

Experiencing Creativity in Organisations: A Practice Approach

Ajit Nayak

In this paper I ask the question: What is the practice of creativity in organisations? I draw on “practice” theories to define creativity at the individual level as novel and appropriate ways of accomplishing tasks, and at the organisational level as the operating logic and internalised dispositions that inform activities. By integrating the two levels, I suggest that we are better able to understand the dynamics of creativity. Empirically I investigate creativity in a large UK supermarket retailer undergoing major change and transformation. My study reveals four domains of contestation that characterise the practice of creativity: intrinsic-extrinsic motivation; pleasure-control; organisational politics; and personal-corporate morality. I discuss how managers experience the tensions within each domain and argue that personal morality plays an important role in enabling creativity.

© 2008 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

In spite of much discussion about creativity and innovation, few managers can live up to the idealised creative genius. While most managers may not even see themselves as a creative genius, they do demonstrate a remarkable ability to respond creatively and cope with organisational uncertainties. In this article, I focus on what managers do creatively in response to organisational situations. I provide insights into managers’ creativity by drawing on two unexplored avenues. First, I draw on a body of theoretical work that has recently gained prominence in academic writings on management. These ideas, broadly labelled a “practice” approach, form a cluster of theoretical insights into “human doings” in an organisational context. Second, empirically I draw upon insights from the supermarket retailing industry, a sector that does not play a major role in our understanding of creativity. The retailing industry is generally associated with innovations in supply chains and distribution (e.g. Wal-Mart, Amazon and Tesco). However, I argue that a study of supermarkets offers insights into managerial and organisational creativity that has not been explored and has the potential to inform companies in other industries.

The notion of creativity articulated in this paper combines the two levels of analysis evident in the extant creativity literature – individual and organisational level – by drawing on practice theories.¹ Traditionally, individual creativity is defined as a person’s ability to think beyond the obvious and produce something novel and appropriate. However, creativity for individuals in organisations is something that gets a job done, rather than being merely novel and appropriate. Managers do not “make up” something that is novel and appropriate; they accomplish something in a novel and appropriate way. As an accomplishment, creativity is the ability to “make do”, to search for simplicity, to be *metistic*, to demonstrate *economy of effort* in achieving maximum results by being sensitive to the “opportune moment”.² In this sense, creativity for managers is inseparable from the everyday struggles and pleasures that they experience. Traditionally, creativity at the organisational level is defined as the culture, structure and processes that nurture individual creativity. In one of the early empirical studies, Pelz and Andrews suggest that one cannot look at the individual in isolation from the organisational context. “High creative ability might be likened to a hardy seed, which yields blossoms when sown on fertile ground, but only thorns when falling on infertile ground.”³ Some of the frequently-stated organisational correlates of creativity are a culture that encourages ideas and enterprise from all parts of the organisation and is tolerant of failure, non-hierarchical and non-bureaucratic structures that reward and encourage flexibility and cross-fertilisation of ideas, and processes that enable ideas to be systematically evaluated and championed. These cultural, structural and processual factors have been popularised through exemplary organisations such as 3M and IDEO.⁴ To this definition of organisational creativity I add the notion of “operating logic” which forms systems of durable, transposable dispositions and trajectories that engender “an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production”.⁵ By operating logic, I mean the “feel for the game”; the everyday creativity of managers is brought into view by way of their underpinning operational logic. In this paper I draw upon these definitions of individual and organisational creativity to analyse how individuals experience creativity in organisations.

Managers do not “make up” something that is novel and appropriate; they accomplish something in a novel and appropriate way

Empirically, I analyse the creativity imperative facing UK supermarkets. Although the industry has been dominated by the “big four” – Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury and Safeway-Morrison – since the 1990s, there has been a wave of innovations by Tesco giving it an ever-increasing march on its competitors.⁶ The rise and dominance of Tesco in recent years and its capability to innovate constantly has forced other supermarkets to innovate. Most supermarkets realise that they need to facilitate individual creativity and engage in transforming their internal culture, structure and processes if they are to remain competitive. In spite of the drive for creativity in the supermarket industry, empirical studies on creativity are generally dominated by technology-orientated industries and companies, such as 3M, Microsoft and HP, as well as R&D labs in technological companies, for example, Xerox Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC) and Silicon Valley and historical studies of Edison’s Menlo Park, as well as famous inventors such as Edison and Marie Curie.⁷ In recent years, “creative industries” have become part of creativity research. Although the aim of the creative industries is to bridge the gap between art and industry, they are at present dominated by the art, media, design, advertising, film and games industries.⁸ Technological and creative industry studies have no doubt enriched our understanding of creativity, but they do exclude a wide range of companies. In this paper I aim to redress the imbalance in creativity studies by looking at creativity at Unico,¹ one of the largest supermarkets in the UK.

¹ Names have been changed in order to keep the organisation and its managers anonymous.

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات