

# My creative experience as a secretary education essay



Reflection is to recapture, ponder and evaluate one's direct experience (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985). Reflective practice plays a significant role in promoting personal development, since it allows people to learn from their experience constantly and provides valuable enlightenment for their future life and career. In other words, profound and regular reflection is an essential condition for effective learning, and a prerequisite to continuous personal development (Boud, Cressey and Docherty, 2006).

Given the importance of reflection, this essay will reflect upon my creative experience as a secretary in Vincent Villa Design. According to Hatton and Smith (2005), reflective writing can be divided into these four aspects: descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection and critical reflection. This model will be employed in the following three parts of main body:

In the Section 1, I will describe my creative idea generation in Vincent Villa Design, which is the combination of descriptive writing and descriptive reflection.

In the Section 2, I will conduct profound analysis about the nature, sources and impact of creativity, taking my creative experience in Vincent Villa Design as example. Also, I will evaluate the quality of my creative judgment and reveal its deficiencies; as well as presenting possible alternative to improve its effect. This part can be referred to as dialogic reflection,

In the Section 3, I will critically reflect upon what I have learned from this creative experience, and present its enlightenment for my future career as a manager. Evidently, critical reflection is involved in this part.

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## **Description of my creative idea generation in Vincent Villa Design**

### **Context and reason for my creativity**

Vincent Villa Design is a specialised decoration and design company for high-end villas in Beijing, China. I have once worked as a secretary and interpreter who handled formal documents and helped with business negotiation between designers and clients from French, Italy, Germany, India and of course, China.

Despite broad sources of customers and designers, the company failed to establish a series of formal document formats. But abundant documents were involved in each villa decoration project, e. g. contracts, engineering designs, formal letters and meeting records. All these documents must be in an order and easy to review from time to time, thus ensuring smooth project progress. Therefore, I started to develop a new pattern of formulating various documents.

### **Process of my creative idea generation**

Permitted by general manager, I have accomplished these four creativity procedures with the support of counsellors and designers.

First, established bilingual Minutes of Meeting in single profiles. Minutes of Meeting first reported the data, time, place, topic and attendees. In addition, each aspect of discussion was listed in the table one by one. Moreover, the Minutes of Meeting were sent to all attendees and the client himself within one working day, to ensure the timeliness of information transmission.

Second, designed new pattern of Decoration Contract and Design Contract with the counsellors. Since original contract had some incomplete clauses and incorrect English translations, I read it carefully and modified the diction while adding some new contract terms. Of course, I resorted to our consellor to ensure the preciseness of new contracts.

Third, provided unified business letters with the watermark of our company. For instance, all the notices for property management office and the clients themselves would be in unified pattern and labeled with the watermark of our company. Redesigned by our design department, such watermark could prevent some copies of our important letters and designs, thus protecting our corporate image.

Fourth, standardised all the technical terms commonly used in design papers. I translated the common terms of various design papers and entered them into computer. Each designer received such a list for reference so that their standardised terms could be understood more easily by foreign clients. Of course, they also provided kind support for my translation by explaining the meaning of some difficult terms. In addition, I also suggested that the design papers should be printed in different levels if necessary. For example, some good design papers could be published as an internal book, which could be used in preliminary contract negotiation to attract generous villa owners.

## **Table 1 Summarisation of My Creative Practices in Vincent Villa Design**

### **Items**

#### **My Creative Idea Generation in Respect to Formal Document Formats**

##### Context

With the setting of a villa decoration and design company, Vincent Villa Design, this creative activity involve general manager, designers and I.

##### Reason

The company lacks standard layout of formal documents, resulting in the difficulty of reviewing and understanding important business information.

##### My contribution

established bilingual Minutes of Meeting in single profiles

designed new pattern of Decoration Contract and Design Contract with the counsellor

provided unified business letters with the watermark of our company.

standardised all the technical terms commonly used in design papers

##### Outcome

My standardised document format ensured more smooth development of various projects, and higher satisfaction from extensive villa owners.

## **Analysis about the nature, sources and impact of creativity: evaluating the quality of my creativity in Vincent Villa Design**

Taking my creative experience in Vincent Villa Design as example, the following will review some theories explaining these three dimensions of creativity: nature, sources and impact. These theories will provide solid evidence for evaluating the quality of this creative practice, revealing its deficiency and presenting a better choice.

### **Nature of creativity**

Abundant management literatures have been attaching importance to the enhancement of creativity in workplaces (Villalba, 2008). For instance, Boden (2004) identifies creativity as the capability of coming up with new, astonishing and valuable ideas and artifacts. As stated by Bessant and Tidd (2007), creativity is to make and communicate meaningful new connections to provide new and unusual possibilities, different viewpoints as well as varied thinking ways, thus allowing us to generate and select alternatives.

