International Journal of Business and Management Study – IJBMS
Volume 2 : Issue 2 [ISSN : 2372-3955]
Publication Date: 19 October, 2015

Creativity in everyday organizational life

Frederik Hertel

Abstract: **creativity is (e.g. Gadner, 1993) often connected with; arts, science, technology, high-end products developed (cf. Plucker, Beghetto & Dow, 2004) by a gifted genius during long, complicated, isolated, challenging and mythical procedures. But, what about ordinary people doing common work in their everyday organizational life? Would it make any sense to describe them as creative as well? Would it e.g. make any sense to describe workers doing industrial cleaning in e.g. our food-industry as creative? In the following article we will introduce a case study in which workers doing industrial cleaning is evaluated in terms of creativity.**

Keywords: creativity, assessment of creativity, everyday organizational life and case study.

I. Introduction

The case study applied in this article is a company specialized in industrial cleaning in the food industry. The manager of the team will obviously be anonymous in this article, but for convenience we will here use the pseudonym Theo, whenever we need to refer to him. The cleaning company hiring Theo deliver industrial cleaning for several Danish companies producing food products. Among the challenges Theo face, is a staff composed by ethnic Danes with traditional attitudes, and a mixed group of migrants from mainly east European countries. The existence of performance contracts creates a cross-pressure between making money for the cleaning company, meeting the expectations of the industry producing food products, and the working conditions/well-being of the cleaning staff. Industrial cleaning in the food industry must meet the demands and standards of the food control, but apparently this still seems to leave some room for negotiating the definition of purity. Despite it is not being the essential point here we note that Douglas (2004) famous anthropological work is a good departure for a discussion of the demarcation line between clean and unclean.

Theo and his staff have experienced a number of changes introduced by the interplay between e.g. the financial crises, increased global competition, outsourcing of jobs, shifts in the population composition etc. In the future Theo and his team will probably continue to face great challenges that will demand continually organizational changes. This actualize Kirkeby's (2009) description of the leader as someone facing a on going warlike situation where s/he must be able to handle contradicting demands, interests, and expectations. According to Benson (1977), such contradictions might actually lead to organizational dynamics and development. This might be the reason why we in our case study notice that Theo is not trying to establish organizational harmony or try to avoid internal conflicts. Instead he unfolds self-management in order to handle his own conflict anxiety, in an attempt to use the organizational (internal and external) conflicts, paradoxes, contradictions and disharmonies as constructively as possible. In other words Theo seems to recognize that he leads an organization never being in balance, and always occupied with organizational changes. In such a changeable situation todays Achilles heel or crop failure could in fact turn out to be the answer of tomorrow's challenges.

One of the consequences of the cross-pressure described above, is e.g. a continuously need for developing new time reducing procedure e.g. making it possible to fulfil the performance contract, to make time for cleaning areas not being part of the daily routines and to reduce the staff's overtime. Whenever time is accumulated, it somehow just seems to vanish, and therefore Theo and his team are in a constant search for methods, techniques and procedures enabling accumulation of time. We will in this article focus on this process of constant search for new methods, techniques and procedures in order to obtain a deeper understanding of creativity in the everyday organizational life.

II. The research question

The intention with this conference paper is to create a deeper understanding of creativity. In order to do so we will challenge the assumption that creativity is connected with; arts, science, technology, high-end products developed by a gifted genius during long, complicated, isolated, challenging and mythical procedures. We will challenge the understanding by address the question: can ordinary people doing ordinary work in their everyday organizational life be seen as creative? In our case study we will focus our attention on workers doing industrial cleaning in our food-industry in order to determine whether they can be seen as creative in their everyday organizational life.

III. The act of creativity

The present article is based on a case study conducted in a company specialized in industrial cleaning. The methodology applied here runs from the research field we (cf. Fast, Hertel & Clark, 2014) name: qualitative economics. During nearly three years we have followed Theo and his team in order to conduct participant observation, formal and informal interviews. Originally we planed to conduct extended participant observations but we had to change plans since industrial cleaning in the food industry is done under great time pressure in a risky environment combining wet floors with chemistry, sharp knifes and heavy machine parts. We did not find any need of being in the wrong place causing injuries or delaying anyone during their work. So we reduced participant observations to a minimum and spend many hours on

Frederik Hertel, Ph.D.
Aalborg University
Denmark

conducting, typing and analysing both informal and formal interviews.

