model was applied in the organization under study. The aims of
observation were to describe the setting that was observed, the activities that took place, the people who participated in these activities and the meanings of what was observed from the perspectives of those observed (Patton, 2002: p262). In other words, "observation" is defined as a data collection method by which the researcher directly observes processes or behaviours in an organization over a period of time (Thietart et al, 2001). Observations varied to the extent to which “the observer participates in the setting being studied, the tension between insider versus outsider perspectives, the extent to which the purpose of the study is made explicit and the duration of the observations” (Patton, 2001: p275). In terms of the specifics of this action research project, the observation proved to be a fulfilling and rewarding experience, since it satisfied the following:

• To provide with the opportunity for observing while working full time.
• To conduct observation as a single fieldworker fulfilling the role of the insider action researcher.
• To evaluate empirically the IPCD model.
• To provide results within a short time frame due to the project deadlines and the executive academic program’s requirements.

The choice of the overt, single, “participant observer” approach reflected the necessity of incorporating these features. The observation enfolded within five months due to the enormous pressures of time and to the limited resources. As Patton suggests (2002: p274) “evaluation and action research typically involve much shorter durations in keeping with their more modest aims: generating useful...timely...information for action”.

This form of direct observation of the application of the IPCD model into the business setting has offered the advantages of understanding the context within the Front End and is applied in a real life setting. Firsthand experience of the people and the setting offered the opportunity of gaining deeper understanding and moving “beyond the selective perceptions” (Patton, 2002: p264). Consequently, the challenge of being an insider while trying to maintain an outsider perspective has to be recognized. Unobtrusive measures as well as documents assisted the action researcher to manifest triangulation of her data.
3.7.4 Reflecting or Enfolding Literature and Reaching Closure.

The description of this step is an overarching explanation since further detail is included in Chapter 7. Enfolding literature and reaching closure were the two final steps of the Eisenhardt roadmap that were incorporated into the Reflecting stage of the action research cycle.

Action literature suggests that the action researcher needs to continually inquire into each one of the main stages of the action research cycle, to evaluate the outcomes and address the need for improvement and next actions (Reason & Torbert, 2001; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Reflecting acted as "a reflecting cycle about the research cycle" as illustrated by Coghlan & Brannick (2005: p25). However, it has not always been a clear cycle within each stage. Regular self-reflection has been a real challenge since "all of us are running our work, our days, and our lives to a greater or lesser extent in habitual, culturally inherited ways" (Reason & Torbert, 2001:p12). Instead, self-reflection would come in the moment of action. Often, it would come after an interaction with the world as well. During the last stage of the action research cycle reflection involved the "dialogue" with the enfolding literature. The emergent model as well as the observation's outcomes were compared and discussed with similar and contradictory findings drawn from the NDP and the Front End literature. In the study, reflection involved also group reflection and planning. Co-researchers and co-subjects were involved at certain stages of the cycle in a dialogue, formal or informal, to validate findings or to agree next steps for action. Indeed, sometimes they acted as judges or sometimes as supporters (Reason & Torbert, 2001). More specifically, the formal dialogue included:

• E-mailing between the sponsor and the action researcher in order to agree the commission of the project.
• Team meeting among the action team members in order to agree upon the planning step of the second action research cycle.

The informal dialogue included:

• E-mails, telephone calls and meetings between the action team members and the co-subjects in order to nurture the new product concepts.
• E-mails between the co-subjects or SMEs and the action researcher in order to clarify and correct data.
• Team meeting and e-mails in order to critically examine the process taken and to agree upon the lessons learned.

Overall, reflection took all the different forms that may be applied to the action research cycle: content, process and premise (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Content reflection referred to the reflection on the diagnosis, planning and acting upon the issues. Process reflection focused on how the diagnosis of the issues was undertaken, how action planning flowed from the diagnosis and how implementation and evaluation were conducted. Premise reflection refers to the critique of the un-stated, underlying assumptions and perspectives that governed attitudes and behaviour.

In the course of the study a reflective diary was kept. Reflection did not always generate more clarity or new insights. Sometimes it helped to “smooth” frustrations and give peace of mind. Only when reaching closure did everything seem clearer, connections were made and conclusions were drawn.

It is argued (Eisenhardt, 1989) that when saturation is achieved, it is time for the researcher to reach closure and stop adding more cases and iterating between theory and data. The action research study has been completed within a time period of fifteen months and included planning, acting, observing, reflecting stage and planning again. Indeed action research literature suggests that cycles typically have different time spans and may last from a few months to some years (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Due to the requirements of the executive academic program, the cycle had to come to its completion. Obviously, given the time and resources, the research could be continued further. Ultimately, the end point of an action research project of limited time duration should not only be the successful implementation of the solution to the target problem, but also the recognition of what has been learned from the process of change. In the study, the final stage of reflections concluded in key and, hopefully, revealing lessons. Furthermore, it concluded in planning a second action research cycle that is described in Chapter 4. It was evident to all the team that the action research cycle does not stop but continues as new problems and new solutions emerge constantly adapting to the changes of the environment. After all, action research could be viewed not as a destination but
as a continuous process of change and dissemination of knowledge (Mumford, 2001).

3.8 Theoretical Perspective of Validity and Trustworthiness in Action Research

Validity in qualitative research has been a controversial issue. Maxwell (1992) supports a view of validity avoiding the philosophical and practical difficulties associated with positivist approaches. Rolfe (2006) questions the appropriateness of any predetermined criteria for judging qualitative research. On the other hand, it seems that there is a surprisingly diverse range of approaches to validity, all of which provide different answers to the quality questions. The particular frameworks used in this study are the ones that seemed most appropriate for the peculiarities of the action research project.

Coghlan's (2001) approach to validity in insider action research seemed particularly relevant. According to the author, insider action researchers can demonstrate rigour and validity for their findings by:

- Accessing different views of what is happening, and seeking both confirming and contradictory interpretations,
- Grounding their findings into theory,
- Challenging the outcomes by comparing them with supporting or disconfirming theories,
- Challenging and testing their assumptions publicly on a continuous basis and
- Providing explanation for their engagement to the steps of the process and recording them to demonstrate truthful representation.

The integration of the Eisenhardt (1989) theory building process into the action research cycle provided a thorough and systematic approach to increase validity as described by Coghlan. The methodical inclusion of instruments and protocols, cross-case analysis tactics, and several uses of literature, provided theory with improved internal validity (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Maxwell's definition of validity sheds more light to quality issues (1992: p283) "validity pertains to the relationship between an account and something outside of that account, whether this something is constructed as objective reality, the constructions of actors, or a variety of other possible interpretations".
Therefore, it is possible to obtain different yet equally valid interpretations from different perspectives. Hence, validity is relative to purposes and circumstances (Maxwell, 1992).

Consequently trustworthiness of data played a critical role in the course of the study. Data trustworthiness involved the three elements of credibility, dependability and transferability (Patton, 2002; Rolfe, 2006). Credibility was enhanced by taking multiple accounts of social reality into consideration through triangulation of various sources during the various steps of the action research cycle. Triangulation, drawing upon multiple evidence-collection methods (Remenyi et al, 2002) not only contributed to the verification and validation of the qualitative analysis but proved to be a very useful approach for exploring different ways of looking at the same subject, and building confidence in the conclusions drawn (Eisenhardt, 1989; Patton, 2002; Gray, 2004). In sum, the data of the study were collected from the following sources:

- In-depth interviews: As stated previously in-depth interviews have been held with subjects matter experts located in different European countries (n=8).
- Internal Documentation related to international innovation projects provided by the SMEs (“Crafting Instruments and Protocols” section).
- Observations of a focus groups discussion and a creative workshop (n=2)
- Field notes recording observations and reflections.

The combination of approaches enabled the action researcher to build on the strengths of each method while minimising the weaknesses of a single approach (Patton, 2002). However, it has to be recognized that these interpretations have to be understood as constructed within the context of the action research project under study. Such an approach places more emphasis on the dependability and transferability of data.

Dependability stems from the transparency and opportunity to question the research process and the data analyzed. It has been discussed (Herr & Anderson, 2005) that addressing bias in action research is not the same as in other types of research. While bias and subjectivity is acceptable in action research, in the course of the study they were critically examined using other mechanisms such as member checks (Rolfe, 2006) and a critical audience (Gray, 2004). Indeed, the action research literature suggests that evaluation of the impact of the action research project has to be judged by the individuals
involved. It is up to them to validate if the criteria set at the beginning of the project have been met (Coghlan, 2001; Gray, 2004).

However the generalisation of the findings poses challenges since the present study has been conducted within a specific context (Flick, 2006). Hence, the element of transferability of results becomes problematic. Transferability is closely linked to naturalistic generalisation in which findings are not generalized but rather transferred from a sending context to a receiving context. Transferability has been particularly pertinent to the action research project since its primary purpose was to serve three audiences: for me, for us, for them (Marshall & Reason, 1994). This is illustrated in Reason & Torbert (2001, p5) words: “a practical knowing embodied in the moment-to-moment action of each research/practitioner, in the service of human flourishing of the eco-systems of which we are part”.

The action research study encompassed and integrated first, second and third person research (Marshall & Reason, 1994). First person research related to the action researcher's ability to foster an inquiring approach to her own life and to assess effect in the organization while acting. Second person research was through engagement with the action research team members or the SMEs as co-subjects of the study to enhance the perspectives of the first person inquiries. Third person research aimed to create a wider community of inquiry involving the academic community by pursuing the acting research project within the context of an executive academic program (DBA degree) as well the wider organization under study.

To establish dependable recording of interviews, tapes should be considered adequate to confirm the quotes of the participants in the dissertation. In the analysis of the findings, respondents had been let to speak for themselves so that the findings incorporated also their own words (Maxwell, 1992). Furthermore, the action research participants' checks were used to improve dependability. All SMEs had the opportunity to check and challenge the categories and themes drawn from the interviews’ analysis as developed by the action researcher. The action research team members were asked to check and challenge the IPCD model as well as the key lessons learned, as written by the action researcher. Therefore, the examination of whether or not the statements and written accounts were a true representation of the participants' views and
experiences enhanced the validity of the action research. Finally, a critical audience was used to challenge outcomes and arguments. The critical audience contained four individuals from outside the context such as the two supervisors of the action researcher who were located in the UK, a former Research and Development Director in the organization under study located in the UK, and an entrepreneur in the service sector located in Greece. Via formal meetings, e-mail, or telephone, progress was shared continuously with each member of the critical group. Hence, the action researcher was able to reflect further on her practice and validate her research claims.

Here some examples of written feedback have been chosen that were provided by members of the action research team and the critical audience.

At an early phase of the research, a member of the critical audience (ex-employee of the organization) said:

"Consequently, in my view, this work should aim more specifically...at highlighting what the critical success factors are (in NPD literature)". (This particular comment helped the action research team to identify and incorporate the success factors into the model.)

From an SME (Respondent 1):

"It looks very good and thorough"

From an action team member (Development Manager):

"I like the description of the model we have tested here"

Hopefully the data are transferable to other clusters of the organization since it emanated from some influential and highly experienced individuals involved in international innovation of fast consumer goods (FMCG) over the last ten to twenty years. Moreover, external respondents' openness or willingness to reveal their best practices as well as their frustrations has to be acknowledged. A further strength had been the variety of experiences. By selecting people with diverse backgrounds in international innovation of different product categories, it was possible to understand the major stages followed during the international Front End and the key success factors, as illustrated by the respondents. As a result, findings were transferable to the action research project of the study and were incorporated into the IPCD model.

More importantly, the experience of the action research has been transferable and valuable for all its three audiences: for me, for us and for them.
For me:

Through the study, the action researcher undertaking the role of the real investigator improved her practice. She was more confident, more relaxed with herself and with others, and more successful. In the course of the study she was promoted to marketing manager of the company. Recognizing the importance of immersion into the local market while loosening control greatly contributed to the quality of her every day practice and her own role as a manager, as described in Chapter 7 (Reflective Diary):

“\textit{I had to take a big breath, and let myself “loose” and relaxed in an attempt to break the vicious cycle. Day by day this behaviour became natural for my team and me}”.

In the course of the study her stated purpose became more encompassing and formulated as a never-ending journey to knowledge that bridges everyday practice: “As a person increasingly adopts intentional first-person research/practices, she or he is increasingly waking up to the possibility of integrating inquiry and action in the present moment” (Reason & Torbert, 2001: p12)

For us:

First person inquiry evolved to include immediate colleagues in addition to the co-subjects of the fieldwork. Consequently, the action research endeavour was shared with the co-researchers and the co-subjects of the project. In the course of the study some individuals (SMEs) have left their positions and moved to other fields of businesses. For them the transferability of the data was only indirect (Respondent 1):

“\textit{Since I am now in a totally new business (investing in new media companies) your research is quite interesting; but only indirectly}.”

As described previously, those who stayed until closure such as the co-researchers engaged in acting and reflecting, making sense of their experiences. For example, the Legal and Claims manager who shared with the team via an e mail his experience in three reflective points “\textit{rather than logic or any kind of scientific approach}”. Especially in the reflecting stage the co-researchers reflected on the application of the IPCD model critically and learned
from the successes and failures. The outcome of this discussion was the key lessons as they are described in Chapter 7.

For them:

Hopefully the study will be of interest to the wider organization. Issues of local consumer orientation, looser controls and more flexibility to ideation teams especially when results are negative are rarely addressed in a multi-national firm. The outcome of the study has indicated that it is time to do so, as explicitly stated by some of the individuals involved in the study (Respondent 1):

"I am sure this will be a very valuable research for many, many people in the organization! Do also bring it under the attention of the Marketing Academy (of the organization), and people like (name of the manager)!

Finally, the knowledge generated through the study is hoped to be valuable for the academic community. Much of the NPD and the Front End literature remains focused on fragmented and disconnected from reality Front End theories. It is desired to make a contribution to developing an alternative path with a more holistic and practical perspective stemming from the IPCD model.

3.9 Conclusions

This chapter states that the research strategy selected for the present study is insider action research, for the main reason that it links theory with practice. It is the strategy which aims at solving organizational problems in real time with managers. In the particular organization the problem addressed was that of lack of ideas. A review of the action research literature concludes that the generalisation of the findings poses challenges since the present study has been conducted within a specific context. Hence, the element of transferability of data becomes significant. Transferability has been attained in this study within three audiences: for me (the action researcher), for us (the participants), for them (the organization and the academic community).

From the methodological point of view, constructivism has been undertaken as the epistemological foundation for this study since it seemed the most appropriate for meeting the research objectives of the study and the issues which emerged from the literature review (Chapter 2).
The lack of sufficient specificity for the application of the action research process to the complex organizational setting led to the integration of the Eisenhardt approach of building theory from case study research (1989) into the action research cycle. Consequently, each stage of the action research cycle incorporated several steps of the Eisenhardt process such as *Planning or getting started*, selecting cases and crafting instruments and protocols; *Acting or entering the field*, analyzing within and cross cases, and shaping hypothesis; *Observing or testing*; *Reflecting or enfolding literature and reaching closure*. Such an integrated methodological approach constitutes an original contribution of the present study.

The following chapter will lead us through the step of *Planning or getting started*, selecting cases and crafting instruments and protocols.
Chapter 4

Planning

4.1 Introduction

“A ship in harbour is safe; but that is not what ships are built for.”

William Shedd

As stated in Chapter 3, the theoretical perspective undertaken for this study is constructivism and aligns with the understanding of the action research study. Action research is “a practical knowing” (Reason & Torbert, 2001: p5) and the questions which need to be answered are: what is the quality of knowing within the practice of this person and setting and what is the qualitative (in the case of the current study) evidence that can support claims of quality (Reason & Torbert, 2001; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

With this in mind, the aim of the chapter is to describe the methods of inquiry adopted for the action research study during the planning or getting started, selecting cases and crafting instruments and protocols stage:

- Firstly, it explains the role of the action researcher and the participants of the action research project.
- Secondly, it describes the stages of the action research cycle and focuses on the research design adopted for each one.
- Thirdly, the chapter provides the approaches selected to improve the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

Overall, the chapter aims to explain how the action researcher engaged in the steps of action research, collected and analyzed her data while testing and challenging her assumptions (Coghlan, 2001).
4.2 Participants

Action research is a participatory and democratic approach. A wide range of individuals was invited to participate in the study. Those involved in data collection are classified into four categories: Subject Matter Experts, managers of the organization, representatives of external agencies and consumers. It is important to make a distinction between the co-subjects, those involved into action being studied and the co-researchers, those involved into the thinking and the shaping of the action research cycles (Reason, 2001; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

The co-subjects involved 22 individuals from all four categories specified previously. More specifically, these individuals were the Subject Matter Experts, managers in the organization, representatives of the agencies (the Agencies are presented with pseudonyms), and creative consumers. The other type of contributions included the involvement of 5 individuals in implementation and reflection during the stages of the cycle. It has to be noted that the Vice President and sponsor of the study resigned during the Acting stage of the action research cycle. He was replaced during the Evaluation stage of the action research cycle by the Director of Household Cleaners, Europe.

In the study, the above individuals will be referred to as the action research team. More details for the participants are presented in Table 2.
## Table 2
THE CO-SUBJECTS & THE CO-RESEARCHERS OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Subjects: SMEs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Internal Project Leader</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>External Project Leader</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>External Consumer Insight Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>External Research Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>External Senior Inventor</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>External Client Service Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Internal Director</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>British</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Internal Project Leader</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Italian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Subjects: Managers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Brand manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Internal Development Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Internal Technical Liaison Unit Mgr.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Internal Customer Marketing Mgr.</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Internal Consumer Insight Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Subjects: Representatives of the Agencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Creative Workshop Facilitator from Local Creative Agency</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Ethnographic Researcher and Moderator from the International Qualitative Agency</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Account Director from the Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Account Manager from the Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Creative Director from the Advertising Agency</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Free Lancer Concept Designer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Subjects: Creative Consumers</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Co-Researchers: Action Research Team Members</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Vice President Household Cleaners Europe/ Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>South African German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Brand Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Development Manager</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Manufacturing Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Legal and Claims Manager</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Greek</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

During the project, a large number of consumers, who were users of household cleaning products, were recruited as passive subjects at the observation stage of the action research cycle. These consumers are presented in Table 3, but they should not be considered as participants at the research.
Table 3
THE PASSIVE SUBJECTS
OF THE ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>Stage of IPCD model</th>
<th>Type of involvement</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Local Consumer Immersion</td>
<td>In-home observations</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>25-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Local Consumer Immersion</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>25-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>Concepts Evaluation</td>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>Females</td>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>25-54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

During the course of the study, a critical audience was involved to challenge the outcomes and findings. As stated in Chapter 3, it contained the two supervisors of the action researcher who were located in the UK, a former Research and Development Director in the organization under study and an entrepreneur in the service sector located in Greece.

4.3 Lead investigator

The lead investigator employed a dual role, that of the student at an executive academic program (DBA) and that of the insider action researcher. In particular, the main responsibilities of the lead investigator in this action research study were:

- Lead researcher in collecting and analysing the data
- Lead individual in feeding back the finding to the Vice President and to the European Director
- Lead initiator and co-ordinator of the application of the IPCD model into the organization.
- Lead initiator of the action research team reflecting discussion on key lessons and next steps.

Throughout the fieldwork study, the action researcher and lead investigator was based in the organization’s office in Greece and travelled to
Italy where the senior management of the Innovation Centre of the European Hygiene cluster was based.

4.4 First Action Research Cycle: Research Design

The design undertaken was insider action research and involved four stages of one action research cycle as described in the following sections. A variety of methods of inquiry were used to explore the research question, including the collection of qualitative data. One research cycle of four stages took place during a period of twelve months.

Figure 7

THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Source: Present author
4.4.1 Definition of the problem

As stated previously, in the case of the European Hygiene cluster business problem, internal evidence (Milan International Workshop, presentation January 2006) demonstrated that “there were not enough big pillars” of common new products for the three countries of the European Hygiene cluster, Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. For a few years, the formal innovation funnel had been empty of new ideas relevant to the three countries alike. Among other reasons, this lack of innovation had led to a negative turnover growth and market share loss in the three countries involved. According to the key stakeholders and countries' representatives, this situation had to change so that there would be a common stream of innovation ideas that people involved would find interesting and worth pursuing. Therefore, the main challenge was to develop stimulating international product concepts for the European Hygiene cluster of countries.

4.4.2 Work carried out

The work carried out in the action research cycle was conducted by the action researcher with the involvement of a number of people who were either the subjects of the data collection or participants in the process of change. Data collection and analysis was a journey of discovery, as is recognized by the constructivist paradigm. At the beginning of the cycle a formal document was written by the action researcher and agreed by her sponsor. The action researcher conducted eight in-depth interviews with internal and external experts (Subject Matter Experts) in international innovation. The action researcher analysed the data (Chapter 5) and developed a new theoretical construct, the International Product Concept Development (IPCD) model. The action research team with the action researcher applied the IPCD model within the organization. Upon completion of the application of the IPCD model the action researcher arranged a team meeting where the action team members discussed the outcome of the project, and proposed recommendations for next actions agreeing the planning stage of the following action research cycle. The action researcher kept notes of that discussion. Then, based on these notes and her diary, the action researcher wrote down the lessons learned, the
implications for management and some directions for future research (Chapters 7 & 8).

Throughout the action research cycle the SMEs, the action research team members, the co-subjects of the research, as well as members of the critical audience, shaped the way forward, challenged and validated the results, as elaborated into the Reflections' sections of the present Chapter.

The stages of the first action research cycle are presented in Figure 7. The data collection methods used for each stage of the first action research cycle is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

THE RESEARCH DESIGN OF THE FIRST ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE

Source: Present author
### 4.4.3 Planning or Getting started, Selecting Cases and Crafting Instruments and Protocols: Agreement of project objectives and deliverables

As stated on Chapter 3 the planning stage of the action research cycle coincides with the first three steps of the Eisenhardt model.

**Getting started**

Secondary internal data were collected with the aim of identifying the problem and of providing feedback to the organization regarding the need for a new solution that would involve a process for international product concept development. In particular, the secondary data included the following sources:

- The Global Computerised Innovation funnel report of the company.
- The official report of the Innovation Center of the organization in the form of a Powerpoint presentation of the Living Hygiene Workshop held in Milan, in January 2006. The report was commissioned by the Vice President of Household Cleaners Europe and sponsor of the study.

The research questions and objectives as drawn from the NPD and the Front End literature, the process and outcome of the first step of the action research study was monitored between the action researcher and the senior management of the European Hygiene cluster by a formal action document (Mumford, 2001). The document included the identification of the need for a process of international product concept development, the definition of objectives and deliverables and was agreed by the sponsor via e-mail (Appendix A).

Gray (2004) noted that the performance indicators have to be set to indicate whether change or improvement has been initiated. For the study concerned, the performance indicator was the acceptance of a new product concept by the consumers of the countries involved in the NPD process. It was also agreed that a report would be distributed to the senior management upon the completion of the study. This communication enabled both the organization and the action researcher to have a common understanding of and mutual agreement about the objectives and the actions to be taken.

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Selecting Cases

As discussed in Chapter 3 one of the objectives of the planning stage of the action research cycle was to identify subject matter experts (SMEs) internal and external to the organization with experience in ideation and in managing international innovation projects. These individuals should have successfully developed international product concepts that delivered growth and market share.

A snowballing strategy was undertaken in order to identify internal and external SMEs in international innovation who would be highly experienced and knowledgeable, with insights highly relevant to international innovation projects. Through the action researcher’s personal knowledge of the industry and its people, and through background discussion with the information-rich individuals, more information-rich experts were identified. Such an approach is consistent with the snowball sampling strategy (Patton, 2002). Saturation point was reached when common themes emerged by interviewing eight SMEs internal and external to the organization (Table 4):

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>First Initial</th>
<th>SME Classification</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Project Leader</td>
<td>Neth./lands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>External (ex. Internal)</td>
<td>Project Leader</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>K</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Consumer Insight Dir</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Research Director</td>
<td>Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>External (ex. Internal)</td>
<td>Senior Inventor</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>Client Service Director</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>Project Leader</td>
<td>Italy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author
4.4.4 Crafting instruments and protocols

The aim of this step was to select the appropriate combination of data collection methods to develop in-depth understanding of the SMEs' perceptions regarding their experiences, as well as to triangulate the interviews' findings.

The eight SMEs were interviewed by the use of the Applied Cognitive Task Analysis (ACTA) in-depth interview technique. The information was collected by means of an interview guide approach and more specifically the task diagram interview and the knowledge audit methods of the ACTA technique. There is a fine line between the interview guide approach and the ACTA technique. The interview guide approach lists the issues to be explored in the course of an interview, ensuring the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with all individuals interviewed. The interview guide offers the interviewer the advantages of conducting the interview in a short time and the flexibility to decide the sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview (Patton, 2002). However, the main limitations faced when adopting the interview guide is that it may not provide the possibility of exploring other topics emerging during the interview and that it depends on the skills and experience of the interviewer (Patton, 2002, Gray, 2004).

The main advantage of ACTA is that it enables an unskilled interviewer to articulate knowledge that may be difficult to verbalize (Militelo and Hutton, 1998: p1619). The ACTA consists of a set of methods designed to help the researcher who has not been trained in cognitive psychology to extract information about the cognitive demands and skills from experts required for the task (Militelo and Hutton, 1998). The ACTA aims at eliciting critical cognitive elements from subject matter experts (SMEs). The ACTA technique originates from Cognitive task analysis (CTA), which is a method for identifying cognitive skills in order to perform a task proficiently. The product of the ACTA can be used to inform the design of the interfaces and training systems.

One of the ACTA methods is the task diagram interview. This diagram aims at identifying the difficult cognitive elements of the task and provides the interviewer with a guideline of questions that provide a surface level look at the task.
More specifically, during the interview, the following three areas were explored:

- The sequence of events for developing international product concepts,
- The decisive factors for successful implementation of the Front End within the organization,
- The examples of best practices during the Front End.

The three major questions incorporated into the interview guide (Appendix B) to explore these points are listed below:

- Think about what you do when you aim to develop international winning product concepts to "Feed the Funnel". Can you break these tasks down into less than six but more than three steps?
- When you aim to develop international winning product concepts, are there any ways of "working smart" or accomplishing "more with less" that you have found especially useful?
- Can you think of a time when you realized that you would need to change the way you were performing in order to get the job done?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

In order to gain more in depth understanding and elicit the SMEs' stories and examples based on their actual experience, the knowledge audit method involved a set of probes that were incorporated into the interview guide (Appendix B). The task diagram interview provided the action researcher with understanding of the steps that the SMEs had taken during the international product concept development, whereas the probing questions of the knowledge audit added clarity and elicited more in-depth understanding (Gray, 2004; Militelo and Hutton, 1998). Furthermore, the task diagram interview provided the freedom to explore and probe further. It was a systematic way of interviewing different SMEs in different countries within the limited time available. It allowed the interviewer to conduct the interview within a very short time frame, from thirty to forty five minutes, because the highly focused questions established clear priorities for the interview (Patton, 2002).

In the cases where the SMEs were situated out of Greece, telephone interview was the approach selected for time and cost reasons. Among the telephone interviews was one joint interview since the two interviewees were
working for the same agency and their wish was to provide their views together. The average interview took 45 minutes, ranging from 40 to 60 minutes. Interviews were tape-recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis.

Triangulation was achieved by the documentation made available by some SMEs. More specifically, the documentation included:

- A Powerpoint presentation with key lessons for an internal innovation project,
- A Powerpoint presentation with visual information for another internal innovation project,
- The internal Marketing/Innovation portal site of the organization,
- Two books, related to consumer understanding and innovation, published by the organization under study,
- Two books, related to ideation and innovation, published by the companies of two SMEs,
- The web sites of the companies of the SMEs

4.4.5 Acting or Entering the Field, Analyzing within and cross cases, and Shaping Hypotheses: Examination of the SMEs' perceptions on steps and success factors at the Front End.

Entering the Field

The main research objective during this step was to explore international innovation experts' views regarding the approach recommended for developing international product concepts based on their previous experiences. The fieldwork began in March 2006 and, it was completed in June 2006.

Eight in-depth interviews were held with SMEs situated in different European countries (Table 4). Seven of them were conducted by phone and one face-to-face. Interviews focused on reflecting on the steps taken during international product concept development based on real life examples and on success factors.

In the cases where the SMEs were situated outside Greece, telephone interview was the approach selected for time and cost reasons. It has been argued that telephone interviews offer the advantages of low cost and faster implementation. However, refusal rates may be higher (Patton, 2002). In the
case of the telephone interviews of this study, refusal rates were low. Only two internal SMEs declined to participate due to heavy workload and two external SMEs who were already linked by co-operation, preferred to participate in the interview jointly. There was only one case where the face-to-face interview approach was adopted as the interviewee was situated in Athens, Greece. All interviewees read the objectives of the methodology of the study and provided their agreement via a form sent to them by e-mail. Their permission for the tape recording of the interview was given orally to the action researcher.

