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Chris Bilton & Ruth Leary: What can managers do for creativity? Brokering creativity in the creative industries

The corruption of creativity

'Creativity' has become a fashionable term in the contemporary managerial and political lexicon, signalling generalised approval in education, business and the arts. In Britain, 'creative industries' has replaced 'cultural industries' as the umbrella term for artistic and cultural production and distribution, and 'creativity' has been incorporated into the national tourism brand¹. In business, managers and academics use 'creativity' to indicate an organisation's capacity for innovation, flexibility and autonomy; these 'creative' values are seen to have replaced operational efficiency and strategic planning as the primary source of 'competitive advantage' in business. In education, creativity has spread beyond its original context of arts based subjects and is used to refer to a generalised ability to solve problems and generate new concepts across the entire curriculum². The term creativity has become so all-embracing as to lose any clearly defined meaning and value. Ask any organisation, industry or individual whether they would ever admit to being 'uncreative' and the corruption of meaning is only too apparent. It seems that we are all creative now. Creativity has become both the language and currency of today's knowledge economy³.

It is the purpose of this article to examine the notion of creativity in the context of businesses and organisations in the commercial cultural sector. We will argue that the dominant view of creativity in Western managerial and political discourse is based on a one-sided definition, summarised in Robert Weisberg's phrase, 'the myth of genius' (Weisberg 1986). This partial definition has led to an artificial separation of 'creative' and 'managerial' functions within organisations and a stereotypical and limiting view of both. We will propose an alternative view of creativity based on

¹ See Labour Party (Great Britain) (1997): *Create the future :a strategy for cultural policy, arts and the creative economy* (London: Labour Party); also Smith, Chris (1998): *Creative Britain* (London: Faber & Faber)

² For a good example of current perspectives on 'creativity' in education, see the British government's report of the National Advisory Committee on Creative And Cultural Education, *All our Futures* (Sudbury: Department for Employment and Education, 1999); also the report by the Northern Ireland Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure, *Unlocking Creativity: A Strategy for Development* (Belfast: DCAL, 2001)

³ For a current view of the 'creative economy', see Howkins, John (2001): *The Creative Economy: How People Make Money From Ideas* (London: Penguin); also Wolf, Michael J. (1999): *The entertainment economy: how mega-media forces are transforming our lives* (London: Penguin)

'creativity brokering' and consider some of the implications of this for management, especially for the management of 'creative' organisations.

Two dimensions of creativity: innovation and value

Psychology remains one of the few disciplines to have paid serious attention to the meaning of creativity. Creativity is an important topic in psychology because the ability to generate new concepts is one of the main characteristics that distinguishes human beings from smart machines (Boden 1992, 270 - 284); if we can understand creativity, we can go some way towards solving the riddle of consciousness itself.

In the creativity literature, most standard definitions of creativity contain two components. Firstly creativity requires that we make or think something new; the idea should be new to the individual and perhaps even new to the world. Boden calls these two levels of innovation 'P-creativity', the ordinary everyday variety which allows us to solve our own daily problems, and 'H-creativity', the creativity behind great artistic and scientific discoveries (Boden 1994, 75 - 76). 'H-creativity' obviously demonstrates greater social significance and higher economic potential, but the principle in both cases is the same and the distinction may, in part, be a matter of good luck; having the right idea in the right place at the right time (Novitz 1999). Whilst the outcome is different in social and economic terms, in psychological terms the thought process is the same. Consequently, most of the psychological literature focuses on 'P-creativity'.

However, Boden emphasises that mere novelty is not enough. To be creative, the idea must also be useful, or valuable (Boden 1994, 75 - 79; c.f. Weisberg 1993, 4 - 5). This second part of the definition is more contentious than the first because value and usefulness depend upon social context or subjective judgement. Some psychological studies resort to a definition of value as defined by a panel of experts within the appropriate field, so that Picasso's painting is 'creative' because art experts and art historians agree that his innovations are valuable. The pictures by a three year old child would (probably) not meet this criterion, so they remain merely 'innovative' or 'different'. Whether we accept the panel's judgement is, of course, another matter.

