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**CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION: THE ROLE OF
CREATIVITY BROKERS TO ELICIT
ORGANISATIONAL CREATIVITY**

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1. Introduction

The growing intensity of competition among markets and the increasing turbulence of the external business environment have focused attention upon how firms achieve and sustain competitive advantage. Over the last twenty years researchers like Martensen and Dahlgaard (1999), Mumford et al. (2007), Anderson and Gasteiger (2008) have investigated issues related to the key factors that allow a company to be competitive and what a company can do to improve its market position. A widely accepted belief is that a company should learn from its external environment and react to unexpected changes. In other words, each company should be a learning organization that is able to codify information coming from the external environment, develop and manage knowledge in order to define strategies and achieve competitive advantage. However, a company doesn't only aim to achieve competitive advantage: a company should sustain it being innovative, introducing new products and improving its way of working. Thus, innovation has become a key factor for every company in order to be always competitive. According Amabile (1996), Mumford et al. (2007) and many other researchers, innovation concerns the "successful implementation of creative ideas": it means that creativity can be considered the starting point for innovation, the necessary condition to implement innovative activities. Hence, for a company it is not enough to learn from the external environment and manage knowledge: each company should be innovative and this implies to be creative.

The increasing interest in creativity and the scholars' debate about the relevance of creativity for innovation and the link between creativity and competitiveness are the antecedents of my choice regarding the topic of the present work. I was interested in the reasons why creativity is relevant for any kind of company, what managers should know and how they should behave to create the favourable conditions for organisational creativity. In particular, my curiosity became strong when I analysed the Bilton and Leary study (2002): they identify a new figure, "creativity broker", that knows how to "broker connections between different people, experiences, talents, technologies and emotions: they broker other people's abilities into productive relationships and they also have an eye for the market" (Bilton and Leary, 2002, p. 58). Thus, I decided to investigate the role of creativity brokers, who could help companies be creative because they are able to connect creative ideas of managers, employees and teams and

translate them into valuable solutions. Hence, the purpose of my dissertation is to understand the role, functions and motivations of creativity brokers.

2. Creativity Literature Review

The published knowledge about creativity and its determinants is fragmented and scholars found their works on different – and sometimes divergent – definitions of creativity. The first definition was creativity as the result of individuals' innate qualities. In following studies, many researchers tried to go beyond the “myth of genius” and defined creativity as a process based on the duality of human thinking: “divergent” and “convergent”, “lateral” and “vertical” thinking. Finally, many researchers like Woodman et al. (1993), Amabile (1996), Drazin et al. (1999) defined creativity by focusing attention on its components. Over the last twenty years, creativity definitions contain two components: novelty and value. For this reason Sarkar and Chakrabarti (2011) brought together these definitions in a comprehensive manner under a single description: creativity occurs through “a process by which an agent uses its ability to generate ideas, products or solutions that are novel and useful” (Sarkar and Chakrabarti, 2011, p.349). According to this definition, the “core components” of creativity are novelty and usefulness. Sarkar & Chakrabarti (2011) expressed creativity as the product of novelty and usefulness. It means that creativity should be measured in terms of both novelty and usefulness, because they are “the only two direct influences on creativity” Sarkar & Chakrabarti (2011). And today this is the most widely accepted definition of creativity.

Much of the creativity literature focused attention upon the different mediators of creativity, by adopting different levels of analysis. Creative behaviours of individuals are affected by personality (Barron and Harrington (1981); Amabile (1988); George and Zhou (2001)), cognitive style and abilities (Taylor (1959); Sternberg and Lubart (1996); Miron-Spektor et al. (2011)), motivation (Amabile (1996)), engagement (Drazin et al. (1999)). Finally Woodman et al. (1993) proposed an “interactionist” perspective according to which contextual factors like organisational culture, group and organisational characteristics can act as an inhibitor or a promoter of creativity at an