However, the challenge faced during the interviews stage was that of language and cultural differences between the British, Dutch, Italian and Greek interviewees (Patton, 2002). The action researcher was aware of these differences and was consciously demonstrating sensitivity to these barriers by probing further when the answer was unclear. Her international background and professional experience in marketing and innovation enabled her to establish authenticity since she was able to make reference to specific jargons, process, and events. However, the ACTA technique presented certain trade-offs such as recall error, reactivity of the interviewee to the interviewer, distorted responses due to personal bias or a simple lack of awareness of the emotional state of the interviewee (Patton, 2002). Despite the trade-offs and challenges, this technique seemed most appropriate for this particular setting due to its flexibility for probing as well as the richness and the detail of information it provided. To overcome these limitations of this technique, all in-depth interviews were tape-recorded and triangulated with the internal documentation, stated previously.

Analyzing within case data

From each transcript, sequence of steps, objectives and approaches taken at each step were identified according to each SME's perception. Next, each step and its respective objective and approach, for each SME, was drawn up in such a way that they were mapped onto a table (Chapter 5). Furthermore, in each interview the answers to the questions of the knowledge audit revealed key success factors that were grouped under ten general themes such as flexibility, local consumer immersion, senior management support and commitment and others.
Searching for cross case patterns

The next step was the cross-case search for patterns. The table (Chapter 5), referred to previously, revealed four key stages during the Front End that emerged from the data analysis. The tactic of selecting key themes identified during the within case analysis, and looked for within group similarities and differences, was followed. The SMEs were classified into two groups, internal and external ones.

Thus, for each of the four stages, accompanied by their objectives and approaches taken, similarities and differences among internal and external SMEs were discussed and emerging findings were drawn (Chapter 5).

A similar approach was followed to analyze and draw findings for the ten success factors (Chapter 5). This process has been particularly challenging, as it required creativity, intellectual discipline and analytical rigor since it was up to the action researcher and lead investigator to decide what things go together to form a pattern or theme and to name it accordingly (Patton, 2002).

Shaping propositions

The findings of the within case data analysis and the cross-case patterns as well as the use of the multiple sources of documentation led to shape some first propositions for a model of international product concept development. It is important to note that in shaping hypotheses in theory-building research (Eisenhardt, 1989) involves measuring constructs and verifying relationships. These processes are more judgemental in theory-building research compared to traditional hypothesis testing research, since researchers cannot apply statistical tests (Eisenhardt, 1989). Hence, the propositions as inductively derived in the study included:

P1: The sequence and the number of events, their objectives and approaches during the international Front End,

P2: The integration of the emergent theme of the consumer immersion into the sequence of events during the international Front End,

P3: The decisive role, during practical application into the organization, of the ten success factors.
Reflections and Acting

Following the planning stage of the action research cycle, the SMEs, who were co-subjects of the study as previously stated, were requested by e-mail to validate the findings drawn from the analysis of the interviews and share their thoughts and recommendations with the action researcher. Two SMEs replied (Respondent 1 and Respondent 4) to this request. Their clarifications and recommendations were taken into consideration and guided the development of a model of international product concept development as elaborated in Chapter 5.

4.4.6 Observing the application of the IPCD model into the organizational setting

The third stage of the action research cycle refers to action and experimentation (Dickens & Watkins, 1999; Gray, 2004; Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). During this stage, the IPCD model was applied into the organization. More specifically, the model was applied into the Greek market since the action researcher had more control over this market and could apply the model within the tight time constraints of the executive academic program. The action researcher undertook the dual role of the participant observer in the setting, keeping a reflective diary and making field notes, videotaping a creative workshop and obtaining documents and videotapes from the applied ethnographic session with the Greek consumers.

The events that were observed for each step are presented in Table 5 and described below:
Table 5  
EVENTS OBSERVED DURING THE IPCD MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES OF THE IPCD MODEL</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. International Opportunity Identification</td>
<td>No events observed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Local Consumer Immersion</td>
<td>Three in home observations, Diaries entries &amp; Focus Groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. International Concept Development</td>
<td>One Creative Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. International Concept Evaluation</td>
<td>One Concepts' Research Debrief Meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

- Three in-home observations, Diaries entries and Focus Groups (held during the Local Consumer Immersion stage of the IPCD model)

An external research agency, expert in ethnography, with the pseudonym IQA was commissioned to conduct research activities with the objective of understanding the usages of the one of the European Hygiene cluster products, that of the Greek bleach product. These activities included firstly, ethnographic activities such as in-home observation of usage of bleach products and diary entries by the housewives-participants, and secondly, focus groups with target consumers. More specifically the consumers involved, as stated previously, should not be considered as participants of the research.

- Three in home observations: Consumers 25-54 years old, users of household cleaning products participated in the in-home observations during the Local Consumer Immersion stage of the IPCD model (n=3 , Females, Greeks).
- Diaries: Consumers 25-54 years old, users of household cleaning products participated in the focus groups during the Local Consumer Immersion stage of the IPCD model (n= 32 , Females, Greeks).
Focus groups: The above stated consumers, who were requested to keep a weekly diary, participated also in the focus groups.

An expert in ethnography conducted the ethnographic activities. The ethnographic research findings were presented by the agency to the action research team members. A surprising observation was that the consumers tend to use the product under study in an extensive number of instances not known by all, such as the usage of bleach for cleaning and disinfecting the garbage can, shoes and toys, which provided inspiration for new concept, packaging and advertising ideas (Chapter 6).

The focus groups were conducted by the expert in ethnography who also had experience in moderating consumer groups. Some of the co-subjects/participants, namely the account director from the advertising agency, the creative director from the advertising agency and the internal consumer insight manager observed one of the focus groups. The role of the action researcher was that of an overt participant who observed the action research participants for two hours during their attendance of the focus group.

One Creative Workshop (held during the Concepts’ Development stage of the IPCD model)

A creative workshop was organized involving the co-subjects/participants of the action research project with the objective of developing new product concepts based on the findings of the applied ethnography activities and the outcome of the focus groups. For that reason, an external facilitator was commissioned. A cameraman videotaped the workshop and the action researcher observed the session as an overt participant for three hours. More specifically the following individuals participated:

Creative Workshop: Co-Subjects such as managers of the organization (n=5), the representatives of agencies (n=5) and the creative consumers (n=3). Co-researchers such as action team members (n=2).

The outcome of the first round was the generation of 34 initial ideas such as a bleach tablet against bad odours especially designed for the cupboards, a doormat with disinfectant properties and others (Chapter 6). Following evaluation and suggestions, only five ideas were voted by the participants as
the most promising; they comprised a disinfectant garbage bag, mild bleach, bleach tools, a bath thick gel, a cleaning care range for sensitive surfaces. The second round produced detailed product concepts of the four ideas and generated One Concepts' Research Debrief Meeting.

- One Concepts’ Research Debrief Meeting (held during the Concepts Evaluation stage of the IPCD model)

The consumer evaluation of the four ideas generated would provide the overall measure of the success of the project against the criteria set. ScreenLab™ was the method employed in the study, combining both qualitative and quantitative research to assess compare and screen concept ideas, identifying those with the highest potential.

The IQA agency was commissioned to screen qualitatively and quantitatively the four selected new product concepts. The IQA employed a patented method, which remains confidential, combining both qualitative and quantitative research to assess, compare and screen the concepts in order to identify those with the highest potential. In this screening test the following consumers were involved:

Concepts’ Research: Consumers 25-54 years old, users of household cleaning products participated in focus groups and quantitative interviews during the Concepts Evaluation stage of the IPCD model (n=120, Females, Greeks).

Results were presented to the action research team and were assessed against eleven criteria set by the IAQ. More specifically, the criteria set were the following:

1. Appeal
2. Differentiation (vs. competitors)
3. Comprehensibility: main message delivered to the targeted consumer group
4. Relevance and reason why
5. Perceived innovation
6. Perceived frequency of usage
7. Buying intention
8. Fit with Household cleaner brand of the study
9. Perceived level of effectiveness
10. Triggering attention
11. Packaging and product fit
Data Collection

The data collection methods in relation to the events observed during the second, third and fourth steps of the international product concept development model included field notes and video-recording and are presented in Table 6:

Table 6
EVENTS OBSERVED AND COLLECTION METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Events observed</th>
<th>Observing Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Three in home observations, Diary entries &amp; Focus Groups</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. One Creative Workshop</td>
<td>Field notes, Video</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. One Concepts’ Research Debrief Meeting</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

- Field Notes
  Detailed field notes were kept by the action researcher to give a record of events that occurred during the second, the third and the fourth stage of the model of international product concept development application into the organization. The field notes included the action researcher’s account of informal discussion among team members during the observation of a focus group of the target consumers and her own record of a creative workshop held in Athens. The field notes included reflections of the action research team that followed the research debrief meeting. Finally, the field notes included the action researcher’s own reflections during the application of the IPCD model into the organization. The field notes provided insights and interpretations critical to record not only the approach taken and the outcome, but to elicit the perceived impact of each stage and evaluate the IPCD model.

- Video
  Video recording was used by an external cameraman to keep a record and help in triangulation of the events that occurred during the creative workshop. When the approach, outcome and perceived impact of each stage of the IPCD model was analyzed, video-recording played a very helpful role in
verifying some assumptions and in validating some activities that took place during the workshop, such as which ideas were generated by each one of the subgroups.

Reflections and Acting

The action researcher initiated the implementation of the model of international product concept development into the organization. During the project, the action research team members were collaborating, exchanging view and ideas, and reflecting on a continuous basis as described in Chapter 6. The IPCD model required such an interaction from the action research team. The enlightening results of the Local Consumer Immersion step of the model firstly encouraged the action team members to organize the following step and secondly, the action researcher and the brand manager to agree with the account director of the advertising agency to develop a new campaign based on the findings. Especially, during the nurturing of the ideas, reflecting was more prominent. The action research team members were immersed into a loop of reflecting and nurturing the new ideas via telephone, e-mails and informal discussions in the office as described in detail in Chapter 6. The outcome of these discussions was incorporated into PowerPoint briefings to the freelancer designer who crafted the concepts before they went to the evaluation stage of the model (Appendix C).

4.4.7 Reflecting or Enfolding Literature and Reaching Closure:
Discussion of the outcomes and implications.

Enfolding Literature

Fieldwork findings provided the practical framework of the early start of the new process development. The aim of this step was to gain a deeper understanding of the conceptual and theoretical framework of NPD and the Front End literature relevant to the fieldwork findings. Models and approaches, drawn from the NPD and the Front End literature were compared and discussed with the findings from the fieldwork and the outcome of the empirical evaluation of the IPCD model. Applied ethnography was discussed to provide further
understanding in relation to the emergent theme of the consumer immersion. Furthermore, the ten success factors, as perceived by the SMEs, were compared and discussed with related influential factors, as drawn from the respective literature (Chapter 7). The middle ground between theoretical and practical perspectives provided for further understanding and added new insights for the development of new product concepts within an organization from an international perspective. Theory and practice provided the ground to gain a deeper understanding of the new construct under the name of International Product Concept Development model.

Reaching closure

As stated in Chapter 3, it is argued that (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005) there are three forms of reflection that may be applied to the action research cycle: content, process and premise. Due to the participatory nature of action research, literature suggests that evaluation of the impact of the action research project has to be judged by the participants (Gray, 2004).

Reflection has played a critical role during this action research project. Firstly, reflection took place for the action research at a personal level. Following every single interview the action researcher took time to think what had been achieved and what could be improved. A personal diary, that remains confidential, included her feelings and impressions for the setting, people involved and the events that were enfolding. Moreover, the diary included the challenges faced and the satisfaction that the action researcher received during the journey to creativity, the journey to organizational and personal change and improvement. These thoughts resulted in recommendations for further research and implications for management. Most relevant parts of the reflective diary are included in the following chapters of the dissertation. The summary of the reflective diary is included in Chapter 7.

Secondly, reflection took place at a group level. The SMEs acted as judges to validate the findings of the interviews. The action team members have acted as judges and supporters at the same time to evaluate the impact of the IPCD process during a formal meeting following the research debrief of the evaluation of the new product concepts. The outcome of this discussion was the three key lessons and a main future action that was incorporated under the
planning stage of a new action research cycle. The action research team was asked to reflect further upon the written documentation of the three lessons learned and the IPCD model and to provide their input by e-mail to the action researcher (Appendix D).

**Reflections and Acting**

As previously described, reflecting on the new knowledge the action research team acquired and the new practices they applied signalled the recommendation of the initiation of a new action research cycle within the organization. Hence the first round was complete and Planning was about to start again.

**4.5 Second Action Research Cycle: Research Design**

As a result of the outcomes and lessons learned drawn from the first action research cycle, the action research members decided to proceed to a second spiral of the action research cycle aiming at implementing the winning concepts from the first action research cycle. The second action research cycle was planned to be implemented at the premises of the organization in Greece. The research design of the second action research cycle is presented in Figure 9.
4.5.1 Planning or Getting started, Selecting Cases and Crafting Instruments and Protocols: Agreement of project objectives and deliverables

The action research team members decided to split into four sub-groups of two, each one of which would adopt one of the four winning concepts to strengthen it further in parallel with their everyday work. The selected concept would have to be implemented in the market place. The action research project was meant to continue. The process and outcome of the first step of the second
action research cycle were monitored between the action researcher and the action research team.

However, since the second action research cycle aimed at the implementation of New Product Development that is not part of this study, it is not included in the dissertation.

Selecting Cases

In the second action research cycle four sub-groups of two of the action research team members represented the cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Winning Concepts</th>
<th>Cases/Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Garbage Bags</td>
<td>Lead investigator, Legal and Claims Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Power Gel</td>
<td>Brand Manager, Development Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. White Care</td>
<td>Manufacturing Manager, Legal and Claims Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Mild Bleach/Home</td>
<td>Brand Manager, Development Manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

Crafting instruments and protocols

The document described the next stages of the second research cycle that would comprise of the following stages:

- Acting or Entering the Field, Analyzing within and cross cases, and Shaping Propositions: Nurturing further the winning concepts and agreeing the ones to be implemented in the market place.
- Observing or Testing: Implementing the selected concept(s) in the marketplace.
- Reflecting or Enfolding Literature and Reaching Closure.

It is apparent that the second spiral of the action research cycle provides an opportunity for further study beyond the scope of this dissertation.
4.6 Ethics

Because an action research project is fundamentally concerned with processes of change and is effected from within an organization, it must take account of the ethical framework and may require different data gathering methods to gain a holistic understanding of the project and its complexity (Gummesson, 2000). The purpose of inquiry and interviewing methods were explained to the interviewees verbally in advance of interview. The statement of purpose was simple, straightforward and understandable and was provided again at the beginning of the interview. Moreover all respondents and co-subjects were sent (by e-mail) an information sheet with the details of the nature of the action research study (Appendix E). Furthermore the co-researcher and the co-subjects received a copy of findings as they would be presented in a final report when reaching closure. Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring anonymity using a pseudonym initial for each respondent in the reporting of the methods of inquiry and findings. Finally, all respondents signed a consent form and a confidentiality agreement (Appendix E).

4.7 Conclusions

The democratic and participatory nature of the insider action research approach selected for this study called for the involvement of a wide range of individuals such as 22 co-subjects and 5 co-researchers.

This research study was enfolded in two action research cycles. The first cycle incorporated the stages of Planning (agreement of project objectives and deliverables), Acting (examination of Subject Matter Experts’ perceptions on success factors, and recommendation of a new Front End model under the name of International Product Concept Development), Observing (application of the International Product Concept Development model), Reflecting (outcomes, management implications and key learning). It entailed, among other, thorough detail of the research design, such as the sampling strategy (snowballing), the interview techniques of the SMEs (Applied Cognitive Task Analysis), the analysis of data and the shaping of the three propositions for the model of the international product concept development. As a result of the outcomes and lessons learned from the first action research cycle, the action research
members decided to plan a second spiral of the action research cycle for further study aimed at implementing the winning concepts developed. This cycle involved *Planning* (agreement of the new project objectives and deliverables).

The second stage of the first action research cycle, namely *Acting*, will be examined in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

Acting

5.1 Introduction

“If you can dream it you can do it.”
W. Disney

This chapter presents firstly the findings as they were derived from both the within and cross-case analysis conducted by the action researcher and secondly the development of a new theoretical construct, the IPCD Front End model. The first aim of the acting stage was to collect data in order to develop an in-depth understanding of the SMEs' perceptions regarding their experiences and approaches incorporated into international Front End. These experiences referred to projects that happened in the past and could not be directly observed. In this particular setting, where the SMEs' thoughts regarding their past experiences in the Front End required further understanding, in-depth interviews were selected as the most suitable method of inquiry.

In the pages that follow, the responses of the internal and external SMEs are presented and analyzed. The major purpose of this analysis is to organize their responses in such a way that patterns and themes are revealed.

The variety of experiences of respondents as well as triangulation of written documents and presentations ensured trustworthiness of the data. Fieldwork findings, including approaches for international Front End as well as key success factors, are presented in a narrative form.

The second aim of the acting stage was to develop a new model for application at the Front End, inductively derived from the fieldwork findings. The model is presented and discussed.
5.2 Phase A: Findings

A thematic analysis approach involved careful reading of every single transcript, manually coding relevant information and drawing on the NPD and creativity literature for grouping the coded information, developing a cross-classification matrix (Patton, 2002) and labelling the emerging themes. Each interview was analyzed separately and thoroughly, based on the findings of the ACTA model and a detailed writing up was completed for each individual interview. Key themes were then selected to highlight group similarities and differences. The findings drawn from the SMEs’ discussions were a first attempt at gaining a better understanding of the Front End from an international perspective. The main theme identified was an International Front End process that included four stages, as revealed by the SMEs:

- Exploration towards an international opportunity,
- Immersion towards international insight,
- Ideation for international concept development, and
- International concept evaluation.

The differences and similarities in the viewpoints between internal and external SMEs in relation to the International Front End process are discussed in the following section. The findings of the within- and the cross- cases analysis are presented in Tables 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

The second main theme identified was the success factors that influence international innovation. The findings of the respective analyses are discussed later in the chapter. Table 13 was used to present all the factors, as identified by the internal and the external SMEs.

5.3 Four stages identified at international Front End

External SMEs pointed out that there were some activities that the organization had to undertake even before the Front End began. According to their views, senior management of the organization had to clarify the vision, the strategic role that the innovation had to play and the priorities of the on-going innovation projects (SME 2):

"So, stage one is - what is the brand and to what degree does the brand form the role of innovation? That's phase one, to me. What is the role of this innovation and is it coming from a known brand?"
However, these points were not part of this study and will not be included in the discussion of the findings. From the analysis of the fieldwork, both internal and external SMEs supported the view that New Product Concept Development at an international level enfolded in four stages. These stages have been grouped under higher order subcategories presented in Table 8 and labelled under the following headings:

- Exploration towards an international opportunity
- Immersion towards international insight
- Ideation for international concept development
- International concept evaluation

Table 8
STAGES AT INTERNATIONAL FRONT END

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Exploration towards an International Opportunity</th>
<th>Local Consumer Immersion</th>
<th>International Concept Development</th>
<th>International Concept Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERNAL SMES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 1</td>
<td>Opportunity identification</td>
<td>Insight activation</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>Concept selection &amp; refining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 7</td>
<td>Opportunity &amp; Exploration</td>
<td>Insight activation</td>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>Concept refining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 8</td>
<td>Opportunity identification &amp; Exploration</td>
<td>Insight understanding</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>Concept selection &amp; evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL SMEs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMEs 2&amp;3</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Consumer needs understanding</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>Concept refining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 4</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Inspiration</td>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 5</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Consumer immersion</td>
<td>Ideas Creation</td>
<td>Concept evaluation &amp; nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 6</td>
<td>Opportunity &amp; Exploration</td>
<td>Insight activation</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field studies
The final subcategories have been created during the process of analysis and were evaluated and agreed with the SMEs and the action research team members via e-mail. These subcategories are examined more closely below.

5.3.1 Stage One: Exploration towards an International Opportunity

The SMEs used two different terms to describe the first stage of the approach taken when developing international product concepts. Internal SMEs used the terms “opportunity identification” and “exploration”. By these two different terms internal SMEs described the identification of consumers' explicit needs that would satisfy management priorities at an international level. External SMEs used more extensively the term “exploration” underlying the search for gaining an understanding of the consumers' explicit needs at an international level (Table 9).

Table 9
STAGE ONE OF INTERNATIONAL FRONT END
AS IDENTIFIED BY SMEs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL SMES</th>
<th>Stage One Description</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SME 1</td>
<td>Opportunity identification</td>
<td>International consumer trends identification</td>
<td>Secondary Quant. Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 7</td>
<td>Opportunity &amp; Exploration</td>
<td>Target consumer's unmet needs identification</td>
<td>Primary/Secondary Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 8</td>
<td>Opportunity identification &amp; Exploration</td>
<td>International consumer's drivers' identification</td>
<td>Primary/Secondary Research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| EXTERNAL SMES | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| SMEs 2&3     | Exploration | International consumer's attitude's identification | Secondary/Primary Qual. Research |
| SME 4        | Exploration | Consumer's unmet needs' identification | Primary Qual. Research |
| SME 5        | Exploration | Global consumer's trends identification | Primary Qual. Research |
| SME 6        | Opportunity & Exploration | Global consumer's unmet needs' identification | Primary Qual. Research |

Source: Field studies
Therefore, a consistent finding across internal and external SMEs was that the initial stage at the Front End should be the search for an international opportunity, common across the countries involved, the search for the creative soil to cultivate the new ideas. Based on the findings of fieldwork, international opportunity could be defined as the unexploited market needs or capabilities by the organization as illustrated by an external SME (SME 3):

"And the objective is to try to identify what they're doing (the consumers) and to try to identify potential white space."

However, the difference between internal and external SMEs was rooted in the approach taken to identify a common international opportunity.

According to internal SMEs, given the management priorities, an international opportunity could be identified initially by secondary research through careful analysis of qualitative and quantitative data available within the organization, the internet or other external and internal sources. If secondary data were not available, primary qualitative consumer research could be conducted to identify trends among consumers of countries involved. Overall, the approach discussed by internal SMEs was more structured and less experimental because market gaps or unexploited capabilities identified by management had to be assessed or driven by management priorities and therefore use both qualitative and quantitative evidence.

A real life example, which was described by an internal SME (SME 8), illustrated how the initial step of the Front End was materialized at an international level for the foods' product category. An international cross-functional team of the frozen foods category of the organization was delegated with the task to develop a European new frozen food concept. That was a challenging task for the project team because, until then, all new frozen foods concepts were generated at a local level. This was due to the belief that tastes in different cultures differ significantly and therefore required the local development of new ideas.

Initially, the innovation team developed an understanding of European trends in the foods' market by analysing quantitative and qualitative data available in the organization. Then, the innovation team delegated an
international research agency to conduct qualitative research involving focus groups in a selected number of countries to explore differences and similarities and identify a common opportunity. Research revealed that a common unmet need, as stated by the European consumer, was that frozen foods have become boring, as they have lost all their sensory properties. Based on these findings the innovation team identified a European opportunity that was defined as “Genuine Taste Excitement” and was brought into life using visual and written stimuli (Figure 10). Implications of such a European opportunity for frozen foods involved a management priority of the organization to exploit further productivity of the Italian factory that possessed a unique capability in producing tasteful, homemade-like pasta.

Figure 10

EXAMPLE OF INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITY BOARD:
Genuine Taste Excitement

Source: Internal Data

According to external SMEs, an international opportunity stemmed from the use of a divergence approach, which involved exploring international consumer trends, followed by a convergence approach, which included understanding differences and similarities among countries to define the gaps in
the marketplace. Therefore, external SMEs stressed the explorative perspective of the initial stage at the Front End, since unmet needs of different target markets perhaps vary, due to different cultural and other environmental factors in each country. External SMEs underlined the need not only for secondary but also for primary qualitative research in order to explore consumers' explicit needs. As an external SME stated, conducting explorative research could stimulate inspiration and assist in identifying emerging trends (SME 4):

"If you don't have anything in particular, you can do exploratory work...like desk research, read things or interview consumers on their habits in general and process this information that you have...try to find grey areas with things they do, things they need. You can also do qualitative work at this stage to get inspiration".

Fieldwork findings with respect to the initial stage at international Front End revealed that exploration towards international opportunity identification was the starting point for developing new product concepts. Descriptions of both internal and external SMEs demonstrated that the initial stage at the Front End had the objective of identifying explicit consumer needs that were common across all the target markets. Views of internal SMEs were that the approach undertaken at the beginning of the Front End was more structured and less experimental, driven by management priorities and based mainly on quantitative evidence, whereas external SMEs described a more explorative consumer-driven initial stage based mainly on primary and secondary qualitative research.

5.3.2 Stage Two: Immersion towards an International Insight

SMEs used various terms to describe the second stage of international Front End. Internal SMEs used the terms "insight activation" or "insight understanding" to describe the second step of the international Front End. External SMEs, without explicitly naming the second stage, referred to it by using a number of different terms such as "consumer needs' understanding", "inspiration", "consumer immersion", and "insight activation" (Table 10).

Moreover, fieldwork findings revealed that objectives and approaches taken during this stage differed between internal and external SMEs.
According to internal SMEs, the objective of the second stage was to develop a common consumer insight platform across the countries involved. Based on their views, a consumer insight platform was defined as an activity.
that would provide the innovation team or individuals with fresh and new information about the target consumers' explicit needs. This activity would involve a deeper understanding of the international opportunity based on consumers' explicit needs using traditional market research techniques. Internal SMEs held the view that inspiration for generation of a common international insight could evolve following a structured approach during an international insight workshop. Following enrichment of their knowledge with findings of traditional consumer qualitative and quantitative research, the innovation team developed and agreed a common consumer insight at an international level. Overall, the approach described by internal SMEs was more structured and less experimental, because it involved firstly traditional research techniques and secondly the organization of an international insight workshop.

However, there was one internal SME (SME 8) who described not only distant understanding but *immersion* of the international innovation team members into the local food markets as a more experimental and explorative approach. Understanding consumers' local food habits helped to generate fresh and new insights. This finding could be potentially explained by the nature of the product category in which this individual was involved. Identification of explicit local consumer needs would potentially prohibit the innovation team from building one common insight due to the different local taste preferences of the target consumers. The identification of implicit needs enabled the innovation team to arrive at one European consumer insight relevant to all markets involved. As the SME illustrated, an international insight was that of the "Mediterranean taste in frozen foods" and stemmed from the identification of the international opportunity "Genuine Taste Excitement" in frozen foods (SME 8):

"I enjoy the taste when I'm very relaxed. And the mood is very positive and also all the ingredients that they have are very natural, are very positive because they are grown under the Mediterranean sun, so it seems that also the food is empowered by the energy of this basin."

External SMEs seemed to agree with that particular internal SME's views with respect to the approach taken during the second stage of international Front End. According to external SMEs, following exploration towards the identification of the international opportunity, one insight platform had to be
generated across all the countries involved. External SMEs stressed, passionately in many cases, the need for a deeper local understanding of the identified international opportunity. Expressing this view, external SMEs signified the need for understanding not only the explicit but also the implicit unmet needs of the target consumers. Fieldwork findings revealed that external SMEs shared the view that facts or explicit needs alone were not enough to generate a common insight across the countries. It was evident according to the external SMEs’ views that traditional marketing research was not enough to reveal consumer needs to feed the international product concept development. As an external SME pointed out, focus groups alone could not reveal how a consumer actually behaved in his/her home environment (SME 6):

“So I tend to try to do in-home interviews. So if people say to me, “Yeah, I’m really trying to eat healthily and I’m really trying to do five fruits and vegs,” and so I go and look in their fridge and I can see how many fruits and vegs they’ve really got.”

External SMEs stressed that those involved into the Front End had to go a step further. They had to “get immersed”, to “get connected” with the consumers in the local markets by interviewing them, by observing them. Experts and/or international project team members, country representatives should go out of the office, discuss, observe and immerse with the target consumers in the countries involved. In addition, local consumer immersion could be combined with further qualitative exploratory research in the countries involved, where needed.

Qualitative exploratory research could involve focus groups or individuals’ in-depth interviews in the target markets facilitated by local moderators. Despite the hypothesized benefits of one research technique over another, cultural differences or market research skills/traditions in certain countries could favour one approach over another.

External SMEs elaborated further on this stage and identified it as a journey towards the search of the creative seed hidden in the latent and explicit unmet needs of the local consumers. It was a journey that aimed at emulating the connections made during local consumer immersing, at drawing out the
latent knowledge about the market and the consumers, and to integrate all the information gathered as described by an external SME (SME 2):

"I'm still trying to gather as much information as possible. I'm not even making decisions; I'm kind of just exploring, just expanding, just digging...then I would start digging into it and sometimes, depending on where I am, I will start talking to people in this country, doing phone interviews, for example. With a relatively small amount of money, you can interview people over the phone in many different countries.

It would be then, that the individuals involved could get inspired, could reach that “eureka!” moment, which could be an insight, an intuitive conclusion. Overall, the approach described by external SMEs was rather new and had a more explorative nature, “a journey”, because it involved an iterative combination of local immersion and qualitative explorative consumer research because there was the belief that traditional marketing research could not reveal consumers’ implicit unmet needs.