Other definitions of value centre on process, not product. A child's drawings are random or incompetent, whereas Picasso's drawings are driven by a purpose or

vision and executed by an experienced, trained artist with a historical knowledge of his field. This author-centred definition of value as 'innovation with a purpose' is reflected in the emphasis on 'problem-solving' in psychological creativity tests and in the argument that creative ideas must demonstrate 'fitness for purpose'; if an innovative idea is a deliberate response to a problem, from a P-creative perspective it has purpose and therefore value. This method of measuring value is less specific than the first because creative problem-solving tests tend to overlook the relative merits of one solution over another, emphasising quantity of new ideas, not quality. 'Fitness for purpose' is a relative measurement of value; the criterion is dependent upon the external circumstances within which the problem is set rather than upon any inherent quality.

Over and beyond any assessment of the process or product, criteria like 'aptness' and 'timeliness' are also used to measure creativity. Here the measure depends upon the wider social context and refers to the circumstances surrounding the idea's reception as much as its production. Chance has a role to play here too; timeliness may be a deliberate aim, or it may be down to luck. 'Aptness' and 'timeliness' lend themselves to the 'systems' theories of creativity discussed in the next section; for example if we consider why certain historical periods have been especially productive in terms of artistic and scientific achievements, it is clear that the cultural and social context may have provided a fertile creative climate or have been unusually receptive to certain innovations (or both). Here value is dependent upon the prevailing needs, interests and attitudes at the time of a work's reception (Simonton 1988, 394 -395).

Because the 'value' component of creativity is difficult to prove or measure, it is often ignored or postponed. When managers use 'brainstorming' sessions to generate new ideas, value judgements are deliberately avoided since they may 'block' the flow of ideas (Adams 1979). Critics argue that the lack of a 'quality filter' means that whilst brainstorming may result in more ideas, there is no evidence that it produces *better* ideas (Weisberg 1993, 62 - 67). The question of value is deferred, to be resumed at a later meeting (and perhaps in a different department); here value judgements are separated from the creative process, delegated as a separate managerial task outside the creative team's remit.

The managerial separation of 'creative' and 'decision-making' functions is a radical departure from the two-part definition of creativity (*new and useful*) advanced in the

psychological literature. Returning to the question, 'what is creativity?', the managerial definition of creativity as innovation derives from a tendency to consider the question in terms of people rather than process, and consequently to focus on certain aspects of that process rather than treating it 'holistically' as a unified, multidimensional whole.

Multiplicity: creativity as process

Process-based definitions of creativity introduce a range of perspectives beyond the singular, gifted individual. Poincaré's early formulation of the creative process provides a good starting point for this discussion (Boden 1992, 19 - 21). Poincaré, a nineteenth century mathematician, describes the following sequence: 'preparation', during which the problem is analysed and possible sources of information and inspiration are explored; 'incubation', during which the sub-conscious mind works upon the problem, while the conscious mind is resting or temporarily distracted; 'illumination', the 'aha' moment of creative breakthrough when the pieces in the puzzle suddenly fall into a new pattern and the solution presents itself; 'verification', where the new solution is tested against the original problem.

Poincaré's sequence is striking firstly for its unpredictable, non-linear progression; it is not clear how long each 'stage' will take, nor what precise relationship one 'stage' has with the next. Secondly, the sequence requires very different types of thinking, ranging from sub-conscious inspiration to rational analysis. This duality resonates with the earlier definition of creativity as something innovative but also useful; for Poincaré innovation comes at the moment of 'illumination', but usefulness must be tested at the point of 'verification'. Other commentators have described a similar duality in the creative thinking process, based on a combination of irrational and rational thought processes. Weisberg (1986) refers to 'divergent' and 'convergent' thinking, De Bono (1982) to 'lateral' and 'vertical' thinking, and Sternberg (1988) has related the duality to different 'domains' within the human mind. Whilst these different commentators might choose to emphasise the 'rational' or 'irrational' elements in the process, what they have in common is a sense of duality or dialectic. It is the tension between conscious and sub-conscious thought in Poincaré's model that produces the new 'creative' ideas, not a reliance on one over the other.