Creativity can be of a combinational, exploratory or transformational nature (Boden, 2004). Among them, combinational creativity is to combine familiar ideas in an unfamiliar and interesting manner. This can bring more surprises. Normally, the outsider is not expected to win the Derby, while ideas X and Y are not expected to be combined. In reality, they have been recognised as mutually irrelevant. Combinational creativity can be witnessed in analogy, poetic imagery, visual collage, and juxtapositions of political ideas in cartoons. Although these conjoined ideas are not originally relevant, such an

interpretation builds a close or perhaps very close link between them, thus satisfying part of your surprise (Boden, 2004).

In many psychological literatures, to form unfamiliar combinations are acknowledged as the only choice of creativity. However, different implications are held by exploratory and transformational creativity. For exploratory creativity, highly valued ideas or structures can be produced. It need not adopt current style in an unthinking manner but search for and test some specific stylistic limits deliberately. For instance, a painter would exhibit his lifework retrospectively through chronological arrangement of canvasses, where the vivid process of exploratory creativity can be seen before your eyes. Otherwise, such an exhibition could have been arranged by a doting family member who has less sense than money. Moreover, exploratory creativity can also vary the adopted style while testing their limits and potentials. In other words, some constraints defining the style can be tweaked or altered slightly, for instance, in the retrospective exhibition mentioned above (Boden, 2004).

Different from exploratory creativity, transformational creativity varies the stylistic dimension to a higher degree. Since exploratory creativity varies original style slightly or superficially, the novel structure is still intelligible to gain immediate acceptance, instead of being rejected as absurd. But in transformational creativity, the new idea will not be accepted or even understood until many years later. For example, *Les Femmes d'Alger* by Picasso is criticised and hidden for some years before being exhibited. Despite their distinct natures, these three processes of creativity take place together in some occasions (Boden, 2004).

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My creative experience is a typical example of exploratory creativity. This is because I have seen the limits of original document style and tweaked it slightly. Such change is not as marked and unintelligible as that of transformational creativity, while it is not merely the simple combination of existing ideas or styles. In this sense, my creativity has accomplished the goal of a feasible exploratory creativity. As a result, standardised documents are widely used in various business links, thus contributing to the operation of a whole villa project. In addition, all the villa owners have perceived the more convenient services provided by our company. Therefore, my creative activity has realised the proper role and practical significance of exploratory creativity.

### **Sources of creativity**

Baldwin and Von Hippel (2009) state that producer model can be viewed as a dominant creativity mode. In other words, producer is a source of creativity. To be specific, it has been universally acknowledged that producers would provide the most creative design for consumers via on-sale goods and services. Evidently, producers seek profit from many users, who purchase and use a design developed by the producers. Therefore, more investment in a creative design can be afforded by a producer serving many clients than any single user. In this sense, producer-developed designs are assumed to have dominant position over user-developed designs in most business fields. It is argued that the expectation of profits is the incentives for producers to create. But producers will lose these profits if their creativities can be copied easily. Then subsidies or intellectual property rights must be provided to



producers so that they can control their creativities exclusively for a period of time (Baldwin and Von Hippel, 2009).

However, producer is not the only source of creativity, which can also originate from user firms or individuals. Creativities by single user individuals or firms have already become two increasingly significant alternatives for creativity model. Both producer and user creativity models have a different manner to acquire economic advantages in some occasions and disadvantages in others (Lundvall, 2010).

My creativity in Vincent Villa Design is just a typical example of producer-source creativity. In the process of this creative activity, I am a member of Vincent Villa Design, the producer who serves extensive villa owners to make profits. The success of my creativity practice has its root in the approval and support from general manager and colleague. Such creativities are motivated by our company's intention to gain profit and maintain good reputation. Having adopted standardised documents, our company provides better products and services to gain stronger customer satisfaction and attract a broader range of customers.

## **Impact of creativity**

For past decades, both organisational researchers and change management practitioners has paid increasing attention to the antecedents, processes and outcomes of creativity in organisations (Eskildsen et al., 1999). Evans and Lindsay (1999) point out that to establish a creative organisation has been viewed as a prerequisite to business excellence. In other words, creativity can exert positive impacts on personal and organisational development.

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However, unexpected risks can also be induced by unsuccessful creativity, which must be taken into full account while planning a creative process.