Findings related to the description of the second stage of the international Front End were grouped under the heading “immersion towards an international insight”. The word “immersion” is explicitly stated in order to emphasize the fact that the international innovators should delve into the local consumers’ world. Findings drawn from both internal and external SMEs’ analysis of interviews with respect to that stage concluded that international insight platform development usually followed exploration towards international opportunity. Internal SMEs mainly identified a more structured approach involving traditional research techniques and participation of the international innovation team in a workshop to generate and agree an international insight platform. External SMEs identified local consumer immersion as a useful additional approach for identifying local consumer insights and integrating the consumer into the process. International insight workshops could serve to facilitate development and agreement of the international insight platform among the participant countries. According to external SMEs, this stage should not be seen as a structured mechanistic process but as “a journey” towards the creative seed for the development of new international concepts.
5.3.3 Stage Three: Ideation for International Concept Development

Findings related to the third stage of international Front End were more consistent. Both internal and external SMEs used very similar terms to refer to the third stage of international Front End. Internal and external SMEs made use of the terms “concept generation” or “ideation” and seemed to share the same views as to what this stage involved. For both internal and external SMEs, the third stage was the creative act of concept generation or ideation that followed immersion towards an international insight stage (Table 11). A concise deep insight would be the fertile soil from which the ideas could grow.

Table 11
STAGE THREE OF INTERNATIONAL FRONT END
AS IDENTIFIED BY SMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL SMES</th>
<th>Stage Three Description</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SME 1</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>International Product Concepts’ development</td>
<td>International Creative workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 7</td>
<td>Ideation</td>
<td>International Product Concepts’ development</td>
<td>International Creative workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 8</td>
<td>Concept generation</td>
<td>International Product Concepts’ development</td>
<td>International Creative workshop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL SMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMEs 2&amp;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field studies

This stage started with the generation of numerous ideas that stemmed from the cross-country insight generated during the earlier stage. Following the development of a fresh and new cross-country insight platform, team members
could embark on generating new ideas. Secondly these ideas had to be selected and translated into product concepts. Findings of fieldwork demonstrated that identifying product concepts involved making a written description of the new product idea that included its primary features and consumer benefits.

SMEs described a structured yet flexible approach to meet these objectives. The approach involved an international creative workshop as a means of involving the innovation team and country members. The objective of such a workshop would be that all members would participate in the creation of ideas, selection of the most promising ones and initial development of the product concepts. Techniques used by the SMEs during the workshop included brainstorming, synectics, creative problem solving. The format of such a workshop was not fixed but it could vary depending on the nature of each project, the budget available and the time constraints.

However, SMEs underlined that the approach taken to generate ideas should not only be limited to a structured process but should also involve other more experimental and flexible methods. Ideas should not only be generated from group interactions using idea generation techniques during a workshop, but also involve ad hoc sources of ideas. Ideas related to the cross-country insight platform could be generated from individuals not directly involved in the project such as country representatives or facilitators or other employees. An external SME (SME 4) mentioned the integration of creative consumers into the development of product concepts as a new approach of generating new ideas. In such cases, local creative consumers could be involved in local workshops or English-speaking, creative consumers could be involved in an international workshop to generate new product concepts. Therefore, the approach taken to generate ideas was characterised by experimentation and exploration since it involved various sources of ideas that were building on the international insight developed and agreed earlier.

The external SMEs' view was that the main challenge was not so much the generation of numerous draft ideas but more the modification, refinement and translation of these ideas into the final product concepts. It seemed that further work was needed by the innovation team to bring the ideas to life, because the product concepts included written and visual details of the product
mix. Consequently, external SMEs again stressed experimentation and exploration to translate the ideas into product concepts.

A real life example of the third stage of international Front End was illustrated by an internal SME (SME 8). The innovation team was inspired by an international insight platform of mothers' concern for providing their young children with the right nutrition for their healthy development. The team generated ideas for a new product range of spreads that involved functional benefits. These would include necessary ingredients, such as calcium and vitamins while maintaining low fat levels for children's healthier development. The ideas were built up during workshops and informal discussions to include more details about the formulation of such products, the weight, the packaging and communication. Alternative product concepts were crafted to capture variations in colours of packaging and expressions of the original idea (Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

EXAMPLE OF AN INTERNATIONAL NEW PRODUCT CONCEPT BOARD: Nutritional Margarine

"Orange product mix" is the code name given by the innovation team

**Orange Product Mix (draft)**

The nutritional margarine to grow healthy and strong - with essential oils, Calcium and vitamins A, B, D and E; but at a significantly lower fat level.

**Formulation:** As existing GoodStart (39% fat margarine with Calcium at 15% RDA and B-vitamin mix), but with relatively lower SAFA and some other minor improvements (improved starch, lighter colour, slight yogurt taste, softer consistency)

**Packaging:** as shown ..., but with further development in terms of colour (balance green - blue), mother-child balance, functional claims. For Germany, "Jule" design used as basis. Proposed Formats 500g & 250g (rectangular)

**Communication:** details to be worked out for each country based on local situation - balance between channels (pack, ATL, BTL, PR) and between messages (child vs family, lower/better fat, role of vitamins and calcium)

**Sourcing:** Nassaukade

**Launch:** Q2 2006

Source: Internal Data
In the case of foods where the sensory properties were important, it was discussed that new product concepts involved not only written concepts but also new recipes inspired by the international insight. The international opportunity identified as "Genuine Taste Excitement" in frozen foods led to an international insight identified as "Mediterranean taste in frozen foods". As a result, international chefs in the innovation team created new concepts and new recipes inspired by the different Mediterranean countries such as Italy, Greece and Spain (Figure 12).

Figure 12
EXAMPLE OF INTERNATIONAL NEW PRODUCT CONCEPT BOARD: Frozen Food Mediterranean Recipes

1. MEDITERRANEAN FOOD Recipes

- **GRIILLE DE MOUTON with FETA from Greece**
  Finely minced lamb meat seasoned with typical Greek spices, filled with Feta cheese.

- **CHICKEN PROVENCAL from France**
  Chicken pieces fried and cooked with tomatoes, onions, garlic, rosemary, thyme, olives and white wine.

- **SEAFOOD FIDEO from Spain**
  "Paella" with noodles instead of rice.

- **FARFALLE WITH SALMON from Italy**
  Pasta with grilled salmon, zucchini, lemon and olive oil.

- **RISOTTO AI FORMAGGI from Italy**
  Risotto with a creamy sauce of Gorgonzola, Mascarpone, Mozzarella and Parmesan cheese.

- **TAGLIATELLE POMODORO E BUFALA from Italy**
  Pasta with cherry tomatoes and buffalo mozzarella.

- **POMODORI AL RISO from Italy**
  Tomatoes filled with rice, basil and olive oil.

- **VEGETABLE PAELLA from Spain**
  Paella with potatoes, zucchini, green beans, mushrooms, artichoke hearts, peas, peppers, carrots, spinach and tomatoes.

Source: Internal Data

Fieldwork findings with respect to the third stage of the Front End revealed that what comes after immersion towards international insight is rather straightforward. Stage three involved development of new product concepts. However, the sources and techniques of ideas' generation may vary depending on the characteristics of each project, resources available, and time constraints. Flexibility and experimentation should be displayed as new product concepts may be further modified, refined and nurtured until they are finalized.
5.3.4 Stage Four: International Concept Evaluation

Internal SMEs referred to the final stage of international Front End as "concepts' selection and refining". External SMEs introduced the term "nurturing" to describe this stage. According to all SMEs this stage involved all the activities that took place following the product concept and the decision-making towards the development of the actual product (Table 12).

Table 12

STAGE FOUR OF INTERNATIONAL FRONT END AS IDENTIFIED BY SMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL SMES</th>
<th>Stage Four Description</th>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SME 1</td>
<td>Concept selection &amp; refining</td>
<td>International Concepts' evaluation &amp; refinement with consumers</td>
<td>Product concept test Sequential recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 7</td>
<td>Concept refining</td>
<td>International Concepts' refining with consumers</td>
<td>Sequential recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 8</td>
<td>Concept selection &amp; evaluation</td>
<td>International Food Recipes selection &amp; evaluation by internal stakeholders</td>
<td>Not specified</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL SMES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMEs 2&amp;3</td>
<td>Concept refining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 4</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 5</td>
<td>Concept evaluation &amp; nurturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SME 6</td>
<td>Nurturing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field studies

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These activities involved new product concepts' evaluation against consumer driven criteria and refinement until finalisation. The approach taken to evaluate the new product concepts was a concept product test as discussed by an internal (SME 1) and an external SME (SME 4). The concept product test took the form of focus group discussions in the target markets where the new concepts would be presented to the consumers and assessed against pre-defined consumer driven criteria. Evaluation could be internal based on individual judgement. An internal SME described a selection process from the foods category where the key stakeholders of the countries involved tasted and approved the final list of European recipes (SME 8):

"Because we have seen the products, we've re-seen the products, finally, we arrived at 4 – 5 – 6 products that we are agreed upon across all Europe."

In contrast to the limited attention, SMEs drew on a structured approach for the selection and evaluation stage. They elaborated and underlined the importance of refining and nurturing the original ideas. Both internal and external SMEs described sequential recycling as an approach for refining and nurturing the new product ideas or concepts. According to the SMEs, this approach took the form of focus group discussion in the target markets with a local moderator. It was based upon a series of sessions with consumers, held at different points in time, over the course of which ideas and concepts were continuously refined. The purpose was to explore the nature of an idea's consumer appeal in a way that enabled its expression to be developed and improved prior to the next round of discussion. Experimentation with wide-ranging stimuli was a key element of this approach, particularly for prototypes or product concepts that involved visual stimuli. It is worth noticing that the concept presented in Figure 11 was refined and modified even further and launched in the European market under the name "Idea" during the writing up of this dissertation. The approach discussed by SMEs for that stage underlined its flexible and less rigorous nature, since it involved not only evaluation but also nurturing of the ideas, allowing them to grow.

Findings with respect to the final stage of the international Front End concluded that evaluation of new product concepts could be as simple as an
individual's choice, or more structured using a product concept test across the target markets, and therefore involve more consumer-driven criteria. In addition, it was evident by all SMEs that selection during international Front End was expected to be less rigorous since new product ideas and concepts should be allowed to grow and advance. Even when a product concept had been selected, additional effort should be invested to refine the concept so as to meet consumer expectations perfectly.

5.4 Success Factors

Both internal and external SMEs suggested that there were several factors that could inhibit and promote the success of international product concept development within an organizational context. Sporadic findings, stated by only a few SMEs, provided new insights for international Front End and were included in the analysis. Success factors identified have been grouped into broader themes such as:

- Adaptability and Flexibility
- Consumer orientation
- Culture of Nurturing ideas
- Senior management engagement and commitment
- Countries' representatives engagement and commitment
- Early and consistent involvement
- Open-mindedness
- Language and writing skills
- Detailed product concepts
- Stimulation in product concepts

These success factors are presented in Table 13:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resp.1</td>
<td>Adaptability Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Open mindedness to other cultures</td>
<td>Detailed concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior management engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Good language &amp; writing skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp.7</td>
<td>Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
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<td>Not identified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early &amp; consistent involvement Nurturing ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resp.8</td>
<td>Adaptability Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Open mindedness to other cultures</td>
<td>Stimulating concept</td>
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<tr>
<td>EXTERNAL SMES</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resps. 2&amp;3</td>
<td>Flexibility Adaptability Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Not identified</td>
<td>Stimulating concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior management engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp.4</td>
<td>Flexibility Adaptability Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Open mindedness to other cultures</td>
<td>Detailed concept</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Early &amp; consistent involvement Nurturing ideas</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp. 5</td>
<td>Flexibility Adaptability Consumer orientation</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Open mindedness to other cultures</td>
<td>Detailed concept</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior management engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Good language &amp; writing skills</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurturing ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resp. 6</td>
<td>Flexibility Adaptability</td>
<td>Countries' reps. engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td>Open mindedness to other cultures</td>
<td>Detailed concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Senior management engagement &amp; commitment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nurturing ideas</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field studies
According to both internal and external SMEs, a number of factors, such as flexibility, adaptability and consumer orientation, are implicated in the success of international Front End process. Adaptability of the process referred to the requirement, by both internal and external SMEs, that stages and actions taken at the international Front End should be adapted to the waves of changes and to the emerging opportunities. Flexibility of the process to help build and nurture the ideas generated was identified by external SMEs as critical at the early stage of Front End. Consumer orientation referred to an approach at the international Front End that would integrate implicit and explicit consumer needs to foster the development of new product concepts. Similarities were identified with respect to internal and external SMEs' views such as senior stakeholders' engagement and commitment, countries' representatives' engagement and commitment, early involvement and building and nurturing of ideas. Senior stakeholders' engagement and commitment involved the organization's leadership in providing encouragement, communicating expectations clearly and giving constructive feedback. Countries' representatives' engagement and commitment involved full or part time members in the Front End, submitting new ideas, providing constructive feedback and committing to the launch of the new product concepts. Early and consistent involvement refers to countries representatives' involvement and their provision of constructive feedback from the early days of the new product concept development. Building and nurturing of ideas refers to an environment that would encourage the generation of new ideas while supporting the advancement and growing of existing ideas.

Fieldwork findings among internal and external SMEs with respect to individual's skills and competencies included open-mindedness, language and writing skills. Open-mindedness to new ideas and different cultures was a consistent finding among internal and external SMEs. Language and writing skills were discussed only by two SMEs (SMEs 1 and 5). Language skills involved foreign language skills for leaders and participants of international workshops and writing skills involved proficiency in writing product concepts. However, an individual's skills and competencies were not discussed extensively, neither by internal nor external SMEs. The competencies and skills required for the individuals involved at the Front End were under-valued to some extent by SMEs. This could be explained firstly by the focus of the SMEs
on the approach taken and less on the success factors, secondly by the limited
time available for the interview and thirdly by the natural reservation to
elaborate on the human factor to an interviewer who was working for the
organization under study. Success factors related to product concepts or
prototypes included detail in development and stimulation in final presentation.
Detail in product concepts’ development was a consistent finding among
internal and external SMEs whereas only two SMEs brought up stimulation in
presentation. The implications of the differences between internal and external
SMEs were that they provided the ground to shape a theoretical construct to
follow at the Front End. This theoretical model incorporates the major fieldwork
findings and it is discussed later in this chapter.

5.4.1 Adaptability/Flexibility

All SMEs described a number of stages when probed on how they had
developed international product concepts. It was argued by both internal and
external SMEs that the approach taken at the international Front End had to
allow for constant adaptation and compromise to meet cultural differences of
team members and target consumers and changes in the internal and external
environment, especially for an international project. Therefore, the sequence of
stages at the early stage should not be rigid and structured but iterative and
adaptable to emerging needs. The meaning of the term “adaptability” was very
similar to the meaning of the term “flexibility” as discussed by external SMEs.
The view taken here is that adaptability and flexibility referred to the same
success factor.

Moreover, a consistent finding emerged among external SMEs that
involved flexibility of the international Front End approach. External SMEs
emphasised that the international Front End was not a mechanistic and rigid
process but rather a fluid, flexible and experimental approach since Front End
was aiming at generating new product ideas not at achieving project milestones.
Therefore, the nature of work at the Front End could not be as disciplined,
structured and goal-oriented as in the NPD process. According to the external
SMEs, there was a need for leaps of imagination, creativity and inspiration to
generate new product ideas and therefore there was a need for an approach
that would provide a framework for this creativity while allowing the individuals
involved to seed, grow and advance their ideas. Building on that, an external SME (SME 2) described vividly the international Front End process as a long and creative journey:

“It's quite a long process; it's quite an involved process. It's not a mechanistic process. I think it's an incredibly creative process if done properly. That takes the innovation from a process to a journey of imagination.”

Therefore, all SMEs acknowledged the need for flexibility/ adaptability during the Front End for the successful develop of new product concepts.

5.4.2 Consumer Orientation

A consistent finding among internal and external SMEs was that of a consumer orientation at the international Front End approach. All SMEs have taken the position that local consumers' implicit and explicit needs played a significant role at every stage of the Front End. It was consumers' explicit needs that were the driving factor in the identification of international opportunity. It was consumers' implicit and explicit needs that were shaping international insight. Individuals involved were required to get immersed into the consumers' world to get inspired at the Front End. Explicit integration of pilot consumers into the Front End as active figures or solution providers was also considered (Research Director). A final list of new product concepts were evaluated against consumer driven defined criteria at the final stage of the Front End. It was an approach that needed thorough preparation and deep consumer understanding at every stage from different viewpoints (SME 4):

“... It's all about understanding and really going in-depth from many different angles.”

As originally expressed by SMEs, the organization's activities at the Front End were organized around the primary goal of satisfying consumer needs. The approach taken reflected a consumer orientation and all individuals involved were expected to be truly consumer-focused. The prime goal of the organization was to tap into consumer needs at an international level so well
that new product concepts could be successfully identified and developed for launch.

In conclusion, fieldwork findings with respect to process' success factors demonstrated that adaptability and flexibility, consumer orientation and nurturing ideas throughout the various stages of international Front End influenced stages at the Front End. Changes in the business international environment with respect to compression in NPD, coupled with the need to get closer to consumers throughout all stages, were leading individuals to seek fluidity and flexibility within structure and adopt consumer-orientation approaches to foster inspiration at international Front End.

5.4.3 Countries' representatives' engagement and commitment

An emerging new finding among internal and external SMEs was countries' engagement and commitment at the international Front End. All SMEs supported the view that commitment and engagement of management in the countries involved were very critical for the development of international product concepts. The role of the management of the participant countries was identified as participating as full or part-time members into the Front End, by submitting new ideas, and by providing constructive feedback and commitment to the launch of the new product concepts.

Almost all SMEs stressed how lack of commitment from the countries' management could seriously jeopardize the success of international product concept development. Countries' management could resist the implementation of new ideas if they were presented with a finalized new product concept without being involved in the development process.

Commitment of local management could be enhanced by regular updates with the whole team at every stage of the international Front End. Engagement and commitment of the countries' management could be encouraged by agreeing and being passionate about common goals, especially when they came from different cultures, different markets. A common dream would potentially provide the international innovation team with a common ambition to cultivate competitive spirit and bring the individuals who would make it happen closer together: as elaborated by an external SME (SME 2):
“If you make it a global team, for example, you almost have – there are, let’s say, three teams competing in each region and they each put their innovation ideas through to you as in a global competition and then a number of ideas are taken. These are winners...starts to get people dreaming again rather than getting them in the funnel... if you say actually the ambition for the brand this year from an innovation perspective is X, this is a competition. Off you go. Dream.”

Therefore, countries’ management could take a more active participative role during stages of international Front End since they had to embrace the new ideas and be inspired and excited because it was upon them that the local implementation depended.

5.4.4 Senior management engagement and commitment

External SMEs mainly identified the engagement and commitment of senior stakeholders as a success factor at international Front End. The role of senior management at the Front End was to provide strategic direction, to understand how to ensure consumer orientation of the core team by the choice of team membership during the Front End and by helping press for consensus in all significant business decisions. In addition, the role of senior management was identified as approving the involvement and selection of external experts at the Front End as well as providing resources. Moreover, it was strongly supported that senior stakeholders should be identified and lobbied at any necessary stage. This could be interpreted as positive, since senior management could act as a power promoter to overcome internal resistance for new ideas. An external SME during fieldwork illustrated the lobbying of senior management as an approach to gain commitment and help the ideas grow (SME 2):

"The second question you need to ask is "who are the people that need to be on board but not in the lead to make the end result the same? What we call traction. How can we ensure that the guys who oversee this work will ultimately make it work for them... but we believe that those guys are better tackled with different techniques, often about one-to-one conversations, often about listening to them very hard and understanding what their fears, objections, obstacles, barriers are."
In contrast, internal SMEs did not seem to stress particularly the critical role of senior management at the Front End. This could be interpreted through the primordial role of the consumer's orientation they wished to stress in contrast to that of senior management who is more actively involved in the feasibility and implementation stages of the NPD process. In any case, as suggested by an internal SME (Spreads Project Leader), the role of senior management was important. However, during the Front End team members should be empowered to make decisions, take responsibilities and experiment.

Findings of fieldwork concluded that the engagement and commitment of senior management influenced the stages of approach taken at international Front End since it assisted the promotion and support of new ideas while empowering the individuals/teams involved.

5.4.5 Nurturing ideas

Nurturing ideas emerged as a consistent finding among external SMEs. External SMEs stressed that ideas were fragile and needed continuous adaptation and refinement. Ideas were creative seeds that needed to advance and grow. Throughout, Front End organizations should stimulate and support continuous nurturing and nourishment of the new ideas at every stage of the Front End. Nurturing of ideas implied allocation of additional resources as it may involve suggestions proposed by participants, experts or consumers and therefore additional effort from external agencies to incorporate amendments into the product concept.

However, the nurturing of ideas was not identified so prominently by internal SMEs. This could be potentially interpreted by the fact that the organization's innovation team leaders were more under pressure to meet the milestones of the innovation project than to take time and resources for nourishing and nurturing new ideas. Therefore, taking into consideration the resources available and the constraints of the innovation project, ideas were considered to be fragile and should consequently be nurtured during ideation and concept evaluation stages to grow further until finalization.
5.4.6 Early and consistent involvement

A new finding for international Front End, which emerged from only two SMEs (Research Director, Foods Project Leader), was that of early and consistent involvement during the Front End and the NPD process. External and internal cross-functional resources such as senior management, team members, countries' representatives, agencies and facilitators had to be involved from the very early stages of the process as was clearly elaborated (SME 1):

"The same group or people were both in the process of creation and in concept evaluation which was very helpful because they understood the problem already much better, and were also able to set up a very good research for that..."

External experts' early involvement could contribute towards a better understanding of the organization's needs and requirements, in further reducing conflicts and in assisting in the nurturing of ideas. Internal cross-functional team members' early involvement could contribute towards facilitating actions taken at each stage, gaining commitment and encouraging the advancement of the ideas. Therefore, early and consistent involvement of participants influenced all stages of international Front End, since it safeguarded smooth flow from one stage to the next, because participants gained better understanding and higher commitment.

In conclusion, fieldwork findings with respect to decisive factors such as countries' and senior management engagement and commitment, nurturing ideas and consistent involvement of contributors influenced all stages of international Front End and were considered critical for success.

5.4.7 Open-mindedness

Both internal and external SMEs argued that individuals who were involved in international innovation projects needed to demonstrate open-mindedness. Open-mindedness involved realising a broader perspective, firstly towards accepting and nurturing new ideas and secondly towards accepting and understanding different cultures and beliefs. According to the SMEs, those involved in the Front End needed to set aside their previous personal beliefs
and convictions about the product and its usage in other markets and to begin their journey towards creativity with an open mind, being ready to risk and experiment. Provided that senior management and countries’ commitment and engagement influenced all stages at international Front End, open-mindedness of those leading and making decisions could potentially embrace and nurture new and local ideas and advance them internationally. An external SME elaborated that, especially at the Front End, individuals had to be open-minded in order to explore and experiment (SME 2):

“When you're talking about that new idea development stage, that's when you have to take the risks – that's where you have to experiment, where you've got to be very open-minded and try things out and explore new ideas.”

Open-mindedness referred also to openness to other cultures to enable those involved in the International Front End to understand the differences and similarities among countries, understand local views, listen to local ideas and make them relevant at an international level. Therefore, open-mindedness was considered as a critical factor of success influencing all stages of international Front End, from exploration towards an international opportunity to international concept evaluation.

5.4.8 Language and Writing skills

A new and interesting finding relevant to international innovation emerged from two SMEs (Spreads Project Leader, Senior Inventor). This referred to the language and writing skills of those involved in developing new international product concepts. SMEs highlighted that individuals who participated in international product concept development projects should have proficiency in a common language. A common language would better enable participants in international creative workshops to gain understanding of embryonic ideas, to generate new, and to build on each other’s, ideas without having the barrier of language difference. This was illustrated by an internal SME (SME 1):
"How well do people speak English? Because that could also have a big impact, particularly when you're doing idea generation. If you're doing it in English and people don't speak very good English, it's not going to work."

Fluency in a common language, usually English which is one of the main business languages, was required to facilitate communication and to excite imagination throughout all stages of international Front End. Weak emergence of such a relevant factor could be explained by the fact that most of the other SMEs were English native speakers and potentially were not facing particular challenges during international meetings and workshops. The two SMEs who discussed this theme were not native English speakers but were highly involved in international innovation projects. In any case, this finding underlined the need for leaders to convene teams to work at the Front End with attention to common language skills.

Writing skills emerged as another requirement for individuals involved at the international Front End according to the two SMEs. Ability and experience to translate new draft ideas into new product concepts, incorporating the description of the idea, and details of the marketing mix could enhance positive evaluation by consumers and positively influence senior management about the power of the idea. Writing skills were considered critical during any stage of Front End since writing a product concept, at whatever stage it might occur, could potentially catalyse nurturing or killing the original idea.

5.4.9 Detailed product concepts

External SMEs argued that product concepts should incorporate as much written and visual detail as possible in order to bring the idea to life. According to the SMEs, product concepts should incorporate functional and emotional elements of the product idea in such a way that they could be drawn on paper and be easily understood by team members, countries' representatives, senior management, or consumers. An example of a detailed product concept was illustrated during the interviews by an external SME (SME 5):
“An idea has to be tangible and to have detail... it's a blue bottle that flows like silk, that has a flip-top opening, curves in the middle – you could even draw it on a piece of paper.”

A requirement for new product concepts is to communicate sufficient detail to encourage individuals involved to progress the original idea, to nurture it and help it grow, in order to gain a higher potential to move it to the following stages of the NPD process.

In contrast, internal SMEs did not discuss the requirement of detail in product concepts to any great extent. It seemed that detail could be potentially more helpful to bring the idea into life during ideation and international concept evaluation in cases where product prototypes could not be developed. In cases where actual product concepts could be developed, such as foods, sensorial elements in product concepts seemed more relevant.

### 5.4.10 Stimulating product concepts

Two SMEs (Project Leaders) were of the opinion that most often product concepts were not that exciting. They believed that detail had to be enhanced by excitement and stimulation to encourage positive feedback by the consumers of the different markets. Drawing upon their previous experience, they suggested the development of concepts that could be stimulating and exciting by adding design, music or whatever appropriate (SME 2) was:

So, if you think about the way people respond – if people respond visually or aesthetically (touch, feel) or respond in an auditory manner – or by sight, smell, taste – the more you can bring something to life. What you’re meant to show is the benefits of using that but on an emotional and functional level. And if people can feel and sense that, that’s much easier and more inspiring for them than it is if you just write on a piece of paper “here are the emotional and functional benefits” which, as you see, to be honest, is what happens.”

An external SME mentioned the use of prototypes, not in the sense of the development of the final product mock up, but in the sense of the addition of
various elements that would enable the consumer to understand, refine and imagine the new concept (SME 4):

"Do you want them to imagine a colour? Find a colour and bring it to them. Don't just tell them it's red — red could be anything. Or don't just tell them it's liquid — show them a liquid that's like that"

An internal SME (SME 8) provided the example of foods' product concepts where recipes were cooked to be tasted by senior management and team members. The concepts were as stimulating as possible to generate a sensorial response by sight, smell and taste. In the foods category, international product concept development seemed a major challenge because the creative idea had to be translated into real recipes and therefore the Front End required very lengthy lead times and resources.

Overall SMEs seemed to agree on the product success factors during the international Front End. Product concept with detail and visual and aesthetic stimulation could influence ideation and international concept evaluation stages because product concepts or food prototypes had to be nurtured within the organization, evaluated by consumers or progressed to product development and so had to be easily understood and inspire all those involved.

5.5 Phase B: International Product Concept Development Model

The findings as drawn from the acting stage of the action research cycle:

• Firstly, provide deeper understanding of the stages, objectives and approaches taken at the international Front End.

• Secondly, add new emerging elements that can further enlighten international Front End.

NPD and Front End researchers have tried to approach Front End activities by describing early start within the NPD process or by generic fragmentary models for the whole spectrum of activities within any organization. These approaches have been criticised because the process descriptions do not take the nature of the Front End into consideration. In addition, the level of detail of the described processes is so vague that it has limited applicable value. Moreover, it has been argued that the relevant processes are structured
and controlled, whereas they should actually be adaptable to changes and therefore flexible and experimental (Poolton & Ismail; 2000; Ernst, 2002) in order to maintain a balance between creativity and discipline (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998).

To address these shortcomings, a theoretical construct has been developed under the heading of International Product Concept Development model. This model is not a structured gate-keeping process, but a flexible and potentially progressive and developing framework for developing new product concepts at the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study. As opposed to other generic processes, this model incorporates influential factors related to the success factors identified in the study, as well as key proposed activities. Each stage of the model is described along with key activities and influential factors.

The International Product Concept Development (IPCD) model is a holistic, progressive model and aims to throw light on where the International Front is going within the organizational context. The IPCD model is shown in Figure 13 and consists of three key parts:

- The embracing arrows define the non-stop nurturing element of the international ideas generated.
- The Ps influential factors (Process, Person, Place, Product).
5.5.1 IPCD Model Part One: Front End Stages and Activities

**Description of Stage One: International Opportunity Identification**

**Key Activity: Assigning of an International Ideation Team**

Ideas without purpose are seed without soil, motion without direction. The IPCD model suggests that beyond the vision and the strategic foresight, senior management has to identify specific market opportunity, which needs to be pursued at an international level. This stage is usually driven by the business goals of the organization and defines the resources that will be allocated to the new areas of market growth. These areas could be a new international market segment, a new cross-country product positioning, a response to an international competitor's move, an international customer's unmet need. In many cases, international opportunity identification precedes consumer
immersion and it may originate from a single individual within the organization who has recognized an unmet need or an undetected problem.

