Theories on creativity | literature review

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Introduction

This paper critically evaluates three pieces of literature on ' Creativity'. The paper is divided into three main sections. Each section will consist of the critical analysis of a piece of literature on creativity. Within each section will be subsections that consist of a summary, evaluation and conclusion. The summary as the name entails will summarize the main points of the literature; the evaluation sub-section consists of the critical analysis of keys points I found interesting in the literature and then a conclusion.

SECTION A

Source: Kaufman, R. C., & Sternberg, R. J. (2010). Constraints on Creativity: Obvious and not so Obvious. In R. C. Kaufman, & R. J. Sternberg, *The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity* (pp. pp. 467- 482). Cambridge; Cambridge University Press.

Summary

The main aim in this book chapter was to analyse and further understand the existing and accepted conceptions on the constraints of creativity. The book in its entirety focused on what creativity is and sought the reasons/factors behind its occurrences and hindrances. In an attempt to answer the question of ' what prevents people, process and products from being labelled as creative', the authors outlined and explained 8 constraints on creativity which originated from the very definition of creativity, human factors and environmental factors[1].

The authors revealed that creativity is often defined by novelty (originality, unique) and quality, a created product is most likely judged by its originality and usefulness. There added that there is a difficulty in judging what is deemed as creative, as judgement calls may differ across time, people, space, environments and situational constraints. The chapter explained the difficulties of measuring creativity, showing that there are constraints that exist in the locus of creativity. There are constraints in adjudging creativity in a person through his work, through the process of creativity or in the end product.

The authors further revealed that creativity can be constrained by the individual and his/her interaction with his/her present and past context. An individual's creative ability can be a result of his past history and environment.

Evaluation:

" What is creative at a particular time or place might not be creative in another" (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010, p. 473).

The main short coming of this book chapter in my opinion is the omission of potentially relevant information; the authors did not go the extra mile to identify other aspects of " The definition of creativity". They explained defintional constraints, telling us that creativity is defined differently across people, time , place, and situations (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010, p. 468). The authors' concept of creativity in this context refers to " novelty and usefulness"; surely these are not the only aspects that define what creativity is. Rehn & De Cock, (2009) challenged novelty and originality as key aspects

of creativity, they showed that creativity is not only about introducing something new but its " about identifying what is truly valuable and permananent in something" (p. 225). Blackberry; a smartphone company , that has been struggling for some time, now plans to bounce back into the competitive mobile phone market by reintroducting its traditional keyboard, that customers knew them for, in their upcoming models (The Independent, 2014). The creativity and innovation here involves reintroducing a pre-existing aspect of the phone design to the new models.

The authors' explanation on the constraining link between risk and creativity was interesting and new to me. They stated that " individuals may decide against creativity merely because it exposes them to risk that they deem unacceptable" (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010, p. 479). Also, that organizations are less likely to take on certain creative ideas or allow creativity because of the risk involved. Amid all the following; I found that certain statements by the authors were abit exaggerated and insufficiently proved. An example of such statements include " the more creative an idea is the more likely to arouse opposition". This statement is not necessarily true in all situations and environments, as there are few environments that encourage and welcome creative ideas, like Google and Cirque du Soliel. That being said the authors have been able to use the risk-reward ratio explanation to change my thinking about creativity in organizations; I find that some organizations that are open to creativity seem to take more risks and yield bigger rewards. Good examples include Google, Apple.

The book chapter was able present ideas that were consistent with my present knowledge on creativity. Take for instance; the idea that knowledge

can both encourage and hinder creativity was very interesting. The authors show us that what an individual knows about a domain can enable him to go beyond what is already known, however in contrast, knowledge makes it hard for individuals to think/see things in a novel way (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010, p. 474). A paper by De Bono, (1969), explained how creativity can be limited by a certain approach of thinking. Showing that vertical thinking involves sticking to a systematic set of knowledge or techniques in generating new ideas while lateral thinking involves exploring a multiple variety of knowledge or techniques in generating new ideas.