In the beginning of our case study we mainly focused on Theo and his ability to build a strong team of a staff composed by ethnic Danes with traditional attitudes, and a mixed group of migrants from mainly east European countries. Soon we understood that our case study involved a field being a far more complex, challenging and interesting than we had imagined. Industrial cleaning is not only requiring competences and skills but also the workers ability to plan, conduct and evaluate their work. Despite the short time spend on on-the-job-training of workers we consider industrial cleaning being a profession. Basically cleaning assignments is split into minor areas, tasks and procedures with estimated time consumption. New team members have short time of training before they are expected to meet deadlines. If one consumes more than estimated time one is either forced to reduce the time consumption of other tasks or forced to include ones spare time. In some cases the cleaning company have to pay overtime but managers are instructed to do whatever to avoid overtime. Industrial cleaning can to some extend be described as a time-game with all actors occupied calculating and reducing time consumption in order to meet deadlines and fulfil demands from the food industry) and the authorities. During our case studies we were impressed by ingenuity applied for develop new ways of thinking, methods, techniques making it possible for Theo and his team to reduce time consumption, meet the expectations of the food industry and at the same time deliver quality of cleaning. We started wondering: will it make sense to describe workers doing industrial cleaning as creative? We obviously also saw this case study as an opportunity to brake the traditional spell connecting creativity with; arts, science, technology, high-end products developed by a gifted genius during long, complicated, isolated, challenging and mythical procedures. Studying creativity obviously requires an understanding of the phenomenon being studied. We understand the social reality as a social construction and, cf. the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (2005 & 2007), we perceive the social reality as relational.

In order to understand creativity we will find inspiration in Plucker, Beghetto and Dow (2004, p. 90) defining creativity as: "the interaction among aptitude, process, and environment by which an individual or group produce a perceptible product that is both novel and useful as defined within a social context". The only thing we need to add to the definition described is that creativity, in our case study, is not only a perceptible product but also the act of creativity. The act of creativity could, the terms of Plucker, Beghetto and Dow be described as the perceptible process. We deal with creativity whenever something (a perceptible product or process) is recognised as novel and useful by someone belonging to the social context or domain being studied. This means that we need (cf. Bourdieu, 1990 & 2002) the habitus of an actor from (cf. Baer, 2008 & 2011) the social context or domain we study in order to determine whether a perceptible product is an expression of creativity.

We do not think that the understanding of creativity produced in one domain or social context can be transferred to another domain or social context without (cf. Adorno, 2008) leaving some kind of residues. We do reject the assumption that a concept of creativity produced in one domain or social context cannot inspire us to gain an understanding of creativity in another domain or social context. By applying this two opposite arguments we argue: a) the concept of creativity produced in one domain or social context cannot be transferred to another without producing serious problems and b) the concept of creativity produced in one domain or social context can be useful inspiration while studying creativity in another domain or social context. In order to evaluate creativity we intend to find inspiration in divergent test (cf. Plucker & Makel, 2010, p. 52) involving categories such as: fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration of ideas. Convergent thinking is dealing with problems or challenges having one fixed or right answer. We here include concepts from divergent thinking since the challenge of saving time is an open-ended problem without only one right answer or solution. Obviously divergent thinking is (cf. Runco, 2008) not identical with creativity but it indicates creativity being involved. We will develop the concepts needed for analysing creativity by involving actors from the social context studied. In this conference paper, (cf. Runco, 1999), we will work with the following assumption: fluency can in this setting be understood as ones ability to produce a number of ideas (responses) in relation to open-ended problems. Flexibility is here immediately seen as ones ability to change the meaning of something. It could e.g. be conducting a reinterpretation changing what, European semiology, could describe as changing the value of something. Originality is indeed involved if a perceptible product or process is considered new for someone having a habitus reflecting the social context we study.

IV. The north side

Industrial cleaning can be seen as encircled by two very different (cf. Gennep, 1999 & Turner, 1995) rituals. The first ritual is taking place right after the factory workers separate the machines, end the day and leave work. At this time the place is handled over to Theo and his cleaning team and until dawn the place symbolically belongs to them. During this period workers have to clean the areas, knifes, machines and get everything back in place before the morning ritual starts. Industrial cleaning can basically be compared with doing the dishes. First the plates are cleaned in water, afterwards soap (chemistry) is applied and finally the plates are rinsed in water. But unlike doing the dishes industrial cleaning includes a forth stage where e.g. knifes are disinfected by applying chemistry. Industrial cleaning is basically about removing the visible and invisible dirt in as short time as possible. At the visible level the cleaning team must leave the area visible nice and clean. At the invisible level cleaning must ensure the bacteriological level being below the limits established by regulations and, in some cases, by retailers buying food products. Each staff member is instructed to control own work in order to ensure quality of work. During the night Theo will be cleaning, managing his team and controlling the quality of

the work being done by his staff. In case of illness Theo will either have to take over or convince someone else to do overtime.