It has to be noted that the market opportunity has to be closely defined. For example, "health" should be a vague definition of the market opportunity but "healthy for mothers with young kids" would be easily understood and would provide the fertile ground for further targeted exploration. Approaches for exploration during this stage require primary or secondary research to identify global common trends into all target markets involved or into a selected number of markets if budget and time constraints exist. A key activity where there is a large-scale opportunity is to assign international and cross-functional teams to advance the international opportunities identified into new product concepts. These teams are fully empowered and accountable for ideation at the International Front End. It is possible that the team can loop back to opportunity identification if new challenges or constraints arise during the international concept evaluation stage.

Description of Stage Two: Local Consumer Immersion

Key Activity: Organizing an International Insight Workshop

Seeing, hearing, being present is not enough to understand the consumer deeply enough. Drawing upon the SMEs' interpretations, the IPCD model advocates that observing, listening and immersing into the consumer's world are capable of opening up new horizons. The IPCD model introduces the local consumer immersion stage at the Front End, which involves the understanding of unmet implicit consumer needs in the target markets. Building on the identification of the international opportunity requires the international ideation team to "dig" deeper and become immersed in the target consumers' world and generate local insights. This task should not be restricted to a single country level. Efforts must be made to connect with consumers in other countries where target markets are to generate insights that may have international relevance.

The IPCD model clearly suggests approaches related to this stage such as applied ethnography in addition to other traditional market research techniques. For further guidance the model proposes the organization of a key activity at this stage that involves an international insight workshop. The
workshop's participants are the team members who have collected various insights during the applied ethnography sessions as well as other cross-functional managers and external agencies. During the workshop, the participants have the opportunity to discuss the insights collected during the applied ethnography sessions further and conclude a common insight platform agreed by all the countries' representatives. Consequently, the insight workshops are focused on specific themes that enable ideation teams to explore opportunities identified in depth and build a common cross-country insight.

Description of Stage Three: International Concept Development

*Key Activity: Organizing an International Creative Workshop*

The world of creation needs some structure. Improvising needs some rules. Creativity need not be an occurrence of chance but flourishes from true effort and continuous persistence. International concept development is concerned with the birth, development and definition of an idea into an international product concept in the organization. The focus in the IPCD model is not to explore artistic creativity but to focus on the notion that the creative output should be useful and of business relevance. Hence, a critical element of the IPCD model is that new ideas should not be created by chance but *to tap into the cross-country insight*. New ideas that tap into the cross-country insight may emerge spontaneously during the insight workshop or from various sources such as from an individual working in a local branch of the organization, or during an international creative workshop.

The IPCD model assumes that individuals working in an organization have the potential to "produce" a creative product within an inspiring organizational culture and with the aid of some well-known techniques. Different creative enhancement techniques involve brainstorming, synectics or lateral thinking (Van Kleef et al, 2005) depending of the ideation project timing and budget constraints. Such a workshop may involve a divergent mix of individuals including members of the international team, suppliers, customers, consumers, external specialists and should be facilitated by an external expert. During the workshop, participants will generate, transform, build, and select winning ideas and create international product concepts. International insight and creative
workshops maybe merged into one if budget and time constraints exist. In such a workshop the ideation team examines a broad range of research material related to the opportunity selected, identifies new insights and designs products that can meet hitherto unknown consumer needs in target markets.

**Description of Stage Four: International Concept Evaluation**

Ideation is not a destination but a journey of progress and transformation. According to the IPCD model this stage involves the recycling and screening of the product concepts developed during concept development. The emphasis during the early stage of international product development is on probing and learning about the nature of consumers' interest in a concept. Different concepts should be used to discover the most appealing concept across the target markets. The quality of the stimulus material should be able to convey the concept accurately to avoid misinterpretations. Concept selection is expected to be less rigorous in the Front End since many concepts should be allowed to grow and be nurtured.

The model suggests mixed methods to evaluate and screen concepts, such as qualitative and quantitative screening techniques. This decision is made upon the consumer test results and the strategic priorities and objectives of the organization and by no means upon the financial, technical criteria or competitor’s activities. The IPCD model assumes that this early stage of idea/concept development is completed when consumers have evaluated the product concepts so that the organization can decide whether or not to bring into life the original concept by moving it to the next stage of the NPD process.

**5.5.2 IPCD Model Part Two: Description of the Embracing Arrows**

The SMEs' interpretations suggested that new ideas are fragile. They need to be incubated and cultivated. They need nurturing and nourishment. They are examined, changed, and reshaped. In the IPCD model the nurturing of ideas is represented by the embracing arrows suggesting that ideas are expected to flow and iterate among the four stages. The IPCD model assumes that ideas can be nourished not only during concept development but also following concept evaluation. Ideas that have not received positive feedback by consumers may be further recycled and refined until they are tested positively. It
may feed the opportunity identification or may initiate the Front End process, indicating that the International Front End stages are advancing and nurturing ideas wherever they occur (Koen et al, 2001: p19). According to the IPCD model, ideas should not be ignored, laughed out of order or drowned. Nurturing ideas is a mind-set, a philosophy that makes the IPCD model live.

5.5.3 IPCD Model Part Three: Description of the “P’s” Influential factors

Process

The view taken here is that the IPCD model is a progressive relationship model that allows for flexibility and experimentation. The model assumes that market opportunities are identified early in the process. However, only the broad parameters of emergent opportunities are then visible. Better-defined aspects and measures will become available only after experimentation and ad hoc exploration. Changes can be expected in what the target consumers want and how they will use the product. Thus, the IPCD model does not represent a linear disciplined process. Stages are progressive and flexible. The mind leaps forward and back, stimulating new ideas while assessing old ones.

The IPCD model assumes that new ideas and concepts are not expected to follow the gate-keeping formal innovation process of the organization. In contrast, the cross-functional team is empowered and responsible for ideation using the IPCD model’s framework for guidance into their journey. Practice of the IPCD model should lead to modifications and refinements to meet the constant changing internal and external conditions. Some stages and key activities can be eliminated or merged depending on the ideation progress, the time and budget constraints. For example, to reduce time and budget for ideation, the international insight workshop and the international creative workshop can be merged in one.

In addition, the model assumes consumer orientation. The consumer is the key driving force in all stages, activities and approaches. Opportunity identification is driven by gaps in the market and not by new technologies developed by the organization. Consumer insight is achieved by gaining a
deeper understanding of consumers’ explicit and implicit needs. Concept development aims at developing new products that will meet consumers’ needs and by generating ideas that will stimulate and inspire target consumers. Concept evaluation refers primarily to consumers’ evaluation and secondarily to screening based on the organization’s business criteria. Hence, the consumer is the key driver in every single stage of the International Product Concept Development model. Targeting the consumer is the main focus of the ideation team.

**Place**

The IPCD model suggests that the organization under study should encourage senior management commitment and countries’ commitment and involvement. Cross-functional ideation teams should be assigned and supported by senior management. Funding resources should be available but remain variable according to the need of the project during this early stage. On the one hand the international ideation team is expected to take risks, but on the other hand to take time to reflect, create and experiment. Progress is expected to be discussed with senior management during update meetings and not during gate-keeping innovation meetings. The reason is that the IPCD model assumes an environment that builds trust and openness among members of the ideation team and sufficient time to reflect on the ideas. It is also critical that countries of the European Hygiene cluster are involved throughout the Front End as full or part-time members. Countries are expected to be actively involved throughout all stages and key activities. Engaging countries is a key enabler to make successful international product concepts to further progress into the NPD funnel and to be launched into the local markets. In other words, the IPCD model is not external to the organization but should be fully embedded into the organizational culture.
**Person**

The IPCD model does not assume that all individuals involved in ideation teams have to be creative. Certainly, individual skills and competencies are influential factors for the success of the model. The IPCD model requires participants who exhibit specific personality traits and cognitive abilities. Because the international Front End is experimental, ambiguous and inherently uncertain, open-mindedness plays a critical role. Thus, one of the basic conditions is open-mindedness, a personality trait that enables better understanding of for instance, different cultures, habits and traditions. Curiosity, imagination and tolerance are also prerogatives for a successful application of the IPCD model. Writing skills, sufficient knowledge of foreign languages and high communication skills contribute greatly to the meaningful communication among international participants, better understanding of consumers and good concept development.

However strange it might sound in the business world, ideation team leaders who are able to build visions and aspirations beyond the narrow moneymaking objective are more likely to succeed in making the ideas flourish and circulate among the countries involved.

**Product**

The IPCD model assumes significant focus on detail during the concept development stage. The ideation team should be in a position to define precisely all the elements of the product mix such as packaging, pack size, label design, formulation, colour coding, and brand or variant name. Details are expected to be brought to life by visual or other stimuli in concept boards. This detailed concept development will enable consumers of international markets to gain a deeper understanding of the new concept itself and the international innovators to identify opportunities for further improvement and nurturing of the original idea.

In the light of the aforementioned argumentation, Figure 13 could be transformed and completed as shown in Figure 14:
Figure 14 is a graphic representation of the International Product Concept Development model including all three parts. The four circles represent the four stages of the Front End (International Opportunity Identification, Local Consumer Immersion, International Concept Development, International Concept Evaluation) and are connected with a black line to their proposed approaches for implementation. The three yellow boxes between the stages represent the key activities proposed to facilitate the International Front End (Assignment of International Ideation team, International Insight Workshop and, International Creative Workshop). The embracing arrows represent the non-
stop nurturing element of the international ideas generated. The Ps influential factors (Process, Person, Place, Product) represent the four cornerstones of the IPCD model.

5.5.4 IPCD Model Strengths and Weaknesses

It is assumed that the proposed IPCD model exhibits certain strengths and weaknesses. The IPCD Development model provides insights and a common terminology for the Front End at an international level. Typical representations of Front End models consist of three stages: idea generation and qualification, concept development, concept rating and concept assessment (Montoya & Weiss 2000). However, these models are more generic and fragmentary, failing to address the far more complex and loose nature of the Front End (Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998). In contrast, the IPCD model is not a linear process but a relationship holistic model. The main implication for management is that the generation of new product concepts is not a destination but a continuous journey for progress and transformation of ideas. Thus, it assumes that ideation is not a capability but requires practising in an inspiring organizational context to become fully embedded into the organization's culture.

In times, where major acquisitions continue to increase and fewer and larger players compete in a given marketplace to attract the interest and buying power of the consumer, the IPCD model is a profoundly consumer-oriented approach. The IPCD model assumes that the consumer is the prime driver for the International Front End and should be the focus of every stage and activity. International opportunity identification addresses consumers' explicit needs; local consumer immersion explores and builds upon consumers' implicit needs; international concept development suggests consumer involvement; and international concept evaluation is based upon consumer feedback and not upon business criteria.

However, it has to be acknowledged that the IPCD model exhibits some weaknesses, as were identified by certain action research participants. First, the model might seem difficult to comprehend, especially when presented to managers and not to academics, and to non-native English speakers. As one of the action team members illustrated (Brand Manager):
It seems complex at a glance, but it can be easily conceivable when you explain it a little bit."

Therefore, it might be appropriate when presenting the IPCD model to the management of the organization or to the ideation teams, to translate it into the local language while accompanying it with a short explanatory note.

Second, the model does not include a prioritization of the success factors as identified by an SME, or in other words co-subject of the action research study (SME 4):

"I kind of miss some prioritization of these factors and how much your SMEs think that each factor contributes to success."

Such a weakness provides an opportunity for further quantitative study of the IPCD model.

Overall, the IPCD model takes a holistic approach to the Front End, because it incorporates not only stages of the process, but also key activities and approaches to be followed and influential factors to be taken into consideration. Thus, the IPCD model provides practical insights to apply creativity within an organizational context and to enable international innovators to adapt to the waves of change more efficiently. However, the IPCD model requires empirical testing to be validated.

5.6 Reflections

The acting stage of the action research cycle proved to be a very challenging yet fulfilling experience for both the action researcher herself and the action research team. At the beginning of the acting stage, and during the process of identifying the internal and external experts, the action researcher was faced with the unforeseen difficulties (Personal Diary):

"I thought that finding experts to interview from the organization I was employed too would not be difficult. Well, life is full of surprises; internal experts were hard to find."

For example, having as a starting point an official internal report the action researcher identified the Becel Pro Active product idea as one of the most successful innovations within the organization. However, the early start of that idea had evolved a few years ago. The Global computerized system of the organization was not able to provide the names of the individuals who were
then involved, since the project of interest had not been updated (Personal Diary):

"Back to point 0... Yet, I could not give up that easily!"

Being determined to complete her inquiry, in the end the action researcher managed to identify an individual who had international experience in more recent innovation of Becel and the snowball “rolled”.

Upon completion of the interviews and their analysis, the internal and external experts were requested by e-mail to validate the findings that are included in this chapter. One internal and one external expert replied to such a request (SMEs 1 and 4). Taking into account that most of the subject matter experts were international travellers with extremely busy schedules it was considered very encouraging to receive these two replies. More importantly, it was considered even more encouraging to receive positive comments, such as that the analysis was good and thorough (SMEs 1 and 4).

Such a dialectic process continued during the following phase of the acting stage in which the IPCD model emerged. For example, the recommendation to clarify the criteria set during the evaluation of ideas was fully incorporated in the model and the dissertation (Stage Four: International Concept Evaluation, Chapter 5). This is illustrated by the action team member herself (Brand Manager):

"2nd page: the evaluation of the new concept is based upon consumers’ acceptance criteria and not upon financial, technical or competitors’ activities."

Furthermore, the internal expert and co-subject (SME 4) added some clarifications regarding the profile of the consumers who could be involved during the various stages of the IPCD model. (Indeed, her suggestions to include creative consumers were taken into account during the application of the IPCD model in the local market). More importantly, the need to apply the model into the market as pointed by a member of the critical audience (former Research and Development Director) was evident:

"The proof of the pudding is in the eating"
5.7 Conclusions

The main findings drawn from the initial phase of the acting stage included the identification of the sequence of events and of the success factors that influence the international Front End. Both internal and external SMEs identified four stages at the international Front End namely exploration towards an international opportunity, immersion towards international insight, ideation for international concept development and international concept evaluation.

All SMEs acknowledged the need for flexibility/adaptability of the approach taken at the Front End to develop new product concepts. Another emerging finding among internal and external SMEs alike included the acknowledgment of a consumer-driven process at the Front End to foster inspiration, since the Front End approach required thorough preparation and deep understanding of consumers’ implicit and explicit needs. Furthermore, open-mindedness was identified as a personal competency to accept new ideas and understand different cultures and beliefs during international Front End.

Some sporadic findings, stated by only a few SMEs, also provided new insights for the international Front End such as the early and consistent involvement of participants into the project and the good writing and language skills.

These findings shaped a theoretical construct developed under the heading of the International Product Concept Development model. This model is not a structured gate-keeping process, but a flexible and potentially progressive and evolving framework for developing new product concepts at the European Hygiene cluster of the organization under study. As opposed to other generic processes, this model incorporates four detailed stages as well as influential factors related to the success factors identified in the study as well as key proposed activities. Such a model provides a guiding yet flexible framework for practical application at the observing stage of the action research cycle.

The following chapter describes the implementation of the model during the observing stage of the action research cycle.
Chapter 6

Observing

6.1 Introduction

"Come to the edge. We might fall.
Come to the edge. It's too high!
Come to the edge. And they came, and he pushed…
and they flew!"
C. Logue

The axis between a theoretical and practical perspective drawn earlier is the hinge on which the development of the IPCD model depends. This chapter presents and discusses the empirical evaluation of the IPCD model in the organizational setting.

• Firstly, for each stage of the IPCD model, it presents the scope and objectives, the approaches taken, the outcome delivered, and the perceived impact.

• Secondly, it evaluates the IPCD model based on the criteria set at the beginning of the action research project.

• Thirdly, it presents the reflections of the action research team upon the completion of the project.

• Finally, it discusses the outcomes and the lessons learned.

This chapter provides an organizational insight on how companies can generate winning new product concepts whilst revealing relationships, linkages and connections at the Front End. It presents and discusses the journey to creativity in action—a journey that never ends...
6.2 Observing the application of the International opportunity identification

6.2.1 Scope and Objectives

Senior management of the European Hygiene cluster prepared an open-ended brief with specific timeline constraints for the ensuing innovation program. The European Hygiene cluster program was to start with the identification of a common positioning of the three brands of the cluster—Greek bleach product, Italian bleach product, and Dutch bleach product—and to proceed through to the development of new product concepts relevant to the three countries of the cluster—Greece, Italy, and the Netherlands. Senior management of the European Hygiene cluster wanted to feed the formal innovation funnel of the organization with new product concept ideas that would increase turnover of the cluster and generate incremental profits.

The initial inquiry of harmonising the positioning of the three brands of the cluster was delegated to an ideation team (which was not the action research team of the current study). This included full time members, such as the European Hygiene cluster project leader, the Innovation Development manager, the account director and the account planner of the international creative agency, the external facilitator from a brand positioning expert agency, and part time members, such as the three country representatives, including the action researcher, who belonged to the marketing function. A kick-off international meeting was set in Milan, Italy where the team shared their concerns and agreed project objectives. The ideation project objectives were the following:

- To develop a common better positioning for the three brands (Greek bleach product, Italian bleach product and Dutch bleach product) of the European Hygiene cluster based on a sharper consumer insight.
- To ensure distinctiveness versus other cleaning brands of the organization—hence fulfilling a clear role in the total household cleaning portfolio.
- To develop a common innovation roadmap for the three brands concerned.

Secondary research by the country representatives demonstrated that the three brands (Greek bleach product, Italian bleach product, Dutch bleach
product) had started losing saliency in a specific target group; women with young children. The project leader with the facilitating agency selected an International Qualitative Agency (IQA) to conduct focus groups among women with young children in the three markets involved - Greece, Italy, Netherlands. Skilled local moderators were assigned from the IQA to learn about attitudes and values and explore different positioning during the focus group discussion. Country representatives observed the focus group discussions that were relevant to their brand and market.

6.2.2 Approach and Findings

As this step preceded the action research project, it will be presented in outline. The IQA fieldwork findings, drawn from the focus groups, revealed that in all three countries modern women still had traditional values such as caring for family, for the ones they loved. The real reason modern women cleaned was a genuine, selfless, sometimes compassionate act done for the ones they loved. Consequently, cleaning was carried out of love. Such a realisation led to a common trend among women in the three markets: modern women were in a continuous effort to find time for whatever they wanted to do; to balance personal satisfaction and family commitments. Findings also revealed that there was a strong brand synergy in the three markets. The three brands were perceived to be as expert, effective, hard working with hygiene credentials fitting well with an idea of an ally. A brand that could be an ally would understand the needs and desires of modern women in a contemporary way; it would harness the trend of modern mothers balancing personal satisfaction and family life. According to the fieldwork findings of the focus groups, connection was relevant to the women in all markets, and therefore it had the potential for all brands.

Upon completion of fieldwork, the IQA together with the facilitating agency analysed the results, integrated the trends and presented to the international ideation team a common positioning or in other words a common opportunity for the three brands. According to the documentation analysis “Living Hygiene for mothers with young children” was the opportunity platform identified by the project team. The “Living Hygiene” platform was defined as a complete hygienic cleaning which helps the consumer to create and manage a balanced happy home as part of her full and complex life.
The platform was depicted on a board (Figure 15) using visual stimuli to help inspiration and understanding among participants and consumers.

Figure 15

INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITY IDENTIFICATION: LIVING HYGIENE

Living Hygiene

SOURCE: Internal Data

Within this platform, the common role of the three international brands would be that of an intuitive cleaning ally who would provide easy everyday solutions to facilitate the consumer's complex life. Within the "Living Hygiene for mothers with young children" platform the common assignment of the three international brands would be that of:

• One international brand that would know that the consumer needed to clean quickly and well, and be liberated from the task whilst assuming that she had effective and long lasting cleaning,

• One international brand that would act to deliver integrated high quality hygienic cleaning to free the consumer from all cleaning concerns and support her in her journey to enjoy a balanced life,
• A sufficiently effective international brand for a thorough clean yet, functionally sophisticated enough not to damage surfaces, surroundings or skin.

Based on the interpretations of the IQA, the “Living Hygiene for mothers with young children” platform could drive innovation and move from basic, problem-based innovation to a more intuitive, friendly approach which meant that the consumer would feel that her needs were almost pre-empted by her favourite brand.

6.2.3 Perceived impact

Secondary research by the countries’ representatives at the beginning of the project provided senior management with more clarity on the potential cross-country opportunity areas. It also allowed them to focus the European research study on the opportunity, the lack of saliency with mothers with young children that was found to be relevant to all the three countries. The common finding regarding lack of saliency of the three European brands (Greek bleach product, Italian bleach product, Dutch bleach product) with mothers with young children led senior management to target European research to modern mothers across the three countries respectively (Greece, Italy, Netherlands). Local moderators used by the international research agency were helpful in gaining deeper understanding of the local brands and their consumers’ needs. The co-operation of the international research agency with the facilitating agency led to integration of local findings into one common positioning for the three brands built upon a common European trend. Project leader’s and countries representatives’ attendance of the focus groups helped in gaining deeper understanding of the local consumers’ perspectives and achieved commitment for the project.

However, the kick-off meeting in Milan did not seem to be very promising. Firstly, the Greek representative who was the action researcher of the current study could not participate. Despite that, the meeting proceeded as planned and the Greek management was not engaged into the process. This is illustrated vividly by the action researcher (Personal Diary):
"Unfortunately a day earlier my flight was cancelled due to a national strike which affected also the international airport of Athens. Despite the fact that Greece could not participate, the workshop took place...

The minutes of the meeting sent to me later revealed that the main objective was to agree the vision and gain commitment. I wonder how is it possible to run the workshop without the participation of the largest in consumption country which is Greece? How is it possible to gain commitment from Greece when Greece is not there?"

Secondly, despite the fact that the representative from the largest bleach market was not present, the cross-countries' opportunities were identified and agreed. Such an approach created more confusion and a sense of lack of team spirit to the local management (Personal Diary):

"Again I wonder how individuals, who had never visited a country or gained a deep understanding about a country and its consumers, could they identify cross-country opportunities? Would the country's representatives know better?

Am I wrong or just frustrated?

The fact was that all of us felt left out…"

Thirdly, during the kick-off meeting, participants had highlighted the need for feeding the innovation funnel of the European Hygiene cluster. Eight months later, only the common positioning was identified but the formal innovation funnel of the Organization remained empty of new ideas for the European Hygiene cluster.

It was at that point that the action researcher volunteered to undertake this task and to proceed to the action research project under study (Personal Diary):

"When you find yourself in a position like that you either get isolated or you act. I decided to take the second route."

The instruments and protocols of the planning stage of the action research cycle as suggested by the literature (Eisenhardt, 1989; Mumford, 2001) were presented to the Vice-president of the cluster. Having identified an international opportunity platform for the three brands of the countries involved, it was agreed that the following step was the local consumer immersion. The action research team members were delegated with the task and the journey continued...
6.3 Observing the application of Local Consumer Immersion

6.3.1 Scope and Objectives

Following the IPCD model the action research team felt that they had to gain deeper insights concerning mothers with young children. At that point, it was important to observe the cleaning behaviour of mothers of young children within their home environment and also to discuss cleaning and disinfecting habits and practices. More specifically the objectives set were the following:

- To understand the criteria used to make the segmentation.
- To identify the advantages and disadvantages of the perceived product segments.
- To find the barriers in the products' usages per segment.
- To explore the occasions of use (when, where, which product) and the equivalent products used accordingly.
- To detect the alternative products/substitutes for bleach category products and reasons why.
- To learn more about heavy users' alternative/versatile applications, instances of use and ways of using the bleach product.

This study was delegated to the IQA who had conducted the previous European Hygiene qualitative study in order to achieve continuity and coherence in the research process. Accordingly, the IQA research approach combined direct in-home observations and interviews with video and a qualitative study in the form of focus group discussions. A week prior to the focus group discussions, respondents were asked to fill in a diary with their cleaning habits and the different ways they were using the product under study.

6.3.2 Approach

A female expert ethnographer was selected by the IQA to allow all the mothers under observation to feel comfortable with the research process. The same expert was selected by the IQA to be the local moderator who would conduct the focus groups with mothers of young children to assure coordination of all research methods. It was most important that the findings from the initial ethnographic research would be integrated into the subsequent focus groups. The refined understanding gained from such in-home ethnography was later
shared among the action research team members and the IQA account director. The expert ethnographer then conducted the focus groups' discussions. These more traditional market research methodologies were used to confirm, clarify and enrich the findings of the applied ethnography.

The ethnographic inquiry proceeded as planned over a period of one hour per respondent with no resistance from the respondents. The expert ethnographer visited each respondent at their home. During this hour each respondent was following her daily cleaning routine such as cleaning the toilet, the bathroom tiles, washing up the kitchen's bench and cupboards. During the home visit the expert ethnographer video-taped the respondent. The first respondent was the oldest woman among the three and she lived in a middle class flat in Athens. The bathroom and kitchen were decorated with traditional white tiles and sparkled from cleanliness. This housewife respondent seemed eager to talk and to explain in detail what she was doing. Consequently, the ethnographer had the opportunity to ask a few questions for clarification such as:

"how much time do you leave the product on the surface or how often do you use it or why do you pour water?"

The respondent exhibited no fear for using the bleach product under study since she was cleaning all surfaces without wearing gloves. The second and the third respondents, who belonged to the younger age groups, preferred to perform their cleaning tasks without being particularly involved in a conversation. In these cases, the expert ethnographer probed again with questions for clarification and further understanding. The second respondent lived in a small, modest flat. She used the product under study extensively in the house. The main observations were that first she was wearing gloves while cleaning with bleach and second she had a difficulty in accessing certain spots in the bathtub with the product under study. The third respondent lived in a modern apartment in Athens. She was wearing gloves like the second respondent while cleaning different surfaces throughout her home.

Following the in-home visits, the IQA recruited 32 respondents and asked them to keep a one-week diary describing their cleaning chores and then,
to participate in the focus groups. Some of the action research participants attended as clients in one of the three focus groups of the study so that they were exposed to real consumer discussions. The meeting room for clients was equipped with all the technological equipment required to observe consumers during their discussion with the local moderator. However, it seemed rather sterile and "cold" for encouraging the sort of atmosphere in which clients should be at ease to listen and reflect upon future product concept ideas. On the other hand, the meeting room for the mothers of the focus group was more relaxed in order to encourage a comfortable conversation among the consumers.

There was a tension in the clients' room when the action researcher announced the observing role that she would undertake for the meeting. A reassurance and clarification of the purpose of the observation seemed necessary to relax the clients and make them feel comfortable with the process. The more the consumers discussed about their habits, their likes and dislikes concerning the product, the more immersed the action research team members were during the discussion. Until that stage, no creative ideas were born. As soon as the group participants began describing their cleaning habits especially reading their diaries and their problems of using bleach, the action team members were conceptually stimulated and produced a variety of new ideas. The action research team members made connections while observing and listening to the consumers in the other room, but key ideas remained ambiguous. The focus groups' discussions proceeded as planned over a period of approximately three hours per group.

Upon completion of the ethnographic inquiry and the focus group research, the action research team were exposed to the actual consumer behaviour and the context of product use through the video recordings of the home visits. Later, they attended the presentation of the ethnography inquiry findings by the IQA. Upon completion of the fieldwork, the action research team was presented with the overall results of the applied ethnography and focus groups' discussions.

6.3.3 Findings

The action research team emerged from their applied ethnographic and focus groups' research with considerable empathic understanding of the
modern mothers' experience while cleaning with the bleach product under study. As stated earlier, the respondents were usually wearing gloves while using bleach due to their fear that bleach might splash them. Only some of the respondents were not wearing gloves during cleaning.

Having finished the cleaning, some of the respondents tended to air the house due to the strong smell of bleach that they found very annoying. A surprising observation was that respondents tended to use bleach in an extensive number of instances (thirty three) in the bathroom, in the kitchen, on other surfaces and articles and to remove difficult stains (Table 14). Based on their previous experience with the product under study, the action research team hypothesized that the extensive number of instances were not widely known among the target group.

