

10 TARA GREY COSTE & CASSANDRA GREY COSTE**MARGINALIZED?! THE NEW CREATIVE IN THE NEW CORPORATE REALITY**

The modern organization is faced with a harsh reality of global competition, unstable markets, and rapid innovation cycles. Long gone are the days when we could settle into a familiar routine and just do our jobs. In this climate, creativity and effectively functioning creatives are more necessary than ever before. However, innovative work and creative people have often been unappreciated and dismissed. Thankfully, there has been increasing attention paid to organizational creativity in this century, to the point where many, if not most, organizations list it as a key goal (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002).

This is good, as being competitive in today's market necessitates serious attention paid to the corporate value of creativity. Unfortunately, coupled with this understanding is an increasing pressure by financial analysts to achieve various performance measures, quite a problem in an organization that wishes to enhance creativity. Organizations will simply not be able to continue to produce creatively under conditions of stress and extreme productivity pressure. Under these conditions, organizations and their employees seek stability, to reduce uncertainty when managerial focus is firmly placed on reducing errors and minimizing waste. As Boehlke (2008) argues, "you may use pressure as a management technique, believing that it will spur people on to great leaps of insight," but "when creativity is under the gun, it usually ends up getting killed" (p. 80).

Luckily, in a time when metrics are king, people are resisting sole reliance on such measures. As Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) attest, "there is something more fundamental in human nature than the image of the 'sober,' rational agent" (p. 124). And there is a growing understanding of the complexity of innovative activity, a greater reliance on teamwork, and an increase in team sizes (Jones, 2009). Furthermore, the fundamental make-up and facilitation of these growing teams requires recognition that managing the diverse and unknown effectively can be a source of competitive advantage (Basset-Jones, 2005; McLeod, Lobel, & Cox, 1996).

That said, diversity can also lead to misunderstanding and conflict, leaving organizations in a tough situation. As Basset-Jones (2005) states, if companies "embrace diversity, they risk workplace conflict, and if they avoid diversity, they risk loss of competitiveness" (p. 169). Thus, we must learn to walk this careful balance and so move on to further discussion of the diverse element and the dynamics of the creative.

For creatives to effectively contribute to organizations that are more rigidly bound than they are, they must be able to think multi-culturally. They must both stay true to their view of the world that encourages them to be different while simultaneously understanding and acclimating to organizational culture. This attention to multiple cultures can, in fact, be quite beneficial to the organization. When people have multiple cultural lenses, they are more likely than monoculturals to develop new ideas and unconventional solutions

leading to less conformity and groupthink (Fitzsimmons, Miska, & Stahl, 2011). Key to the effectiveness of this approach is an environment in which there is an atmosphere of trust and respect so that people may invoke different perspectives to use creative problem solving for joint gains (Fitzsimmons, Miska, & Stahl, 2011).

Fortunately, if a certain level of trust can be achieved, great gains in corporate innovation can be achieved. Long discussed in the creativity literature is the fact that novel ideas result from combining thought categories both within and across domains. As Yang and Konrad (2011) state, “access to new sources of information, knowledge, and perspectives enhances the potential for organizational innovation by increasing the number of thought categories and mental images available for modification and recombination” (p. 1064). Furthermore, research supports the notion that organizations with a greater store of various knowledge bases are better innovators and can develop and adopt new processes into daily operations (Yang & Konrad, 2011).

The flip side of idea generation in the creative process is, of course, the acceptability factor. An idea must be both new and useful to be creative. Thus, in the exchange of varying perspectives on an idea there must be authentic evaluation of and elaboration on the original thought. To fully take advantage of what history has to offer and mobilize creatives to bring their unique perspectives to a corporate world, a recognition of the similarities of all oppressed movements is needed. A key component of this is that the creative must use what he or she has to advantage. Marginalized peoples cannot simply rewrite the system, but understanding the system can be of vital help. According to Sandoval’s (2000) theory of oppressed groups:

All social orders hierarchically organized into relations of domination and subordination create particular subject positions within which the subordinated can legitimately function. These subject positions, once self-consciously recognized by their inhabitants, can become transfigured into effective sites of resistance to an oppressive ordering of power relations. (p. 54)

Creatives need not try to overtake the non-creatives in the corporate setting, but rather position their talents to take hold and permeate the consciousness of the organization (Sandoval, 2000).

To do this, creative and creative teams must claim an emancipation of sorts. “Emancipation is triggered by the assertion of equality in the face of institutionalized patterns of inequality, it works through a process of articulating dissensus, and it creates a redistribution of what is considered to be sensible” (Huault, Perret, & Spicer, 2014, p. 22). Emancipation, more traditionally the battle cry of the revolutionary, is not a dynamic we usually associate with corporate life. However, recent literature in management theory speaks to themes such as self-discovery, freedom, rebellion, and eliminating unnecessarily alienating forms of work organization (Huault, Perret, & Spicer, 2014). As Huault, Perret, and Spicer (2014) argue, emancipation is the process through which one becomes free of cultural conditions that place restrictions upon your ability to articulate your ideas. If creatives are to be more effective for the organizations they work for, they must be emancipated from the cultural barriers placed in their paths.

Other pieces speaking to the value of individual difference and the struggle faced by marginalized people may shed further light on this struggle. Susan Cain’s (2013) explora-

tion of the place of the introvert in today's extrovert ideal mindset brings forth a good example of harnessing agency in marginalized groups. Cain's book, *Quiet*, explores not solely the oppression of introverts in today's public and private spheres, but delves into the strengths of introverts in contemporary systems. Cain highlights the connection between "socially poised introverts" and creative people (p.74). Thus, we return again to the notion that the creative may never want to fully assimilate to the dominant culture of the corporation, as evidence points to that only stymieing the creative process. Moreover, corporations need not thrust creativity upon all members of an organization. It is the healthy mix of difference that breeds innovation (Cain, 2013).

