Focus

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FOCUS

Paradox, Articulation, and Issues in the Transition from Creativity to Innovation

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While the link between creativity and innovation has been established by work in management science (Sarooghi, Libaers, Burkemper, 2015), it remains poorly understood, and both are often studied separately. This can raise the question of the role of creativity in innovation and creative processes (Cohendet, Parmentier, Simon, 2017), or it can confine creativity to the early stages of innovation processes, where it is considered a “black box” (Birkinshaw, Bouquet, Barsoux, 2011).

Innovation is fueled by ideas, so idea generation is a key step in the process. There are many idea generation methods and although some have been measured for their effectiveness, such as the brainstorming method (Doran and Ryan, 2017), it is still difficult to evaluate their impact on innovation with any certainty, since creativity is measured in situ. In addition, Unsworth (2001)

1. e.g., Triz, C-K, six thinking hats, brainstorming, mental mapping, metaphor, wishful thinking, and design thinking etc.
shows that an idea can be put forward spontaneously, without the use of specific methods, to solve emerging problems. Moreover, although idea generation is addressed in the creativity literature (Anderson, Potočnik, Zhou, 2014), the fundamental question of the selection of ideas remains little studied except in the stage-gate process, which is derived from innovation literature. The same is true for the implementation of ideas, which is often ignored, even though it plays a fundamental role in transforming ideas into innovation. Beyond these neglected stages, the form of the ideas themselves raises questions because of the great variety in both how they can be expressed and the context in which they emerge. Indeed, ideas take the form of a pitch in entrepreneurship, a “high concept” in the film industry, or a “breakthrough” in video games, and they are more solution-oriented in other industries. This variety in creative forms and their evolution during the innovation process highlights why it is so difficult to understand the transition between creativity and innovation. Moreover, when it comes to selecting or evaluating an idea, that idea can turn out to be difficult to grasp, multiform, not very formalizable, and not always identifiable.

From this perspective, what may be perceived at first glance as a simple transition in a linear process is in reality a neuralgic point in the articulation of two regimes necessary to any innovation process: the divergence regime and the convergence regime. Idea production is part of the former; idea selection or evaluation is part of the latter. Together, they make up the innovation process. Some studies consider idea generation to be an exploration activity based on divergent thinking, while idea implementation is an exploitation activity based on convergent thinking (Revilla, Rodríguez-Prado, 2018). Other studies suggest that creativity is about capturing ideas of value, while innovation is about capturing the value of ideas (Carrier, Gélinas, 2011) without, however, insisting on the paradigmatic opposition of these two positions, since the capture of ideas is also confronted with the crucial question of the value of ideas.

It is in light of this issue of articulation between these two different regimes – the divergence and the convergence – that we propose, first, a re-examination of the works that investigate the link between creativity and innovation and, second, an introduction of the contributions to this special issue. We suggest that this
articulation does not operate in a simple, linear, and potentially improbable transition but in an extremely delicate knitting together of two radically different logics. The innovation process takes both divergence and convergence into account, without articulating them in a purely sequential way, because selection – the key stage of the transition – is played out in a dynamic manner.

The Dynamic Articulation of Creativity and Innovation: The Current State of the Art

The approach of a dynamic process in which creativity and innovation are articulated is consistent with the interactionist approach of Woodman et al. (1993). The authors show that creativity comes, not only from individual capabilities, but from interactions between the individual and the organization. Thus, the difficulty in understanding creativity at the organizational level lies in the need to take the individual level, the group level, and the organizational level into account at the same time. We must therefore study the link between creativity and innovation at these multiple levels, while also exploring the effects of individual creativity, team creativity, and organizational creativity on innovation. Creativity also requires the organization to manage paradoxical configurations (Andriopoulos, 2003), such as supporting employees’ passions while achieving financial goals, or encouraging personal initiative while maintaining a shared vision. To understand the complexity of the relationship between creativity and innovation, we must also link these paradoxical configurations to innovation.