These insights were validated by the focus groups' research findings that identified multiple usages of the bleach product under study. However, not all respondents knew the whole spectrum of the potential instances of use. Moreover, mothers with young children seem to have a fear about extensive usage due to the strong odour and the aggressive formula of bleach. These observations also highlighted the opportunity of extending the product under study into other product categories related to its extensive usages. Significantly, the action research team was able to reflect new ideas that would potentially capitalize on the insights of this market.
Table 14
FINDINGS OF LOCAL CONSUMER IMMERSION STAGE:
EXTENDED USAGES

| Kitchen               | Sink  
|-----------------------|-------
|                       | Drain |
|                       | Cooking Cuisine Bench |
|                       | Cupboards |
|                       | Table |
|                       | Fridge |
|                       | Kitchen Towels |
| Bathroom              | Toilet Bowl |
|                       | Wash Basin |
|                       | Tile & Silicone joints |
|                       | Bathtub |
|                       | Mopping |
|                       | Drain |
| Other Surfaces & Other Usages | Veranda |
|                       | Railing & Window Frames |
|                       | Flower pots |
|                       | Garden furniture |
|                       | Shoes |
|                       | Toys |
|                       | Car disc wheel |
|                       | Fridge |
|                       | Garbage can |
|                       | Trolley bags |
|                       | Hands soaping |
|                       | Foot’s cleaning |
| Difficult Stains      | Mould |
|                       | Rust |
|                       | Rust |
|                       | Grease |
|                       | Excrement of birds |
|                       | Colour paints |
|                       | Nicotine |

Source: Field studies

6.3.4 Perceived impact

The action research team’s observations and information, provided by the research agency and by the respondents, almost instantly had direct implications on generating new ideas. This outcome contributes a new element to the applied ethnography literature (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006) that proposes formal meetings among the team members to discuss and generate ideas based on the findings of the ethnographic sessions.

In the current study, findings about the fear of using the bleach product under study extensively because of its strong odour and its aggressive formula led to the generation of a number of new ideas such as an aromatized bleach, a milder bleach
product containing less hypochlorite appropriate for fearless usage on different application modes or a new bleach product with anti-allergic texture to reduce any unpleasant side effects (hands, smell). The insight about the ergonomic difficulties associated with safety attributes of the product during usage led to the new ideas of an improved bottleneck, also as a spare part, and a thicker bottle plastic. Findings about the extensive multi-usage of bleach led to other ideas such as a new specialized bleach for the oven/fridge, a new specialized bleach for windows, thick bleach in spray format appropriate to access difficult surfaces more easily, and a new foam format of bleach aimed firstly at specialized usage such as stains on clothes and secondly at eliminating the possibility of run-off and damage to other surfaces such as the placement of treated items on radiators without the fear of dripping on to the floor. The organization had not previously thought about market responses to such performance attributes of their bleach product. However, these ideas were still ambiguous.

The video recordings of the home visits were helpful in communicating key consumer attitudes and needs to the action team members who were not present during the ethnographic inquiry. This allowed the action research team to understand respondents' perspectives clearly and to avoid strategic error in generating new ideas. However, it has to be noted that the two younger consumers who were being observed were rather apprehensive due to the use of the video camera, a limitation of this technique which has been noted in the existing literature (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). In that situation, the inclusion of a self-reporting approach such as the diary entries, as suggested by Sanders (2006) enabled the consumers to collect more instances of usage. Consequently, the action research team was able to gather more insights.

In summary, the findings from consumer immersion were compelling and resulted in a significant number of new ideas that would have been difficult to achieve had the team not undertaken such an in-depth research program. If local consumer understanding had been preceded directly with traditional marketing research techniques rather than beginning with ethnographic inquiry, these new ideas would have been overlooked or would not have emerged at all. Removed from the context of their product use, focus groups participants would have lacked important memory cues such as airing their house after application or the use of the product for personal wash purposes.
The ethnographic research findings were valuable not only for gaining new insights regarding improvement or development of new products but also for signalling the creative content for a new communication campaign (Personal Diary):

"She (the Account Director) looked at me in the eyes and smiled:
- Hey, we can communicate all these, don’t you think so?
- Yes, I nodded. Definitely yes.
What a great opportunity for the business, I thought"

The advertising agency, which was part of the action research team, utilised the research and generated print and television communications that connected the product with mothers of young children, whilst recalling the multi-purpose usages of the bleach product under study. The new communication campaign featured a young woman cleaning- and disinfecting various areas of her home such as her bathroom, living room floor, and kitchen' sink with the bleach product under study. However, there were spots in the house such as the doorknobs, the kitchen chopping board where germs were hiding, too. Via a visual effect these spots were made to change their appearance like a chameleon to attract the viewers' attention and remind them that these spots needed cleaning and disinfection, too (Appendix F). These findings resonate with Rosenthal & Capper (2006) who mention the role of applied ethnography in advertising. Based on the results of the applied ethnography and the focus group research, the action research team decided that it was time to generate new ideas based on the inspiring insights they had gathered so far.

6.4 Observing the application of the International Concept Development

6.4.1 Scope and Objectives

Once the consumer insights from the local market were identified, the next step was to develop product concepts. A one-day creative workshop was organized and took place at the Organization's premises in Athens, Greece. The main objectives of the workshop were:

- To explore, map and prioritise local consumer insights.
- To present, explain, advertise and promote new additional usages of the product under study.
To develop ideas for packaging, labelling that may encourage expanded, more frequent usages.

To explore ideas for refining product concepts or for creating new product concepts to aid in expanded usage.

The organization of the workshop was delegated by the organization to a skilled local creative agency, with the pseudonym LCA. The organization's choice of the facilitating creative agency was based on the long and proven expertise of the agency in generating new ideas and in solving business problems. The organization also ensured that, prior to awarding the contract, the agency should recruit and involve creative consumers in the workshop under study. The organization's decision was led by the action researcher who was responsible for the budget and the advertising agency that had co-operated extensively with the creative agency in developing new ideas for communication. The LCA Director became the facilitator of the creative workshop. The role of the facilitator included setting the ground rules to be followed, highlighting different ways of working and provision of a safe and welcoming environment for the creative workshop participants that was conducive to their feeling comfortable with one another, mutually inspired in the creation of new ideas.

6.4.2 Approach

Twelve individuals attended the creative workshop:

Managers of the organization:
- Brand Manager (n=1)
- Internal Development Manager (n=1)
- Internal Technical Liaison Unit Manager (n=1)
- Internal Customer Marketing Manager (n=1)

Representatives of the Agencies:
- Creative Workshop Facilitator from the Local Creative Agency (n=1)
- Account Director from the Advertising Agency (n=1)
- Account Manager from the Advertising Agency (n=1)
- Creative Director from the Advertising Agency (n=1)
- Freelancer Concept Designer (n=1)

Consumers:
- Creative Consumers (n=3)
Lead Investigator:

- Action Researcher/Observer (n=1)

The LCA recruited and involved three creative female consumers who were end-users of the bleach product under study. The three external experts represented a new communications partner of the company who had passionately volunteered to join this workshop. To meet the goals of the workshop more effectively, one external skilled designer joined the participants. An external cameraman videotaped the workshop activity to provide triangulation in sources of evidence.

Preparation for the setting of the creative workshop was particularly challenging. Due to budget constraints, the setting was agreed to be in one of the meeting rooms of the organization’s premises in Athens. The selected meeting room did not have any visual stimulation appropriate for a creative workshop. Originally, the meeting room had blue-grey walls with large windows overlooking the streets around the company. There were a few chairs and black desks with silver legs, an MDF bookcase and pale lights: the room appeared uninteresting. The marketing team and the action researcher decided to decorate the room differently: a green Christmas ribbon was placed around the meeting room door and around the windows surrounding the meeting room. Comfortable and relaxing sofas replaced all chairs. The three product ranges of the European Hygiene cluster were placed onto desks in front of the sofas to assure clear visibility by all the participants. Magazines that the target consumers were used to reading were also available. The room’s temporary makeover transformed it into a much more relaxing yet, stimulating place without any connotations of a strict and sterile business environment. The participants were able to feel comfortable from the minute they stepped in and became immersed in the friendly and warm atmosphere of the creative workshop.

The organization of the workshop is presented in the Table 15.
Table 15
OUTLINE OF THE CONTENTS OF THE CREATIVE WORKSHOP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>RESPONSIBLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morning</td>
<td>1. Introduction of participants</td>
<td>1. Brief welcome and introduction</td>
<td>1. Action researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Creation of a relaxing atmosphere</td>
<td>2. Participation in creative activities (e.g. role playing)</td>
<td>2. Facilitator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Generation of 33 new ideas based on four topics (1. kitchen, 2. bathroom, 3. difficult stains, 4. other surfaces and usages)</td>
<td>3. Work in four sub-groups</td>
<td>3. Sub-groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Presentation of ideas to the workshop’s participants and voting</td>
<td>4. Sub-groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5. Development of draft drawings</td>
<td>5. Sub-groups and Designer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afternoon</td>
<td>4. Selection of the 4 most promising ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Nurturing of the 4 most promising ideas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

- Morning: The workshop began with the introduction of the participants. The action researcher made a brief introduction and explained to the participants that her role would be that of an observer. Then, the action researcher sat in front of her laptop to take notes electronically, and the workshop began, led by the facilitator. There was a deep bonding among the participants who had co-operated in the past both within and outside the organization. As the action researcher observed, the participants were sitting relaxed, leaning towards each other and smiling. The presence of the cameraman, the designer and the action researcher as an observer did not seem to affect this strong affinity. The presence of the consumers together made them feel like one group amongst a few aliens. Consequently, the facilitator took time for introductions and used her appropriate sense of humour, to make all the workshop participants feel comfortable and at ease with one another.

At the beginning of the workshop, all participants took a break from their specific problems and participated in some general creative activities such as role-playing. Then, the entire group conducted a review of important trends in hygiene and the values that the brand under study held. Following a short break, the facilitator split the team into four subgroups of two to four individuals, trying to achieve equal cross-
Each team was given the objective of generating new product ideas based on the insights of usages generated during the previous step of the model (The four subgroups topics were 1. kitchen, 2. bathroom, 3. difficult stains, 4. other surfaces and usages). The subgroups gathered in different places of the meeting room in front of flipcharts, one for each team. The participants were standing up, skimming the research findings, discussing, and writing on to the flipcharts while the designer was assisting in drawing the concepts. Again, it seems that there was a deep bonding body language as the participants were standing close to each other, talking passionately, even making jokes to each other sometimes.

Afternoon: The subgroups' ideas were presented to the entire group for evaluation and suggestions. As an aid to this evaluation effort, each of the subgroups' ideas was evaluated according to three criteria:

- Originality (how revolutionary is this solution from a consumer point of view),
- Feasibility (how quickly can the solution be realized employing current available technology),
- Strategic intention (how much each solution fitted the strategic priorities of the European Hygiene cluster).

Next, the facilitators probed the subgroups to work on the most promising concepts. The subgroups continued and informal drawings were produced by the designer with the input of the participants.

Reflecting on the new concepts generated during the creative workshop, the action research team decided that the concepts needed further nurturing and refining in order to be presented in greater detail. The action researcher, the associate Brand manager, the Development manager and the designer spent four more weeks refining, enriching or further simplifying the most promising concepts.

### 6.4.3 Findings

The product concept development step produced a number of promising product concept ideas for the product under study that stemmed from the local consumer insights generated during the previous step of the IPCD model.

The first round of the subgroups produced thirty-three initial ideas. A short description of the initial ideas is presented in Table 16 under each subgroup topic with the order as written during the workshop.
Following evaluation and suggestions, only five ideas were voted by the participants as the most promising ones. These included a disinfectant garbage bag, mild bleach, bleach tools, a bath thick gel, and a cleaning care range. The second round of subgroups further refined the selected ideas. The ideas were transformed into product concepts and draft drawings were prepared. The product concepts included the consumer insight, the product benefit and the product promise. The draft drawings included also details on the elements of the packaging and the aesthetics. These draft product concepts are presented in Table 17.

Upon the completion of the creative workshop, the action research team discussed how these concepts could be further nurtured. They took into account the input from the subgroups and built the draft concepts into final ones incorporating a consumer insight, a product benefit and a reason to believe. The drawings became very detailed, incorporating all the elements of the product mix bringing the initial ideas to life. Furthermore, the final list was enriched with concept ideas fed by the innovation managers of the European Hygiene cluster and by the country representatives of the Italian market. The final list of product concepts is presented in outline in Table 18.
### Table 16
FINDINGS OF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT STAGE:
INITIAL IDEAS STEMMEED FROM LOCAL CONSUMER INSIGHTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kitchen</th>
<th>Garbage bags to disinfect from germs</th>
<th>Hygiene/Cleaning Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dual perfume/bleach spray</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cloths for sensitive surfaces or metals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleach paints for the walls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instant usage plates kids mat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleach tablet for the cupboard effective against bad odours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doormat with bleach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Automatic device to provide with dosing advice for bleach products</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hand dish-wash detergent with bleach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antibacterial hand dish-wash liquid in transparent pack</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knobs with bleach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shopping bags for bleach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bathroom</td>
<td>Multi tools bleach bottle</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bath thick Gel</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Toilette sponge with micro particles effective against mould.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Windows spray with bleach also effective in killing germs in air conditioning</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Toilette brush with bleach</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Foam for the toilette</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In mould labelling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bottle with dosing cup in the shape of a bathroom basin</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bottle with dispenser</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Surfaces &amp; Other Usages</td>
<td>Refillable mop with bleach</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spray against mould and insects for the walls and the wardrobes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bleach product targeted specially for the army and the army hospitals</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bleach powder against snakes targeted to scouts</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleach product designed for refrigerator use against germs and bad smells</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New cleaning care product range with oil for wooden surfaces with hygienic cleaning properties</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A mild bleach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult Stains</td>
<td>Sponge with bleach with one special hole for one finger for convenience in usage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleach stain powder</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pot mats with bleach perfume to be placed under the pots against insects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Special label with bleach perfume for the floor against insects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bleach product effective to regain shine on surfaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field studies
| **Garbage Bags** | Litter bags are the focal point for many microbes. Wherever I place them they transmit microbes and so, I am obliged to through them away every day. I would like to be able to through litter bags away whenever I want, without any worries |
| **Mild Bleach** | As time goes by, white clothes lose their original whiteness; they look shabby and turn yellow. With Greek bleach product Advance I have the “whitest white”, since I can use it only in white cotton clothes, yet the light-coloured clothes are excluded. Furthermore, I am obliged to choose a programme with the “pre-wash” attribute since my washing machine does not have a special bleach case. |
| **Bleach Tools** | Now, the new range of cleaning tools, sponges, mopes can be reloaded instantly with bleach liquid as soon as they are place onto their specialized base. |
| **Bath Thick Gel** | There are spots/places inside a house that are focal points for microbes (joints, area around the sink etc.) where I want to use Greek bleach product locally, but I can not have the control of the product flow. |
| **Cleaning Care range** | Greek bleach product is my brand-ally for the house cleaning and disinfection that protects my personal place against germs. I trust it for a safe home, for the people I love. |

**Source:** Field studies
**Table 18**

**FINDINGS OF CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT STAGE:**
**THE FOUR MOST PROMISING IDEAS AND THE NURTURED CONCEPT DEVELOPMENTS**

| Garbage Bags | New Litter Bags: the most hygienic choice  
They are extra-resistant because they are made from a plastic of excellent quality. They are practical in use, with plastic strings for safe closure and carriage.  
They maintain your litterbin clean & block the evolution of microbes, since they are saturated with bleach. |
|---|---|
| Power Gel | The new bleach Power Gel bleach allows you to use it wherever you want, having the absolute control of flow, even in places that you can not reach or do not want to touch.  
Thanks to the bound nozzle & the super gel formulation, new Power Gel bleach is ideal for the local cleaning of tough stains and disinfection, since it stays and acts for longer time in the difficult spots inside and outside the house |
| Mild Bleach/White Care | The New bleach WhiteCareTM resolves your problems. It can be used on all clothes where bleach use is permitted by the manufacturer (cotton, nylon & polyester), in white and light-coloured clothes. With a mild formulation, so that you can use it directly on the cloth-inside the machine drum.  
Newbleach WhiteCareTM, the only one suggested from the greatest machine-wash manufacturer for clothes.  
And your clothes are becoming again snow-white, soft and tender with a fabulous freshness fragrance, easy, quickly and safely. |
| Mild Bleach/Home | The new Bleach Home offers the absolute combination of a visibly effective cleaner for ALL surfaces of a house (small & big surfaces such as: floors, walls, tables etc.) with a great long lasting fragrance.  
Thanks to the unique gel formulation with active micro-bubbles, it cleans in depth all the surfaces easily and quickly, without rinsing required while at the same time it flavours with a marvelous freshness fragrance that surprises you delightfully. |

Source: Field studies
6.4.4 Perceived impact

By gaining a deeper understanding of the product usages, the subgroups were able to generate ideas that were providing solutions to some of the problems and were grasping the opportunities that emerged during the local consumer immersion stage. The subgroups took a different angle and approached the challenge of creating new product concept development from the consumer's point of view, based on the ethnography research findings. Moreover, as a method of integrating user insight into the concept development process, co-development with creative consumers proved to be more widely applicable within the organization. Despite the very limited duration of the workshop (only one day), the concepts generated indicated that it was quite possible for creative consumers to imagine a future outside their current worldview when offered the right tools, climate and process. This is a finding that resonates with the views of Roberts et al. (2005) who advocate the integration of creative consumers into the Front End. The participation of the creative consumers led to new concepts being generated that were grounded in the consumer reality.

The solutions that emerged involved product concepts that were either an improvement on existing product ranges, or the development of new products or new categories. During the morning session, the focus was more on divergence so that the ideas remained ambiguous. The team members expressed their first thoughts and ideas with reference to new product development. Encouraged by the facilitator, the participants were very willing to give their existing ideas. The members of the team were willing to express the ideas they had in mind because their ideas would be listened to by a receptive audience during the creative workshop. In the afternoon session, the focus was to go deeper and translate the initial ideas into detailed and sharply defined product concepts. The task of generating ambiguous ideas seemed far easier than developing a sharp and detailed product concept. Moments of silence, disagreements over the colour of the pack revealed the tremendous effort that was required to become creative in a convergent manner. Even more, the action researcher observed how difficult it was to achieve a consensus among the team members. The active role of the facilitator helped to solve the tensions and achieve an agreement. More than anything, she helped the team members in building on each other's ideas and therefore on crafting detailed concepts. However, it seems that more
time was required to refine the product concepts further and to be able to add the final details that would enable the designer to draw them unambiguously.

The output of the creative workshop had direct implications for the designs of the new product concepts. However, the process to finalize and add stimulation and detail to the winning ideas required time and resources. When the freelancer designer began to design the initial ideas, he felt puzzled (e-mail from free-lancer to action research member/brand manager):

"A lot of questions emerged while working on designing the concepts ...as we have agreed we will have to meet again and discuss them further. Please call me."

The informal discussions that followed concluded that pack formats from other product categories could be used as points of reference and inspiration. More e-mails were exchanged. Upon completion of the concepts, the Development manager and the Legal & Claims manager, who were also part of the action research team, contributed the technical and legal perspectives in shaping the concepts. According to their feedback, some of the claims had to be revised. One month later, the action research team finally managed to transform the ideas into concept boards as suggested by the existing literature (Graf & Saguy, 1991; Kotler et al, 2001; Morris, 2006).

In summary, the idea about the appreciation of the aesthetics of mild bleach led to two alternative propositions, one with packaging design with curves and soft colour coding and another one with transparency and fresh colour coding. The idea about the ergonomic difficulties associated with dosing of the bleach product led directly to improved design of the thick gel concept. The additional ideas sourced by the innovation managers of the European Hygiene cluster and the country representatives of the Italian market that fed into this stage, highlighted how new ideas may emerge from various sources and demonstrated that the steps of the model are flexible. In addition, the continuous and conscious effort to refine and nurture the original concepts gave the participants a sense of ownership and a reassurance that their ideas were not killed, but that they were being transformed and progressed within the organization. In contrast, nurturing required tremendous effort and time since the action research team had to carry on with their daily work activities and life (Personal diary):

"I do not think I am going to make it! On the one hand it is the everyday work, one the other, it is the DBA, the fieldwork, the reading, the writing and of course the kids and the family!"
That was a turning point for the action researcher herself. Following up her supervisors' advice and support, she decided to continue her journey with the action research team and implement the next stage of the IPCD model that it is described in the next section.

6.5 Observing the application of the International Concept Evaluation

6.5.1 Scope and Objectives

The final stage of the IPCD model involved the evaluation by consumers of the final list of the new product concepts. The key objective was to identify how consumers perceive the concepts under investigation and reveal the ones worth launching in the Greek market or exploring them further. The concepts would be evaluated in terms of:

- Appeal
- Differentiation
- Comprehensibility of the main message delivered to the target group
- Relevance and reason why
- Perceived innovation
- Perceived frequency of usage
- Buying intention
- Fit with the brand under study
- Perceived level of effectiveness
- Triggering attention
- Packaging and product fit

The research would aim at assessing each of the four concepts based on likes and dislikes, and on exploring the positive or negative aspects of the product benefits and features. It would also evaluate the intention to buy for each product concept in comparison with the other three. It would also try to evaluate each concept based on its distinctiveness, relevance with the mother brand, positioning and uniqueness. Overall, the research would aim at identifying areas of improvement for each of the four concepts.

The IQA undertook the new fieldwork for the evaluation of the final four new developed concepts. The organization's choice of selecting the IQA again, was as previously stated, based firstly, on the proven expertise of the agency in consumer's research, and secondly on maintaining a consistent involvement of the participants.
6.5.2 Approach

The research methodology proposed and conducted by the IQA was a mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative methods that was the agency's trademark. Therefore, the methods of recruitment and analysis remain confidential. The sample of this evaluation research that was conducted during the evaluation stage of the IPCD model, included 120 women aged between 18-24 years old (including mothers with young children) who were responsible for the shopping and maintenance of their household. All of them were users of household cleaning products and detergent with a representation of brands. The sample was selected from the greater Athens area representing all socio-economic classes and it did not incorporate any of the consumers involved in the previous stages of the IPCD model. The qualitative method involved four focus group discussions of ten respondents each of three hours duration. The quantitative research included eighty face-to-face quantitative interviews at hall centres using the Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method of data collection of twenty-five minutes duration. Fieldwork was conducted in March 2007.

6.5.3 Findings

Upon completion of fieldwork, results were presented to the action research team by the research agency. For each concept, the presentation of results included:

- Description of appeal
- Product and pack related issues
- Summary of evaluation on key attributes
- Purchase intention
- Key lessons

The results are presented in outline more specifically for each concept:

Concept Garbage Bags

The concept idea of garbage bags with a disinfectant end benefit succeeded in deviating from the category's monotony. It created positive reactions among consumers and it triggered attention and interest at concept level. It was perceived as quite intriguing, offering a new and appreciated benefit. This new concept created interaction and involvement with consumers because it worked both rationally and emotionally. The new concept provided reassurance as to the desired durability and
practicality and addressed feelings of security and hygiene. Consumers recognized the holistic product offer and showed high trial intention. Consumers perceived the pack positively, although a large size format was considered restrictive because the consumer would use it only on special occasions and not everyday.

Overall, the garbage bags concept was a differentiating idea because it brought newness in the category, aroused consumers' interest and created curiosity.

**Concept Thick Power Gel**

The concept idea of a thick power gel had increased appeal among target consumers. It was perceived as new, innovative and of high performance. The name (Power Gel) was considered impressive and connoted advanced extra efficacy. This new idea had enhanced relevance for target consumers because it touched upon the need for convenience and the emotional reassurance for dirt removal. Such a positive reaction was initially driven by the pack format with the advanced and convenient bottleneck. The ergonomic design of the bottleneck enhanced practicality and convenience in difficult spots. Overall, the pack format was appreciated positively as convenient, modern and practical. Yet, the pack format directed its product character mainly as a toilet bowl bleach providing a specialized application for bleach. Specialization of usage was further enhanced by the gel nature of the product. The refined texture format was seen as even thicker bleach providing extra efficacy and use as a supplement to other strong spot removers. Such a specific pack format communicated a specialized product with restricted usage mainly in toilet bowl due to strong resemblance with this pack with other packs in the toilet bowl category.

In conclusion, the concept idea of Thick Power Gel was appealing due to its superior and convenient pack format. However, ideas were not defined sharply since it did not pay justice to the more holistic product character intended.

**Concept Mild Bleach/White Care**

This concept was a well-accepted product idea that was appealing at a rational level. Consumer interest mainly related to communicated convenience. Consumers perceived this new concept as user-friendly because pre-wash was avoided where it involved broad usages. Despite product convenience at an emotional level, actual
differentiation was not apparent. The concept lacked a clear point of reference so that consumers failed to grasp any added significant attribute compared to competition. The pack format disorientated consumers because it mostly referred to detergents, thereby supporting and justifying product confusion.

Overall, at a first level of understanding, the product proposition was appealing and the benefits offered were rather appreciated. Yet, at a second level of understanding, the product character remained vague and the product uniqueness was not successfully addressed.

**Concept Mild Bleach/Home**

The new concept idea of a mild bleach for the home met the general-purpose cleaners’ market segment prerequisites of aroma and cleanliness. Indeed the key benefit conveyed was the promise of a pleasant aroma that was considered significant for the general-purpose cleaners’ users. The suitability of the new product for all surfaces acted as an additional trigger for trial intention. In spite of this, the concept idea did not differentiate strongly from the competition. The benefit of aroma remained within the basic norms of the category and therefore as a must and a given. In addition, the expected disinfection function restricted its usage to certain surfaces (mainly floor, doors and cupboards).

Consumers perceived the pack format positively. It was considered contemporary and in line with the norms and expectation of the household cleaning products’ segment. Transparency was considered appealing, engaging and attractive because it reinforced the contemporary character. Overall, the concept was appreciated. Its uniqueness and differentiation from competitive products could be further enhanced.

Following the findings of each concept the research agency evaluated all concepts on their success potential based on the two dimensions of uniqueness and relevance. All concepts were mapped by the IQA against the two dimensions and conclusions were drawn and discussed (Figure 16).
In conclusion, the concept of Garbage Bags was perceived as a sustainable, novel, and a winner proposition. The consumer evaluation indicated that a greater range of sizes would make the idea more relevant as well as more easily adopted in daily practice. The concept of Power Gel had great potential as a novel winner. However, this concept required more clarification and communication of broader instances of use and needed to add a more aromatic variant that could reinforce trial intention. The Mild Bleach/White Care concept was a winning me-too. However, it lacked a defined product character in terms of claims and pack. The concept of Mild Bleach/Home was another winning me-too that offered a clear and evident proposition for a general-purpose cleaner new product while guaranteeing the desired mild efficacy.

6.5.4 Perceived Impact

The final stage of the implementation of the IPCD model was the “moment” of truth for the action research team. After months of exploring, understanding, developing and refining, it was time to evaluate the IPCD model using the criteria set in the formal action research document at the beginning of the project as indicated by the existing literature (Dickens & Watkins, 1999). The criteria set, at the beginning of the
project, were that the IPCD model would be able to generate new product concepts that would be perceived positively by the consumers. The first criterion was indeed met: the action research team generated thirty-four embryonic ideas and four new concepts stemming from a deeper understanding of “the mothers with young children” target group. After years of having an empty formal innovation funnel, several new concepts were identified that were not ad hoc but that addressed the “Living Hygiene” opportunity identified and agreed by the organization.

During the presentation of the research findings the members of the action research team were rather nervous. Moments of silence when the presentation seemed to invoke scepticism such as in the case of the Mild Bleach/Home, were replaced by reactions of enthusiasm when consumer evaluation was positive, such as in the Thick Power Gel. The action research team members showed high interest, asking questions, requiring clarifications, and expressing their opinions and ideas. The IQA concluded that there was potential for launch implementation in the new concept ideas of Thick Power Gel, Mild Bleach/Home and Mild Bleach/White Care provided that the concepts would be further nourished and refined. Furthermore, these concepts together with the concept of Garbage Bags could prove to be strategically interesting ideas for the brand’s image considering the umbrella positioning towards “Living hygiene for mothers with young children”. As the “Living Hygiene for mothers with young children” suggested an element of mildness, the brand may benefit as it could distance itself from the ‘harshness barrier’, holistically enhance its affinity and increase its possible applications for use. Overall, the IQA concluded that there was high potential in the concept ideas of Power Gel, Mild Bleach/White Care and Mild Bleach/Home taking into consideration recommendations and further amendments.

6.6 Reflections

Previous experience has demonstrated that under the constant pressure to speed up the development of ideas, the senior management of the European Hygiene cluster used to rush through the Front End product development process. This resulted in costly oversights and inaccuracies or in lack of ideas overall. The IPCD model succeeded in meeting the senior management and ideation team members’ expectations of generating new product concepts relevant to mothers with young
children as it is illustrated by one of the action team members (Development manager):

"I like this model which we have tried here in the local market."

The action research team showed appreciation for the IPCD model because it provided them with guidance and at the same time allowed them to be empowered and free to create.

Furthermore, the team felt that the ideas had more chances of survival because they were kept and nurtured within the ideation team and were not exposed to the formal gate-keeping process system of the organization. Until then, the draft ideas were generated ad hoc and were inserted, accompanied by a complete business case, into the formal computerized innovation funnel of the organization. In most cases, the new ideas were ignored or denied by executive regional committees.

Following the presentation of results the team reflected with the IQA on the overall conclusions, recommendations and next steps. The agency's views that this research should involve not only screening of the ideas but gaining a deeper understanding led the team to decide not to kill any idea but to nourish them all further. As a result, the action research members decided to split into four sub-groups of two, each one of which would adopt one of the four concepts to strengthen it further in parallel with their everyday work (Chapter 4). The action research project provided opportunities for further study in the future. The IPCD model did not reach a final destination, it was meant to work towards a continuous transformation for progress of ideas into the organization. However, more importantly the application of the ICPD model provided a sense of ownership and pride to the action team members as it is illustrated by the Legal & Claims manager:

"Even if someone won't see his ideas/contribution being finally realized through the innovation process – as in the case with most of us who participate at certain stages of the process- he still has the feeling of being part of a process that led to something valuable to the company, reflecting directly to self esteem in the workplace."

