Creativity: A social approach

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Overview

• What is creativity?
• Where is creativity located?
• What or who is creative?
• How does creativity take place?
• Is there a creative process?
• Is this process individual or social?
• How are we creative together?
• Can creativity be enhanced?
• How can creativity be enhanced?
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ASSESSMENT OF CREATIVITY

MODELS OF THE CREATIVE PROCESS

TECHNIQUES FOR CREATIVITY ENHANCEMENT
ICE-BREAKER

• Meet your neighbour
• Smile widely + introduce yourself
• Talk about an instance of creativity that first comes to your mind (person, object, etc.)

• 1 min each!
AND THE SOCIO-CULTURAL AGENDA

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A little bit (more) history

CREATIVITY
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THE “HE”-PARADIGM

- Paradigm of the genius
- First to develop historically
- An individualistic stance
- Fundamental book: Hereditary Genius

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THE “I”-PARADIGM
• Paradigm of creative person
• “Democratization” of creativity
  • Person-oriented
  • Psychometric & cognitive studies

CREATIVITY
A little bit (more) history

THE “WE”-PARADIGM
- More recent, emerging mostly after the 1980s
- Creativity as social, based on networks of collaboration & interaction
- Alimented primarily by cultural or socio-cultural perspectives

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CREATIVITY
But... what is creativity??

• Many things: personality trait, quality of things, attitude, social convention, etc.etc.

• A classical scheme by Rhodes (1961/1987), the four Ps of creativity:
  – Person
  – Product
  – Process
  – Press (environmental factors)
The focus on product

• Most past and present definitions of creativity are product definitions

• Why? Simply because products are easier to study and agree on

• This is not fully satisfactory though (see Runco’s, 2007, notion of ‘product bias’)
What makes a product creative?

• Smiling widely again at your neighbour
• Think of what kinds of information about a product you would need to decide whether it is creative or not

• 3 minutes in pairs
• 3 minutes in groups of four
The multi-layered model

• The core of creativity:
  Novelty & Originality
The multi-layered model

- The core of creativity: Novelty & Originality
- Qualified in terms of: Value & Utility
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- Qualified in terms of: Value & Utility
- Judged as creative: ‘Expert’ judgement
- Cultural differences: Across time & space...
Interim summary (1)

• Creativity does not reside in the object but largely depends on social agreement
• There are societal discourses about creativity that legitimise who can be called creative
• However, this is not to deny the existence of creativity as just another social construction
• Creativity and creative processes have a ‘materiality’ given by the generation of artefacts
Reflections by Poincaré

"For fifteen days I strove to prove that there could not be any functions like those I have since called Fuchsian functions. I was then very ignorant; every day I seated myself at my work table, stayed an hour or two, tried a great number of combinations and reached no results. One evening, contrary to my custom, I drank black coffee and could not sleep. Ideas rose in crowds; I felt them collide until pairs interlocked, so to speak, making a stable combination. By the next morning I had established the existence of a class of Fuchsian functions, those which came from the hypergeometric series; I had only to write out the results, which took but a few hours”

“The Foundations of Science” 1908
The creative process

• A traditional four-stage model (Wallas, 1926)
  1. Preparation (collecting information, documenting, working at a conscious level)
  2. Incubation (taking a break from the problem, working at a sub/unconscious level)
  3. Illumination (the Aha! or Eureka moment, getting the idea, having the insight)
  4. Verification (testing the idea, working again at a conscious level and using critical thinking)
Reflection task!

• Thinking about your own creative process, does it map out into the general four stage model? Are there differences and if so why do you think that is?
Critique of the model

• It is very general and does not allow for differences between people and between creative domains
• It is linear and often it is the case that creative processes have a less predictable progression
• It puts a lot of emphasis on illumination, the creative idea and the role of the subconscious
• As such it places the individual at the centre and the social at the periphery of creativity
Why would creativity be social?

• What is your take on this question?
• Is the social aspect even needed to think about creativity?
• What is ‘social’ about creativity?
1. Creativity requires a social world

• Going back to the role of the social for defining and discovering creativity

• Csikszentmihalyi’s model positioning creative production at the confluence between:
  – Persons and their characteristics
  – The field of experts and ‘gatekeepers’
  – The domain of the creation

• In this view without field & domain there is no creativity to talk about!
2. Creativity requires collaboration

• Very often creativity visibly requires the collaboration of multiple actors

• We can include here two instances:
  – Group or team creativity (short term, common in organisational settings)
  – Creative long-term collaborations (e.g. Pierre & Marie Curie, Sartre & Simone de Beauvoir, etc.)

• In the words of Barron (1999): ‘all creativity is collaboration’
3. Creativity requires division of labour

• There are though more invisible and pervasive forms in which the social is involved

• Becker’s (2008) notion of art world as produced by a network of people in cooperative activity

• The creator is not the isolated ‘author’ but fundamentally relies on division of labour (e.g. to produce materials used to create, etc.)
4. Creativity requires a social mind

• Finally one could say all this is good in its own right but surely creativity needs a ‘mind’

• Yes, but as it happens, this mind is more social than we often think of!

• Not only the knowledge we use to be creative is acquired through social means, but the mind itself is dialogical in nature, functions ‘in terms of the other’ (Marková, 2003)
“Even when the artist works in solitude all three terms are present [work, artist and audience]. The work is there in progress, and the artist has to become vicariously the receiving audience. He can speak only as his work appeals to him as one spoken to through what he perceived. He observes and understands as a third person might note and interpret”

(Dewey, 1934, p. 111)
Interim summary (2)

- Creative work goes through different stages, nuanced by individual & domain characteristics
- There is a need to surpass individualistic conceptions of the creative process and discuss its psycho-socio-cultural nature
- This has a series of practical implications, some of the most important having to do with the way we think about creativity enhancement
Brainwriting exercise

• Finding ways to enhance creativity requires creativity in itself!

• We will use the brainwriting technique to come up with many ideas about HOW TO ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO BE CREATIVE

• Write down up to 3 new ideas about how this could be done every time you receive a piece of paper; you will have 2 minutes for this!

• You are encouraged to read existing ideas
What is brainwriting?

• Brainwriting is also known as the 6/3/5 method
• In the ‘original’ formula 6 people write 3 ideas in 5 minutes, and then swap papers
• In this way we get a total of 108 ideas in 30 minutes!
• Variation: participants can be asked to write each time different ideas than those they find on the paper
Why to brainwrite?

• The technique is based on the same ‘quantity generates quality’ idea of brainstorming
• This is a group exercise and, as such, ideas are often built ‘on each other’

• Unlike brainstorming though there is no verbal exchange and this is both an advantage and a limitation
• Why?
Interim summary (3)

• Enhancing creativity often requires collaborative work

• Many techniques such as brainstorming and brainwriting are based on this

• Just as there is no creativity with only the ‘self’ and no ‘other’, there is no development of creativity in a social vacuum

• See Vygotsky’s ‘zone of proximal development’
Summing up the social approach

• Creativity’s trademark features of originality and value depend on ‘subjective reception’
• In its turn, subjective reception is shaped by broader frameworks of ‘cultural reception’
• Creative processes take place in a social mind
• Creativity requires a social world, collaboration and division of labour
• The enhancement of creativity can and should exploit these networks of social relations
So we can conclude with...

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• If you would like to know/read more I am happy to share articles (e-mail v.p.glaveanu@lse.ac.uk)