individual level. Thus, an individual's creative behaviour is the result of the interaction of person and situation in which an individual performs his/her tasks. This interaction takes place at each level of an organisation. Thus, a full understanding of individuals' creativity is strictly linked to a deep examination of group creativity and organisational creativity. The literature (King and Anderson (1990); Amabile (1996), Choi and Thompson (2005); Sung and Choi (2012)) suggests that group creativity depends on individual creative behaviours, group characteristics, relationships among members, problem solving process and knowledge. Individual and group creativity are strictly connected due to their common denominator, which consists of expertise and learning process. In the recent literature, (Audia and Goncalo (2007); Gino et al. (2010)) past success and different kinds of experience are considered factors affecting both individual and group creativity. However, individuals or teams can acquire experience only if they are open to learn and acquire new knowledge. Recently, the literature has tried to develop a better understanding of learning process at each organisational level because it is strongly related to the acquisition of experience, knowledge creation, retention and transfer processes, which in turn are driving forces of creativity (Hargadon, 2002). For this reason, organisational learning as well as organisational climate and leadership style is considered one of the drivers of organisational creativity. Much has been investigated about organisational creativity. Cummings (1965) and Amabile (1998) focused attention on the variables to take into account for an effective utilization of individual and group creativity, which were defined as input of organizational creativity. They identified a new organisational design that can be most conducive to high levels of creativity at the organisational level. A creative organisation is characterised by: small degree of formalisation of relationships, flexible power-authority-influence structure, autonomy concerning work methods, open communication channels, free flow of ideas and participative management, large discretion for individuals that show high creativity potential. In other words, creativity is truly enhanced when the whole organisation supports it, employees are more committed to creative activities because they feel motivated by interest, curiosity, but also by challenging tasks, non-routine jobs and supportive environment. A relevant driver of organisational creativity is the work environment. The most comprehensive study was developed by Amabile et al. (1996). They focused the attention upon the

relationship between the work environment perceptions of individuals and the creativity outcomes and described five work environment dimensions that have different effects on organisational creativity: encouragement of creativity, autonomy, resources, pressure and organisational impediments. All these forces are complementary because they depend on decisions taken by management.

For this reason researchers started investigating the critical and controversial role of leaders within an organisation that tries to boost its creativity: they tried to describe how leaders' decisions mediate the effect of creativity drivers. According to Mumford et al. (2007) leaders of creative activities should possess capacities that help them manage creative people and groups. First of all, leaders should have creative thinking skills because they are relevant in the evaluation of creative efforts of others and in the creation of intellectually challenging and collaborative climate within groups. In addition, Mumford et al. (2007) pointed out the relevance of leaders' social skills, which allow to interact and communicate with followers, interpret their creativity potential and comprehend how to exploit it. In their studies Mumford et al. (2007) showed that the effectiveness of leadership is also affected by expertise, which consists of technical and creative problem-solving skills, and knowledge: leaders with a good understanding of organisational culture, structure and strategy exert a higher influence on the creativity of individuals and teams. However, capacities, knowledge and capabilities are not sufficient to ensure leadership effectiveness. According to Mumford et al. (2007), the exercise of influence requires tactics that allow leaders to manage creative people taking into account individual and group characteristics, features and goals of creative efforts. Leaders should define challenging goals in order to involve people rather than only increase their motivation. Through interactional tactics, charismatic leadership style and persuasive skills, leaders can influence positively the intrinsic motivation of individuals and teams, even more if they actively participate in the creative idea generation.

Thus, leaders are not simply required to avoid the practices and the procedures that inhibit creativity. They should actively attend to the management of creative people. The effective exercise of influence by leaders implies professional focus, autonomy, intrinsic motivation, creative thinking, emotional intelligence and tactics that empower and involve followers (both individuals and teams). Much has been already investigated

about the role of leaders and how their behaviours can enhance or inhibit creativity at each organisational level. However a “hot question” is still open: how is it possible to ensure that managers develop skills, competences and tactics to effectively boost organisational creativity? This issue suggests that maybe specific figures are required within organisations in order to support leaders in managing creativity and improving organisational performance. A possible answer is provided by Bilton and Leary (2002). They identify a new figure that could help managers: “creativity brokers”. They don’t possess necessarily creative skills, but they know how to “broker connections between different people, experiences, talents, technologies and emotions: they broker other people’s abilities into productive relationships and they also have an eye for the market; they emerge as the key figure engineering the relationships within and between different individuals and types of thinking within the creative process” (Bilton and Leary, 2002, p. 58). Thus, creativity brokers could have a crucial role within the organisation because they are able to connect creative ideas of managers, employees and teams and translate them into valuable solutions. Creativity is a critical concern in most companies and creative brokers support managers in exploiting creativity at each organisational level.

