Industrial Marketing Management 42 (2013) 113–124

Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Industrial Marketing Management

Competence integration in creative processes[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 4 April 2011
Received in revised form 20 September 2012
Accepted 24 October 2012
Available online 23 November 2012

Keywords:
Advertising agency
Competence
Creativity
Integration

ABSTRACT

Research on creativity focuses extensively on it as a personal skill or discusses how an organization can contribute to a creative environment for its staff. Rather than referring to the organization as the environment, this paper concerns interorganizational and intraorganizational interaction between different creative individuals who together shape the creative process and output. Specifically, the paper focuses on the integration of new competences into present structures, thereby emphasizing competences *in use* in creative processes. Two case studies from the advertising sector illustrate the integration of competences obtained through interorganizational interaction and the hiring/development of staff. The paper concludes that the integration of new competence is path dependent. As a new competence is added, the creative process becomes increasingly complex and marked by representation rather than participation in creative processes. An overlap between competences is necessary if they are to add to the output. This paper contributes to research on creativity at interorganizational and intraorganizational levels through exploring differences between competences per se and competences in use in regard to the integration of competence in creative processes. It also contributes to research on advertising through its depiction of competence integration among advertising agencies.

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1. Introduction

This paper discusses the integration of new competences into present structures and its effects on creative processes. Competence is defined as knowledge and skills of individuals (Andrews, 1971; Mooney, 2007), and competence integration in this context refers to the coordination of new and existing competences, based on their interaction, to obtain a joint output. Creativity refers to the capability of developing novel yet appropriate solutions (Amabile, 1988). The literature on creativity typically describes it as a set of personal skills, and organizations are seen merely as the environment that may support the creativity of the organizational members (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Cummings, 1965). This paper views the environment as consisting of interacting individuals (cf. Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993) on intraorganizational and interorganizational levels. The creative process is hence influenced by the competences of its participating individuals and the way they interact. The purpose of the paper is *to describe and discuss how the integration of new competence affects the creative processes of firms*. Such integration takes place in two ways: through internal competence development (the hiring or development of staff) and through collaboration with external parties. The paper illustrates the integration of competence at advertising agencies. The following questions are discussed:

- How does adding competence affect the creative process?
- What impact does the choice between developing competence internally or in collaboration have on the creative process?

The research gap the paper intends to fulfill is that of the relation between competence integration and creativity. The paper pools research on creative processes and interaction, while discussing them from a competence integration point of view. The description of the creative process as interactional indicates that different individuals impact one another, and hence new competences may change present creative processes. The objectives of the research are to explain the difference between competences per se and competences in use in the integration of competences into creative processes, and to provide an alternative view of creativity on the organizational level, as processed in interaction among intraorganizational and interorganizational individuals.

The paper contributes to research on creativity through discussing it on the interaction level and on interorganizational levels. Further, the paper contributes to research on advertising (cf. Nyilasy & Reid, 2009) through connecting ideas on creativity with empirical findings relating to the practices of advertising agencies: The different ways of integrating new competence in creative processes are illustrated by two case studies about advertising agencies. The designation of advertising agency refers to companies that focus on designing and

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[☆] The author would like to thank associate professors Torben Damgaard, University of Southern Denmark, and Anna Bengtsson, Uppsala University, for valuable comments on a previous version of this paper. She also gratefully appreciates the comments of two anonymous reviewers and the special issue editors, which helped her to improve the paper further.

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0019-8501/$ – see front matter © 2012 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.
http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.indmarman.2012.11.009

producing marketing campaigns, strategies, and packages to help other firms in their marketing communication. Compared to creativity in processes of innovation, advertising emphasizes creativity as artistic skills, with a focus on complementary professional competences that together develop a shared output (Reid & Rotfeld, 1976; Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Hence, each individual has a predefined role on a team that possesses complementary competences for each creative process (i.e. advertising campaign project).

The competences of advertising agencies have traditionally resided in project leaders who manage individual campaigns and customer contacts, art directors who decide on visual ideas, and copywriters who produce texts (Fletcher, 1990). These competences are supplemented by the skills of assistant art directors, graphic designers and production managers in the production of campaigns. Printing has often been kept out of advertising agencies, and photography, public relations, communication, and sometimes copywriting have usually been contracted with freelancers or bureaus specialized in these areas of competence. New ways of communicating, dominated by the Internet as a marketplace and social media as communication tools, have put pressure on advertising firms to integrate new competences with present ones (Sasser, Koslow, & Riordan, 2007). The new competences include technological skills that also contribute to the creative process through providing ideas for solutions as well as artistic presentation. This development is marked by agencies that are reconsidering their competences, how to develop their businesses (Hermelin, 2009), how to design individual campaigns, and how final customers act in response to marketing (Sasser, 2008).