By highlighting the central role of knowledge management in the management of innovation, the application of knowledge-based frameworks (e.g., resource-based view, evolutionary approaches) to organization studies over the last thirty years also reinforces this approach, which can be considered constructivist: in other words, knowledge and the value of ideas are built during the innovation process (Maniak, Midler, 2008). Debates that center on the notion of “dynamic capabilities” (Teece, 2007), which describes an organization’s ability to adapt in complex and turbulent socio-economic environments, have confirmed the strategic coupling of knowledge management and innovation processes. The idea itself is at the
heart of learning and creativity because it can be considered the result of an intention to act that leads to a statement integrating a new knowledge network and sometimes involving new networks of knowledge brokers (Parmentier, Loarne-Lemaire, 2018; Parmentier, Szostak, and Rüling, 2017). In its journey, the idea often emerges in organizational interstices (Cohendet, Simon, 2007), is part of multiple collaborative networks (Perry-Smith, Mannucci, 2017), and creates new links between people and knowledge. At the organizational level, the capability is integrated into both organizational routines and production processes. Creativity can thus be a complex organizational capability that can nurture an organization’s dynamic capabilities by providing the ideas necessary for organizational evolution and renewal (Napier and Nilsson, 2006).

Like dynamic capabilities, creative capabilities must be examined in terms of resources, routines, processes, and organizational factors to understand their nature and the way in which they are built. Recent work by Cohendet and Simon (2016) shows that, in the video game industry, the ability to renew creative routines is at the heart of organizations’ performance. Valuable ideas are one result of creative capabilities: How can we encourage them? How can we capture them? How can we present them while taking into account the context and final objectives? How can we recognize those that are most valuable to the organization? How can they be evolved? How can we develop and maintain them over the long term? How can we renew them? How can they be integrated into innovation processes? Moreover, beyond creative climates that have a positive effect on innovation (Dul, Ceylan, 2014), what are the most favorable organizational conditions for the development of these creative capabilities, and what is their effect on the innovation capabilities of organizations?

The relationship between the dynamics of knowledge creation, creativity, and innovation can also be highly dependent on the type of industry and the type of firm. Sarooghi et al. (2015) find that large companies in high-tech industries transform more ideas into innovation than large companies in low-tech industries. In the video game industry, for example, advances in technology are considered in the creative process and are often a new source of ideas that can lead to innovative products (Lê, Massé, Paris, 2013). The dynamic between creativity, technology, and innovation thus becomes crucial. In the creative industries, which involve
producing or distributing goods and services whose main value lies in creativity and intellectual capital (see UNCTAD report, 2008), the idea is one of the essential raw materials. In order to survive and develop, such companies must build specific organizational capabilities to manage their employees’ creativity; these capabilities can be managerial (Parmentier, Picq, 2016), structural (Parmentier, Mangematin, 2014), or procedural, with specific routines (Cohendet and Simon, 2016; Paris and Lang, 2015). In the service industry, creativity also plays a major role in developing innovations (Giannopoulou, Gryskiewicz, Barlatier, 2014), with a particular focus on mobilizing the creativity of employees and customers (Sigala, Kyriakidou, 2015). In these industries, the action of creative entrepreneurs is also often crucial. More generally, entrepreneurs’ creativity plays an important role in developing innovations, particularly in small- and medium-sized enterprises (Ahlin, Drnovšek, Hisrich, 2014). However, while studies have often focused on individual level of analysis, it is also instructive to study innovative entrepreneurial processes at the organizational level. For example, the bricolage of creative entrepreneurs works as a mediation mechanism that facilitates the transformation of creativity into innovation (An et al., 2018).

The link between creativity and innovation is also strongly influenced by the environment. This raises the question of the relationship between the management of an organization’s boundaries and the creativity of its members. The open innovation approach proposes opening up the creative and innovation processes to external contributions in order to access new resources and knowledge, including ideas (Chesbrough, 2003). For example, Parmentier and Gandia (2013) show that inviting a community of users to contribute their thoughts stimulates valuable ideas for the organization. Ideas must also cross the organization’s internal boundaries to feed into the processes of creation and organizational change. New creative spaces – both physical, such as third places,2 and virtual, such as social networks, innovation communities (Cohendet et al., 2021), and online brand communities (Parmentier, 2015) – challenge the company’s boundaries and even question the role of boundaries in the emergence of creative solutions. Indeed, these spaces question what kind of “opening up” processes should be put in place to encourage the generation of ideas that are valuable to

2. For example, “fab labs” and coworking and hacking spaces.
the company and their transformation into innovative concepts that refresh both the organization and its product and service offerings. In addition, as studies show, the nature of an individual creator's relationships and their position within networks can influence idea generation throughout the journey of ideas (Perry-Smith, Mannucci, 2017), and the position of an organization in a business cluster strongly moderates the effect of the creative climate on innovation (del-Corte-Lora, Vallet-Bellmunt, Molina-Morales, 2017).