3. Research Method

Within the broad and challenging topic of creativity, it is still not clear how managers can become able to adopt those managerial practices that enhance creativity at each organisational level. The present work aims to make a substantial step forward in the understanding of the most appropriate managerial practices that value and exploit creativity. In particular, this investigation focuses on new actors that may have a strong role in the implementation of these managerial practices: the creativity brokers (Bilton and Leary, 2002). In particular, my investigation tries to provide a clear definition of creativity brokers by explaining who they are and which capabilities and competences they need to play their role. In particular, I try to understand how creativity brokers can perform their functions within organisation’s boundaries, support managers to integrate creative efforts at each organisational level and why organisations would need these new figures in order to enhance and exploit creativity.

The literature review about creativity and its organisational dimensions helped me examine the most important studies about creativity and managerial practices required to enhance it, identify gaps in knowledge and avoid duplication. In this way, I could define my research question, which is to understand role, functions and motivations of creativity brokers. It is a previously unexplored topic, even if the literature about the brokerage activity is wide. In fact, interest about this new kind of brokers has grown over the last few years and the existing knowledge about it doesn't allow for a quantitative analysis. For these reasons, I adopted a qualitative approach: it allows to explore in depth the subject of study and capture details that cannot be obtained from quantitative methods, connections between components and contextual factors, creating links between apparently unrelated matters (Hakim, 1987). Thanks to a qualitative research method, I can define the role of creativity brokers and break it down in its essential features, provide a further understanding of creativity brokers' functionality and explain why companies need them. Indeed, my research is based on case study methodology, which is usually adopted to conduct a contextual analysis of a limited number of events and address a complex research question. Case study is a research method based on an in-depth investigation of events: it is a holistic approach that allows to provide a richly detailed portrait of the phenomenon under investigation. I adopt case study methodology because the present work attempts to examine "how" and "why" questions related to creativity brokers' functionality. According to the case studies classification proposed by Yin (2013), my method consists of an exploratory investigation: the aim is to get a full understanding of creativity brokers looking beyond their descriptive features, given that a limited previous research about this topic exists. In order to do this, I study multiple cases rather than only one in order to gather the most relevant evidence and get valid results. My sample consists of seven meaningful cases that can provide insight into the topic of interest. They are successful facilitators¹, who started working in the U.K.: over time their reputation has become high and today they collaborate with freelancers and big international companies. Their work consists of helping people think and behave creatively in order to contribute to innovative activities carried out by companies they work for or create and develop new businesses.

¹ In my investigation an issue related to the terminology exists. The term "brokers" is adopted in literature and I use it in explaining my research question and the sample. However, in the real-life context the companies I select for my sample are considered intermediaries and prefer to be called "facilitators".

The selection of these creativity brokers is the result of a long process that paid attention to details related to activities they perform, in particular to the centrality of creativity for activities carried out by creativity brokers. I could select these cases thanks to the help of researchers involved in two projects. The first is Brighton Fuse, a project analyses the growth of Brighton's successful creative, digital and information technology clusters. The second is Cre8tv.eu (Creativity for Innovation & Growth in Europe), a European multi-partner project that aims to describe the meaning of creativity and the relevance of creative and cultural industries in shaping the European economy. For my study, I need to collect data within a real context: it involves the gathering of evidence from different sources. First of all, I collect data about the chosen cases from their official websites in order to get a general overview about them. Their websites are rich of digital content which includes: reports about the most recent collaborations with international clients; documents providing detailed descriptions about activities and tasks performed by these facilitators; videos which consist of recorded images and speech of people performing or explaining facilitation activities or companies evaluating the collaboration with creativity brokers. Then, I collect data by analysing material that some creativity brokers have made available for my investigation: they are books that explain in detail the skills that facilitators should develop, the process they use for the collaboration with clients, what they should focus on and what they should avoid doing. In order to conduct a deeper investigation, I also rely on interviews. I define a general set of questions to ensure that the same general area of information is collected from each interview. However, I need to adapt it to the specific characteristics of each creativity broker according to the information collected from its official website. I choose semi-structured face-to-face interview², also called in-depth interview: I ask general questions without answer constraints and focusing on impressions and opinions of respondents about the topic of study. In fact, respondents have enough freedom to provide answers, explain and motivate them, although the interviewer guides the discussion to focus on the topic of interest. In addition, I decide to record interviews, asking each interviewee for his/her approval, in order to ensure an accurate account of the conversations and

