

Creation of creativity: play, passion and the imagination

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October 2011

Summary

This study is a reflection of my quest to find answers to the question of how creativity can best be managed. It has generated a number of insights that I have described in the relevant chapters and that may be applied in practice, or if only hereby achieving empirical scrutiny. The research does not have the pretension of providing a comprehensive overview of the relevant literature regarding creativity but rather provides a cross-section of publications that are closely linked with the question of how to manage creativity (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, 1999, Gaspersz, 1998, 2006, Amabile, 1983, 1996, 1998, 2002, Trompenaars, 2007, Kao, 1997, Kets de Vries, 1996, De Geus, 2007, Voorendonk, 2007). I attempted to come to a critical consideration and also to the mapping of contradictions, relationships, complementary insights and interdependence.

In regard to the concepts of improvisation, experimentation, dealing with paradoxes, dedication, commitment, imagination and imaginary capabilities a strong cohesion exists. This coherence does not only emerge in conversations, dialogues and discussions about creativity, but it also plays a significant role in scientific research. In addition, the notions of intuition, association, inspiration, intelligence, and the unconscious play an important role in exploring creativity. The latter are, however, difficult to direct or manipulate and as far as I am concerned, therefore, fall outside the domain of creativity management. The first series of concepts may in my opinion, be accommodated in three themes or domains, namely that of Play, Passion and Imagination.

The following is a chapter in which I explain why creativity is important for organizations. Primarily to generate innovation, autonomous growth and added value but also to allow employees to experience that their creativity is appreciated and they thereby contribute to meaning in the workplace. Considered this way, creativity has material and intangible returns. One would expect that substantial investment is being made in regard to creativity management. However, the issue of the so called company paradox of the 21st century (Ten Hoopen & Jansen Groesbeek, 2008) comes to mind: just when businesses should be more creative and more innovative they focus more on monitoring and control, whether or not spurred by shareholders and regulators. I note that in spite of the importance that creativity is ascribed in the daily practice of managers and directors it gets far less attention than it deserves. A bleak metaphor visualizes creativity as being the most acclaimed stepchild.

In the subsequent chapters I elaborate in regard to the relationship between creativity and, respectively, person, behavior and environment.

It is valuable to have a perspective on personal preferences and sensitivities of employees in regard to establishing a creative and stimulating environment. This is important because of the fact that the subjective interpretation of the environment variables determines the way

in which they take effect. A complicating factor hereby is that people often do not themselves know what environment variables effects their capacity for creativity responds positively. With regard to personality traits, there are no unambiguous links to be found, with the exception of the 'openness' personality variable (Batey,2010, Feist, 1998) associated with creativity in the capacity of ideation. Outside this context, it is not possible to appoint effective predictors of creativity in terms of personal qualities.

The relationship between intelligence and creativity is strongly differentiated; the ability to reason logically is connected with creativity in the form of divergent thinking, crystallized intelligence (general knowledge and verbal creativity) is related to a creative self-image and creative performance. In addition, of course, a particular intelligence level is needed to understand abstract or complex problems as such before one can focus on the finding of solutions.

Creative people are well able to hold paradoxical beliefs or perspectives without becoming frustrated. Creative people may also be characterized as having seemingly contradictory features within themselves.

The cohesion and mutual dynamics between personality characteristics is so complex that reliable predictors of creative behavior or with creativity-related sensitivity for environment variables are not clear. A specific expression of creativity, improvising, is somewhat an exception. Improvisation lies closer to acting immediately, in delivering a direct *performance* than creativity in a broader sense. The element of the immediate challenge and tendency to act in response to it triggers personality characteristics such as self-confidence, stress resistance, daring to make errors and the ability to make adjustments.

Creativity, reduced to a form of human behavior, is reviewed in the light of a learning theory /behaviorist perspective and an economic/sociological model (the rational choice theory, Scott, 2000). Our behavior is, in addition to the role that our personality plays, to an important extent, influenced and determined by the environment in which we are and the consequences which follow on this behavior. A large part of our behavior is learned and conditioned which means that behavior is no longer original because of the fact that the underlying reason for that action, thought or experience lies in the past. Also the rational consideration that once was created and led to an empowered result will not be recreated over and over again.

Focusing on creativity is focusing on original behavior because creativity cannot be conditioned. We hereby ask people to exhibit behavior or express ideas which do not revert on existing thinking or behavioral patterns which in itself requires the courage to let go of this. This means that a certain form of safety must be experienced in order to express oneself in such a way. Security as a condition for showing creative behavior is to be organized at the 'front', namely the creation of a situation perceived as being safe and at the 'back' of behavior, the reaction formation on – or consequences that one connects to the expression of creativity.

The meaning that is assigned to a problem or the expected added value when solving it plays an important role in the development of creativity. The more weight is awarded to a

problem or the solution, the more intensively and prolonged people will be dealing with it and that, in turn, increases the chance of creative solutions. This makes that managers try to organize a collective ambition by achieving shared perceptions or a uniform meaning to a question.

The link between environment and creativity is however difficult to appoint. The main reason for this is that people vary greatly in what encourages them to become creative. People create their reality by giving meaning to what they perceive. Any conceivable organizational culture or mixture of multiple types of culture has as much chance of creative contributions from employees as other cultures.

It is about the interaction between employee and surroundings. Although there are context variables that can be manipulated in order to enhance the problem-solving or creative ability, as for example when promoting a more effective composition of the board members (in addition to decision makers and subject matter experts also the insertion of moderators) in the process of opinion formation and decision-making, these are more or less independent of the culture of an organization.

For the majority of the environment variables that can be influenced in order to optimize creativity applies that the effects depend on the relative sensitivity of the employees to these variables. The continual exchange between manipulation of environment variables and the subjective interpretation provides us with insight into the question of under what conditions creativity thrives. It obliges the manager who takes creativity serious to persistently gauge which of his interventions have a positive effect on the creativity of the employees and to utilize this knowledge more effectively.

The elements that are positively linked with creativity as diversity, error tolerance and space for experimenting or freedom of movement place the manager for the dilemma of control or letting go. It demands that he shows the willingness, daring and creativity to optimally organize conditions in which he will have to encounter the boundaries of what is permissible and functional. The conditions of error tolerance and experiment space also apply for him. In short, the managing conditions for creativity cannot exist without the creativity of the manager.

It is useful to distinguish between two forms of creativity which I refer to as alpha and beta creativity. The main difference between these two forms lies in the positioning of the creative spark in relation to the creative effort that must be supplied. In regard to beta-creativity the centre of gravity of the effort lies before the creative thought, for alpha-creativity this gravity lies afterwards. The substantive justification for the distinction between these two forms of creativity is based on results from several studies on the links between creativity and personality traits, intelligence factors, subject matter expertise, skills and the role of the unconscious, namely intuition and association. I also consider this distinction to be useful because of the fact that creativity is a hard tangible phenomenon, it is difficult to define, analyze, and to unravel.

There are several contemporary methods of dealing with change, problem solving and innovation, which are characterized by involving all shareholders and employees on an equal

basis. These methods reflect the more or less modern development in the organizational landscape where hierarchical relations seem to become obsolete. I point to methods as Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al., 2003), Real Time Strategic Change (Dannemiller, 1992 en Jacobs, 1994), World Café (Brown en Isaacs, 2005) and Open Space (Owen, 1997) where the elements of play, passion and imagination play an important role.

These aforementioned core themes or domains represent in my view, the backbone of every policy on creativity management because of the fact that without sufficient attention to the Play, the Passion and the Imagination, it is not possible. The considerations which go together with this persuaded me to appoint these elements of the creative process in the title of the piece.