

# Newsletter

## Creative Thinking: Techniques and Tools for Success!

Welcome to this latest newsletter for the Creative thinking techniques and tools for success MOOC. This edition includes an interview with Neil Barron from Litelok reflecting on how he works and his experiences during lockdown. We also have an update on the B-link software which is now available again after an outage. Finally we draw some of the strands considered in the newsletter together with a brief feature on individual differences, creativity and TRIZ.

## Interview with Neil Barron from Litelok

When you get the chance to speak to a long-standing friend about their work, you know you are in for a good conversation when he starts out 'I don't want to be compared to Dyson'. Well this was the opening exchange in a most pleasurable discussion with Neil Barron, Founder of Litelok

Litelok design, manufacture and sell award-winning bicycle locks.'



Image: [Litelok.com](https://www.litelok.com)

Neil didn't need any prompting in getting going:

We've had a times three increase in manufacturing output since the beginning of lockdown. Sales have doubled. I find I confuse people. Am I a CEO, a designer, a manufacturer, an engineer. I am drawing on all my experiences with Rolls-Royce in engineering some 20 years plus on. In organisations I am known as a maverick inventor. I like to be regarded as an inventor because people know what this means.

Manufacturing is so important. We do put some manufacture out, but started long ago to work on our own processes and develop these.

I am interested in building the right culture. I don't want to just design products, but technology and processes too. I am interested in a new take on production culture. Coming up with something and then just doing it – this leads to advances and cutting edge technology.

### So how is it going?

The commercial side is rocking at the moment – in a good way. Doubling rates in anything is a challenge and we have been able to do this.

Innovations have come from someone saying you couldn't make something in a particular way, and then just sitting down and thinking about, then having a go and developing a solution and then when you go back and show someone that it can be done they come on board with you and make it even better. It's a great feeling. It's continuous innovation, leap frogging, producing new processes. It means we have a pipeline of improvements for our existing products, and a pipeline of new products and technologies.

We've had our biggest business to business order recently, as well as incredible direct sales.

### How did it all start?

Originally it all started in a workshop at the Royal College of Art in South Kensington. I observed that as bikes got lighter, the locks got heavier. This observation was one of many insights. I'd had three bikes stolen.



Image: [Litelok.com](https://www.litelok.com)

### Can you describe any characteristics of how you approach your work?

I'm constantly making things. We all do in the company. It's been 3000 or more prototypes. We're constantly experimenting. Sometimes you get what you are expecting and what you want. Other times, functionalities emerge that you were not expecting. Latent creativity. I look for affordance in design – I am constantly re-appropriating.

Do you work on your own, with a team. What do you think of engaging with stakeholders?

I'm renowned for working on my own initially and not doing focus groups. But of course we now have a team of engineers. People don't always know what they want. I trust myself to surprise people, and then take an idea even further with their feedback. This is where prototyping and making stuff is so important. If you give someone a product they can try it out, does it work for them?

A lot of what I do is as a result of experience.

I foster chaos and entropy to generate the unexpected.

I describe myself as an opportunist, and I look for gaps in things which other people don't seem to see.



**Neil Barron winning his first Red Dot Design Award for Litelok Gold Wearable.**

Image courtesy of Neil Barron

You can find out more about Litelok at [www.litelok.com/](http://www.litelok.com/)