² Given the availability of interviewees, it has been possible to do face-to-face interviews or interviews on Skype. However, for Design Mediators case it has been not possible to meet the interviewee. Thus, I sent the questionnaire by email and the company provided answers (clearly I had the possibility to ask for more detailed information when we needed).

avoid losing data. I adopt semi-structured interviews because they allow to collect data directly from people that are supposed to possess them: they are founders, professionals and organisational role-holders that work within the chosen companies and are directly involved in facilitation activities, as the following table shows:

Table 3.1: Interviewees, Role within companies and Interview Method
(Source: Self-elaboration)

Company	Interviewee	Role	Interview Method
The Werks	Ian Elwick	Founder	Face-to-face interview
Design Mediators	-	-	Questionnaire
Desall	Giorgia Callegaro	Sales Manager	Interview on Skype
Creative Exchange Group	Dee Hennessy	Facilitation Expert	Interview on Skype
Creative Facilitation	Johnnie Moore	Facilitation Expert	Interview on Skype
?What If!	Simon Bray	Capability and Culture Director	Interview on Skype
RedZebra	Oliver MacDonald	Co-founder, Director and Facilitation Expert	Face-to-face interview

In addition, they allow to ask follow-up questions: they provide focus, but allow a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information. Finally, semi-structured interviews offer flexibility to approach distinct respondents differently, while ensuring the adequate coverage for the research purpose and the validity of collected data.

4. Case studies

I create seven case studies: the Werks, Design mediators, Desall, Creative Exchange Group, Creative Facilitation, ?What If!, Redzebra: I construct them on the basis of data collected through interviews, the analysis of documents made available by creativity brokers and the information published on their official websites. I conduct the analysis keeping in mind the research question that I want to address and the most relevant aspects of the topic under investigation. I describe in detail creativity brokers focusing on their skills, activities they carry on, the functions they perform, their clients and the collaboration with them. In addition, I consider feedback that each creativity broker collects from its clients after the collaboration: I want to understand how clients describe their experience with the creativity broker and the benefits they have gained from it. In other words, my focus is not only on techniques and processes: I also consider the experience and the past success of creativity brokers as well as the perspective and the judgement of people and companies that ask them for help. Thus, the purpose of case studies is to organise and analyse collected data to provide a clear and complete picture of creativity brokers included in the sample. My aim is to develop an understanding of their role, functions and motivations: I want to figure out the relevance of creativity and how much the experience with creativity brokers is pivotal for freelancers as well as for organisations.

5. Discussion of Results

Once individual cases have been examined focusing on specific features that correspond to questions asked during the interviews. I move on to the second step, which consists of a cross-case analysis: it consists of a systematic comparison based on the same criteria adopted for the individual case analysis. Then, I figure out similarities and differences among cases. In this way, I can group similar cases, interpret them and organise findings according to criteria such as definition, functions, role and motivations the components of my research question and the ingredients for the generalisation of results. The purpose of my work is to provide a reliable and exhaustive explanation of creativity brokers, their role and their functions according to the results

of cross-case analysis. It means that I try to provide a widespread definition of creativity brokers and a general delineation of their importance for organisational management.

