

Review by Marianne Duijst (from <http://marianneduijst.nl/2016/11/18/eurostar-2016/>)

Bright and early Monday morning, Fiona Charles opened her tutorial *The Art and Science of Test Heuristics* with the message that her tutorials heavily depend on participation and discussion amongst ourselves. We are at Eurostar for a conference, so that rang true to me. What are heuristics? What makes it art? Where is the science? A heuristic is a fallible method of solving a problem. It is a rule of thumb. A mental shortcut to help you solve a problem. There is an art to coming up with your own heuristics and science loves to test things out. A heuristic is fallible. They can be useful in a large number of situations, but they are dangerous too if you apply them to a situation where they don't work.

That raised the question: how do we test heuristics? One way: find three circumstances in which it works, and three where it could get you into trouble. Luckily, our community is already well-involved in this topic. Fiona directed us to a few resources: Elisabeth Hendrickson's heuristic cheat sheet, Adam Knight's e-book and Karen Johnson's list.

In her tutorial, Fiona challenged us to think about testing and to test our thinking. Through a number of exercises, she encouraged us to come up with our own heuristics. It allowed us to hone our ability to verbalize which heuristics we use in our work, and then to communicate this. By stating it aloud, it allows one to see when the heuristic works and to recognize when we are using an unsuitable heuristic for the work at hand.

The first exercise also functioned as an icebreaker. First, the entire group joined a human knot, and our goal: untangle back into a circle without breaking our arm holds. This soon proved impossible, as shown through one of our heuristics: perceive based on experience. (Our arms were so mixed up that multiple people held onto the same person, therefore, a circle could never be formed without breaking our hold). Other heuristics used: question the rules, question the target, examine the possibilities within the constraints, define the problem and just try something to get started. We redefined our goal and the rules, allowed limited hold breaking and formed two separate circles instead.

After debrief, we tackled the next challenges in small groups. Each group would play two games or puzzles and focused on what heuristics you use to win the game. Some games were meant for a single player, which we played as a group, and other games were multi-player games. In debrief, each group shared which heuristics they'd applied to each game, which ones worked for one game and not the other and so forth. Generous time was allotted to this part of the workshop, and for me, this space for discussion of different approaches and strategies, my fellow participants' experiences and how they related these tactics to their everyday work proved to be most valuable. One of the lessons I'll take away from this workshop: the difference between cooperation (working together as a whole group to find out how to win the game) and competition (each trying to win themselves in a multi-player game), and the impact it has on communication and learning. How often do we set ourselves up for competition when we seek cooperation instead?

The afternoon, the commercial from Molson promoting their Beer Fridge (sing Canadian anthem to open) made its appearance. What heuristics would we use to test it? Each group tumbled down their own rabbit hole. What is it? How does it work? Does it matter if it actually works as long as the marketing works? What is its purpose? When should it open? What if it opens and the beer is warm? Or there is no beer at all? How does it get replenished? How can we break it? Needless to say, the afternoon debrief proved interesting and engaging, as these (and more) questions were raised, and addressed. Thinking about testing and testing our thinking.

The tutorial closed with an opportunity to raise our own testing questions to the group, to help each other with the issues we face in our every-day working life.