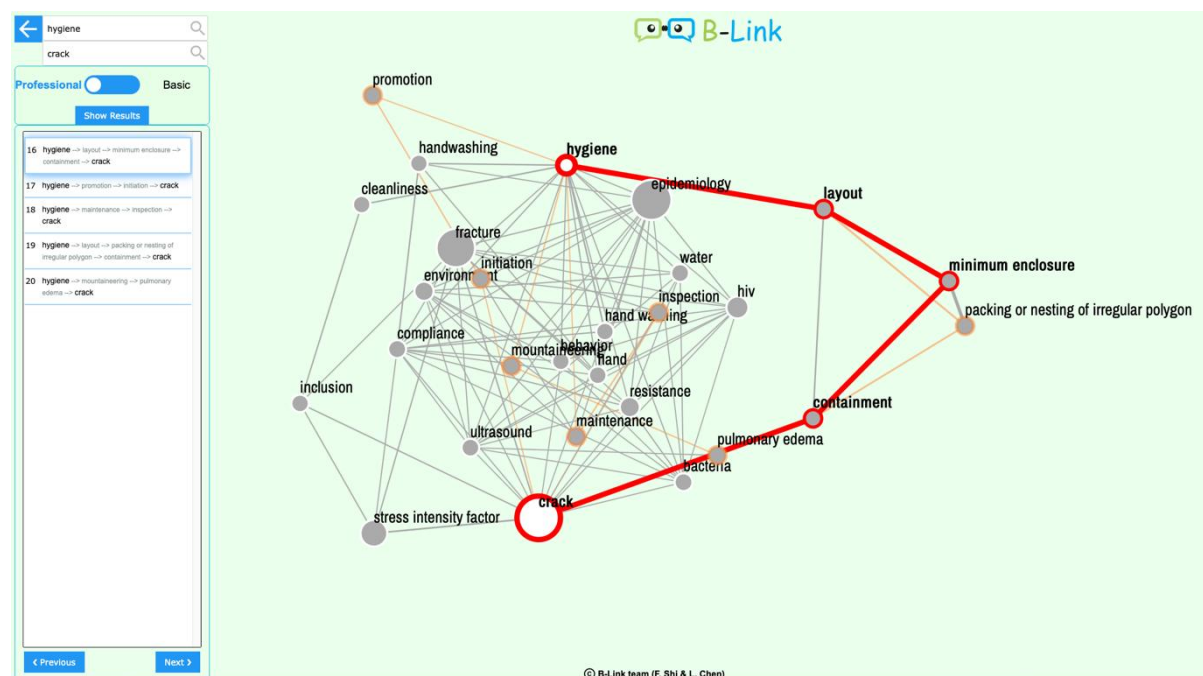
## B-Link available again

B-Link is a data-driven creativity support tool to aid a user to explore knowledge. Users are able to freely explore words and phrases, and results are shown in the forms of a list and network. You can interact with the results shown in network, and discover knowledge associations and domains by operating in the functional panel. Thanks to the data base which was built up by collecting key information from academic publication articles in Elsevier's datasets, the data engine has been able to identify associated words or phrases and paths between two words/phrases, and classify network data into different clusters as well.