The findings of the application of the IPCD model were shared with the new Regional Vice President of the European Hygiene cluster as best practice. Despite the fact that he had just taken up his post, the Regional Director welcomed the new concepts proposed by the ideation team and asked the team to consider fast
implementation. He demonstrated appreciation for the integration of ethnography into the model and agreed that the innovation managers would have to immerse with the local consumers more intensively in the future.

6.7 Conclusion

The application of the separate stages of the IPCD model resulted in various findings. The International opportunity identification stage resulted in the development of a common positioning or opportunity for the three brands involved in the study namely “Living Hygiene for mothers with young children”. The Local consumer immersion stage based on applied ethnography generated new insights on the aforementioned target group, such as the extensive uses of bleach products. The third stage, namely International Concept Development, was effectuated through a creative workshop of the action research team led to the generation of 33 new product ideas. The four most promising ones were evaluated by consumers during the final, International Evaluation stage of the model.

In contrast to previous experiences, based thoroughly on the approval of executive regional committees, the application of the IPCD model was positively evaluated by the ideation team, as they felt that the ideas had more chances of survival. Furthermore, it was also appreciated by the Regional Vice President of the European Hygiene cluster, who welcomed the integration of applied ethnography and encouraged the team to progress the ideas forward.
Chapter 7

Reflecting

7.1 Introduction

"What I hear I forget,
What I see I remember,
What I do I know."
Chinese Proverb

This chapter aims at bridging theory with practice and at shedding light on the shadow that falls between idea and reality by comparing and discussing the findings of the spiral of the action research cycle with the NPD and Front End literature. It involves tying the emergent findings to existing literature by asking what it is similar to and what it contradicts. Such an approach (Eisenhard, 1989) enhances the internal validity and theoretical level of the IPCD model as derived inductively during the acting stage of the action research cycle. Fieldwork findings drawn from the action research cycle have revealed a number of lessons learned that influence the Front End in a multi-national organization. These lessons are presented as discussed and agreed by the action team members. Finally, the chapter describes the personal reflections of the action researcher during the course of DBA and action research inquiry.

7.2 Enfolding literature: Discussion of the application of the IPCD Model

7.2.1 IPCD Model Parts One and Two: Discussion of the application of Front End Stages, Activities and the Embracing Arrows

The findings drawn from the observation of the application of the IPCD model (Chapter 6) revealed that international opportunity identification was the starting point for developing new product concepts at the Front End. Yet, since the project under
study involved consumer-led innovation, the objective of that initial stage was to elicit explicit common consumer needs across the target countries of Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. These findings add clarity to the NPD literature (Urban & Hauser; 1993; Fuller 1994; Kotler et al, 1996) that gives only a general indication that the initial step of the early stage of NPD process should involve the specification of market, technological and organizational opportunities. The application of the IPCD model indicated that this is a significant change that has to be made at the beginning of the Front End projects; in marketing-driven projects, the initial stage has to focus on the identification of consumer needs and not on the technological capabilities of the organization. Furthermore, the identification of consumer needs refers to exploratory work such as secondary or primary qualitative research with consumer groups either in all the countries involved or in representative countries or regions.

Secondly, in international innovation projects, where there is more than one brand involved, the Front End should stem from a common positioning across brands. These actions are taken as part of the new product strategy (Kotler et al, 2000) and are included in the NPD process. Consequently, this may result in the use of an extensive amount of time and resource. The “journey” for the identification of the common positioning of the three brands (Greek bleach product, Italian bleach product, Dutch bleach product) of the cluster lasted months and required a huge amount of time and money (as stated in Chapter 6 the current study had no intention of focusing on the product and portfolio strategy, so that this was only presented in outline).

Thirdly, the definition of the common opportunity has to be explicit and precise. The more precise it is, the more room it provides for further exploration and inspiration in the following stages at the Front End. Findings suggested that the concrete and precise definition of the international opportunity (“Living Hygiene for mothers with young children) shaped the direction of the process towards that specific target group. This lends support to creativity authors who argue in favour of “serious creativity” or creativity with a purpose within the organizational context (DeBono, 1992).

A new emerging finding was that local consumer immersion towards an international insight was an additional step during Front End that involves not only the identification of target consumers’ explicit but also their implicit needs. Consumer immersion for the generation of international insights has not yet appeared as a separate stage during the early stage of the NPD process within the reviewed NPD literature. This second stage of the IPCD model as applied to the organization is a
modification of the existing NPD and Front End literature (Graf & Saguy 1991; Urban & Hauser, 1993; Fuller 1994; MacFie, 1994; Kotler et al, 2000) as it introduces a new stage during the early stage of the International Front End and adds clarity to Morris' (2006) theory, since it links the generation of insights with the opportunity identification and the idea generation in a straightforward manner.

More importantly, the application of the IPCD model underlined the importance and the challenge of the process of generating cross-country insights in order to end up with one common global or regional insight. The reason consumer insights are so important is because in many instances they can assist in revealing unique opportunities for the development of international winning product concepts. Indeed, practical experience in the Greek market revealed that the product under study was used at home in 33 different instances that gave inspiration for new product and advertising ideas. This finding resonates with the views of NPD researchers (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Poolton & Ismail, 2000; Kleef, Van Trijp, Luning, 2004; Rosenthal & Capper, 2006; Morris, 2006) who recommend applied ethnography as a suitable research method that may lead to the generation of new market insights.

The current study, in its search for applying local consumer immersion, has also been able to add to some existing theories on applied ethnography. First, the adoption of applied ethnography does not necessarily exclude other research methods during the Front End (Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Poolton & Ismail, 2000). Applied ethnography was used primarily to identify consumer insights followed by qualitative and quantitative research to validate these findings. Secondly, among the applied ethnography techniques used, diary entries from consumers seemed particularly useful to capture all the 33 instances of use. In-home observations revealed only the everyday housekeeping chores, whereas the diaries captured more unusual usages because the housewives were able to think unobtrusively. Thirdly, findings suggested that insights on their own are not enough to confirm the NPD literature (Rosenthal & Capper, 2006). The ethnographic observations, intuitions and supporting evidence need to be communicated to the product innovation team members who did not participate in the ethnography and to be leveraged through workshops. In the current study, the brainstorming of possible solutions to transform the observations into graphic, visual representations of possible solutions was incorporated into the next step of the IPCD model.

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Stage three of the IPCD model as applied to the Greek market revealed that ideation for international concept development followed local consumer immersion. Hence, stage three involved ideas generation and development of new product concepts. It was evident from the application of the IPCD model that the ideation was not an ad hoc process but it was closely linked with the generation of insight. Insights generated during applied ethnography were so inspirational that in the study, some first embryonic ideas sparkled instantly during the debriefing meeting of the applied ethnography results. This demonstrated how ideas generation can be integrated at the Front End and resonates with Morris (2006) who supports the view that insights identification precedes ideas generation.

The application of the IPCD model indicated also that the sources and techniques of ideas generation were dependent on the available resources and time constraints of the project. For example, due to the time and budget constraints, a large number of ideas were generated in a one-day workshop held at the organization’s premises. Additionally, the study suggested that it was highly valuable for the generation of ideas to involve in the workshop both internal sources from different functions as well as external sources such as the creative agencies. This view is supported by many NPD authors who suggest various techniques for ideas generation at the Front End such as brainstorming, involving internal - workers, employees - or external sources - agencies, suppliers, conferences, and competition (Booz et al, 1982; Urban & Hauser, 1993; MacFie, 1994; Fuller 1994; Kotler et al, 2000; Morris 2006).

Findings during the observation of the application of the IPCD model also suggested that ideas should be developed into concepts in the form of written descriptions of the new product features and consumer benefits in agreement with the views of other NPD authors (Graf & Saguy, 1991; Kotler et al, 2001; Morris, 2006). The study sheds light on the relevant literature since it indicated that concept development is a highly demanding process requiring a continuous nourishment and refinement of the ideas until finalisation.

More importantly, the study indicated that the concept evaluation was implemented with consumer-driven criteria. Management decisions to progress the concept further or not followed the positive consumer results of the evaluation tests. The practical experience of the application of the IPCD model indicated that it was not possible to make financial analyses and manufacturing feasibility assessments at such an early stage because the future financial potential of generated concepts at this early
stage were unknown. These findings lend support to the views of most NPD authors (Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 1982; Urban & Hauser, 1993; Kotler et al, 2000), but contrast with Koen et al. (2001) who support the view that idea selection should be based on business criteria.

According to the experience gained in the observing stage of the action research cycle, the evaluation of concepts was as simple as the team members' choice or more structured as in a product concept test that involves both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For example, in the study the action research team's decision-making power was used to select the ideas to be further developed during the insights/creative workshop; in addition, a screening test that combined both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted by an external research agency (IQA) to assess, compare and screen the product concepts as suggested in the literature (Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 1982; Urban & Hauser, 1993; Kotler et al, 2000). As noted in Chapter 4 the test is a patent of the agency and remains confidential.

However, as previously stated (Chapter 2) the literature does not seem to take into account the fluid and experimental nature of the Front End and supports the view that screening of concepts is the final gate before the feasibility stage of the NPD process. The study indicated that evaluation of concepts does indeed involve the nourishment of concepts and therefore it is not the final destination. It has been recognized that certain individuals use the NPD stage-gate process in a linear fashion to kill new product ideas (Stevens et al, 1999). In contrast, the study suggests that concept evaluation is shaped by the mindset to nourish and improve the concepts rather than "kill" them. It is worthwhile noting that the results of the consumer test as presented by the agency included not only the consumer feedback but also their ideas for further improvement of the concepts presented. It was the nurturing of the creative idea, the refining of the product concepts following the comments of the different consumers that led to a winning product concept. Accordingly, it was the nurturing of ideas that underlined the whole process and underpinned a flexible and progressive framework of work.
7.2.2 IPCD Model Part Three: Discussion of the application of the 4Ps

Influential Factors

Process

The current study demonstrated that flexibility and experimentation are exhibited at the Front End since new product concepts are further modified, refined and nurtured until they are finalized. This view resonates with recent NPD and Front End literature (Koen et al., 2001; Ernst, 2002; Morris, 2006) but is in contrast to those NPD researchers who argue that the NPD process and therefore early start is characterised by a more structured and bureaucratic nature (Booz, Allen & Hamilton, 1982; Graf & Saguy, 1991; MacFie, 1994; Khurana & Rosenthal, 1998; Kotler et al, 2000).

It was evident during the application of the IPCD model that the action research team had the opportunity firstly to adapt the IPCD model to its needs and time and budget constraints and, secondly, to experiment with different versions of the concepts until they are finally developed for testing. Hence, the nature of the process as observed in the study was underlined by freedom and lack of control, which agrees with the views of Amabile (1998), and by no means by the application of bureaucratic rules and formalisation. During the application of the IPCD model, the action research team were free and empowered to experiment at the Front End towards their final aim of the development of winning new product concepts.

However, the observation of the application of the IPCD model confirmed recent NPD and Front End theories in that flexibility and freedom alone is not enough to generate new concepts. The steps of the process have to be explicit or known to the individuals involved in order to guide the actions towards the agreed objective, as suggested by Poolton & Ismail (2000). The current study argued in favour of a balance between a formal and a more flexible approach at the Front End since it has been acknowledged that, in contrast to the formal NPD process, the fuzzy Front End is more chaotic, experimental and less structured (Koen et al, 2001).

Hence, according to the study, the early stage of the NPD process cannot be seen as a mechanistic rigid and fragmentary process but as a well known, yet flexible, fluid and progressive approach, ready to adapt to changes or requirements of the environment. It has been indicated that flexibility should foster creativity and inspiration
at the Front End but should grow within a guiding organizational framework in a way that becomes deeply embedded into the organizational culture. Such a view clearly resonates with Stevens et al. (1999) who advocate the combination of creativity and business discipline to foster success within the NPD process. Only then can an appropriate balance between flexibility and structure (Nambisan, 2002), logic and passion be maintained.

Furthermore, the fieldwork findings of the application of the IPCD model indicated that the local consumers' implicit and explicit needs played a significant role at every stage of the Front End. All the activities at the Front End were directed towards the primary goal of satisfying consumer needs. This study adds to the limited empirical evidence of NPD literature (Lukas & Ferrel, 2000) regarding the role of market orientation into innovation and confirms findings of some NPD researchers (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Burgelman et al, 1996) because it strongly underlines the role of consumers at the Front End. Besides, the findings not only concluded that the consumers' explicit needs influenced Front End but they also uncovered that the consumers' implicit needs revealed an emerging opportunity for the Front End. For example, the exploration of the consumers' explicit needs revealed that mothers with young children lacked saliency with the brands of the study. However, this finding could not create inspiration for the generation of new ideas. In contrast, the identification of the implicit needs of mothers with young children revealed opportunities to extend the bleach brand into other areas of usage such as the garbage bags with a disinfectant end benefit (Chapter 6).

Moreover, the study noted the integration of pilot consumers into the Front End as active figures or solution providers or co-creators (Nambisan, 2002), implying that creative consumer integration at the Front End as an expression of market orientation could positively influence the generation of new ideas at the Front End (Von-Hippel, 1986; Roberts et al, 2005).

Hence, the current study clearly suggests that, especially in a FMCG organization, strong consumer orientation plays a critical role and should underline all stages and activities at the Front End. Such a strong consumer orientation should involve both understanding of explicit and implicit needs but also active consumer integration into the process. It is noteworthy to quote the comment of an action research team member, who was the technical manager of the organization, and who
stressed the leading role of the consumer in innovation, as it emerged from the application of the IPCD model (Development Manager):

"This model includes what is missing from innovation nowadays, the need of the consumer. The technical experts have forgotten the consumer and...develop products that are not relevant for her."

Place

The findings of the observing stage of the action research cycle added to the existing literature and suggested that the role of the country's representatives in the international Front End involved their participation in the Front End, the submission of new ideas and more importantly their commitment to the launch of the new product concepts. As indicated by an action research team member (Legal and Claims Manager):

"the European marketing and development managers should pay particular attention to meaningful local input. So,... instead of being regarded by RTCs as a "challenge" to their authority and knowledge, it should lead them in creative and broader thinking, becoming more receptive, accommodating local needs in international projects, and thus maximising the value for both the companies and themselves."

Accordingly, the international innovation teams should "lean" towards the countries' representatives by understanding the local consumer needs.

In relation to the senior management commitment and support the current study indicated that looser formal controls, risk-taking and commitment from country team members enhanced the successful development of international product concepts. Such findings lend support to several research reports and management textbooks on creativity and innovation (Amabile, 1988; Earle 1997) that demonstrate how creativity can be blocked by rigid bureaucratic rules and instructions, conservative rules and values, time pressure, heavy work load and stress.

In addition, the observing stage of the action research cycle indicated four relevant points. First, that senior managers should allocate the resources to the ideation teams, set clear targets and include them into the team members' work-plans.

Secondly, during the Front End the role of senior management should involve the empowerment of the team. The team has to be free to select how they approach their work. In other words, the senior management should focus on the "what" and not on the "how" at the Front End, a finding that resonates with Amabile (1988). In the
current study, due to the changes in the senior management, involvement and
direction into the project was indeed minimal, thus leaving autonomy for creativity
among the team members as is also suggested in the literature (Swink, 2000). As a
consequence, the action research team was fully empowered by the senior
management and generated new product concepts accordingly.

Thirdly, the senior managers should allow time for exploration during the Front
End. The findings drawn from the observing stage of the action research cycle clearly
indicated that ideas were considered to be fragile and therefore should be nurtured
during ideation and concept evaluation stages to grow further until finalization.
Therefore, risk assessment should be conducted during the next stages of the NPD
process and not during the Front End. Ideas could only be nurtured and grow where
the organizational climate is free of fear of failure and denial and provides the time and
resources for reflections and creativity, as supported by Koen et al. (2001). However,
in the current study, the action research team was overwhelmed by the day-to-day
workload, as elaborated by an action team member (Legal and Claims Manager):

"Usually we are heavily preoccupied with day-to-day operational matters and we rarely
have the chance to sit back, try to adopt a completely fresh look on things and reflect."

It is imperative for senior management to foster a creative climate that
stimulates employees to spend unscheduled time testing, validating and nurturing their
own and others' ideas (Amabile, 1988; Koen et al, 2001). Therefore, the senior
managers should not only focus on short term goals such as cutting costs, but also on
long term goals such as the creative activity of innovation (Trott, 1998).

Fourthly, as clearly stated by an action research team member (Development
Manager):

"It requires commitment from the Big European Heads, and not only the Greek ones,
since those are the ones who decide what we will sell to the consumers."

Hence, it is not only the local but also the international senior management who
should truly embrace the implementation of the Front End in the organization,
behaving not as remote controllers, but as enablers and nurturers of continuous
creativity.

The findings drawn from the observing stage of the action research cycle
suggested also that the early and consistent involvement of participants safeguards
the smooth flow from one stage of the Front End to the next. These findings build on
existing literature that emphasizes the importance of external and internal sources'

Furthermore, these findings add to the existing literature by clarifying how or when external or internal sources for ideas generation are involved in the process. One of the common mistakes the organizations make "en route" is the fragmentary involvement of internal and external participants into the ideation projects. Such an approach creates confusion, lack of commitment and "buy in", and loss of business time in the organization. Thus, it is underlined that the early and consistent involvement of participants safeguards smooth flow from one stage of the Front End to the other because participants gain better understanding, higher commitment and a sense of ownership for the new ideas.

**Person**

The findings drawn from the observing stage of the action research cycle (Chapter 6) revealed one of the key competencies of international innovators. Open-mindedness involved a broader perspective towards accepting and nurturing new ideas and secondly towards accepting and understanding different cultures and beliefs. Accordingly, the Front End requires involvement of individuals who are able to exhibit flexibility, imagination and an ability to see all sides of an equation. These findings lend support to existing literature (Amabile, 1988; Troy et al, 2001) that the characteristics of a creative personality such as flexibility, openness, curiosity, imagination and tolerance for ambiguity, fosters creativity at the Front End.

Another new element of the current study was the ability of the innovator to exhibit openness to new cultures, beliefs and views. The application of the IPCD model and, more specifically, the application of the local immersion stage clearly indicated that the managers involved in ideation should not necessarily be highly creative, but that they should maintain a continuous effort to be insightful and to open as many "windows" as possible to the consumers of the different markets through a diversity of different contacts. In a multi-national environment, this ability to understand consumers in different markets, and be open-minded, should be one of the key characteristics of the managers involved in the process.

The observing stage of the action research cycle also revealed two of the key skills of international innovators. According to these findings the individuals who are
involved at the Front End should be able to exhibit fluent knowledge of foreign languages relevant, in each case, to the specific international market. Furthermore, efficiency in writing skills was also vital. In the light of lack of relevant literature concerning the importance of the language and writing skills theme, these findings provide new insights for the International Front End within the organizational context. These findings were first drawn from the observing stage and resonate with the findings drawn from the acting stage of the cycle (Chapter 5). During the application of the IPCD model it was evident that fluency in foreign language and writing skills were necessary to facilitate communication among international participants, especially with respect to the international opportunity stage of the model, the better understanding of consumers and clear concept exposition. For example, the meaning of the English sentence “Living Hygiene for mothers with young children” had to be clearly understood by all the countries’ representatives in order to be translated into the local languages. In the Greek market, a different expression which had similar meaning was used to communicate it to the local consumers. Writing skills were found to be critical in all stages of Front End since writing a product concept at whatever stage it may occur could potentially affect nurturing or killing the original idea.

Because proficiency of language and writing skills is held to be critical, this falls under the umbrella of communication. As suggested by a member of the critical audience it is quite common to check on the efficiency of communication by asking for feedback and/or paraphrasing by participants during the course of events. Consequently, this simple procedure would highlight any serious problems within a given group of mixed languages and abilities.

Product

The application of the IPCD model indicated the need for attention to detail during the Front End. The findings as drawn from the observing stage of the action research cycle, suggested that further attention was needed to refine elements of the new international product concept by agreeing and presenting in detail to the consumers the characteristics of the product mix such as the packaging, the label, the sub-variant name, and the formulation. For example, in the current study (Chapter 6) the mild bleach wash additive idea was very thorough. The idea included details related to:

- The variant name ("White Care"),

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• The description of the idea ("The New bleach WhiteCareTM resolves your problems. It can be used on all clothes where bleach use is permitted by the manufacturer (cotton, nylon & polyester), in white and light-coloured clothes. With a mild formulation, so that you can use it directly on the clothes inside the machine-drum").

• The consumer benefit ("And your clothes are becoming snow-white again, soft and tender with a fabulous freshness fragrance, easy, quickly and safely")

• The design of the packaging (short, with smooth lines and an ergonomic handle).

Such a detailed description of the new product idea led consumers during the concept evaluation stage of the model to gain a better understanding of the new concept itself. It also allowed the participants of the action research project to identify opportunities for further improvement and nurturing of the original idea such as to improve the pack format because it was more appropriate for a detergent product than a wash additive (Chapter 6).

These findings provide additional evidence to existing research (Cooper & Kleinschmidt, 1987; Poolton & Ismail, 2000) by acknowledging that paying greater attention to detail engenders higher rates of success during the NPD process. According to the current study, the innovators at the Front End should not only generate numerous embryonic ideas but work them out in detail. Only then, will the new product concepts be easily and accurately understood by the ideation team members, the senior management, the countries and the consumers of the local markets.

The finding drawn from the application of the IPCD model (Chapter 6) demonstrated that detail in new product concepts had to be enhanced by stimulation. More specifically, the development of new product concepts should be stimulating and exciting by adding a diversity of elements such as visual details or sensorial attributes. For example, in the current study the action research team gave "life" to the mild bleach idea by creating a concept that included not only all the details described earlier but also a graphic, coloured representation of the pack (Figure 17).
Stimulation in product concept development is a new finding that adds to the existing literature related to the detail in NPD. This new finding suggests that the new product concept should be "told" in a compelling way in order to stimulate touching, thinking, feelings and sensations of the ideation team members and the target consumers. Such an insight hopefully enables the organizations to avoid the common mistake of presenting the new product concept in an uninspiring way such that they may be "killed" before they are "born". Such a view resonates with Hunter (Ideo, 2007) who advocates the usage of prototypes in order to make the world more tangible.

In conclusion, the findings drawn from the observing stage of the action research cycle, as compared with the existing NPD and Front End literature, provide the middle ground between theoretical and practical perspective as drawn from this study. The current study clearly adds to the existing literature while it also uncovers new insights. The study indicates that ideas should have a purpose so that clear, concrete market opportunities have to be identified from senior management. These opportunities become the initial stage from which ideation teams will embark on their "journey" towards transformation. During this "journey", ideation team members are not only present to see and hear, but also to observe, listen and immerse themselves in the consumers' world to uncover their implicit and explicit unmet needs.

More specifically, an emerging new finding drawn from the current study was that ideation is closely linked with local consumer insight because insight is the creative seed for the development of new ideas. An additional new finding was that the
ideation team members need to work hard to enhance original ideas with inspiring stimulation. Furthermore, during the process of concept development the individuals involved should exhibit good language and writing skills to foster better communication and common understanding. The findings from the observing stage clearly suggest that creativity need not be an occurrence of chance but requires true effort and continuous persistence.

7.3 Reaching closure: Lessons learned

"No longer do we ask, “Is this the right method? Instead, we ask, “What is the quality of knowing within the practice of this person and community?”"

Reason & Torbert, 2001: p7

This section steps back from the specifics of the action research project to reflect more generally on the IPCD model and its application. Upon the completion of the presentation of the consumer evaluation results, a team meeting was held initiated by the action researcher. She posed informal, open ended questions to initiate the discussion such as:

- How do you feel about the process we followed?
- What are the pros and cons?
- What we should do next?

The action researcher kept notes of the discussion among the action team members. Following this discussion the action team members agreed the planning stage of the next spiral of the cycle. The action researcher, based on her notes and on her reflective diary, concluded the lessons learned drawn from the application of the process.

Then, the action research participants, upon the action researcher’s request, validated by e-mail the lessons learned as well as what had changed following the IPCD model implementation.

Literature on NPD and the Front End enabled the development of a theoretical and analytical perspective for the early stage of the new product concept development within an organization. The implementation of the IPCD model highlights three main learning aspects namely:
Within the organizational context, the approach at international Front End is a holistic and progressive framework.

Key success factors: How not to make mistakes "en route".

International Front End requires a new mindset within the organization.

7.3.1 Within the organizational context, the approach at international Front End is a holistic and progressive framework

In the case of the international Front End, it would appear that the approach taken within the organizational setting is not an ad hoc initiative to generate new ideas but a guiding framework for the managers involved. This is in contrast to current practice where the process by which ideas/concepts are generated operates in an "ad hoc" manner (Flynn et al: 2003: p417). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that the international Front End approach takes a holistic perspective. This is in contrast to the views of the NPD researchers (MacFie 1994; Fuller, 1994; Graf & Saguy, 1999; Kotler et al, 2000; Morris, 2006) who fail to acknowledge the different nature of the Front End and imply that the process is fragmentary and operates within a gate-keeping framework. Moreover, not only does it lend support to the Front End authors Koen et al, (2001) who support a holistic model of the Front End, but it also adds further detail for its practical application within an organizational context.

The first stage of the IPCD model included the identification of a common market opportunity across the countries involved. The definition of a purpose of the ideas represents an important starting point at the international Front End and contradicts NPD authors' views who argue that the starting point should be a search for new ideas via the use of creative problem-solving and other techniques (MacFie, 1994; Fuller, 1994; Graf & Saguy, 1999; Kotler et al, 2000). The second stage involved the identification of the consumers' implicit needs through the immersion of the ideation team members in the consumers' world. From the divergence perspective of the first stage, the ideation team has to take a convergence perspective during the second stage. In contrast to NPD and Front End authors who have not yet incorporated this stage into the process at the early start (Figures 10, 11) the IPCD model clearly suggests a new link between the broad purpose of the idea and the development of the idea itself. It was evident that the omission of the local consumer
immersion stage could deplete the value of the model to foster identification of international ideas with local relevance as well as improvement in the elements of the marketing mix. International concept development and evaluation are the two subsequent stages, but these stages are not new.

However, two new elements are demonstrated compared with the existing literature. The first new element is that new concepts are not developed into their final status during the international concept development stage, but are continuously nurtured to grow and be further improved throughout the Front End. Hence, the approach is progressive towards the continuous strengthening and improvement of the new concepts. It is demonstrated that it is an evolution and not iteration among stages, as it is argued by other NPD and Front End authors (Urban & Hauser 1993; Koen et al, 2001; Morris, 2006). The second new element is that the evaluation of the new concepts is based upon the consumers' acceptance criteria and not upon financial or technical feasibility criteria. During such an early stage when concepts are continuously being nurtured and transformed, accurate financial and technical information cannot easily be produced.

Furthermore, it is indicated that the IPCD model guides practitioners by recommending not only a clear sequence of events as suggested in the existing NPD and Front End literature (Figures 10 & 11), but also key activities for facilitating implementation such as the insight and creative workshop, and detailed approaches, such as the applied ethnography for the newly-introduced stage of the local consumer immersion. The key activity of the creative workshop provided an axis in the implementation of the IPCD model. In the action research project, it was the main creative activity where the whole team collaborated, built consensus and saw landscapes with new eyes. Moreover, the creative workshop was the cornerstone for ideas nurturing. In addition, applied ethnography called attention to explore opportunities or implications that were not obvious at the outset, but arose instead through drawing inferences about behaviours that may demonstrate unconscious needs. For example, existing deductive research (internal data) provided only three usages of the product under study such as cleaning of floors, toilettes and kitchen benches, whereas applied ethnography identified 33 usages of the product. The integration of applied ethnography into the IPCD model ensured a broad coverage of potential kinds of issues, plus learning in the realm of ergonomics, aesthetics, and insights for new concepts and new marketing strategy and communication.
7.3.2 Key success factors: How not to make mistakes “en route”

It is demonstrated that the approach at the international Front End within an organizational context is holistic not only because it incorporates clear sequences of events, key activities and approaches but also because it incorporates decisive factors for successful implementation. This approach lends support to Koen et al. (2001) who proposed a Front End model that incorporated influencing factors that add new insights from an empirical perspective. The success factors of the approach taken at the international Front End relate to four dimensions drawn from Rhodes (1961), the four Ps namely, Process (flexibility and consumer orientation), Place (senior management commitment and countries involvement and commitment), Person (open-mindedness and language and writing skills), Product (detail and stimulation in product concepts).

Consideration of the Process factors proved to be very valuable for the action research team. The guiding yet flexible framework of the IPCD steps enabled the action research team to aggregate the ideas from all relevant constituencies and select the new and relevant concepts from the non-innovative ones based on informed analysis rather than assumptions, hunches and internal power struggles. Consumer orientation enabled the team to generate new ideas linked with the European positioning of the brand thereby tapping onto local consumer implicit needs. Therefore, the model was able to bridge the international with the local side of the Front End innovation thus producing international ideas relevant to the local markets. The implementation of the IPCD indicated that a strong consumer and not just market orientation can clearly lead to unique new products (Figure 16). This finding lends support to the literature that underlines the role of consumers at the Front End (Cooper & Kleinshmidt, 1987; Burgelman et al, 1996).