Another consistent idea presented by the authors is the internal constraints of creativity. It explains that creativity can be encouraged and hindered from within. They stated that an individual's creative ability is based on his ability to see things in a different way, his willingness to criticize his own work, his decision to overcome any obstacle, his motivation and his choice to be creative. (Amabile, 1998) stated that " within every individual, creativity is a function of three components: expertise, creative-thinking skills, and motivation".

Conclusion

The book chapter was well written and detailed in describing the different constraints on creativity. The authors clearly explained their aims, providing two questions on creativity to which they attempted to provide possible answers to. The authors offered possible answers that were more descriptive than analytical, moreover, majority of their ideas were very logical. Although the chapter provides relevant information on creativity constraints;

unfortunately it doesn't provide a lot of potential applications due to its descriptive nature.

SECTION B

Source: Rehn, A., & De Cock, C. (2009). Deconstructing Creativity. In T. Rickards, M. Runco, & S. Moger, *The Routledge Companion to Creativity* (pp. pg. 222-231). Oxford.

Summary:

The main aim of the book chapter was to explore the supressed dimensions and pre-concieved notions of creativity that focused on ' the new', on ' value, and ' organizational success'. The chapter was written to prove the need for a critical and philosiphical analysis in getting a grip on the aporia of creativity. The authors used a critical analysis tool called ' deconstruction' which was introduced by Jacquez Derrida. The deconstruction tool seeks out things/factors that have been suppressed by a hierarchical order, in the case of creativity; it seeks out factors that the dominant notions of creativity have hidden. The paper carries out three deconstructive moves on the notions of creativity.

The first is on novelty and progress. The authors question the assumption that creativity is centrally related to novelty and progress. Using a few examples they were able to identify that the notion of novelty is analytically problematic. Further stating that the praxis of creativity focuses more in achieving a goal, thereby strongly suggesting that novelty is not always the

overriding aspect to consider when achieving ideological goals. Aspects such as the reintroduction of pre-existing ideas can also be efficient.

The second deconstructive move is on originality and uniqueness. The authors challenged the dominant notion that creativity must have original properties, stating that " originality is a process and not an essential characteristic" (Rehn & De Cock, 2009, pp. 226-227). They emphasized on the importance of creativity through copying, imitating, and reproductive work. They went further to state that the process of creation is more creative than the end product itself, suggesting that there should not be too much focus on the characteristic role of originality and uniqueness in creativity as it is limits the scope of creativity.

The third deconstructive move is on recasting the ideology of creativity; which states that creativity is not necessarily as good and positive as it is widely percieved to be. The authors suggest that creativity is tied to a moral and ideological context. They explain that creativity can exist in negative ways, such as torture methods, fradulent activities and killing people, however, this negative aspects are hardly ever brought up. Kaufman & Sternberg, (2010), describes this as directing creativity toward the darkside.

Evaluation:

The ideas of the authors challenge the widely accepted notions of creativity. I agree with the suggestions of the first deconstrustive move on novelty and progress. Novelty should not be the central aspect of creativity when achieving a goal, as there is creativity in the implementation of pre-existing ideas. However, it should be noted that the application of this type of

creativity in organizations is not very popular as certain markets tend to demand new innovations rather than traditional or pre-existing ones. The definition of creativity truly differs across people as Kaufman & Sternberg, (2010) explained, the authors perception on creativity in this case is obviously different to the norm however these perceptions are not generally accepted ones.

The authors raised an interesting point that " originality is a process not an essential characteristic", I agree to a certain extent that the process of creation can be more creative than the end product, moreover, this cannot surely be the case in every domain. In technological markets, the consumers do not necessarily care about the process of creativity, there are mostly concerned about the originality and uniqueness of end product. In another domain, art for instance, originality is mostly seen in the process of creation rather than end product.