If different types of thinking are required within the creative process, it seems more than likely that different types of thinker might also be called upon. This is the basis

for 'systems' theories of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 1988, Simonton 1988); a creative process is not the result of one person or even one set of people but of intersecting and interacting relationships between them and others. Each participant is dependent on another; for example, Picasso's painting is informed by his relationship with contemporary avant-garde artists, African art traditions, curators and critics, his society and with posterity. Becker's (1982) 'art world' describes a similar intersecting set of relationships feeding into systems of critical reputation, patronage, education and tradition which support the development of individual creativity. These 'systems' theories of creativity can also be related to Marxist theories of cultural production (Wolff 1993).

Another set of theories of creativity attempts to itemise the different personality traits and intellectual aptitudes which might contribute to creative thinking, either by focusing on eminent 'creative' people (Wallace & Gruber 1989) or by conducting tests with a sample group (Torrance 1988). The lists of aptitudes and traits appear so many and varied that it is difficult to privilege one over another. In line with the thesis of this article, it seems that creative potential is determined by a *combination* of different factors (both internal and external) rather than on a single identifiable personality type or drive. Moreover, it seems highly unlikely that all the requisite or desirable characteristics identified by the researchers could ever be found within a single person. It is more probable that the desired combination be spread across a group of people with different but complementary skills, aptitudes and personalities, as illustrated in Taylor's 'totem poles' diagram (*figure* Taylor 1988). This likelihood is reflected in the managerial practice of assembling 'multi-skilled' teams of employees from across the organisation, assigned according to team role rather than to functional role or competence (Belbin 1993). Creative abilities may be further redefined or 'stretched' by organisational context; according to Amabile, creativity stems not so much from individual talent as from the manager's ability to 'match' individual employees to appropriate tasks (Amabile 1999a, 10).

Thus far these systems theories of creativity have shared a common view of creativity as a complex, unpredictable and multidimensional process, requiring different types of thinking. These types appear to fall into two principal categories, 'divergent' thinking (taking problems apart, lateral or 'out of the box' thinking, spontaneous and intuitive thought) and 'convergent' thinking (putting together evidence and testing solutions, 'vertical' thinking within a clear set of boundaries, rational and logical thought). It is the tension between these types of thinking that

engenders a new idea. It also seems plausible that, because of its complexity, the creative process might be shared productively among several people and that a diversity of external and internal factors (amounting to a creative 'system') will further influence a successful outcome.

Genius: creativity and the individual

The majority of 'Western' commentators, from Plato to Freud and De Bono, have tended to focus on the divergent, spontaneous and 'irrational' aspects of creativity. It is Poincaré's period of incubation followed by illumination which appears the most difficult part of the sequence to explain and to imitate; analysis and verification appear relatively straightforward. It is here too that the core of the creative process, the creation of something new, seems to take place. The emphasis on one particular type of thinking leads to an assumption that creativity is associated with one particular type of person, the individual creative genius. The myth of genius dominates managerial approaches to creativity and popular culture.

This mythology has been propagated through many unsubstantiated first-hand accounts of creativity (Ghiselin 1985, 18 - 19). Weisberg (1993) examines the evidence behind these tales of irrational genius and spontaneous invention in science and the arts (Kekulé's discovery of the structure of the benzene molecule while dozing in front of the fire, Coleridge's poem *Kublai Khan*, Picasso's painting of *Guernica*). In each case, Weisberg argues that the 'discovery' resulted not from a sudden and mysterious moment of illumination but as a result of careful, concerted effort over a period of time and the technical expertise of the creator; moreover the first-hand accounts sometimes conveniently overlook the direct and indirect contributions of others (collaborators, contemporaries, editors and advisers) which lie behind the individual creative moment. In popular culture the image of the individual creative genius offers the producers of popular culture a convenient way of branding disparate cultural products, thereby glossing over the collective nature of many creative enterprises.

