

CREATIVITY: A VENTURE WITHIN THE COMPANY

When complexity increases and becomes long-term, the company needs to boost creativity– the aptitude of finding new solutions to a specific problem. This was one of the conclusions of the World Economic Forum 2006 which took as its theme "The creative imperative". One of the articles published set the tone: "In the twentieth century, businesses concentrated on managing risk [...] and made transactions and processes predictable. In this century, businesses will need to tame two more amorphous foes: uncertainty and doubt".¹ Five years later, complexity is still at the centre and creativity remains in the cracks. There is a reason for this. The challenges facing companies are difficult. We have to ask what costs, risks, processes, rhythms, or changes in individual or collective organisation creativity entails. Constraints which slow it down can be perceived within the company while difficulties relating to the impossibility of defining it are equally present.

Creativity is slowed by constraints within the company when the latter fails to decouple industrial organisation from human organisation; in other words, certain rationalisation and standardisation processes which can be efficiently applied to industrial production lines prove counterproductive when unconditionally transposed to individuals. The cult of statistics, a negative view of failure, the demand for constant productivity, short-termism, the constant noise of information flows are all "industrial approaches" which stunt human creativity and relegate it to obscurity. The stereotyping of business schools, which establish their own classification by comparing the initial salaries of their alumni and mass produce managers whose prime motivation is to earn a great deal of money fast, is another factor in this reductionist "industrialisation of intelligence". Certain amalgamations derive from the same tendency. To regard individuals as "human resources" is to confuse muscle with brain. Man is a source. To confuse innovation with creativity is to forget that innovation needs creativity but that creativity does not necessarily need innovation. To confuse creativity with youth is to forget that pianists and managers are better at fifty than at thirty. To confuse creativity with producing ideas is to forget that an idea is not a solution and that an idea and a piece of work are separated by a lengthy process of implementation which requires actions and a sense of the job. And the job is creativity, although many authors² consider that creativity is first and foremost an aptitude that everyone has and wants to cultivate.

Rather than attempt to circumscribe creativity, it is simpler to define a few principles that all great creators apply in art and in the sciences, as well as in economics and politics. These principles of creativity, which already exist within the company, are rational and accessible. They could be consciously reinforced and circulated as fractals – the almost identical shapes that exist at every level of a structure. Here are four principles.

¹ N. Noria and T. Stewart, *Risk, Uncertainty and Doubt*, Harvard Business Review, February 2006.

² M. Runco (2007), *Creativity – Theories and Themes: Research, Development and Practice* – R. Florida (2007), *The Flight of the Creative Class* – D. Pink (2006), *A Whole New Mind* – W. Bennis & al. (2000), *Douglas Mc Gregor revisited – Managing the human side of the enterprise* – M. Csikszentmihalyi (1996), *Creativity* – H. Gardner (1993), *Creating minds*.

Be aware and listen

Being aware and listening is more than just listening. It means being on the alert, aiming for a deeper level through analysis, intuition, gesture or failure. As Pierre Boulez said, vigorous and exacting thinking tends to want to create its own material, and, vice versa, new material inevitably entails a renewal of thought.³ A creative person is capable of both crafting and listening and of allowing himself to be crafted by the work he creates. This creation is a metaphor for the colleague's assignment, the manager's team or the company vis-à-vis its leaders. Being aware and listening means capturing the minuscule signs of an organisation or changing a single note in a symphony during composition; this is statistically insignificant in terms of quantity but its quality may influence the whole.

Practise a constant to-ing and fro-ing

As Henri Matisse said, everything in painting is a question of organisation.³ If you want red to be redder, adding red is pointless. You need to change the adjacent colour. In order to be conscious of this, you have to come and go among the colours. Do you want the talented Y people to be less demanding and commit long-term to the company? Why not invest more in the adjacent colour, the Y people whose degrees are less prestigious and whose potential is certainly under-estimated (how many great writers have a doctorate in literature)? This to-ing and fro-ing represents a fertile break, mental flexibility and a practice that alternates between compliance and transgression, the day-to-day and the long-term, task and role, tension and resolution.

Set constraints: balance, coherence, clarity, concision

Igor Stravinsky wrote that he needed constraints that would give him a framework for invention.³ In the face of the constraints it experiences – competition, complexity, transparency, productivity – the creative approach demands the setting of its own constraints in its work. Confronted, for example, with the numerous demands of the written press, the committed journalist's challenge is surely to seek a simultaneous balance between the objectivity of the facts and subjectivity of the sources, a coherence between the immediacy of his article and the actual progress of events, in clear and concise language. Such are the dilemmas of creativity.

Pursue an ideal

The knowledge societies, which put the economy at the centre and the human element at the centre of that centre, generate a complexity which demands more creativity from a growing number of individuals: a challenge, a venture within the company, the road to which involves a better decoupling of production and machine processes from human processes which need a more balanced mingling of quantitative methods and qualitative approaches. Being aware and listening, to-ing and fro-ing, setting constraints and pursuing an ideal are qualitative principles which, while they do nothing to lessen uncertainty and doubt, do incorporate them as driving forces because they give rise to trust, respect, desire and exigence.

Claudio Chiacchiari, founder of *Saisir le temps*®

Translator: Louise Bigwood

³ P. Boulez (2005), *Leçons de musique* – H. Matisse (2005), *Ecrits et propos sur l'art* – I. Stravinsky (2000), *Poétique musicale*.