In the morning a new ritual is conducted involving Theo and officials from the factory. In about an hour managers, laboratory technicians and sometimes workers will be make tests to determine whether cleaning is acceptable and the areas symbolically can be handled back to the factory and the production team. In case e.g. knifes, machine parts, area etc. are not clean Theo will have to make adjustments quickly. If we at this particularly point, when the place is symbolically handled back to the factory, evaluate industrial cleaning in terms of creativity we will obviously be evaluating the results of industrial cleaning. Testing e.g. a smart watch, car or a chair in terms of creativity would make perfectly sense. But we cannot make sense of evaluating the result of industrial cleaning in terms of creativity involving the categories: fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration of ideas. Industrial cleaning as a product is useful but it is quite difficult to describe it as novel. Exploring industrial cleaning as involving creativity require a focus on the processes taking place between the two rituals described above.

One might consider industrial cleaning just being a matter of repeating certain routines or acts involving the four stages of cleaning described above. But repeating routines or mental schemes will just be what Theo symbolically describes as creating north sides. The north side is a metaphor for a spot, a place or a thing not being noticed by the cleaner and therefore not being properly cleaned. It is not possible to avoid north sides but if one avoids fixed cleaning schemes one avoids continuously repeating the same north side. Changing cleaning techniques, strategies and methods means changing north side. Whenever this is done successfully we consider processes of industrial cleaning being creative since the processes might be considered both novel and useful.

V. Sausages and fish fillets

Originality is a key concept while evaluating a product or process in terms of creativity. But obviously adjustment is needed before we can apply the concept of originality to the domain: industrial cleaning. We suggest differentiating between two quite different types of originality. One we name radical originality and it is probably best noticed whenever the beholder sense what Alfred Schutz (2005, p. 110) describes as a chock. After the chock the beholder notices that radical originality initiates a leaning process exceeding the previous understanding. During our case studies we notice originality not creating the same kind of chock since it is not quite as radical as the originality described above. Since we still deal with something unique we still consider it being original. The other type of originality being unique but not being radical will here be named: originality.

In order to work with the concept of originality we probably need to establish the antithesis of originality. The antithesis to originality is the reproduction of a thoughtless cleaning routine or mental scheme for cleaning since is not only producing a low quality of cleaning it is also accelerating the time pressure. Repeating a routine or mental scheme for cleaning means maintaining time consumption and that is not an option for Theo and his team. Every member of the team must evaluate the task he/she is about to do and plan a strategy for accumulating time for tasks consuming more time then estimated or time consumed on cleaning areas not included in the daily work plans. This means that Theo's team must produce a large quantity of ideas. In terms of creativity such a production of ideas is described by the concept: fluently. Cleaning a production line for e.g. fileting fish is not a standard procedure. Variations in production flow, work hours, amount and type of fish means the cleaning assignments is changing from night to night. These changes means that Theo and his cleaning staff every night must develop original processes in order to get the job done, obtain quality of work and in order to accumulate time.

According to Theo, being involved in industrial cleaning for almost two decades, radical originality is rare when it comes to industrial cleaning. One example of radical originality involves serious problems with a coat of dirt on a fileting line. Applied a long list of chemicals did not solve the problem so night after night the cleaning team ended up consuming a lot of time and manpower scrubbing the spots. The coating of dirt evolved and time consumption increased leading to a minor crisis in the cleaning team. Theo ended up contacting an audit in order to get a new point of view on the problem.

It is probably important to note that there is a major difference on dirt and on the chemistry in soaps applied for industrial cleaning. The production of e.g. salami with a high content of fat produce a quite different dirt compare e.g. with dirt produced in a fileting line processing fish with a high content of proteins. Beside from that there is also difference between dirt appearing while processing fish with high and a low content of fat. The specialist consulted suggested using a foaming machine in order to foam a soap product with a chemical composition usually not being foamable. By foaming the soap the chemical composition actually changed and suddenly it removed the coating of dirt in short time and without much manpower. The audit describes this as novel solution and we therefore notices this an example of radical originality. The solution was combined with flexibility since the process included a new interpretation of the available soap.