First of all, I have to solve the issue related to the terminology and clarify the reason why I have to replace the expressions “creativity brokers” and “brokerage” respectively with “creativity facilitators” and “facilitation”. I made reference to the work of Bilton and Leary (2002), where “creativity brokers” are defined as those that know how to “broker other people’s abilities into productive relationships”. All seven companies reject the use of the term “broker” because for them it refers to a person working as an agent, a trader who focuses on businesses, money, market and personal proceeds. The interviewees explain that their focus is on people rather than on numbers or businesses. For this reason, they prefer to be called facilitators: they facilitate the interaction between people within teams and organisation, they intervene to improve any kind of activity or process and get the expected results through creativity. In other words, all companies included in my sample work as described by Bilton and Leary (2002), but they define themselves as creativity facilitators, experts that use creativity to improve relationships and performance of people within teams and organisations.

Even if during the analysis I observe many differences among the case studies, I can provide a widespread definition of creativity facilitators. They are experts highly committed to support people that work daily with creativity. Creativity facilitators have experience and knowledge about problems and issues that freelancers, companies and creative people face and know how to identify possible solutions. They work closely with individuals or companies every day and offer them experience, knowledge, competences and tools to deal with creativity and exploit its value. The widespread definition of creativity facilitators is very general and includes all experts that provide pragmatic support to freelancers and companies that lead creative businesses or develop new products. To be thorough, I have to explain also the narrow definition of creativity facilitators, which is more complete and more satisfying than the widespread definition.

Creativity facilitators are practitioners of creativity, professionals having many years of experience helping people discover their creative potential and learn the best approach to realise it in everyday work. Creativity facilitators know how to unlock creativity in people and integrate their creative efforts within teams or organisational contexts and translate them into valuable solutions for companies. In fact, thanks to

their background, expertise and talent, creativity facilitators make people able to think and behave creatively in the most genuine manner. They have deep knowledge about human interactions, are able to understand the thinking and the behavioural style of people as well as their strengths and limitations: this allows them to quickly define the best way that encourages people to synchronize their creative efforts. To make this possible, creativity facilitators shape energising events and workshops, adopt specific techniques to create an exciting environment, where both employees and managers feel comfortable and motivated, and remove all those obstacles that prevent the practice of creativity. Being creativity practitioners means to effectively unlock creativity in any kind of person: for this reason creativity facilitators play different roles performing many functions.