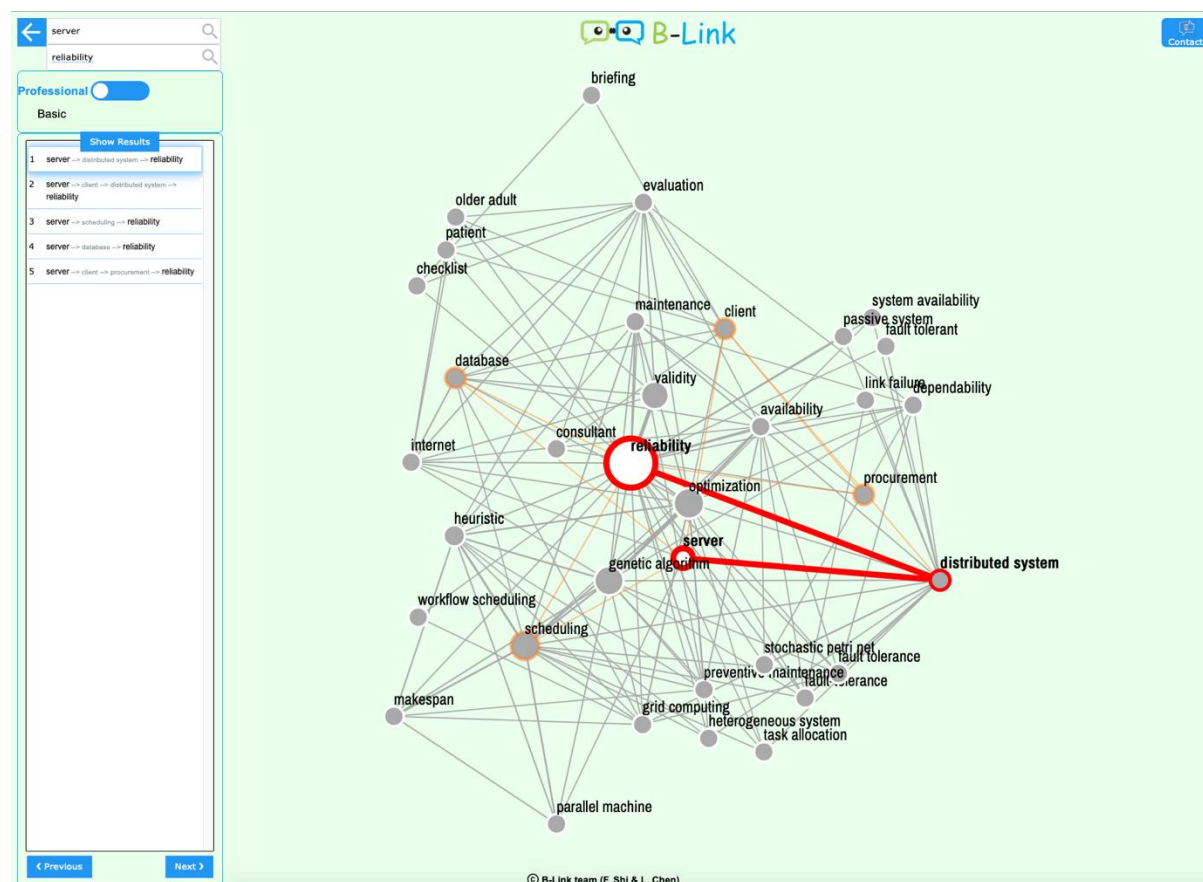
Unfortunately B-Link was temporarily unavailable for some of the 2020 lock-down. We could not access a server and were unable to reset it for some weeks – our apologies. The software has now been moved onto a cloud service and is available again at:

<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/design-engineering/research/creativity-innovation-and-enterprise/>





An example, exploring hygiene and crack with B-Link



Exploring reliability and servers with B-Link

## Individual differences and TRIZ

The interview with Neil Barron touches on the materials in the course in a number of ways. The first is that we are all individuals and each of us will inevitably have our own approach to getting things done as well as our own preferences. While we may be able to identify some similarities and traits and even develop a taxonomy that covers a wide range of approaches, we are each unique and individual differences can and do come into play. Neil mentioned that he often likes to work alone and has the confidence to work in this way until sometimes he has an advanced prototype and the product is close to being fully formed before he even shares an idea with anyone. Creativity can be a shared activity associated with some of the group approaches outlined in this course. It can also be a solo activity undertaken within an exploratory, experimental and evolutionary manner. It was also interesting to note Neil's comment on how the contradiction between bikes getting lighter and locks getting heavier inspired initial work on Litelok.

If you needed any inspiration to look at TRIZ and the use of the contradiction matrix to suggest principles of innovation, then this could be it.

### INTERESTED IN THE PREVIOUS LIVE WEBINARS?

Review the full recordings now available in the Creative Thinking course, see LIVE WEBINARS at the end of [Week 7](#). You can also see previous newsletters here too.

September 2019 Webinar: Meet Peter Childs  
October 2019 Webinar: Let's Meet Charlotte Slingsby  
January 2020 Webinar: Discover Alan Moore  
February 2020 Webinar: Meet Shafina Vohra  
May 2020 Webinar: Meet Daniela Paredes