

Spotlight on PDMA France Paris Conference on “Front End and Open Innovation” encourages networking

Anne-Christine Ayed, PDMA France President and Research and Innovation Director of DBApparel (acayed@pdma-france.org), and Eric Gabas, PDMA France Secretary and founder of Innovation Framework Technologies (egabas@pdmafrance.org)

France has been viewed as an innovative country since before the reign of Louis XIV—a farsighted economic innovator in his own right. Today France ranks fourth in terms of R&D investments of the top 1,000 global companies, behind the United States, Japan, and Germany. But despite the support of multiple government agencies for research and development, innovation professionals still lack a place to look for practical answers and opportunities to meet with their peers. This vacuum led to the launch of PDMA France, the French affiliate of PDMA under the wing of the Southern Europe Chapter of PDMA. This article describes how it was born and its current focus as well as the launching event held in Paris last June.



Anne-Christine Ayed



Eric Gabas

PDMA France was created in early 2007 by a group of friends, all passionate about innovation. To understand the needs and priorities of its future members, the founding team initially organized an online survey of research and development (R&D) and marketing professionals. The results did not leave much room for question. The affiliate's future members asked the group to focus on sharing best practices and building a network of innovation professionals. Given the new Produce Development and Management Association (PDMA) tag line, “Connecting innovators worldwide,” the affiliate could not be better aligned with PDMA itself. Thus PDMA France, a part of PDMA Southern Europe, was born.

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PDMA France was launched on June 6 in Paris with a one-day networking-oriented conference entitled “Front End and Open Innovation.” In France, Open Innovation has been implemented by several large companies, mainly in the consumer product industry; and it is now becoming a hot subject. One of the conference objectives was to share practical experiences with those in other industries and to provide small and medium-sized companies with the right contacts to start their own initiatives. The event was sponsored by Artemis International, a portfolio management software vendor; Cegos, a large training company; and Dim, the largest French apparel company.

Best practices in action

PDMA Executive Director Robin Karol opened the conference with an address on the expansion of PDMA worldwide, its objectives, and its member benefits. To ensure shared understanding of innovation principles, Marie-Aline Geninet, Innovation and Project Management Training, at Cegos, gave a presentation on these. After that, Eric Sellier, author of the book *Fabriquer le Futur 2*, explained the principles of the French “take” on innovation, called “Front End and Open Innovation.”

The program also included presentations from several leading French companies such as L’Oréal and DBApparel. Each speaker explained how Open Innovation had been implemented in his company, not as a standalone activity but well integrated in its innovation processes. DBA emphasized the importance of integrating Open Innovation as a key element of the company innovation strategy, embraced and led by senior executives. L’Oréal is well known as a very innovative high end consumer fragrance and cosmetics company with year after year of top line growth exceeding 10 percent. L’Oréal executives shared their experience in a partnership with Nestlé that resulted in the creation of a new business, Inneov, which sells nutritional supplements for skin and hair. Dezieo, a design and trend company then gave a number of examples of innovation driven by design in various industries, from apparel to perfumes, appliances and architecture.

Speed-networking gets thumbs up

What was particularly unique about this event was the speed-networking session. During this time participants had a chance to meet others during 10-minute “dates.” “One of the principles underlying Open Innovation is to look for new ideas outside your own company or field,” noted one of the affiliate organizers. “Organizing speed dates seemed to us a

good way to encourage it and to help create the network of professionals that everybody is interested in." Each of the 60 participants received a roadmap with the names of the randomly allocated persons to meet. Each 10 minutes went by quickly. A bell ring announced the end of each date, when one of the two people was required to move to another table for the next date. "The participants just loved it. Ten minutes forces people to be less formal and to go straight to the point," commented another participant. "Given the overwhelming feedback we have received, next time, we will add a second session, with the ability to choose some of the dates."

Roundtable discussions

To encourage additional interactivity between participants, the program also included two sessions of roundtables facilitated by an expert, with a maximum of 10 participants. Eight were conducted simultaneously. Participants had a large choice of subjects, all related to Open Innovation. Here again, the participants loved the ability to share best practices informally, ask questions, and exchange business cards for future contacts.

The day concluded with a presentation from 3M's Nouchine Humbert, New Development Manager, Consumer & Office, who said that 3M has maintained a high level of innovation by complementing its internal R&D efforts with intensive open innovation activities.

PDMA France Looks at Leveraging Innovation Networks

One of the hottest topics discussed during the PDMA France conference in Paris June 6 was the use of customer and inventors networks to speed up the creation of innovative products and services. Very few companies in France have been using these services. Listeners were particularly interested in how DBApparel has used innovation techniques. Here are three kinds of Open Innovation networks. The first two are used by DBApparel.

Customer networks are private online communities that can be used to uncover innovation opportunities. They are usually made up of 250 to 400 selected members and run for four months or more to help find white spaces for innovation and customer pain points. They have been particularly useful for companies to articulate unmet needs, generate new ideas, define and quantify innovation opportunities, and evaluate proposed products.

Inventor networks are communities of inventors and creative problem-solvers to which companies can publicize their innovation specifications, either based on the "customer network" activities described above or fully developed internally. The process usually used a specialized third party to distribute the requirements, evaluate and prioritize submissions, and to prepare them for review by the innovation seeking company.

Open networks run by specialized consulting firms operate online and connect corporations to the appropriate resources. See page 18 for an article on this topic.

For more information on these subjects contact Anne-Christine Ayed at (acayed@pdma-france.org).

PDMA France: Where innovators meet

Feedback to the first PDMA France conference has been unanimously positive and will help promote PDMA France and attract new members. The French chapter managed to find a good balance between case presentations and more interactive sessions like the roundtables and speed-networking. People in the innovation field are looking for active participation in addition to sharing; PDMA France is determined to continue to give them this opportunity. PDMA France is now planning its next series of activities, with the same priority of connecting people around an innovation theme. The full program and presentations (in French) can be found on the French affiliate Web site: www.pdma-france.org

Anne-Christine Ayed is PDMA France President and the Research and Innovation Director of DBApparel. Eric Gabas-Varini is PDMA France Secretary and the founder of Innovation Framework Technologies.

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