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Creativity in Management

– its Origins & Relevance in Today's Organisations

“I’ve always been an optimist and I suppose that is rooted in my belief that the power of creativity and intelligence can make the world a better place”

Bill Gates, 2007 (in The Saturday Evening Post March/April issue)

Creativity is as old as the Genesis; The Creation, and most often people, speak of creativity, in mystical tones – as though, it is a spirit possessed by only a few, and this spirit or ‘muse’ dictates, as Plato argued (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976 as cited in Sternberg, 1999).

What is it?

When thinking of creativity Da Vinci, Beethoven, Picasso, Einstein and other creative geniuses come to mind. For decades creativity has been a controversial subject in that it is usually associated with madness, as in Mozart, but there is enough empirical and anecdotal evidence that creative production requires a high level of motivation. Most creative genius are depicted as individuals who approach their work with great intensity whereby they even forget to eat and sleep to complete their creative work (Sternberg, 1999).

Some first researchers regarded creativity as a gift or property of an individual (Guilford, 1950; Kris, 1952; Maslow, 1959). Maslow describes creativity in terms of self-actualisation, as being the spontaneous expression of a person whose more basic needs have been satisfied, placing it at the top of the hierarchical needs pyramid (Maslow, 1943). Some psychologists argue that creativity by definition is mysterious and beyond the pale of empirical scrutiny (Feist, 1999). But more recent studies recognise that all humans with normal capacities are able to produce at least

moderately creative work in some domain, some of the time (Amabile, 1997).

The notion of creative thinking was first recognised by J. P. Guilford in his presidency speech whereby, he mentioned the need for the study and development of creativity (Guilford, 1950). Since then, definitions of creativity found in the literature vary according to the level of analysis used.

Creativity has been defined as something that is viewed as novel (original) and useful with regards to ideas or problem solutions. It refers to both the process of idea generation or problem solving and the actual idea or solution (Amabile 1983; Weisberg, 1995; Amabile et al, 2005). Sternberg and Lubart's (1999), definition is an appropriate example: they define creativity as the development of novel and useful ideas that organisations can develop in order to generate innovative products, services, procedures or processes (Sternberg & Lubart, 1999).

While some authors describe creative thinking in terms of cognitive style, such as being either adaptive or innovative (Kirton, 1980), or as explorer and assimilator styles (Martinsen, 1995; Kaufmann, 1979), others such as De Bono (1970) refers to creative thinking as 'lateral thinking' as opposed to vertical thinking.

For the purpose of this article Gardner's (1989 pp.14) definition will be adopted;

“Creativity is best described as the human capacity regularly to solve problems or to fashion products in a domain, in a way that is initially novel but ultimately acceptable in a culture”

The study of **Organisational Creativity**, from a management perspective, has emerged from the psychology study of creativity in individuals with the latter often being researched in the context of innovation - Innovation became a central part of science and technology policy making and rhetoric in the 1980s and 1990s. The emergence of creativity as an issue of management evidently has the same origins (Miettinen, 2006).

Although, it has long been debated that the words creativity and innovation have been used interchangeably, from the literature review carried out by the author, an evolutionary and divergent meaning of creativity (vis-à-vis innovation) has emerged.

All innovation begins with creative ideas thus innovation is defined as the successful implementation of creative ideas within an

organisation. In this view, creativity by individuals and teams is a starting point for innovation; the first is necessary but not sufficient condition for the second (Amabile, 1996). Creativity is considered as a topic of wide scope that is important at both the individual and societal level of a wide range of task domains (Sternberg, 1999).

How important is Creative Thinking in Organisations?

Creative thinking in organisations is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, the degree and complexity of the current changing environment is driving firms, both large and small, to seek new ways of conducting business to create wealth (Stopford, 2001). Secondly, creativity in organisations has been heralded as a key method for developing sustainable competitive advantage (Amabile et al, 2005)

The literature highlights that the employees of an organisation are a potential rich source of ideas and they should be encouraged to take part in the early stages to ensure a constant supply of ideas is generated to input into the innovation process (Woodman et al., 1993; Guimaraes and Langley, 1994; Andriopoulos and Lowe, 2000; McAdam and McClelland, 2002; Thamhain, 2003; Wood, 2003 as cited in Smith et al, 2008).

In summary, what used to be an intellectual interest for some thoughtful executives has now become an urgent concern for many, as competition turns into a game of who can generate the best and greatest number of ideas (Amabile & Khaire, 2008) especially so, when considering the fluidity of the global economic scenario. It is therefore essential that organisations are able to enhance their creativity. Thus, organisations need to identify the factors that influence their creativity so that they can be managed more effectively in order to improve creative outputs (Majaro, 1992).

For example if we take the Financial Sector who is experiencing continuous change in the face of the recent global economic developments, what place does organisational creativity hold in such companies?

Creativity can make the difference between failure and success. It is sought by many organisations but only a rare handful reach the Holy Grail of becoming creative exemplars – Google's buzzing campus life, Apple's super-cool products and Patagonia's laid-back outlook are just a few successful examples (Harris, 2009).

Creativity should be the tool that helps the organisation to become more effective and not just more efficient. To reach this aim, a holistic approach is required if the input of creative thinking is to play a contributing role in the pursuit of long-term success. This calls for top management to look at organisational creativity as one component in a complex framework of interrelated elements (Majaro, 1992). Besides, this is only possible if the innate creativity of everyone is developed (Carr, 1994).

Key Elements for Organisational Creativity to exist	
The Individual	Continuous development of the individuals' innate creativity
Group Creativity	Facilitating the generation of ideas within a team
Organisational Creativity	Setting the right environment and culture that stimulates a positive attitude towards the sharing of ideas in problem solving.

These 3 elements will be further discussed in the subsequent articles to follow on the same subject.

This article is Part 1 of a series of articles that explore the power of Creativity in Organisations from a Management perspective.

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