Consideration of Place factors also proved to be valuable for the successful implementation of the action research project. It supports the NPD and creativity literature (Amabile, 1988; Earle 1997) that argues for a risk-taking, tolerance for failure and time-to-reflect climate within the organization in the process of fostering success and nurturing ideas at the Front End. Indeed, the action research and ideation team was able to be creative within a business context and combine passion with facts, and
enthusiasm with logic because it was fully empowered by the senior management to try and implement the model into the local market. The team felt that tight controls strangled innovation. Planning, budgeting and reviews, applied to existing business, were omitted, as they would squeeze the life out of the ideation effort. The team members were more relaxed to create and improvise without having to provide financial input and assessments into the organization's formal computerized innovation system. The team members had also the flexibility to change key activities such as in the case of the insight and ideation workshops that merged into one. Loosening formal controls and flexibility enabled the team to tighten their interpersonal connections and develop new product concepts successfully. However, the creative teams should not be "hived off" but instead they should be rooted in the market reality. More specifically, it is proposed that the members of the Innovation Centres of the organization, who are currently "hived off" in cities such as London, Milan and others, should be reconnected firstly, with the local markets through the application of the IPCD model and secondly with the regional/local operating companies through the setting of common market share targets for the new launches.

A new learning was that the involvement of external experts and technical resources early in the process facilitated a faster pace because moving from one stage to another did not encounter resistance or formal authorization. This lesson lends support to the existing NPD and Front End literature (Imao et al, 1983; Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Ernst, 2002; Knox & Mitchell, 2003) that advocates the involvement of external and internal sources into the Front End. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that incorporation of the Person factors plays a very critical role during implementation at the Front End within the organization. It is the people who drive the application of the Front End. Being open-minded enabled the team to gain an open exposure to views and ideas from a variety of functions and environments and led to exchange and building on each others' ideas. The integration of creative consumers as already proposed by Roberts et al. (2005) into the creative workshop as well as a variety of experts throughout the different stages of the Front End built further openness and led the team to gain a further appreciation for the consumer needs, activities and each others' ideas.

It is demonstrated that by taking the Product factors into account, a series of considerations can be made before bringing the product onto the market. This permits gaining more insight into the new product, and leads to an earlier go/no go decision.
before resources and time are wasted on ultimately non-viable ideas. This lends support to the NPD authors who argue that the more attention is paid to detail during the early stage, the higher success rates are (Poolton & Ismail, 2000; Ernst, 2002). Generation of embryonic ideas was not considered adequate for feeding the innovation funnel. The strong quest for detail and stimulation forced the marketing team members and the designer to devote additional effort and improvise the name, packaging, label and formulation. It has to be noted that some ideas sounded good and inspiring when they were described very briefly on a piece of paper but when brought into life through visual details, they were sometimes different. The pack seemed inappropriate, colours did not match, or the cap was very small. The quest for stimulation fed nourishment of the original ideas because most of them were re-worked more than five times. Importantly, the quest for detail forced the marketing members to explore feasibility with the technical team. Potentially, the usage of prototypes could be also incorporated in such a process.

7.3.3 International Front End requires a new mindset within the organization

One last point that needs to be underlined is that the international Front End requires a new mindset for its successful implementation in the organization.

It has been demonstrated that creativity at the Front End does not require an ideation team that works in isolation in order not to be “contaminated”. On the contrary, it requires individuals who are immersed into the everyday business world and the consumers’ world. The Front End requires that ideation teams embark on their “journey” towards transformation and progress. During this “journey”, ideation team members are not only present to see and hear, but also to observe, listen and immerse themselves into the consumers’ world to uncover their implicit and explicit unmet needs. However, this journey is challenging. The action research and ideation team worked for the Front End in parallel with their everyday jobs. The marketing and technical members of the team as well as the designer could never have anticipated the tremendous effort and time, and the nurturing of concepts that was required, especially when it was taking place in parallel with everyday work. The organization should allow managers to step back from their everyday work and allocate one day a
week to focus on deeper understanding, observing, imagining, developing and reflecting. Furthermore, the organization needs “to reconsider its strategies to ensure that they have activities in place that will facilitate creativity and ultimately realise new products in the future” (Trott, 1998: p213). For example, an approach would be to try and improve the understanding of the IPCD model within the organization. In this way, the organization could empower its people not only to dream a new future for the business but also to make it happen.

It is concluded that this study has proved to be a successful action research project encountering all the common elements identified in the literature (Chapter 3). The project included a loop of one full action research cycle and the planning stage of the second action research cycle. First, the study was focused on research in action with real people who were the 22 individuals involved in various stages of the study. It resolved the issue of lack of new product concepts in the innovation funnel by generating numerous draft new ideas (Table 16). Four of these ideas have been further developed and are planned for launch in the market. Furthermore, the extensive number of new usages of the bleach product under study, as identified by the IPCD model, has become the new European platform for the organization. In addition, the action research project brought change into the organization since the Greek Household Cleaning business delivered double digit growth following years of decline. Finally, the action research project involved a democratic dialogue of the researcher with the participants that resulted in rewarding reflections and lessons learned. The following section steps aims to reflect more generally on the action research experience within the framework of the DBA dissertation at the University of Surrey.

7.4 Personal reflections: The DBA/Insider Action Research experience

This DBA dissertation was completed within two years. Two years of agony, frustration, physical and emotional tiredness. I was faced with challenges I could never imagine. An action research DBA has certainly been a multi-task experience: working full time, having a second baby, moving countries, changing job responsibilities, conducting the research fieldwork, reading the literature and writing the dissertation. Some said it would not be possible...But somehow it happened and it was made possible by adopting creativity and discipline.
At the beginning it was fuzzy...like the Front End; some research data, lots of ideas and thoughts, confusion than clarity, and empty pages waiting to be filled. In addition, the sponsor was pressing: “We need new ideas...when can you have them?” In the UK and Greece, where I have lived during these years, I had to find a room in the house just for me. In Surrey, I moved all my books in the small study. In Athens, I converted the basement of my house into the writing/creativity room for the writing and completion of the thesis. Books, piles of papers were on the desk, the chairs, and the floor almost everywhere. I prepared a timetable that I agreed with the University. However, the assumptions for this timetable were rather naïve. I assumed that refinements would be no more than two per chapter and that everything would go as planned. But refinements were much more and a lot of things went wrong!

My two young boys were getting sick throughout the winter, for one full year I had to bear all the responsibilities of my family as my husband had to stay back in the UK, my sponsor left the organization just a few months before I completed my dissertation. There were a lot of moments that I felt time was against me. I sacrificed a lot to find the time to work on the DBA, the weeknights, when the children were not sick and most of the weekends and holidays. At the beginning it was more reading and discussing with my sponsor, line manager, and supervisors. It was more understanding and reflecting. The more I was reading, the more I was reflecting and the more I was finding the courage to continue.

Methods of inquiry in an exploratory insider action research was a challenge to complete, especially because I am a holistic thinker and preferred to have the whole picture before moving to each chapter. Hence, I was writing the methodology and methods of inquiry chapters’ following a literature review in action research. Challenged by my supervisors and a professor of action research I had to rework on my approach many times. Having completed the methodology and methods of inquiry chapters and having agreed them with the supervisors the next step was acting. Acting involved fieldwork that meant interviewing internal and external experts to the organization. One could imagine that finding internal experts to interview when the interviewer was an employee of the organization would not be difficult. Well, life is full of surprises; internal experts were hard to find. Some of them had left the company; others were new and did not have the tacit knowledge of the innovative project of my concern. Despite these obstacles I was determined to complete my study “I could not give up so easy” (Personal Diary).

At the end, fieldwork was successfully completed on time. Analysis of the fieldwork data provided some new insights. Over several months I read and reviewed and reflected on my collection of data. It was a Christmas night that I had a Eureka moment where I was led to the values of applied ethnography. I realized then how important it was to “dig” beneath the surface; to listen, to observe and to immerse. I also realized that my colleagues in the office
were not aware of that approach and therefore they remained isolated and disconnected behind their piles of research reports. When the action research team used the applied ethnographic method, they could not believe that the product under study was applied in so many different ways by the consumers. Therefore, the team became rooted again to the consumers' reality, realized the new usages and applications and created new concepts and communication. Following that Eureka moment I saw my study with new eyes and I was immersed in writing and conducting more action research fieldwork.

Uncovering the success factor that was related to Place I realized how different our business reality was. Controls were really tight; time to reflect was perceived as laziness. We had to enter data, analyze figures and above all deliver results. But how can you deliver results without creativity? It was a vicious cycle: poor results, more control, less time to reflect, less creativity, further poor results. When the action research team took “time off”, it felt at ease and had fun and was able to develop and apply creativity and create new concepts and communication.

That experience was a lesson for me, personally. I realized that I was also part of the business reality. Despite poor results I had to take a big breath, and let myself “loose” and relaxed in an attempt to break the vicious cycle. Day by day this behaviour became natural for my team and me. Perhaps, it should not have been a surprise that the results became positive.

Moreover, I realized that the application of the 4Ps success factors created a bonding among the action team members. The action research team was empowered, inspired and wished to continue their work together towards the nurturing and implementation of the new concepts. The challenge now is to continue the action research project beyond the DBA requirements. The application of the process alone without the consideration of the success factors could potentially fail to create such a strong creative team.

I wrote the thesis with intensity and passion. I kept a diary, memos, e-mails, videos, transcripts of meetings and interviews, meeting minutes, research reports and other documents, print and electronic publications as well as e-mails to and from the action research participants. I had also records of my e-mails to my supervisors, and other professionals and critical friends who were showing the direction of my study as part of a dialogue process. It was definitely more time and energy consuming endeavour than I thought of initially.

This action research project does not have a well-defined ending. Instead, a new reality has emerged and the group of managers will continue to nourish the concepts while generating new ideas following the structured yet flexible process proposed by the framework of the model. For me, this DBA experience has changed my life. I have learned how to imagine instead of being constrained by structure, I have learned to be passionate whilst having control but above all, after years of practice, I re-discovered the limitless world of theory.
and knowledge; and I have decided I wish to continue this beautiful and challenging journey that never ends…

7.5 Conclusions

The whole journey would not be as valuable if it did not end with a phase of thorough reflection. First of all the findings were compared with the existing literature, in order to add clarity to the otherwise fuzzy Front End. Secondly, the key lessons learned were drawn by the action research team. Finally, the action researcher immersed herself in some personal reflections.

A review of the reflecting step of the first action research cycle concluded that the application of the IPCD model provided findings that bridged theory with practice. Among these findings was the fact that the initial stage of marketing-driven projects had to focus on the identification of the consumer needs and not on the technological capabilities of the organization. Furthermore, it was established that the local consumer immersion should be an additional step during Front End involving the identification of target consumers’ not only explicit but implicit needs.

As far as the key lessons learned are concerned, it was concluded that the approach at International Front End is a holistic and progressive framework, taking into consideration some key success factors, namely the four Ps (Person, Place, Product, Process). However, the most important lesson learned was that the International Front End requires a new mindset within the organization.

At a personal level, the experience for the action researcher has been both challenging and rewarding. It required constant effort and focus, despite the personal problems posed by family life and job expectations, but at the same time it offered her new competencies, such as a simultaneous practice of creativity and discipline.
8.1 Conclusions

In order to understand how the early stage of New Product Development is applied within an organizational setting, an insider action research was undertaken from 2006 until 2007 in a Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) multi-national organization.

In order to add sufficient specificity to the complex organizational environment in which the study would be conducted the Eisenhardt (1989) process of building theory from case studies was integrated into the action research spiral. This integrated model constitutes one of the original contributions of the present study. More specifically, the action research cycle involved the following:

- Planning or Getting Started, Selecting Cases and Crafting Instruments and Protocols (agreement of project objectives and deliverables),
- Acting or Entering the Field, Analyzing within and across cases, and Shaping Propositions (exploration of subject matter experts’ perceptions on best practices and success factors, and development of a new Front End model under the name of International Product Concept Development model).
- Observing or Testing (application of the International Product Concept Development model).
- Reflecting or Enfolding Literature and Reaching Closure (outcomes, management implications and key lessons).

Taking an analytical framework based on the NPD and Front End literature, subsequent stages and influencing factors during the early stage of the process were examined.
Theoretical constructs proposed by research studies within the NPD and Front End literature suggest a fragmentary approach with little detail on its practical application. Fieldwork findings drawn from the SMEs' views in relation to approaches taken in international innovation lead to the development of a new model for the Front End which addresses this shortcoming. The International Product Concept Development (IPCD) model is not a linear fragmentary process with stage gates but a holistic model which describes approaches and factors of influence during the early stage of international new product development.

In detail the IPCD model consists of three key parts:

- The embracing arrows define the non-stop nurturing element of the international ideas generated.
- The 4 Ps influential factors (Process, Person, Place, Product)

The implementation of the IPCD model into the organization highlights three main lessons learned.

The first lesson is that, within the organization, the approach taken at the international Front End is that of a holistic and progressive framework. It is demonstrated that the approach taken within the organizational setting should not be an ad hoc initiative to generate new ideas, but a guiding framework for the managers involved. The IPCD model is another original contribution of the present study since it guides practitioners by recommending not only a clear sequence of events but key activities for facilitating implementation such as the insight and creative workshop, and detailed approaches, such as the applied ethnography for the newly introduced stage of the local consumer immersion. Furthermore, this framework is holistic and progressive. These are two emergent elements since at first the new concepts are not developed into their final status during the international concept development stage but are continuously nurtured to grow and further improved throughout the Front End. Hence, the approach is progressive towards the continuous strengthening and improvement of the new concepts. Furthermore, in contrast to other theoretical constructs, the IPCD model does not foresee the existence of stage gates during the Front End, thus the new concepts are not "killed" at their birth due to financial or
technical feasibility criteria but are continuously nurtured and transformed until they are strong enough to enter the implementation phase of the innovation funnel.

The second lesson is that the consideration of the key success factors at the Front End prevents the organization from making mistakes “en route”. The success factors of the approach taken at the international Front End relates to four dimensions, the four Ps namely, Process (flexibility and consumer orientation), Place (senior management commitment and countries involvement and commitment), Person (open mindedness and fluent language and writing skills during the Front End which is an additional original contribution of the present study), and Product (detail and stimulation in product concepts). The incorporation of the four “Ps” success factors at the Front End enables the organization to practise successfully new product concept development.

The third lesson learned is that international Front End requires a new mindset within the organization. Successful implementation of the Front End within the complex and constantly changing environment of the organization needs not to be an occurrence of chance but a true effort and continuous persistence in every day practice. It is emphasized that the action research/ideation team worked for the implementation of the IPCD model in parallel with their every day job activities and managed to develop four strong new concepts. It is outlined that managers involved in ideation should make a conscious effort not only to see, hear and be present but to observe, listen and immerse in the consumers’ world to uncover the latters’ implicit and explicit unmet needs. Thus, it is imperative that the organization makes the time and resources available for this “journey” and cultivates the efforts of its employees towards the implementation of creativity. In addition, such a mindset requires individuals from the Innovation Centers of the organizations to be immersed firstly into the everyday business world, by aligning their targets with those of the operating companies, such as the market shares of the new launches, and secondly into the consumers’ world by applying the IPCD model at the Front End.

It has been discussed that the action research project is not just about bringing change into the organization but about empowering and inspiring the people (Gray, 2004). Indeed, this action research project not only disseminated new insights about the approach taken at the Front End and led to the development of new concepts to fill the empty innovation funnel but empowered and inspired the action team members themselves. This journey of learning and creation enabled them to take responsibility
for adopting the new concepts generated, to strengthen them until their final
development in parallel with their every day work beyond the horizons of the action
research study.

Furthermore, the present study unravels some considerable achievements that
are presented in the Table 19:

Table 19

UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEMS ADDRESSED</th>
<th>UNIQUE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of sufficient specificity of the action research project</td>
<td>1. The introduction and application of the new integrated approach of the action research cycle and the Eisenhardt process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity at the International Front End</td>
<td>2. The development and application of the holistic and progressive framework of the IPCD model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity for the role of applied ethnography for the action research team in the context of the stages of the Front End.</td>
<td>3. The integration of applied ethnography by the action research team during a specific step of the IPCD model that of the Local Immersion stage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Present author

It has to be recognized that the applied ethnography is not novel in itself within the organization under study. On the contrary, it has been used sporadically in various international innovation projects. However, the unique contribution of the study is the integration of the applied ethnography by the action research team into the guiding framework of the IPCD model as a separate and critical step of the process.

8.1.1 Implications for management

The IPCD model supplements existing literature by suggesting specific process stages, while integrating success factors to foster new ideas at the Front End. The model is critical to the function of management because it describes what the organization is doing at the Front End and why it is doing it. Furthermore it provides a frame of reference, standards for evaluation and room for corrective action when there is a discrepancy. The model reveals relationships, linkages and connections at the Front End. First comes the relationship between the sequence of events and the influential factors, such as the four $P$s mentioned above. Second comes the local ethnographic study as the linkage of the international opportunity and the generation of new product concepts’ stages. Third comes the connection of unmet latent consumer
needs to building ideas with a broader scope of application. Appreciation of this holistic approach will help international ideation managers to effectively introduce ethnography within a formal yet flexible framework at the Front End. Hence, the IPCD model enlightens and unravels the fuzzy Front End not only for junior but also for more experienced international innovation managers who are delegated with the task to feed with ideas the innovation funnel of their organization.

Implications for management have to be organized around three general axes:

• Reinforce influential factors
• Consider lessons learned by team members
• Manage the International Front End process

Although those success factors may be more specific to the European Hygiene cluster innovation teams, it must be urged to better understand current and ongoing influential factors of Process, Person, Place and Product at the Front End.

Failure to take the influential factors into consideration would potentially result in a poor model which will not be able to help managers to deal with the complexity of the Front End. A mismatch between model and reality may occur in times of rapid change. Beliefs and conceptual reference points may be invalidated by subtle changes long before anyone realizes it. Such changes can be an excellent opportunity to reconsider the validity of the influential factors. A practical and cost effective method would be to conduct informal communication sessions with the ideation team members.

Furthermore, lessons learned should be taken into consideration when the ideation teams are applying the IPCD model. The model should be treated as a guiding framework during the early stage of the innovation funnel. The model should not be incorporated into the formal innovation computerized system of the organization since such an approach would reinforce further control. The model should not be viewed as a precept, but it should be embedded into the organization’s culture through daily practice and continuous adaptation. The Front End happens because individuals have insights, passion for growth, enthusiasm to make improvements, and interaction with one another. Countries should have to participate towards the implementation of the international product concept development model. The action research team should be regional and should comprise representatives of the countries and Innovation cross-functional team members, such as marketing, technical and claims support. When individuals work in a positive environment in which they are empowered to work creatively and allowed to make mistakes, then they will challenge
and inspire one another to see landscapes with new eyes and create and nourish new exciting ideas.

Finally, the Front End process must be itself managed, but so must the process of improving the Front End process too. It is recommended that a regular process of aggregating from team members influential factors as well as lessons learned should be established. Moreover such an activity should be followed by an effort to reinforce influential factors and apply the lessons learned. The Front End involves ideas that create the future. But the quest for innovation is doomed unless the individuals involved take time to learn from the past.

Overall, the application of the IPCD model could provide a useful framework for other organizational settings, such as other clusters of the organization under study as well as other FMCG organizations. Ideation and innovation managers in other FMCG organizations can learn the methodology about developing new product concepts from an international perspective. Moreover, the IPCD model can enable the ideation and innovation managers to learn how to develop new concepts which meet successfully local, regional and/or national consumer needs.

8.1.2 Limitations

Although the present study takes an important first step toward shedding more light to the Front End bridging the practical with the theoretical perspective applying an original methodological approach there are certain limitations that may be addressed through further research. Firstly, the study was conducted among the countries of the cluster of one product sector (household cleaning products) of the organization. Secondly, the Local Consumer Immersion, the Concepts’ Development and Evaluation stages of the IPCD model were applied within a single country of the cluster. Thirdly, the IPCD model does not reveal the relationship among the influential factors neither does it provide concrete guidelines on how the organizational culture may be changed to embrace the model. However the generalisation of the findings poses challenges since the present study has been conducted within a specific context (Flick, 2006). Thus, the present study has direct implications for further research.

8.1.3 Implications for further research

It has been acknowledged that an action research project does not have a well-defined ending. As new realities emerge, the process may be extended. Firstly,
additional research is needed in other product sectors or unrelated industries to assess the transferability of the findings beyond the specific scope of the present action research project. Two major sectors in which this might be applicable would be advertising and banking. Secondly, replication through multiple case studies for the next stage of the action research spiral is required. This would enable the application of the Local Consumer Immersion, the International Concept Development and the International Evaluation stages of the model in Italy and the Netherlands as well or the repetition of the action research cycle several times in Greece. This would allow further refinement of the IPCD model including its stages, key activities and success factors among all the countries of the cluster. Thirdly, a quantitative research study is necessary to measure the constructs of the 4 Ps influential factors of the IPCD model. Such research may evaluate the causal relationship between the factors identified in the model and its subsequent stages and activities. Additional research is needed to clarify further how the mindset within the organization can be changed for the embedment of the IPCD model.

In any case, the IPCD model is considered to be a guiding framework that allows for refinements to adapt to the changes of the business environment. This study has highlighted the need for future research that extends into different industry and services' sectors and adopts different approaches. Such work is encouraged to enable researchers and practitioners to unfold the fuzzy Front End and foster new ideas into FMCG organizations. In conclusion, this action research is viewed as illuminative and inspiring for other researchers and practitioners who might test the model in other business environments.
References

External:


Goldenberg J. and Mazursky D. (2000) “First we throw dust in the air, then we claim we can’t see: Navigating in the Creativity Storm,” *Journal of Creativity and Innovation Management, 9*(2), pp. 132.


Conference Papers

Groth. M., Silfverberg A., EURAM, Paris (2007) "In Search of a Methodology to Assess Firms’ Radical Innovation Capabilities-Lessons Learned from an Exploratory Study".


Lang A., Reich S., EURAM, Paris (2007) "Managing Breakthrough Innovation at a German Car Supplier".


Internal:

Internal Documents


Unilever Marketing Academy Understanding Consumers, London

Further Reading

Cook B. “Writing the Left out of Management Theory: The Historiography of the Management of Change", Organization’s Articles, University of Manchester, 691, pp.81-105.


Synectics Imagine, White, London.

Appendix A
Dave,

All, I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to discuss with you my research initiative. As mentioned, attached please find a summary of what I explained to you during our phone call. If you need further references you may contact my line manager, Lars Gerber, Unilever Frozen Food, UK. My understanding is that the budget used for such an initiative is upon the sponsor's discretion.

And regards,
Dave,

very much for the confirmation sent to the University. As promised attached please find a more detailed and proposal for the project. I would highly appreciate it if you could let me know your feedback so I can proceed.

regards,
Household Care European Category has demonstrated improvement in TM by taking out where growth though has been more difficult to achieve. Especially for the Soft Hygiene or the track record of innovations so far has been poor, not enough big pillars. How can category feed the funnel with winning ideas?

Is a general awareness that a critical success factor for the NPD process is in the ties that occur during the Ideas stage (Cooper, 1985, 1988, 1998, McGuinness & ay, 1989 cited Kleef et al, 2004 pg. 181, Khurana & Rosenthal 1998). However, this remains “fuzzy”; these activities of the early stage are the least explicit; a deeper standing is needed to enable managers to develop winning concepts for winning products marketplace.

Objectives:

- Undertake an action research project for the DBA, University of Surrey on Soft Hygiene r with reference to Feed the Funnel stage (Q2 2006) and with main objectives:
  - Explore international-internal and external to Unilever- best practices for Feeding the I with winning ideas.
  - Share insights with the Soft Hygiene team and assist in shaping the approach to be ed.
  - Document the process followed by the Soft Hygiene team, as part of the action research t of the DBA program.
  - Gain understanding and document the learnings as perceived by the Soft Hygiene team, t of the action research project of the DBA.

Methodology:

The action research project will take place within a period of approximately five months ng the transition period from the time the BBI is being finalized (Q1 2006) through the ation of winning innovation ideas that will Feed the funnel (Q2 2006).

1 (March-April 2006):

- Explore theory and best practices external to Unilever for Feeding the Funnel.
  que to be used: Desk research. DONE
- Explore the process followed and learnings of two other Global/Regional Innovation who managed to generate winning product ideas for the funnel. It is proposed that are from Foods namely Family Spreads and Home Care namely Fabrics (Dirt is Good).
  que to be used: Interviews with some members of the teams (depending on their role ailability) and collection of visual material produced during the process followed.

2 (April-July 2006):

- Share findings with the Soft Hygiene Sponsor/Leader and team members and contribute ining and implementing a new/improved way forward to Feed the Funnel.
  que to be used: Writing of summary booklet with learnings and proposed way forward, tation if needed, and active participation in the Workshops.
To document the process followed by the Soft Hygiene team.

Technique to be used: Observation and collection of visual material produced during the process.

Upon the completion of the Feed the funnel stage to explore the perceptions of the Soft Hygiene team (Sponsor, Leader, Country members) for the process followed and learnings for future.

Technique to be used: Group discussion or phone interviews.

Activity Plan - Phasing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Q4 05</th>
<th>Q1 06</th>
<th>Q2 06</th>
<th>Q3 06</th>
<th>Q4 06</th>
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<tr>
<td>BBM</td>
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<tr>
<td>ROADMAP DEFINITION</td>
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<tr>
<td>FEED THE FUNNEL</td>
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<td>PACK DESIGN</td>
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<td>NPDS 07</td>
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</table>

DBA program will be completed on September 2007 by printing a booklet with overall art, conclusion and learning which will be available to the HHC Category as well as to the ever Marketing Academy.
Appendix B
1. Think about what you do when you aim to develop international winning product concepts to Feed the Funnel. Can you break these tasks down into less than six but more than three steps? (Task diagram)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Description of the step (including place/location, market research, evidence taking place)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Can you describe the team composition, specialization and role of each member?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Specialization and current position</th>
<th>Role in the team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. Of the steps you have just identified, which require difficult cognitive skills? By skills, I mean judgments, assessments and problem solving-thinking skills. (Task diagram)

Has there been a time when you have walked into the middle of a situation and known exactly how things got there and where they were headed? (Knowledge audit – past and future)

Can you give me an example of what is important about the Big Picture of developing international winning product concepts? (Knowledge audit – big picture)

Have you had experiences in which part of a situation just popped out at you; where you noticed things going on that others didn't catch? What is an example? (Knowledge audit – noticing)

When you aim to develop international winning product concepts, are there any ways of working smart or accomplishing more with less which you have found especially useful?

Can you think of an example when you have improvised in this task or noticed an opportunity to do something better? (Knowledge audit – opportunities/improvising)

Can you think of a time when you realized that you would need to change the way you were performing in order to get the job done? (Knowledge audit – self monitoring)

Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendix C
Dear George,

Please find attached the final concepts. The last one (slide 8) is followed by the alternative packaging propositions (slide 9), as we agreed already. Please confirm everything is OK & the requested copies will be ready tomorrow.

Please let me know where they should be sent (all details - sent by courier for dispatch within 24h).

Kind regards,

Olga Stavrianidou
Mktg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Marinou Antypa 92, 141.21 N.Hrakleio,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-2701551
Fax: +30-210-2701536

24/2/2008
From: Stavrianidou, Olga  
Sent: Δευτέρα, 27 Αυγούστου 2007 1:01 μμ  
To: Sakellariou, Evy  
Subject: FW: Concepts Klinex screen-lab'07  
Attachments: Slide3.JPG; Slide4.JPG; Slide5.JPG; Slide6.JPG; Slide7.JPG; Slide8.JPG; Slide9.JPG

6. New ideas concept creation & shared with the local research mgr. for further improvement

Olga Stavrianidou  
Mktg Dept.  
Unilever Hellas AEBE,  
Chimarras 8, 151.25 Marousi,  
Athens, Greece.  
Tel.: +30-210-6304675  
Fax: +30-210-6304717

---

From: Stavrianidou, Olga  
Sent: Monday, February 26, 2007 5:43 PM  
To: Panagopoulos, George  
Cc: Sakellariou, Evy  
Subject: RE: Concepts Klinex screen-lab'07

Dear George,

Pls. find attached the requested Klinex Concepts. The 3 last concepts refer to 2 alternative ideas we would like to test for a Klinex GPC:

a) i.Klinex GPC (Lysoform mix: formula+claims+Lusoform packaging)-see slide8
   ii.Klinex GPC (Lysoform mix: formula+claims+Klinex packaging)- see slide7

b) Klinex GPC (Cif Oxygel mix: formula+claims+packaging)- see slide9

Please contact me should you need clarifications & let me know for your comments.