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, the theoretical point of departure is described. The theoretical foundation of the paper is based on research on creativity and on competence interaction and integration. Following the section on theory, the method used is described. Next, the two cases are presented. Thereafter, the cases are analyzed. The paper ends with a concluding discussion that includes managerial implications and ideas for further research.

2. Theory

2.1. Creativity

Creativity appears as a concept in different disciplines, including architecture, psychology, and management (Ackoff & Vergara, 1981). It refers to the generation of something new, yet useful (Stein, 1963; West, Kover, & Caruana, 2008). The novelty dimension of creativity is closely related to innovativeness (Amabile, 1988), while the usefulness describes a wider audience's acceptance of what is created. The criteria of appropriateness and productivity (Daniels, 1974) indicate that creativity need not refer to the most far-reaching idea with the highest degree of newness. Rather, creativity implies coherence and an ability to win the approval of external parties (Sasser, 2008). In advertising, the creativity of an idea is judged on how positively others respond to it (Armbruster, 1974; Till & Baack, 2005; West et al., 2008) as well as on artistic novelty (Reid & Rotfeld, 1976).

Literature on creativity refers extensively to creativity as the *competence* of individuals (Guilford, 1950; Shalley, Zjou, & Oldham, 2004). Amabile (1988, 1997) describes creativity along the dimensions of expertise, motivation, and originality, and various studies on innovation/entrepreneurship and creativity refer to it as a characteristic of the innovator or entrepreneur (Im & Workman, 2004; Knox, 1990; Majaro, 1988). Advertising research discusses creativity as a competence expected by organizational members. Unsworth (2001) uses the concept of *professional creatives* to emphasize how creativity is expected by organizational members based on their positions as project leaders, art directors, and copywriters.

2.2. Creativity and the organization

In addition to describing the creativity as a competence, researchers often consider how an organization constitutes the environment surrounding and supporting the creativity of individuals (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Sasser and Koslow (2008) refer to creativity in advertising from three different perspectives - people, place, and process - thus indicating that creativity has a personal-skill, a contextual, and a process dimension. Ekvall (1996) emphasizes the importance of an organizational climate characterized by risk-taking, dynamism, freedom, and debates for individuals to be creative. Amabile et al. (1996) state that work group support, challenging work, organizational encouragement, freedom, and sufficient resources positively impact creativity. With reference to the above, Andriopoulos (2001) summarizes research on how an organization may support the creativity of individuals in terms of organizational climate, leadership style, organizational culture, resources and skills, and structure and system. In addition to the provision of sufficient resources, both Andriopoulos (2001) and Amabile et al. (1996) posit that a low level of organizational structure and a high degree of freedom encourage creativity.

Rather than as a supporting environment, the organization could be viewed as consisting of its members. Such a perspective emphasizes how creative processes are shared among interacting individuals. While individual actors may possess the competences that delimit what activities can be performed, the execution of activities involves several actors that inspire one another and interact to enhance the quality or value of outputs. Thus, the sphere of interaction is the accomplishing unit for the output (Watson, Michaelsen, & Sharp, 1991). Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) refer to the creative process as a social one, and Woodman et al. (1993) emphasize that the creativity of a group is not merely the sum of the individuals' creativity. Thompson (2003) describes methods to enhance creativity on group levels and thereby emphasizes interaction among individuals and group composition as important ingredients.

In advertising, different competences (cf. Unsworth, 2001) are expected to contribute to the creative process. Each actor (as copywriter, art director, and so forth) contributes her/his part rather than constituting a separate entity. Their outputs (Armbruster, 1974; Till & Baack, 2005; West et al., 2008) are judged on the organizational (or interorganizational) level rather than ascribed to individual performance (Weinzimmer, Michel, & Franczak, 2011). While scholars such as Woodman et al. (1993), Thompson (2003), and Weinzimmer et al. (2011) recognize the interaction in creative processes and point to shared output, the literature rarely considers *interorganizational* interaction. Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003) adopt a social-network perspective on creativity but consider output as individual. In addition, the literature on creativity does not treat the integration of new competences in creative processes, but treats organizations foremost as static, and as stated above, often only unilaterally impacting the creativity of the individual through constituting a supporting environment. Fig. 1 depicts the creative process based on interaction.

2.3. Interaction and coordination of competence

In interaction, individuals complement each other and need to be coordinated. The concept of coordination often refers to how activities are organized and co-organized within a company. It may, however, also include interaction on interorganizational levels. As discussed by Piercy (2009b), relationships with external parties need to be reflected in the internal coordination of activities, and interaction with external parties also needs to be coordinated. The literature has cited conflicts of interests and problems of control in interorganizational interaction to highlight the coordination aspects of competence (Andersen, Christensen, & Damgaard, 2009; Andersen & Drejer, 2009; Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Pearce & Robbins, 2008). Referring to the risk of conflict

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