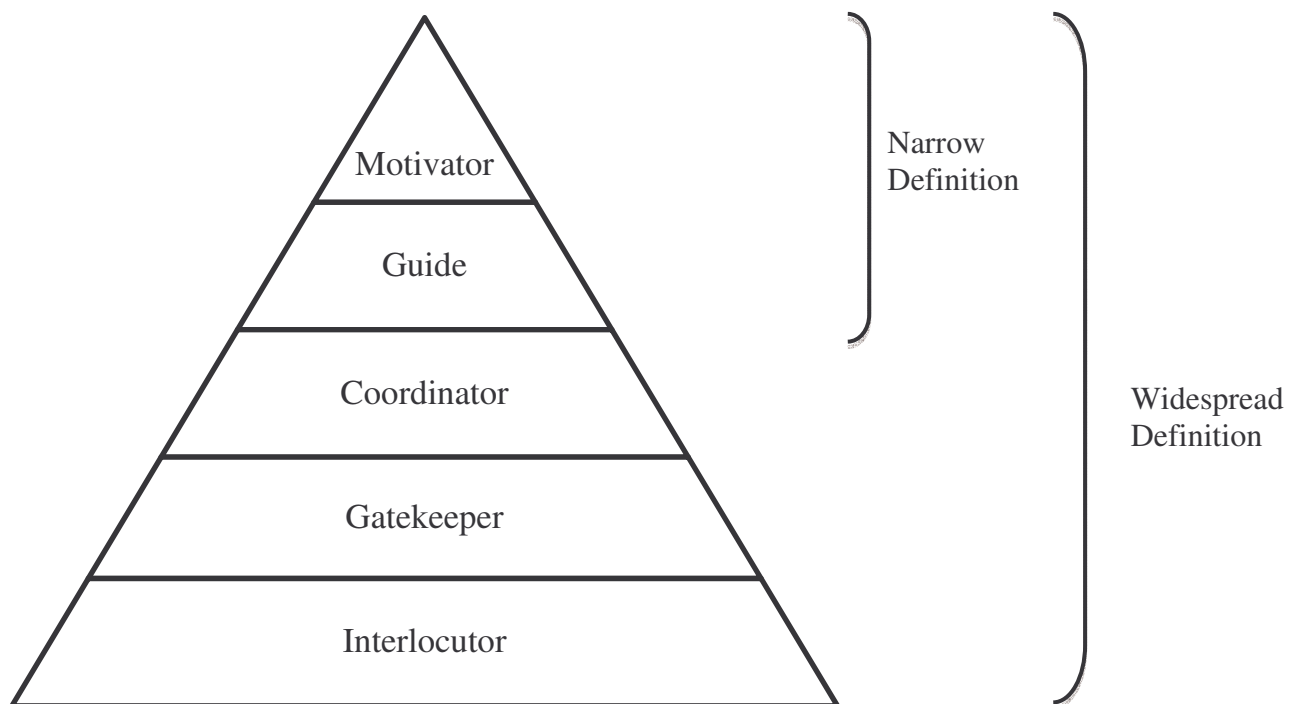


Figure 4.3: Creativity Facilitators' Definition and Roles (Source: Self-elaboration)

First of all, they give people opportunities and tools to appreciate and exploit the potential value of creativity. It is possible because they are interlocutors: they listen to people and make efforts to understand what lies behind their words, identify the way they prefer to work, know how to build and manage relationships with a wide variety of

individuals and define interventions that fit particular issues or problems faced by companies or freelancers. During meetings, they help participants dynamically engage: they use creative thinking exercises to encourage team work and creative problem solving. In addition, they build commitment and creatively guide managers and other participants to results. In addition, creativity facilitators create workshops and conferences where participants laugh, feel comfortable and get to know each other and concentrate on the content. Finally, creative facilitators use living metaphors, which physically simulate important concepts that are related to the workshop content: the goal is to achieve greater communication and cooperation of participants, who can gain a deep understanding about the workshop's content and objectives and achieve memorable sessions. Then, creativity facilitators are coordinators: they help clients go through engaging processes and activities, explain each phase, objectives and goals: they define the best way to meet what clients need and maximise results in terms of creative efforts of participants. Creativity facilitators are also a guide: they know process, tools and activities required to enhance individual creativity and carefully help people go through them. It means that a creativity facilitator gives practical support in every single activity or phase of the process in order to ensure the engagement of people and the best use of available resource like time, energy and information. Finally, creativity facilitators help managers obtain great results in terms of engagement and commitment through practical support and interactive approach. This is possible because creativity facilitators are motivators. Indeed, they support managers to create a favourable environment to unlock creativity at each organisational level, from individuals to the whole organisation. Thanks to the creative facilitation, managers become courageous, take risks, change and behave creatively and they become an example for other organisational members. In this way, for managers it becomes easier to engage and mobilize people to enhance organisational creativity and make innovation happen.

6. Conclusion

My research suggests that creativity is a strategic tool, an underdeveloped key factor for competitiveness that needs to be reconsidered. Creativity facilitators know

that managers need creativity to take action, reach the best decisions and make their company innovative and competitive. Companies need to be creative, look for what changes every day outside their boundaries and get ready to react quickly. Indeed, creativity gives companies the agility to adapt to these changes, try new things and shape their culture to embed innovation in their businesses. The present work identifies the role and functions of creativity facilitators and explains why managers and the whole organisations need them. I provided a valid answer to my research question and I hope I gave a good contribution for a deeper understanding of creativity facilitators and their relevance for people and companies. In fact, my dissertation helps to understand why creativity is crucial for companies and how it is strictly related to innovation from a practical point of view. Creativity facilitators are creativity practitioners, who develop unforgettable experiences that lead people to discover their creative potential and realise it in everyday work because if creativity is not nurtured and practiced, it will be lost. For this reason, organisations need creative facilitators: to cultivate and develop creativity, value human beings operating at the fullness of their potential through creative behaviours: they create value and uniqueness that are the keys to innovation and sustainable competitive advantage.

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