Weisberg's conclusions are provocatively anti-romantic; creative people are not dreamers and visionaries, but intellectual beachcombers, skilfully reclaiming ideas and experiences from the past and reapplying them to problems in the present. The 'aha' moment of discovery is based not on genius but on 'domain-specific expertise'. Individual creators tap into expertise and specialist knowledge within a particular intellectual or cultural 'domain'; 'breakthrough' thinking always has an

unacknowledged precedent in the individual's accumulated memories, experience and knowledge of their own and others' ideas within that domain. Weisberg's model of 'incremental creativity' re-emphasises that creativity is only possible in the context of a deliberate intellectual process and a collective intellectual system.

Nevertheless, the mythology of genius contains several assumptions which influence managerial approaches to creativity: creativity is person-centred not process-oriented; innovation is privileged over value; intuition is prized over rational decision-making; ideas emerge suddenly and 'spontaneously', not from evolutionary 'incremental' processes. These assumptions lead managers to regard creativity as a human resources issue (recruitment and training), rather than a matter of organisational design (systems and processes). For example many managers approach the problem of creativity by sending individual employees on a creative thinking course, rather than examining the procedures and systems within the organisation which might inhibit or enliven creative processes. After a few days of mind games and lateral thinking exercises, the employees return, enthused but not empowered, to confront the familiar hierarchies and traditions which continue to block the transition from individual innovation to organisational creativity.

The divided organisation: 'creatives' and 'suits'

Of course the managerial view of creativity based on individual exceptionalism has certain advantages for anyone defined as a 'creative person'; such individuals may be granted some exemptions from the normal social and organisational rules. A refusal to conform to organisational culture may be tolerated, even encouraged. However, this tolerance is unlikely to extend into operational deadlines and targets. It might be that this limited autonomy suits some artists very well. Exempt from managerial responsibility, protected from harsh economic realities, the 'artist as genius' is free to concentrate on their work. Any problems outside their immediate tasks can be delegated to 'management'.

Whilst stereotypical perceptions of 'creative people' and managers provide a kind of licence on both sides for the individual, they inhibit organisational creativity. The person-oriented definition of creativity is the point of divide in the workplace between 'creatives' and 'suits' making for difficult communication between the two camps, sometimes descending into outright mutual contempt (Powell and Friedkin, 1986).

For the 'creative', protection from managerial realities comes at a price; vulnerability to exploitation and a loss of control over their career or their intellectual property. Disconnected from markets on the grounds that this will corrupt the purity of artistic inspiration, information about audiences and markets is filtered by management and 'creatives' may find themselves having to develop their work in an information vacuum. The lack of communication or synergy at organisational level is a recipe for ill-informed decision-making, both at the 'creative' end of the organisation and in the marketing department.

For the manager, much energy is expended on the 'problem' of communication between the creative department, the rest of the organisation and the client; isolated from any deeper appreciation of their function and value to the organisation as a whole, creators inevitably waste time generating ideas which may be innovative but are ultimately useless because they are inappropriate or misdirected according to the organisation's broader objectives. Meanwhile, managers are reluctant to intervene in an area of the business which is purported to be temperamentally, intellectually and culturally outside their mental ambit; consequently managerial interventions are often deferred until they are too late to have any useful input into the creative process.

The mutually suspicious and destructive separation between 'creatives' and 'suits' stems from a one-sided, person-based view of creativity. If managers are to get beyond this polarisation, they will need to engage with a process-based view of creativity, where the key lies not in the individual components (rational vs. irrational, divergent vs. convergent, genius and non-genius) but in the totality of relationships between them. The crucial task for managers then becomes the connecting or brokering of these elements for the mutual benefit of all parties involved in the creative process.

Otherness and contradiction

When we discuss definitions of creativity and genius with students, they are surprisingly sympathetic to Weisberg's rationalist, anti-romantic arguments. Given that most of these students have academic and professional backgrounds in the arts rather than in science or social sciences, it may be that Weisberg's approach seems refreshingly unfamiliar. Or it could be an indication of the pervasive managerialism in the cultural sector; arts organisations seem fatally attracted to the more mechanistic versions of 'scientific' management (Cummings, Wilson and Bilton, forthcoming). To

paraphrase Oscar Wilde, when managers get together for dinner they discuss creativity; when artists get together for dinner they discuss their five-year business plan.