And this is key—difference, risk, and discomfort-- all these things come along with creativity. Blazing a trail for that which is different will involve taking some risks and the very real possibility of failure. Although research affirms that people, and organizations, in general tend to avoid risk and uncertain outcomes (Shalleya & Gilson, 2004), creatives must carve out a space that allows them to take risks, to fail, to learn from those failures and continue stretching the envelope. Thus, sounding the rebel yell of emancipation is not enough; a sense of play must also come into being. Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) argue that since the start of the Industrial Revolution traditional administrators have emphasized rationality and consistency, but studies of exceptional professional creatives find that the creative maintain their playful attitude toward their work for the span of their careers.

Clearly organizations should recognize that a diverse mix of employees can be beneficial. In fact, a number of organizations that have made a strong commitment to diversity have begun to make the connection between business goals and diversity (Shapiro, 2000). The creativity literature has long argued that interaction with a diversity of people is essential to creative productivity. Often labeled the "value in diversity" hypothesis, it is argued that group diversity should lead to a diversity of ideas from various knowledge, skills, and perspectives and, thus, lead to better creative problem solving (Shalleya & Gilson, 2004). However, increasing numbers of historically marginalized people does not necessarily give them voice (Yang & Konrad, 2011).

Recent literature has started linking failures in diverse employee involvement to the failure of organizations to ascertain what will motivate diverse employees to become involved (Shapiro, 2000). To truly succeed, organizations must blend solid employee involvement practices with solid diversity management practices so that the different information, knowledge, and values of historically marginalized people can be injected into higher-level organizational decision making (Yang & Konrad, 2011). Organizations must allow the spaces and learning experiences that enhance self-actualization and creativity, must encourage deep understanding of a new concept, must facilitate opportunities to develop multiple and flexible perspectives (Burlison, 2005).

Thus, the decision of many corporations to include creativity or innovation as part of their mission is a complex undertaking that can often be more for show than an indicator of true intent. To institutionalize creativity is different than embracing the intuitively creative. We venture to say that institutionalizing creativity is too broad and does not allow each member of an organization to focus on his or her strengths. Ahmed (2012), looking at the status of diversity in institutions, asserts that "when things become institutional, they recede. To institutionalize x is for x to become routine or ordinary such that x becomes part of the background for those who are part of an institution" (p. 21). While diverse thinkers in an organization should undoubtedly be present, the desire to make difference unnoticeable is harmful to individuals' unique identities and histories.

Strategies to combat this concern need not look further than the tactics one uses to make something institutionalized in the first place. As soon as something becomes a given, it must be brought back to the forefront of consciousness and critiqued yet again. Ahmed (2012) argues that getting diversity into an organizational consciousness involves knowing that "when your task is to get out information that is less valued by an organization, the techniques for moving information around become even more important" (p. 30). One that is marginalized or those working on behalf of the marginalized must constantly be working to bring the value of that diversity to the forefront of the minds of the organization.

Obviously, conditions don't change overnight. Organizations have been slow to learn how to manage diversity in a positive manner (Shapiro, 2000). Yet there has been progress in our learning on that front. Research indicates that leadership clearly articulating the reasons why diversity will help achieve organizational goals helps employees overcome biases (Yang & Konrad, 2011). As leaders induce diversity, they should also simultaneously implement tools to help reduce stress and conflict such as focusing on larger goals (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Furthermore, they should implement strategies to foster trust and inclusiveness, so that they may capitalize on diversity to achieve an innovation advantage (Basset-Jones, 2005). Finally, Boehlke (2008) suggests the following:

1. Pace productivity: recognize performance motivators and stressors
2. Capitalize on failure: foster a more trusting learning environment
3. Manage connections: leverage connections as well as relationships
4. Pay the price: acknowledge the risks and rewards of being different (p.78)

And the leader must juggle both that which makes the traditional work well and that which makes the non-traditional work well.

Clearly, a leader of the diverse must possess a special expertise to enact that which is different and rewarding. He or she should utilize a number of tactics that will address the concerns of creative people working in an organizational environment that may not be the best fit for them (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Findings from performance evaluation research indicate that leaders should give specific support for creative role expectations and develop an environment where employees expect to receive developmental feedback. For this to be effective, leaders must emphasize information sharing and constructive feedback; what seems most important is how the feedback is given (Shalleya & Gilson, 2004). This is clearly supported by the creativity literature which includes the place in which the creative process is occurring as a critical element of success.

Which leads us back to the organization in crisis, the organization in this scary modern reality that makes many administrators want to tighten the reins so that they may control what they can—this will not work. Gaining competitive advantage means focusing on employee contributions given through consent and commitment rather than blind compliance. As Boehlke (2008) eloquently states:

We cannot accelerate innovation by increasing the demand for flawless execution or striving to eliminate uncertainty. Without honest and open inquiry into this domain of action, [power mongering] behavior, which drives harder and harder for more and more, easily remains unchecked. Pacing productivity requires con-

versation about the dynamics of the generative process of humans at work. We are *not* machines. (p. 82)

Leaders must steer away from “command and control” and toward a stance of facilitating, of encouraging, of empowering their employees with a focus on individual needs and aspirations (Shapiro, 2000).

Boehlke (2008) argues that “leadership at the intersection of power and passion requires establishing trust in domains we are unaccustomed and often inexperienced in addressing” (p. 86). Helping employees strive toward self-actualization, to become everything they are capable of being, requires emphasizing creativity, play, flexibility, well-being, and adequate challenge (Burlison, 2005). And it requires that the creatives themselves learn to place their voices firmly in the organizational context without losing that which makes them the powerful growth element that they are.

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