Kind regards,

Olga Stavrianidou  
Mktg Dept.  
Unilever Hellas AEBE,  
Marinou Antypa 92, 141.21 N.Hrakleio,  
Athens, Greece.  
Tel.: +30-210-2701551  
Fax: +30-210-2701536

24/2/2008
5. additional improvements

Olga Stavrianidou
Mktg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
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Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-6304675
Fax: +30-210-6304717
4. updated new ideas illustrations.

Olga Stavrianidou
Mkg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Chimarras 8, 151.25 Marousi,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-6304675
Fax: +30-210-6304717

From: k k [mailto:kiriakakis_art@yahoo.gr]
Sent: Thursday, February 08, 2007 6:06 PM
To: Stavrianidou, Olga
Subject: klinex telika

Συγγνώμη για την καθυστέρηση, τα πρώτα mail μου γύρισαν πίσω. Ελπίζω αυτά να τα πάρεις.

Κώστας

Χρησιμοποιείτε Yahoo!
Βεβαιωθείτε το ενοχλητικό μηνύ ματα (spam); To Yahoo! Mail διαθέτει την καλύτερη δυνατή προστασία κατά των ενοχλητικών μηνυμάτων
http://login.yahoo.com/config/mail?lang=gr
From: Stavrianidou, Olga
Sent: Monday, February 05, 2007 5:05 PM
To: 'k k'
Subject: RE: klinex workshop visuals

Κώστη, 
Σε στέλνω τις φωτο και μιλάμε για περαιτέρω διάφη σου δουλειά.
Θα σου τηλεφωνήσω,

Olga Stavrianidou
Mktg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Marinou Antypa 92, 141.21 N.Hrakleio,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-2701551
Fax: +30-210-2701536

From: k k [mailto:kiriakakis_art@yahoo.gr]
Sent: Monday, February 05, 2007 12:25 AM
To: Fragoyiannaki, Athanasia; Stavrianidou, Olga
Subject: klinex workshop visuals

olga kali sou mera

Douleuontas proekipsan polles apories sxetika me to sxediasmo alla mias kai eipame oti tha ta doume kai tha girisoume na ta ksanadoulepsoume pare me na ta poume

24/2/2008
From: Stavrianidou, Olga
Sent: Δευτέρα, 27 Αυγούστου 2007 12:51 μμ
To: Sakellariou, Evy
Subject: FW: klinex workshop visuals
Attachments: 3196419898-foot spray.jpg; 3046716091-panakia.jpg; 1574824390-sakoula.jpg; 577138836-sakoules pack.jpg; 3751280008-sensitive care.jpg; 3818970506-auto clean.jpg; 4148761253-soap gel foot.jpg

2. 1st new ideas illustration

Olga Stavrianidou
Mktg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Chimarras 8, 151.25 Marousi,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-6304675
Fax: +30-210-6304717

From: k k [mailto:kiriakakis_art@yahoo.gr]
Sent: Monday, February 05, 2007 12:25 AM
To: Fragoyiannaki, Athanasia; Stavrianidou, Olga
Subject: klinex workshop visuals

olga kali sou mera

Douleuontas proekipsan polles apories sxetika me to sxediasmo alla mias kai eipame oti tha ta doume kai tha girisoume na ta ksanadoulepsoume pare me na ta poume

K.

Χρησιμοποιήστε Yahoo!
Βαρεθήκατε τα ενοχλητικά μηνύ ματα (spam); To Yahoo! Mail διαθέτει την καλύτερη δυνατή προστασία κατά των ενοχλητικών μηνυμάτων
http://login.yahoo.com/config/mail?_int=gr

24/2/2008
From: Stavrianidou, Olga
Sent: Πέμπτη, 1 Μαρτίου 2007 4:17 μμ
To: Panagopoulos, George
Cc: Sakellariou, Evy
Subject: Klinex screenlab Concepts 2007
Attachments: Slide1.JPG; Slide2.JPG; Slide3.JPG; Slide4.JPG; Slide5.JPG; Slide6.JPG; Slide8.JPG; Slide9.JPG; Slide7.JPG

Dear George,

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Please let me know where they should be sent (all details - sent by courier for dispatch within 24h).

Kind regards,

Olga Stavrianidou
Mkg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Marinou Antypa 92, 141.21 N.Hrakleio,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-2701551
Fax: +30-210-2701536

From: Panagopoulos, George
Sent: Thursday, March 01, 2007 2:08 PM
To: Stavrianidou, Olga
Cc: Sakellariou, Evy
Subject: Concepts

Dear Olga,

please advice when the concepts will be ready.

Yorgos

Yorgos Panagopoulos
CMI Manager Unilever Greece
Tel 1-Elais Offices: +30-210-4895561
Tel 2-HPC offices: +30-210-2701517
Appendix D
Hello Evy,

That has been a while! I am already in my new job for over a year and positively surprised to see your mail!

I have just rapidly scanned your research - and to be honest, I will not have the time to look at your research in much detail in the coming days. It's quite busy over here - and since I'm now in a totally new business (investing in new media companies) your research is quite interesting; but only indirectly.

But from the quick scan it looks very good and thorough; and I'm sure this will be a very valuable research for many, many people in Unilever! Do also bring it under the attention of the Marketing Academy, and people like Nils van Dam!

I wish you all the best for the future!

Warm regards,
Claire Boonstra

---

Dear Claire,

Firstly, I would like to thank you for your kind help and time during the interview. Secondly, I would like to share with you the outcome of the analysis of the interviews I had with you and other experts (you are Respondent 1). May I please let you know that during the past few months a lot of changes took place including the leave of the Vice President and my sponsor) and the Director of Household Cleaners Europe from Unilever. These individuals have recently been replaced, and therefore I intend to share with them all the findings.

I hope that reading of the findings will not take you much time but hopefully provides interesting insights. I would kindly like to ask you to share with me any corrections, clarifications or feedback so as to improve the validity of my study. Your input would be highly valuable especially before I share my findings with the new stakeholders in the next few weeks.

I would like to thank you in advance,

Best regards,

Evy

Nobile: 0030 6976 077433

24/2/2008
Dear Evy,

thank you for sharing your work with me. It was a pleasure reading all these interesting views on innovation and I must say that your analysis matches my idea of international innovation projects a lot. Since you have asked for feedback, I have two minor points to make.

- The way I see it, the fourth stage of innovation "Nurturing & Evaluation" is one big stage but with two sub-steps: "Nurturing" & "Evaluation". First the team needs to nurture the ideas, and this means "green housing", allowing the early ideas some breathing space and some room to be better expressed and fine tuned, before you move on with evaluation. This happens mainly because idea generation might produce very breakthrough and innovative (or even crazy) ideas, which might be in need for re-expression or fine tuning with local culture. In this stage we use Early Adopters; highly expressive and experimenting consumers, who are very open to new ideas and can read through new ideas for benefits and usability. These people treat the new ideas gently, without killing them & help us identify possible gaps and flaws in the ideas, before we test them with mainstream consumers. After "Nurturing", we decide which ideas can move forward, we fine tune them and we move on to "Evaluation". Early Adopters have offered us the "green light" regarding the viability of the new ideas but what about relevance? Here we need mainstream consumers. These consumers evaluate the ideas qualitatively and quantitatively and help us decide about launching, launch strategy and optimum marketing mix. In other words, my opinion is that you need 2 different types of consumers at this stage; mainstream consumers cannot be faced with very early ideas, because they might kill them (due to conservativism, habit, fear of change or misinterpretation of early marketing mix). On the other hand, Early adopters can help you make the initial nurturing but cannot tell you, whether this will be a mass success product, as they do not represent the majority of consumers.

- My second point has to do with success factors. I completely agree with the factors you have determined, but I kind of miss some prioritization of these factors and how much your respondents think that each factor contributes to success.

Thank you for letting me share my views with you. I wish you the best of luck with this project - please let me know how it went.

Have a great summer holiday

Fotini

Fotini Papadopoulou

Research & Innovation Director
Research International Idea Architects

6-12 Chalkidonos Street GR 115-27 Athens
Switchboard: +30 210 77 28 500
Tel: +30 210 77 28 770
Fax: +30 210 77 95 886
Internet: www.research-int.com

24/2/2008
From: Stavrianidou, Olga
Sent: Δευτέρα, 27 Αύγουστου 2007 6:13 μμ
To: Sakellariou, Evy
Subject: RE: How to Feed with ideas the Inno Funnel

Evy,

My comments are:

1. The chart seems complex at a glance, but it can be easily conceivable, when you explain it a little bit.

2. I would propose to add a 3rd new element of the model, which will be the involvement of the local team (BB), who are excluded currently from the identification of new consumers’ & technology’s opportunities, from the very first step of the process.

3. Additional proposed criteria for new concept evaluation: 2nd page: “the evaluation of the new concept is based upon consumers’ acceptance criteria & not upon financial, technical or competitors’ activities criteria”.

4. Important point to make is that the model does not add complexity to the existing framework from one hand & from the other hand, it could feed the funnel with new international ideas with local relevance.

At your disposal

Olga Stavrianidou
Mktg Dept.
Unilever Hellas AEBE,
Chimarras 8, 151.25 Marousi,
Athens, Greece.
Tel.: +30-210-6304675
Fax: +30-210-6304717

From: Sakellariou, Evy
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2007 3:57 PM
To: Agelou, Apostolos; Hinopoulou, Katerina; Vlassopoulos, Gerassimos; Stavrianidou, Olga
Subject: How to Feed with Ideas the Inno Funnel

Dear All,

Following up our experience in consumer research, brainstorming sessions and development of new ideas for HIC, I have proposed a new model (to guide us to produce new ideas in a systematic way) and learnings from this journey that we had) which I would like to share with you for comments, feedback etc.

I am highly interested in your ideas how to move this forward locally.

My intention is to share this with the Category on the 5/9 and add your names as the team that made it happen.

Thanks for your help,

Best regards,

Evy
Hello Evy,

Well, it was the first time in many years that I had read a text within Unilever that reminded me of my University years, away from the usual company jargon and terminology! It proved a refreshing, although demanding experience, as there was a lot of "marketing" stuff in it which I was not so familiar!

The points I list below are mainly based on the experience I had this last year, participating in various steps of the "Local Consumer Immersion" step with our brand Klinex (brainstorm sessions, attending meeting and getting involved in various exchanges with the Centre, becoming familiar with the results of the extensive local consumer research/observation at home), rather than logic or any kind of scientific approach:

1. I regard the Local Consumer Immersion (LCI for my convenience!) step and the 4Ps as very useful tools in the innovation process. Instead of regarding the assimilation of local experience and input as just another bureaucratic step in the Inn. process, the European marketing and development managers should pay particular attention to meaningful local input. So, the LCI step, instead of being regarded by RTCs as a "challenge" to their authority and knowledge, it should lead them in creative and broader thinking, becoming more receptive, accomodating local needs in international projects, and thus maximising the value for both the companies and themselves! There is a clear need for an alternative mindset in the "Centre".

2. It would be useful if you could summarise the benefits of the "Local Consumer immersion" and the "4Ps" in a short list of 5-8 bullet points in the end of the memo. These bullet points could be useful action tips/recommendations for the Innovation process, extracted from your experience in making use of the two a.m. tools. Actually, these tips/recommendations already exist within your memo, it's just that it would be good to have them all gathered together in a short list (for those who won't read 5 pages!!)

3. Finally, may I share my personal experience from participating in some aspects of LCI for Klinex during the past 1-1.5 year. It is not often within Unilever they we have the chance to "immerse" within something that is really creative; usually we are heavily preoccupied with day-to-day operational matters and we rarely have the chance to sit back, try to adopt a completely fresh look on things and reflect. The whole process is an engaging one, which values participation and commitment. Even if someone won't see his ideas/contribution being finally realized through the innovation process -as is the case with most of us who participated at certain stage of the process-, he still has the feeling of being part of a process that led to something valuable for the company, reflecting directly to self-esteem in the workplace.

Best regards,
Gerry.
Sakellariou, Evy

From: Hinopoulou, Katerina
Sent: Παρασκευή, 3 Αυγούστου 2007 12:47 μμ
To: Sakellariou, Evy
Subject: RE: How to Feed with Ideas the Inno Funnel

Dear Evy,

Following up our experience in consumer research, brainstorming sessions and development of new ideas for HHC, I have proposed a new model (to guide us to produce new ideas in a systematic way) and learnings (from this journey that we had) which I would like to share with you for comments, feedback etc. I am highly interested in your ideas how to move this forward locally.

My intention is to share this with the Category on the 5/9 and add your names as the team that made it happen.

Thanks for your help,

Best regards,

Evy

From: Sakellariou, Evy
Sent: Thursday, August 02, 2007 3:57 PM
To: Agelou, Apostolos; Hinopoulou, Katerina; Vlassopoulos, Gerassimos; Stavrianidou, Olga
Subject: How to Feed with Ideas the Inno Funnel

Dear All,

Following up our experience in consumer research, brainstorming sessions and development of new ideas for HHC, I have proposed a new model (to guide us to produce new ideas in a systematic way) and learnings (from this journey that we had) which I would like to share with you for comments, feedback etc. I am highly interested in your ideas how to move this forward locally.

My intention is to share this with the Category on the 5/9 and add your names as the team that made it happen.

Thanks for your help,

Best regards,

Evy
Appendix E
Subject: Re: New Ideas

Evy

That sounds good.

We and I could do Wed 5th April
irs 6th am
i 7th am...
irs 13th all day
: us know

--- Original Message ------

From: "Evy Sakellariou" <Evysterlariou@Unilever.com>
To: "David Arkwright" <david.arkwright@meat-brands.com>

Subject: RE: New Ideas

Dear David, hi,

'first of all, I would like to thank you in advance for your kind
elp. We are also every pleased with the outcome and looking forward
o the next steps. As far as my course is concerned may I please
larify the objectives of my study:

Working Title: "Creativity in European Product Concept Development:
An Insider Action Research study in an FMCG multi-national
rganisation".

his study aims to investigate the development of European fast
oving consumer good concept development at the early phase of the
novation process in the Unilever Western Europe division and apply
anges into the Soft Hygiene cluster as part of an action research
ject. More specifically, it is intended to explore alternative
olutions as perceived by external and internal experts involved into
ccessful projects from other Unilever divisions that resulted in
inning ideas. Then, it is intended to select the most appropriate
ternative solution and apply it in practice as part of an action
search project.

ith this in mind, my plan is the following:

Interview five internal (including Foods) and external to Unilever
erts regarding processes and best practices for the development of
oss country winning product

Concepts.

Timing: by mid April

Analyse findings, synthesise from the New Product Development
terature and share learnings with the IC and the MEAT-BRANDS Agency

Timing: beg. May

Implement agreed way forward as a Country representative

Timing: May-TBC

Discuss with IC, the MEAT-BRANDS, and country team members the
put, achievement of objectives and then, document learnings.

Timing: Upon completion of process/TBC


I hope this is fine with you. As part of step 1, I would highly appreciate it if we could arrange a 30-45 minutes telephone discussion (semi-structured interview) with you and Katie to discuss insight driven cross-country innovation. May you provide me with your availability for the next 2 weeks.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Best regards,

Evy

Household Cleaners, Machine and Hand Dishwash
Unilever Hellas
4, Antypa str. 92,
Athens, Greece
Tel. 0030 210 2701 549

Best regards,

Evy

Interview 5 internal and external to Unilever experts regarding processes and best practises for the development of international/cross country winning product concepts. Opportunity to undertake a study of the Fuzzy Front End of concept development and the processes followed as were perceived by information rich individuals.

-----Original Message-----
From: David Arkwright [mailto:david.arkwright@meat-brands.com]
Sent: Friday, March 24, 2006 10:59 AM
To: Evy Sakellariou
Subject:

Dear Evy

It struck me that we do not have any plan in the diary to move forward.

I spoke with Katie immediately after Milan and she is of course very keen to help you on the project.

Let me know your movements.

This end we are very pleased with the outcome of the Milan workshop. Luca and I are together next week to move it on.

All best

David
Hi Evy

Please could you confirm time

The number for you to call will be +442076251017

Regards

--- Original Message ------
from: "Evy Sakellariou" <Evy.Sakellariou@Unilever.com>
to: "David Arkwright" <david.arkwright@meat-brands.com>
date: Friday, March 31, 2006 1:00 PM
subject: New Ideas

Hi, David,

If Wed. the 5th, 14.00 London time is fine with you and Katie, I would highly appreciate it if you could add a few details about yourselves and sign the consent form in the attachment here below and return it to me before the day of the interview. Everything will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name and details will only be used for my personal reference during the analysis of the data from the interviews. I hope it is ok with you if I use a tape recorder during our discussion so I can remember what we have said during the analysis of the data a few weeks later.

Thank you in advance,

Best regards,

Evy
Subject: RE: Project Orange-Best practice

Attachments: Learnings Orange v03042006.ppt; Orange consumer insights BOOK final 04-Jul-2005 full.doc

Dear Evy,

I hereby send you the Orange team learnings, as well as the consumer insights book I talked about — for inspiration! Wish you all the best with your research - and I’m very interested in receiving the port! Would you please (also) send it to my private address (see Cc)?

Thanks a lot!

And regards,

Claire Boonstra

and Development Manager

Unilever Europe Foods, SCCE

+31 10 439 3912

+31 6 51184291

+31 10 439 4148

Claire.Boonstra@unilever.com

---Original Message-----

From: Evy Sakellariou [Evy.Sakellariou@Unilever.com]
Sent: Thursday, January 19, 2006 2:16 PM
To: Claire Boonstra

Subject: Project Orange-Best practice

Hi Claire,

Introduce myself, my name is Evy Sakellariou and I am the Group Brand Manager of Blend Care and Dishwash of Unilever Greece. Recently I am involved into a new project by our European Category to develop a through innovation product concepts for the newly born Soft Hygiene Cluster (Rome, Italy, Netherlands).

Therefore, we are looking into best practices from other Unilever categories (such as foods, personal care) for new/successful ways of developing European concepts.

I ask if it is possible to let me know any time and date (after the 25th. of March please) that is convenient for you to have a telephone conference where you share how as an individual and as a team you have managed to create the successful range concept for spreads?

Looking forward to hearing from you,

And regards and thank you in advance for your kind help and time,
Hi Evy

Lovely to hear from you and good to hear your news.

I'd be delighted to help with your thesis. I'm around tomorrow i.e. Friday 5 May until 2.30, next Thursday 11 May after 4pm or on Friday before 12.00 or after 2.30. I'm running a conference Mon-Wed so won't be able to talk then, I'm afraid.

Let me know which suits you best.

Kind regards, Caroline

Synectics - Pioneers in Innovation
10 Wyndham Place
London
W1H 2PU

Tel: +44 (0) 207 616 9797
Mob: +44 (0) 7808 720150
E-mail: cholt@synecticsworld.com
Website: http://www.synecticsworld.com

"Top quartile innovators get more than ten times higher returns from their investment."
Source: Arthur D. Little Innovation Excellence Study 2005

Caroline, hi,

I hope you are well. We have met appr. 2-3 years ago when I was working as a Senior Development Manager at Birds Eye, UK. Since then I have moved to Athens and taken a new responsibility from the Unilever Household Care IC for new concepts development for the Soft Hygiene cluster (Greece, Italy, Netherlands). This responsibility is combined with my postgraduate study I am pursuing in the UK. This study concerns with interviewing experts (strictly confidentially) in new ideas international development like yourself, analyse the findings, implement action in a cross country.

24/2/2008
innovation Unilever HHC project and incorporate the analysis for my study (Doctoral in Business Administration) at the University of Surrey.

It would be so kind of you if you would like to participate.

Please find here below some more detailed info:

**Working Title of thesis:**
"Creativity in European Product Concept Development: An Insider Action Research study in an FMCG multi-national organisation".

This study aims to investigate the development of European fast moving consumer good concept development at the early phase of the innovation process in the Unilever Western Europe division and apply changes into the Soft Hygiene cluster as part of an action research project. More specifically, it is intended to explore alternative solutions as perceived by external and internal experts involved into successful projects from other Unilever divisions that resulted in winning ideas. Then, it is intended to select the most appropriate alternative solution and apply it in practice as part of an action research project.

With this in mind, the plan is the following:

1. Interview seven internal (including Foods and Home/Personal Care) and external to Unilever experts regarding processes and best practices for the development of cross country winning product concepts.
   Timing: by end May
2. Analyse findings, synthesise from the New Product Development literature and share learnings with the IC and the MEAT-BRANDS Agency
   Timing: beg. June
3. Implement agreed way forward as a Country representative
   Timing: June-July
4. Discuss with IC, and the country team members the output, achievement of objectives and then, document learnings.
   Timing: Upon completion of process/TBC

I hope this is fine with you. As part of step 1, I would highly appreciate it if we could arrange a 30-45 minutes telephone discussion (semi-structured interview) to explore the Ideas stage for the development of successful international product concepts you have worked recently, discuss and share learnings.

Your name and all information/insights you will provide me will be treated with confidentiality.

I would highly appreciate if you could provide me your availability or the next days.

24/2/2008
Thank you in advance,

Evy

Evy Sakellariou
DISHWASH & HOUSEHOLD CARE BUSINESS UNIT MANAGER UNILEVER HELLAS
M.ANTYPA 92 STR.
ATHENS, GREECE
TEL: 0030 210 2701 549
Mobile. 0030 6976 077433

24/2/2008
"Creativity in European Product Concept Development: An Insider Action Research study in an FMCG multi-national organisation".

DBA University of Surrey, HHC IC Unilever

Documentation sheet:

Interviewee full name: Muriel MacCallum

Date of interview: Friday, 7th of April, 2006

Location of interviewee: London

Duration of interview: 45 minutes

Gender for interviewee: female

Age of interviewee: 38

Job role of interviewee: Senior inventor, ?What If!

Qualifications of the interviewee (education, international experience etc.): See Biog attached

Interviewer: Evy Sakellariou

Location of interviewer: Athens, Greece
Consent Form Interviewee:

This consent form is designed to check that you understand the purposes of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you are willing to take part.

Please mark with an X as appropriate

1. I have read the information sent by e mail describing the study [YES] [NO] x
2. I have received sufficient information about the study for me to decide whether to take part [YES] [NO] x
3. I understand that I am free to refuse to take part if I wish [YES] [NO] x
4. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason [YES] [NO] x
5. I know that I can ask for further information about the study from the interviewer [YES] [NO] x
6. I understand that all information about the study will be treated as confidential [YES] [NO] x
7. I know that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the study report, including myself [YES] [NO] x
8. I agree to take part in the study [YES] [NO] x

Date: 6th April 2006
Name in Block Letters please: Muriel MacCallum

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research report and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that no individual respondent will be identified in such report.

Date: 6th April 2006
Name in Block Letters please: Muriel MacCallum
Hi Evy,

It was lovely to talk to you and to hear that you managed to get a job back with Unilever in Greece. I was also pleased to hear that your little boy is doing much better with his asthma, it is such a worry when your little one is ill.

I attach the agreement as discussed, could you please call me on my home nb tomorrow as I will be working from home on 00 44 1737 551 243.

Thanks,

Muriel.

---Original Message-----
From: Evy Sakellariou [mailto:Evy.Sakellariou@Unilever.com]
Sent: 06 April 2006 10:28
To: Muriel MacCallum
Subject: New Ideas

Dear Muriel,

It was great to talk to you after so long. Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to discuss with you New Ideas for my study and for the Unilever Household Care group. I would highly appreciate it if you could add a few details about yourself and sign the consent form in the attachment here below and return it to me. Everything will be treated with strict confidentiality and your name and details will only be used for my personal reference during the analysis of the data from the interviews.

Thank you in advance,

Talk to you tomorrow at 12.00 London time, 14.00 Athens time.

Best regards,

Evy

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"Creativity in European Product Concept Development: An Insider Action Research study in an FMCG multi-national organisation". 

*DBA University of Surrey, HHC IC Unilever*

**Documentation sheet:**

**Interviewee 1 full name:** DAVID ARKWRIGHT

**Date of interview:** Wednesday 5th of April, 2006

**Location of interviewee:** London

**Duration of interview:** 45 minutes

**Gender for interviewee:** M

**Age of interviewee:** 39

**Job role of interviewee:** Brand Consultant

**Qualifications of the interviewee (education etc.):** BA HONS

**Interviewer:** Evy Sakellariou

**Location of interviewer:** Athens, Greece
Interviewee 2 full name: Katie Oakley

Date of interview: Wednesday 5th of April, 2006

Location of interviewee: London

Duration of interview: 45 minutes

Gender for interviewee: F

Age of interviewee: 41

Job role of interviewee: Brand Consultant

Qualifications of the interviewee (education etc.): BA HONS

Interviewer: Evy Sakellariou

Location of interviewer: Athens, Greece
Consent Form Interviewee 1:

This consent form is designed to check that you understand the purposes of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you are willing to take part.

Please mark with an X as appropriate

1. I have read the information sent by e mail x describing the study
2. I have received sufficient information about the study for me to decide whether to take part x
3. I understand that I am free to refuse to take part if I wish x
4. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason x
5. I know that I can ask for further information about the study from the interviewer x
6. I understand that all information about the study will be treated as confidential x
7. I know that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the study report, including myself x
8. I agree to take part in the study x

Date: 3 April 06
Name in Block Letters please: DAVID ARKWRIGHT

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research report and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that no individual respondent will be identified in such report.

Date: 3 April
Name in Block Letters please: DAVID ARKWRIGHT
Consent Form Interviewee 2:

This consent form is designed to check that you understand the purposes of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you are willing to take part.

Please mark with an X as appropriate

4. I have read the information sent by e mail describing the study
   YES   NO
   X

5. I have received sufficient information about the study for me to decide whether to take part
   X

6. I understand that I am free to refuse to take part if I wish
   X

4. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason
   X

5. I know that I can ask for further information about the study from the interviewer
   X

6. I understand that all information about the study will be treated as confidential
   X

7. I know that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the study report, including myself
   X

8. I agree to take part in the study
   X

Date: 3 April 06
Name in Block Letters please: KATIE OAKLEY

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research report and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that no individual respondent will be identified in such report.

Date: 3 April 06
Name in Block Letters please: KATIE OAKLEY
"Creativity in European Product Concept Development: An Insider Action Research study in an FMCG multi-national organisation."

DBA University of Surrey, HHC IC Unilever

**Documentation sheet:**

**Interviewee full name:** Fotini Papadopoulou

**Date of interview:** Tuesday 11th of April, 2006

**Location of interviewee:** Athens, Greece

**Duration of interview:** 45 minutes

**Gender for interviewee:** Female

**Age of interviewee:** 29

**Job role of interviewee:** Qualitative Research Manager & Innovation Manager at Research International

**Qualifications of the interviewee (education, international experience etc.):** First degree in Psychology (Panteion University Athens), MSc in Social Psychology (London School of Economics, England). Have worked previously in the areas of clinical psychology and design and work for Research International for 6 years. I have been responsible for Innovation and Creativity in the last two years. Throughout my career in Research International, I have worked for many big multi-national clients, such as Coca-Cola, BAT, Phillip Morris, BP, Unilever, Gallaher, Heineken, etc.

**Interviewer:** Evy Sakellariou

**Location of interviewer:** Athens, Greece
Consent Form Interviewee:

This consent form is designed to check that you understand the purposes of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you are willing to take part.

Please mark with an X as appropriate

1. I have read the information sent by e mail describing the study
   YES X

2. I have received sufficient information about the study for me to decide whether to take part
   X

3. I understand that I am free to refuse to take part if I wish
   X

4. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason
   X

5. I know that I can ask for further information about the study from the interviewer
   X

6. I understand that all information about the study will be treated as confidential
   X

7. I know that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the study report, including myself
   X

8. I agree to take part in the study
   X

Date: 11 April 2006
Name in Block Letters please: FOTINI PAPADOPOULO

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research report and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that no individual respondent will be identified in such report.

Date: 11 April 2006
Name in Block Letters please: FOTINI PAPADOPOULO
Interviewee data summary: Claire Boonstra

Date of interview: Tuesday 4\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2006

Location of interviewee: Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Duration of interview: 45 minutes

Gender for interviewee: Female

Age of interviewee: 30

Job role of interviewee: Brand Development Manager, Family Goodness, SCC Europe

Qualifications of the interviewee (education etc.): MSc in Civil Engineering (2000); Strategic Marketing for KPN Mobile, i-mode Europe (2001-2003); Brand Development Manager for Unilever, SCC Europe (2003-2006)

Interviewer: Evy Sakellariou

Location of interviewer: Athens, Greece
Consent Form:

This consent form is designed to check that you understand the purposes of the study, that you are aware of your rights as a participant and to confirm that you are willing to take part.

Please mark with an X as appropriate

1. I have read the information sent by e mail describing the study
   YES   NO   x

2. I have received sufficient information about the study for me to decide whether to take part
   x

3. I understand that I am free to refuse to take part if I wish
   x

4. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without having to provide a reason
   x

5. I know that I can ask for further information about the study from the interviewer
   x

6. I understand that all information about the study will be treated as confidential
   x

7. I know that it will not be possible to identify any individual respondent in the study report, including myself
   x

8. I agree to take part in the study
   x

Date: March 31st, 2006
Name in Block Letters please: Claire Boonstra

I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in the final research report and other publications. I understand that these will be used anonymously and that no individual respondent will be identified in such report.

Date: March 31st, 2006
Name in Block Letters please: Claire Boonstra
Appendix F