This attraction of opposites suggests that any attempt to 'teach' creativity requires a compensatory approach. While corporate employees may need to have their boundaries disrupted by 'lateral thinking' and free association, artists and humanities students may respond better to approaches which emphasise discipline, organisation, repetition and logic. De Bono makes this distinction in his writings on creativity training. Lateral thinking and brainstorming may be useful techniques in business, especially if the business is governed by a rigidly hierarchical structure and an approach to management based on clearly defined objectives, roles and tasks. However, the same set of techniques may be redundant or even counter-productive when applied to a group of artists (De Bono 1992, 34). For most artists and arts organisations the challenge is not 'thinking out of the box'; the challenge is rather to 'redefine the box', establishing rules and boundaries within which creative ideas can be shaped and developed (Boden 1994, 79 - 84).

As highlighted in the previous section, the alliance of apparently contradictory, opposing types of thinking seems to recur in many definitions of creativity, from Poincaré to Weisberg, Sternberg and Boden. In organisational terms, this tension between spontaneity and organisation is a necessary part of organisational design. Gary Kirton's (1991) study of creative teams in engineering firms found that teams tended to comprise two distinct, opposing types of thinkers: innovators (inventive, independent thinkers) and adapters (flexible team players who are good at picking up and adapting other people's ideas). The teams which included a mixture of both inventors and adapters were the most successful. If creativity is seen to result from a set of complementary yet opposing processes, creative thinking requires an engagement with 'the other', with unfamiliar people and types of thinking. Homogeneous teams, while ensuring quick solutions and instant consensus, do little to stimulate creative thinking (Amabile 1999a, 14).

Theories of creativity highlight this combination of opposites as a vital stage in the generation of new ideas and concepts. Koestler's theory of 'bisociation' describes creativity as consisting in the surprising combinations of different, opposing concepts and realities. Moreover it is the ability to hold both realities simultaneously in mind (the use of metaphor) which marks the truly creative thinker (Koestler 1964). A

characteristic of creative people encountered in our research is that they are indeed comfortable with their own and others' contradictions; furthermore they also have a high threshold for tolerating the tension that such contradictions may cause and are able to turn this tension to their own creative advantage. (Storr 1972, pp 238-9, Tardif and Sternberg 1988, 431)

The theory of creativity as an alliance of opposites is consistent with the process-based definition of creativity as a sequence involving different, contrasting types of thinking. It also fits with a systems view of creativity as the product of interactions and dependencies between different, opposing forces rather than the product of an individual mind. According to this theory, a team of people with different but complementary attributes are more likely to engage in the necessary stages of creative thinking than a team of like-minded people. Similarly a creative individual will have a capacity for contradiction or 'internalised otherness', and will be capable of playing many parts in their own mind; this protean capacity may be reinforced by the mutual dependencies and interactions which make up the individual's personal art world.

Brokering creativity

In order to stimulate a productive creative process, it will not be enough simply to empower or transform the individual; individual creativity will only thrive when individuals are part of a larger creative 'system', through which different ideas and aptitudes can collide in unpredictable ways. Engineering such a system is the role of the creativity broker, enabling connections across boundaries and encouraging people to exchange ideas and talents and to collaborate in their mutual development.

Similarly, if we accept that creativity is a process, it will not be enough for managers simply to identify and nurture talented individuals. While talent may yield the potential for creativity, if raw talent is to be productive it must be connected to other ideas and other people. Creativity brokers do not necessarily possess the talents themselves, but they know how to broker other people's abilities into productive relationships; they also have an eye for the market. In the music industry Simon Frith (1983, 99 – 102) has identified the importance of 'hucksters', the small-time players who broker deals between artists, labels, radio stations and listeners. As functions of A&R, artist management, marketing and promotion become increasingly centralised, the old brokering skills of Frith's hucksters have become increasingly marginal. The result is

a more streamlined management style with less space for the unexpected hit and the unpredictable talent⁴.

