
Collective Creativity

Felix von Held

Collective Creativity

Exploring Creativity in Social Network
Development as Part of Organizational
Learning

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RESEARCH

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Foreword

By writing this book Felix von Held demonstrates brilliantly his ability to be a traveler between two worlds: His extraordinary, interesting and pace making topic has its roots in educational science as well as in economic science, organization science, and psychology. His work uses and enriches these branches at the same time. Felix von Held analyzed the synergy of individual and collective activity within operational working processes aiming at the development of industrial innovation. To deal with this subject means to face a tremendous challenge in several ways.

First, the elusive matter of the examined professional activity, the essence of innovation is to challenge and overcome well-rehearsed processes, routine procedures and “normal” working results. It is demanding to initiate new processes and products that have to prove their value in the daily business within short term. Second, the simultaneous analysis of individual and organizational learning and working processes presents a demanding challenge, theoretically as well as methodologically. Third, it needs a high competency in educational science and in management science to locate the analyzed processes in the daily work life within the profession and to measure them in a scientific way.

The concepts of creativity and innovation play an important role in state of the art research. Although these concepts seem to be closely related it is difficult to combine them. Creativity is mostly considered as an individual attribute, and therefore used in sciences like psychology or educational sciences. Innovation is commonly used as an attribute for organizations and other supra-individual entities and therefore is a theme particularly addressed in sciences like business economics (such as innovation management) and sociology.

Felix von Held proves his knowledge of the relevant work and is able to reliably assess its potential. From the analysis of the state-of-the-art, he coherently derives the method used in his study, in particular the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT), survey instruments like the Intrinsic Motivation Inventory, and the techniques of Social Network Analysis.

The empirical work was conducted in the operational environment of a large automobile manufacturer, where innovation processes are brought up.

Felix von Held succeeded in having access to a large number of innovation projects and to conduct a longitudinal research with actual innovation teams, which

consisted of employees of different units who met regularly. Senior level groups of experts, which should achieve a consensus with the CAT, were built for the validation of the innovation efficiency.

Moreover, the longitudinal treatment of network data on the one hand, and the common allocation of individual and organizational data on the other hand are interesting methodological approaches. Felix von Held managed to combine both in a plausible way. In particular remarkable is his longitudinal treatment of the data. Felix von Held presents some surprising results and conclusions that are starting points for future research. It is surprising that in the first phase of the group work the level of expertise of the team members was not predictive for the outcome, but it revealed to get important in later phases of the teamwork. Future research is needed to better understand this pattern of evidence. Creativity of the team members significantly predicted the conjoint learning processes and innovations. The future will reveal how such findings will influence the future design of modern workplaces. The work of Felix von Held contributes a lot to increase appropriately the role of creativity in modern professions.

Prof. Dr. Hans Gruber,
Vice-Rector,
Professor of Educational Science,
University of Regensburg, Germany

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my mother Christiane for supporting me throughout my research, to my sister Julia for her creativity, to Yuval and Baruch for becoming part of the family, to Julia Rhodius for her love, trust, and believe in me.

I want to thank my long-time friends Christian Saß, Holger Stephan, Iwer Bäcker, Marco Götz, Markus Wierl, Reinhard Saller, and Kirstin and Ingo von Klitzing, Felix Werle, and my Colleagues at BMW “Marketing Innovations”, especially Philipp Wiegand, Marie-Luise Lorenz, Tina Deinlein, and Ulrich Stephanie for supporting me and Jörg Reimann for making the studies possible. I am grateful to Thomas Mansell, to Gabriele Richter and to Tatjana Rollnik-Manke for their editing help, to Knut Eckert for the beautiful illustrations and to all those who helped me in various stages of this work.

Most of all, I want to thank Prof. Dr. Hans Gruber and Prof. Dr. Michael Dowling for their guidance, feedback and excellent support.

Finally, I dedicate this work to Adnan Abuomar my coffee guy – anyone who knows me will know why.

Felix von Held

Table of Contents

- Foreword.....5
- Dedication7
- Table of Contents9
- Index of Figures 13
- Index of Tables..... 15
- 1 Introduction and Research Focus 21
 - 1.1 Overview.....26
 - 1.2 Research Background.....28
- 2 Theoretical Background and Current Research35
 - 2.1 Creativity.....36
 - 2.1.1 Introduction to Creativity in Research36
 - 2.1.2 Conceptualization of the Creative Process..... 41
 - 2.1.3 Methods for the Assessment of Creativity..... 44
 - 2.2 Creativity in the Context of Organizational Learning46
 - 2.2.1 Research Perspectives on Organizational Learning47
 - 2.2.2 Individual Creativity in the Context of Learning.....49
 - 2.2.3 The Social Perspective of Creativity in the Context of Learning.....58
 - 2.3 Creativity in Social Networks62
 - 2.3.1 Introduction to Social Network Analysis62
 - 2.3.2 Creativity in Social Network Research67
 - 2.3.3 Collective Creativity in Social Networks..... 78