After this experience Theo´s team started elaborated new ideas by experimenting with foaming soap usually not being foamable. By applied these new methods once or twice a week they were able to reduce time consumption and obtained better quality of cleaning.

VI. Triviality, repeatability & uniformity

We do not try to convince anyone that industrial cleaning always requires creativity. We have noticed several tasks and processes not including elements of the concepts retrieved from the field of divergent thinking. Industrial cleaning is undoubtedly considered a low prestige and low-paid job but as

a result of the (cf. Douglas, 2004) connection between purity and danger it is also a quite important job. The common understanding of industrial cleaning is probably a job connected with: hard work, simplicity and monotony. But common understanding is obviously not always right. With great humor George Lakoff (1990) shows how common understanding of concepts e.g. like a bachelor might fall short while examples like Tarzan, the Pope or Donald Duck are included. In a similar spirit we have intended to show that industrial cleaning is not just a matter of triviality, repeatability and uniformity.

The case study introduced clearly indicates that industrial cleaning in the food industry is neither simple nor easy. It is actually a quite complex job requiring a professionalism involving much more than just a combination of manpower, basic cleaning skills and competences. We argue that some of these requirements can be described though the concepts of creativity involving categories such as: originality, flexibility, fluency, and the elaboration of ideas. We agree with Baer (2008 & 2011) that a context-independent understanding of creativity is creating methodological problems. Avoiding such methodological problems is actually the reason for our transformation of general concept and categories on creativity into domain-specific categories and concepts fitting our case study on industrial cleaning. Since we here have focused our attention on analysing our case we will leave discussion of the transformation of concepts to elsewhere.

VII. Conclusion

The aim with this conference paper has been the development of a better understanding of creativity in the everyday organizational life. We have shown though a case study that creativity is not only taking place in e.g. arts, science and technology. Despite radical originality being rare we have shown that workers occupied doing industrial cleaning in their everyday organizational life conduct creative processes. All in all our case study clearly indicates that ordinary people doing ordinary work in their everyday organizational life are and should be recognized as creative.

References

[1] Adorno, Th. W. (2008). Lectures on Negative Dialectics. Kundli: Polity Press.

[2] Baer, J. (2008). Commentary: Divergent thinking test have problems, but this is not the solution. In Psychology of Aesthetics, creativity and the arts, 2008, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 89-92.

[3] Baer, J. (2011). How divergent thinking test mislead us: are the Torrence test still relevant in the 21st century". In Psychology of Aesthetics, creativity and the arts, 2011, Vol. 5, No. 4, p. 309-313.

[4] Benson, J. K. (1977). Organizations: a dialectic view in Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 22, No. 1, Marts 1977.

[5] Bourdieu, P. (1990). The Logic of practise. Cambridge: Stanford University Press.

[6] Bourdieu, P. (2002). Outline of a theory of practise. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[7] Douglas, M. (2004). Purity and Danger. Norfolk: Routledge & Keagan Paul.

[8] Eco, U. (1988). Horns, Hooves, Insteps in Eco, U. & Sebeok, Th. A. (1988). The sign of three. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

[9] Fast, M, Hertel, F. & Clark, W (2014). Economics as a Science of the Human Mind and Interaction. Theoretical Economics Letters, Vol. 4, Nr. 6, p. 477-487.

[10] Gadner, H. (1993). Creating minds. New York: Basic Books.

[11] Gennep, A. van (1999). Rites de passage. Oslo: Pax forlag a/s.

[12] Kirkeby, O. F. (2009). Det nye lederskab. Tilst: Børsens Forlag.

[13] Plucker, J. A. & Makel, M. C. (2010). Assesment of Creativity in Kaufman, J. C. & Sternberg, R. J. (2010). The Cambridge Handbook of Creativity. New York: The Cambridge University Press.

[14] Plucker, J. A., Beghetto, R. A & Down, G. T. (2004). Why isn't creativity more important to educational psychologists? Educational psychologists, 2004, Vol. 39, Issue 2, p. 83-96.

[15] Runco, M. A. (1986). Divergent thinking and creative performance in gifted and nongifted children. Educational and Psychological Measurement 1986, no. 46, p. 375.

[16] Runco, M. A. (2008). Commentary: Divergent thinking is no synonymous with creativity. Psychology of Aesthetics and the Arts, 2008, Vol. 2, p. 93-96.

[17] Turner, V. (1995). The ritual process. New York: Aldine De Grynter.