For the individual artist, the ability to broker creativity may be a more important factor than individual talent. As already noted, attempts by psychologists to measure or predict creativity by identifying specific 'traits' or abilities have never resulted in a consistent pattern or personality. The most productive creative mind will not necessarily be the most naturally talented. Equally, it is not uncommon to possess all the natural talents to be creative, yet lack the vital spark to turn that creativity into productive output (Storr 1972, 49). The missing ingredient here may be the ability to tap into whatever natural talents are there - and to borrow other people's. As noted by Weisberg and Amabile, this 'tapping in' requires motivation, self-awareness and knowledge of the domain. Artists who are genuinely productive (rather than simply showing 'potential') may not possess the greatest talents but they know their own strengths and weaknesses, provoking the necessary trade-offs in order to achieve an effective combination. They are good at tuning into and exploiting their own stocks of experiences, memories and different styles of thinking. They are also alert enough to broker deals with other creative talents when their own creative equity is low.

This capacity to broker 'deals' is especially important in the commercial creative industries. Turning an idea into a commodity requires a range of different types of thinking and specialist expertise from different individuals, from talent scouts to producers and editors. On rare occasions, individual creators may have the flexibility to play all or some of these roles themselves. More often they will need to broker their own talents and other people's, building effective alliances and finding the right person (or the right technology) for the right task. The ability to 'broker' connections between different people, experiences, talents, technologies and emotions becomes the principal function of both creators and managers in the creative industries.

Implications for management

⁴ The nearest contemporary equivalent to Frith's 'hucksters' are those established artists like Madonna, Kate Bush and Noel Gallagher who use their fame to promote the talents of other emerging artists. The fact that the only remaining hucksters are themselves artists (and famous ones to boot) is perhaps an indication of the low-risk, corporate culture of the contemporary music industry.

Motivation

One of the key management functions in any business is motivation and leadership. In the context of the creative industries, the motivation which lies behind creative work is notoriously elusive. As Anthony Storr indicates, all the evidence suggests that motivation comes from within; the external rewards of artistic and cultural production remain so pitifully small and unpredictable, no other explanation seems possible (Storr 1972). The motivating force behind creativity has been ascribed to various internal drives, including childhood trauma (Freud 1990) or physical or mental illness (Sandblom 1995). According to Teresa Amabile, 'extrinsic' forms of motivation, whether rewards or punishments, are, in most cases, an irrelevance; offering people rewards for creative tasks may at best have a secondary, contributory impact where 'intrinsic' motivation is already strong, but at worst the rewards will undermine intrinsic motivation and so defeat their own purpose (Amabile 1990).

Taking this emphasis on 'intrinsic motivation' at face value, it would be easy to conclude that the best thing a manager can do for creativity is to do nothing, thereby reinforcing the old divisions between creativity and management. Amabile herself warns against such a conclusion; while intervening in the creative process is likely to inhibit creativity, setting 'strategic targets' may well enhance creativity. The key, according to Amabile, lies in clearly defining the creative goal whilst not attempting to prescribe the means (Amabile 1999, 10). Whilst acknowledging the need for 'autonomy around process' Amabile appears to share Boden's view that setting boundaries for creativity works as a stimulus, not a barrier (Boden 1992, 82 - 85).

Risk

Another way of thinking of motivation is as a form of risk or investment (Sternberg, O'Hara & Lubart 1997). Here the challenge for management is to develop a more imaginative approach to risk management and resource allocation. Developing an idea, from initial concept through to completed prototype, requires a series of risks at each stage in the process. Some of these risks require the investment of material resources, particularly in the later stages as the idea goes into production; however, in the earlier conceptual stages the risk is more personal, requiring individuals to invest time and effort in an initial idea, then stake their reputations (or at least risk looking foolish) as they attempt to explain and promote their idea to other people. The capacity to take personal risks is one of the functions that sets apart the

productive artist from the potential artist. In the contemporary creative industries, when we are confronted by an artist's unmade bed, a pile of bricks or a music sample lifted off a drum machine, it is all too easy to claim 'I could have done that!' The reason that these works were made by them and not by us is that somebody, or a series of people, took a risk (cf. Bayles and Orland 1993, 14).