In considering the ability to interact with an environment, we must highlight the digital environment. Globalization and the evolution of digital technologies have had a powerful impact on creative and innovation processes. Digital technology influences the mechanisms for integrating absorption capabilities (Ruiz, Brion, Parmentier, 2020), promotes the emergence of multisided platforms (Gawer, 2014), and affects creative processes in the creative industries (Panourgias, Nandhakumar, Scarbrough, 2014). The internet enables new forms of creativity and is thus less embedded into social structures and into the codification of creative processes (Sapsed, Tschang, 2014). The link between creativity and innovation thus seems to have been reshaped by digital technologies.

**The Dynamic Articulation of Creativity and Innovation: Contributions**

The dynamic relationship between creativity and innovation, understood as two regimes that need to be carefully articulated or brought into permanent dialogue, is at the heart of this special issue.

Research into creativity shows that the problem construction stage is considered to be key in the creative process. In the first paper, “Individual Preferences in Creative Problem Construction”, Marie-Laurence Caron-Fasan, Valérie Chanal, Valéry Merminod, and Emmanuel Montfort focus on the factors related to individuals’ preferences in problem construction. They identify that individuals who express a particular preference for problem construction tasks also enjoy being involved in the whole creative process according to the FourSight model, from clarification to implementation.
This counterintuitive result indicates that, for individuals, problem construction combines a set of varied activities that are not only related to clarification but also ideation and implementation. Moreover, individuals who express a particular preference for problem construction tasks also have a higher level of creative self-efficacy. Thus, at the organizational level, this study suggests involving those who identify problems in the whole innovation process. This stronger integration could facilitate the transformation of ideas into innovative products, services, and processes.

The following two papers focus on attempts to articulate creativity and innovation through creative organizational devices (third spaces and “Creativ’Café”). More precisely, in their paper “Activating Creativity in Situations of Uncertainty: The Role of Third Spaces”, Sandrine Le Pontois and Marc Jaillot aim to gain a deeper understanding of how creativity can lead to innovation in an entrepreneurial context. The authors examine the introduction of uncertainty in a pedagogical device considered to be a third space on student entrepreneurial creativity. The challenge for the students is to use their acquired knowledge to solve a problem in an uncertain situation, both in the pedagogical device and in the final results of their work. The results of the analysis show that this type of third space facilitates the transformation of abilities into capabilities at the individual level and encourages the transition from creativity to innovation at the collective level. Uncertainty in an equipped and protected space makes it an “enabler space”, which helps individuals commit to action and turn their creativity into innovation. This research questions organizations that minimize uncertainty as much as possible, as by doing so they deprive employees of the space for articulation between creativity and innovation. In their paper “Adopting a Creative Device: Between Organizational Creativity and Organizational Innovation”, Emilie Ruiz, Chloé Anselmo, and Patrick Llerena examine the articulation of creativity and innovation within the creative device the “Creativ’Café”, which is a space for discussion and collective experimentation, to transform ideas into innovation. They identify three tensions related to the antecedents of organizational creativity and innovation: a tension of participants’ “motivation vs. commitment” during the launch of creative device, a tension of “creativity vs. control” during its implementation, and a tension of “integration vs. autonomy” during its perpetuation. This research points to the difficulty of adopting an creative device that develops
organizational creativity. The authors suggest that these tensions could be balanced by developing an organization’s creative capability through open innovation.

Finally, the paper “The Impact on Idea Selection of the Intrinsic Qualities of a Creative Idea and its Presentation: The Case of Pitch Evaluations during Start-Up Weekends” by Guy Parmentier and Séverine Le Loarne-Lemaire examines the conditions that positively impact the reception of entrepreneurial pitches, with short pitches being considered a form of idea. Is a good idea enough for the pitch to be considered “good”? Can a good pitch compensate for an average idea? The study confirms that presenting a good idea alone is not enough for it to be selected; the idea must also be presented well. This study highlights the important role of the “ideator” for an idea to be perceived positively and accepted by an organization. The idea does not carry an intrinsic innovation potential on its own; rather, it is the socialization of the idea through the work of the ideator that transforms it and progressively leads to innovation. Idea management systems in organizations must therefore take the social dynamic of presentation and the socialization of ideas into account in order to promote the progressive transformation of ideas into innovation.

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