Despite, the authors description of deconstruction as an analytical tool, the chapter has not done alot in showcasing its actual analysis on the notions of creativity as it describes it would. The chapter seems to be more about the justification of the deconstructional tool itself than an analysis on the notions of creativity. The idea of deconstructing creativity is very good as it provides an alternative and challenging view to that of the dominating notions of creativity. It enables creativity researchers to go further in considering more factors that can possibly sharpen the concept of creativity. However, these chapter makes deconstruction come off as a presentation of silenced and unpopular opinions on creativity rather than an actual critical analysis. One can say that the authors' way of thinking is more lateral than vertical as they

find multiple and alternative ways in defining creativity. " Deconstruction may be a new way of playing the philosophers' game; yet it does not challenge the rules of the game ot the game as such" (Zima, 2002, p. 169).

Conclusion:

This book chapter was well written and efficient in explaining a different view on creativity. One that challenged the widely accepted notions of novelty and originality. Even though the idea of deconstruction wasn't put through to satisfaction; the authors did well in encouraging and challenging readers to go beyond the preconcieved notions of creativity and simply refuse to be spoon fed with widely accepted notions of creativity.

SECTION C

Source: Simonton, K. D. (2012). Fields, Domains, and Individuals. In M. M. (Ed), *Handbook of Organizational Creativity* (pp. pg. 67-86). London: Academic Press

Article summary

The main aim of this paper was to challenge the assumption that creativity is an individual thing. Drawing from Csikszentmihályi,(1999) systems perspective, the authors argue that creative production is a result of an interaction between three systematic components, namely, the domain, the field and the individual. The domain consists of a set of symbolic procedures and rules within an area of creativity. Domains represent a shaped culture or symbolic knowledge that is shared by a certain group of people or even the whole of humanity. Music, Mathematics, Art, and technology are examples of

domains. The authors explain that the set of symbolic knowledge, rules and procedures vary across different domains, adding that, symbolic knowledge in each domain continually evolves. The second component, the field, represents the gate keepers of the domain, they are responsible for judging whether an idea is good enough to be included in the domain. Such people include experts in that particular domain that give significance and relevance to ideas or products presented to them. The third component of the creative system is the individual; the individual(creator) draws on knowledge and information from the domain and then develops and produces an idea or product to be included into the domain. This idea or product could either be accepted or rejected by the field.

Evaluation:

The ideas in this book chapter were put through as expected, I agree with the author in the sense that creative products do not originate from an individual alone but from a contribution of other individuals. Haiven (2012), explained that creativity is a social and collaborative process, further stating that " every creative genius was part of a communitiy of peers and societies that supported him or her". It is logical to say that an individual taps from the knowledge and information previously contributed by others in a domain and utilizes it in producing his/her own variations and then gets judged by the field (in this case; community and society).

" Do individuals who enter a given discipline display dispositional traits and developmental experiences that line up with field and domain characteristics?"(pg. 77).

The author's explanation on the effects of dispositional traits and developmental experiences is logical and consistent with my knowledge on creativity. Creative individuals are indeed characterized by distinctive sets of skills, motives, interest, and values. These distinctive factors affect their placements within and across domains. An individual in the music domain might not have the same dispositional traits as one in a biology doman. Also it is possible to see that within the same domain, say academia, individuals can have more knowledge, more skills, more value than their peers. The effect of developmental experience on an individual's discipline placement was also well explained. I found this to be very consistent as Kaufman & Sternberg (2010) also identified under contextual contraints that an individual's placement or interest in a certain domain is affected by the individuals past and present context.

Conclusion

The main shortcoming in my opinion is the writing style adopted by the author. The author provided a few logical examples in this book chapter to help in driving his ideas through. While some were practical and relatable, others were abit unnecessary and over the top. Take for example, under the explanation of ' Domain', the author characterized a domain using concepts from Quantum Mechanics which to me was highly unnecessary and pointless to a reader without a scientific background. Overall the ideas of the author are very logical and applicable in an organizational context. It does not exactly tell you how to increase creativity in individuals, moreover, its explains the process of creativity.

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[1]These constraints included: definitional constraints, constraints on locus of creativity, time constraints, contextual constraints, internal constraints, resource constraints, task constraints, negative mechanisms for constraining creativity