The shift from a person-centred to a process-oriented theory of creativity requires that managers cease to think of extraordinarily motivated individuals, and focus instead on a succession of risks taken at stages in a creative process. The role of the creativity broker in this context is to provide an environment where risks can be taken and where resources can be mobilised. This managerial function applies both to personal risk and to material investment.

At a personal level, creative individuals must feel free to experiment and take risks. At one level this may mean providing a 'risk space' where the creator is temporarily freed from constraints of time and resources and where the fear of failure is alleviated (Bayles and Orland 1993, 19; Amabile 1999b, 140). Here the creativity broker is in effect a permission giver, authorising the risk-taking necessary for a creative outcome and providing a 'safe haven' for the creative activity.

At the same time, we have argued that creative processes need boundaries (Boden 1994, 79). For freelancers the boundaries may be set out in the brief; for a creative organisation they may be determined by prevailing market conditions and organisational capacity. The task of the broker is to negotiate between these boundaries and the ideas that take place within them; the boundaries must provide a clear starting point, but must allow sufficient space for innovation and experiment. In the end as the boundaries are repeatedly crossed, the creative process may transcend them, redefining the parameters and so transforming the conceptual space (Boden 1994, 79 - 84).

For creative organisations, where creative production is a group enterprise not a solitary activity, a further layer of personal risk lies in the relationships between collaborators. Co-creators must be prepared to share ideas and participate in a broader system, otherwise the system and the business will stagnate. Again, such participation requires a leap of faith. The role of the creativity broker is then to provide an 'open-minded space' (Walzer 1986) within which individuals can confront alternative ways of seeing and doing, where different talents and types of thinking

can collide in unexpected ways, and where risk is seen in terms of opportunity not threat or failure. Relative failure is itself seen by Amabile as a part of the creative process, since initial mistakes will eventually allow for an improved outcome (Amabile 1999b). The acceptance of failure, as much as the reward for success, offers an incentive for innovation and risk⁵. Again it is here that the art of creativity brokering can make a contribution, by signalling trust in the idea's potential and encouraging the artist and others to invest in its development.

At the level of resource allocation, creativity brokering serves the function of mobilising 'risk capital' within the business and ensuring that resources are directed to ideas at the critical stage in their development. This may mean negotiating across hierarchies and between departments in order to develop a flexible, responsive approach to decision-making. Within a hierarchical system, managers avoid intervention in the creative process until the results emerge at the other end. This cautious approach is partly following the logic of 'intrinsic motivation' in creative individuals which supports a 'laissez-faire' approach to management; however, it is also a reflection of inflexible, top-down decision-making. Creative organisations must learn to develop more flexible systems for resources allocation and decision-making, allowing resources to be mobilised at an earlier stage in the creative process (Kantor 1988).

Productivity

Managers are judged by their results. In the creative industries, it is not enough to have good ideas; it is also necessary to exploit those ideas and turn them into revenue streams. The distinction between creative potential and creative productivity can be traced back to the different stages and types of thinking involved in the creative process; creative ideas must not only be innovative, they must also have value.

The distinction between potential and productivity is reflected in the basic terms of intellectual property law. Intellectual property rights apply to ideas which are 'original' (innovative) and which are expressed in 'tangible form'; within this formula it is

⁵ James Dyson's business partner, Mark Bickerstaffe, recently highlighted the British entrepreneur's tolerance for failure and the inspirational effect this has on those around him: 'James lets you run with it and make mistakes. He's the first to say as long as we've learned something it's not disastrous. He gives people vision, the capability to do anything' (Interview with Fiona Lawrie, Observer 16th January 2000)

possible to trace two distinct stages in a creative process, the point of origination or 'illumination' and the point of realisation or 'verification'. Ideas in their pure, intangible form are not protected under copyright; the author must turn that idea into something; a book, a picture, a recording. Not only does the tangible form provide legal proof of the idea's existence, it also demonstrates that the author was sufficiently convinced of its value to develop that mental prototype both intellectually and materially, turning it into a completed artefact. In order for a creative process to produce something of 'value', it is not sufficient simply to have an idea; in an age of free content and aesthetic saturation, ideas are cheap. The creator must translate the 'innovative' idea into the finished article; only then does it have value and consequently become a marketable commodity. This transition from potential to product requires an investment of time and resources; the creativity broker, whether they are the idea's originator or not, deals in such investments.