Table 1 Review about Creativity Theories

## **Field**

## **Researchers**

## **Statements**

Nature of creativity

Boden (2004)

the capability of coming up with new, astonishing and valuable ideas and artifacts

Bessant and Tidd (2007)

make and communicate meaningful new connections to provide new and unusual possibilities, different viewpoints as well as varied thinking ways, thus allowing us to generate and select alternatives

Boden, 2004

of a combinational, exploratory or transformational nature

Sources of creativity

Baldwin, C. and Von Hippel, E. (2009)

Producer is a source of creativity

Lundvall, B. A. (2010)

The increasingly important model is user creativity.

Impact of creativity

Eskildsen et al., 1999

Both organisational researchers and change management practitioners has paid increasing attention to the antecedents, processes and outcomes of creativity in organisations

Evans and Lindsay (1999)

To establish a creative organisation has been viewed as a prerequisite to business excellence

For instance, my creative document formats has allowed Vincent Villa Design to present its stance and attitude more clearly. This creative practice also promotes the communication and collaboration among general manager, colleagues and I. As stated above, the watermark used in business letters is redesigned by the design department, while some difficult terms are explained by experienced designers in our company. All these people take initiative in providing support for my creativity, thus achieving its good outcome.

However, the users of our services fail to be involved in my creative process. By combining the feedback and support from producers (our company) and users (villa owners), I could have generated better effect of creative practice.

And many villa owners would have perceived that their feelings and suggestions were valued. In turn, they would show stronger preference for our delicate services and recommend it to their friends. Then my creative contribution would have played a better role in enhancing our corporate image. In conclusion, the better choice is to combine the feedbacks from producers and users.

### **Reflection on what I have learned from my and others' creative contribution**

Kolb (1984) highlights reflection as a cyclic learning process which covers these four links such as concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation (to see the figure below). The former three stages have been interpreted in above analysis, and the following explains how I will conduct creativity practice actively in future.

Source: Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning experience as a source of learning and development*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Thanks to my creative experience mentioned above, I have gained full awareness about the significance and impact of creativity. In addition, I have also perceived the fact that a successful creativity cannot be accomplished by myself only, which must rely on the combination of various personalities and abilities in a harmonious team. This provides great enlightenment for my academic year and future career. Once I am assigned to a position with greater responsibility, e. g. a manager, I will encourage all my subordinates to provide timely and distinctive advices by rewarding those active creators via subsidy or annual bonus. In other words, a good platform and

atmosphere will be provided so that every team member shows intention to generate creative ideas. Furthermore, I would expand my personal relationships with managers of homogenous companies and potential clients while maintaining normal working relationships with them. More efforts will be made to improve my personality charm and management competence, thus creating a more adhesive team.

Furthermore, Wallas Stage Model will be employed in my creative process.

Wallas (1926) outlines that a creative process mainly covers these four stages such as preparation, incubation, illumination and verification.

Preparation is to assess the problem initially; incubation thinks about the problem unconsciously; illumination comes to an idea generated from the thinking of incubation stage; and finally, verification is to verify, adapt and optimise the idea consciously. Similar to the model by Kolb (1984), this creative process is also a benign cycle in which every stage is independent and complementary for each other. In other words, the full cycle must be completed to ensure the effectiveness of creativities.

Obviously, these three stages of preparation, incubation and illumination have been involved in my creativity in Vincent Villa Design. However, I fail to incorporate verification to my creative process. This is because I have not attempted to modify the new document formats constantly to allow an experience of our surprisingly changing services. Therefore, I would conduct more critical thinking in future career as a manager, and thereby realise a benign cycle of creativity with great efforts.

## Conclusion

This essay reflects upon my experience of establishing creative document formats in Vincent Villa Design, which can be referred to as exploratory creativity. General Manager, designers and I have been involved in this creativity, but I fail to ask villa owners for their advices in advance. Better alternative for my creativity is to combine producer creativity and user creativity, i. e. seeking feedback and help from both colleagues and clients. Such reflection allows me to gain a broader sight into my creative contribution and learn more for my future career as a manager. I would build formal working relationships and personal friendships with my subordinates, homogenous service providers and the most importantly, customers.

National Advisory Committee on Creative and Cultural Education (NACCCE, 1999) reported these four characteristics of creative process: imaginative to generate something original; purposeful to put imagination into practice for some targets; produce original ideas related to one's own and others' previous work or output in some specific field; create values for a particular objective by generating ideas and deciding the most appropriate one.

Therefore, I would make all attempts at accomplishing a benign cycle of imaginative, purposeful, original and valuable creativities. In my future career as a manager, Kolb learning cycle and Wallas Stage Model will be adopted to enhance my creative management competency.