At a time when management theorists are attempting to move beyond 'command and control' models of leadership and management, the 'creativity brokering' analogy resonates with the participatory, flexible style of management being advocated for a new knowledge-based economy which is dependent on the flow of ideas, information and 'human capital'. Management, if these theorists are to be believed, is becoming quite 'creative'. In fact, if they are doing their jobs properly, the artist and the manager are not so far removed as they at first appear. Both are manipulating and exploiting ideas; the process through which value is added is no longer by way of the linear 'value chain' but by creating a space within individual talents, experiences and perceptions can collide in interesting ways. If there is a distinction to be made between managers and artists, it is primarily one of scale; while artists tend to broker these exchanges internally, within their own thought process, managers broker the external relationships between artists, audiences and investors. Within the creative industries, the functions of management and cultural production blur together; the creativity broker emerges as the key figure, engineering the relationships within and between different individuals and types of thinking within the creative process.

Conclusion

This article starts from a dualistic theory of creativity based upon process, rather than the individual creative person. Western managerial approaches to creativity have been largely determined by an emphasis on 'divergent thinking', reflecting, in part, a business culture in which orthodoxy, hierarchy and 'scientific' approaches

predominate. In this context, 'divergent thinking' represents a challenging alternative which can allow managers to generate new ideas. The approach has led to an emphasis on individual 'creative people' rather than an analysis of how creative processes and creative systems operate in concert. It has also tended to value novelty and innovation over usefulness and fitness for purpose.

This dominant view of creativity has led to an opposition between 'creatives' and 'managers' which restricts and stereotypes individuals, blocking the exchange of ideas and information. This separation is reinforced by an education system which channels creative and non-creative subjects into separate streams from an early age, encouraging managers and artists to see the world, and each other, from opposite perspectives. 'The creative genius' and 'the bureaucratic manager' assume the archetypal roles of the opposing halves of a bad marriage.

By locating creativity within the individual, creativity training only succeeds in fostering a temporary enthusiasm for 'different' ways of working; once the individual returns to the workplace, they must revert to the familiar 'uncreative' patterns inscribed in the process and structure of the organisational system. A more productive approach would be to tackle creative systems and processes at an organisational level.

The emphasis on novelty for its own sake is equally damaging. From a managerial perspective, pure innovation requires direction, based on an awareness of the areas where innovation would be beneficial over those where it is unnecessary or even counter-productive. The direction of ideas is arguably no less creative or important than their generation.

A management style, based on 'creative individuals' and 'out of the box thinking', might be appropriate in certain business environments. However, in the context of the creative industries such an approach lacks relevance. In fact it is more likely that the creative organisation will benefit from developing contexts and frames of reference in which to do the thinking. Creative processes thrive in a disciplined framework within which creative ideas can be channelled and developed through the allocation of resources and exchange of ideas.

Creativity brokering attempts to facilitate creative thinking by making connections across organisational boundaries and individual habits of thought. The encounter

with different realities requires a willingness to embrace change and to take risks; creativity brokering encourages risk by alleviating the fear of failure generated by a prescriptive 'managerial' model and by developing systems of barter and exchange which allow for ideas and information to collide in unexpected ways.

In today's knowledge economy ideas and information are cheap – it's what you do with them that counts. Successful managers of creativity are the brokers who add value to the creative process by directing the traffic of ideas and resources, and by 'matching' ideas, individuals and organisational tasks. This occurs not just at the output end of the supply chain, with managers simply waiting to match completed products with appropriate markets. The involvement of the broker comes earlier, at the point where new ideas are being generated through the interaction between raw concepts and talents. Creativity brokering indicates the extent to which management has ceased to be a science and has become an art; creative businesses need creative managers.

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