3	Research Approach and Questions	85
3.1	Study I: Measurement of Creativity in Social Network Analysis	86
3.2	Study II: Collective Creativity in Social Networks	87
3.2.1	Social Network Development.....	88
3.2.2	Creativity in Social Networks.....	89
3.2.3	Factors on Actor Level	91
4	Study I: Assessment of Creativity	95
4.1	Study I: Study Design - Assessment of Creativity	96
4.1.1	Method of the Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT)	96
4.1.2	Application of Procedures and Instruments	98
4.1.2.1	Sampling	99
4.1.2.2	Procedures, Instruments, and Indicators.....	100
4.1.2.3	Analysis	102
4.2	Study I: Results Assessment of Creativity in Social Network Analysis	102
4.2.1	Descriptive Statistics	103
4.2.2	Reliability Tests.....	104
4.2.3	Relations between CAT Categories	106
4.2.4	Relation between CAT Categories and Workshop Ranking	107
4.2.5	Relation between the CAT Indicators and the Self-Assessment	109
4.3	Study I: Discussion Assessment of Creativity in Social Network Analysis	111
5	Study II: Social Network Analysis.....	117
5.1	Study II: Study Design using Social Network Analysis	118
5.1.1	Method of Social Network Analysis (SNA)	118
5.1.2	Application of Procedures and Instruments	120
5.1.2.1	Sampling	120
5.1.2.2	Procedures, Instruments, and Indicators.....	122
5.1.2.3	Analysis	125
5.1.2.4	Sub-Study III: Intrinsic Motivation	128
5.2	Study II: Results Social Network Analysis.....	130
5.2.1	Analysis of Social Network Measures	131

5.2.1.1	Analysis of Network Developments	131
5.2.1.2	Descriptive Statistics of Network Centrality Measures	135
5.2.1.3	Correlation between Ego-Centralities	137
5.2.2	Analysis of Network Development in the Context of Creativity	140
5.2.2.1	Correlation CAT Indicators and Centrality Measures	141
5.2.2.2	Partial Correlation between Centrality Measures and CAT Indicators	146
5.2.2.3	Regression Models of Interaction and Creativity on Centrality	148
5.2.2.4	Results of Illustrations and Centrality Tables.....	153
5.2.3	Actor-Level Measures.....	168
5.2.3.1	Self-Assessment Creativity	168
5.2.3.2	Expertise	169
5.2.3.3	Intrinsic Motivation Inventory	174
5.3	Study II: Discussion Collective Creativity in Social Networks.....	181
5.3.1	Social Network Development.....	184
5.3.2	Discussion of Creativity in Social Networks.....	188
5.3.3	Discussion of Statistical Results	189
5.3.4	Discussion of Centrality Tables and Network Illustrations	198
5.3.5	Discussion of Actor-Level Factors	202
5.3.5.1	Self-assessment of creativity	202
5.3.5.2	Expertise	203
5.3.5.3	Intrinsic Motivation.....	205
6	Key Findings and Implications for Future Studies.....	209
6.1	Key Findings on the Research Design	213
6.2	Key Findings on Collective Creativity.....	215
6.3	Knotwork Insights	224
7	Literature	227
8	Appendix.....	241

Index of Figures

Figure 1: Research Fields (own illustration).....	23
Figure 2: Ideas Engine (Eckert Design).....	29
Figure 3: Production network of the BMW Group (BMW Group 2006: 3).....	30
Figure 4: Research Field of Creativity (own illustration).....	40
Figure 5: Conceptualization of the Creative Process Stages (adapted from Kaufmann, 1993).	42
Figure 6: Components of Creativity (Amabile, 1999, p. 4).....	50
Figure 7: Creative Thinking Phases (own illustration, adapted from Weinert, 2002).....	51
Figure 8: Idea Generation (own illustration).....	52
Figure 9: Two Sides of Motivation (adapted from Frey & Osterloh, 2000, p.25).....	55
Figure 10: The Research Field of Organizational Learning (own illustration).....	60
Figure 11: The Role of Creativity on Levels of Learning (own illustration).....	61
Figure 12: Research Field of Social Network Analysis (own illustration).....	69
Figure 13: Network Structures (adapted from Lehtinen, Hakkarainen, & Palonen, 2004, p. 212).....	73
Figure 14: Creativity-Centrality Spiral (adapted from Lehtinen, Hakkarainen and Palonen, 2004, p.212)	76
Figure 15: Model Creativity-Centrality Spiral (own illustration).....	78
Figure 16: Factor Model of Collective Creativity (own illustration).....	83
Figure 17: Histograms Idea Evaluation (own illustration).....	104
Figure 18: Expertise split (own illustration).....	172
Figure 19: Proposed Factor Model for Collective Creativity (own illustration).....	183
Figure 20: Proposed Relation between Centralities (own illustration).....	187
Figure 21: Positive Relations between Centralities (own illustration).....	187
Figure 22: Proposed relations between centrality and creativity (own illustration).....	189
Figure 23: Model Creativity-Centrality Spiral (= Figure 14, detailed outline see sub-section 2.3.2.).....	192
Figure 24: Positive Correlations between Creativity and Centrality (own illustration).....	195
Figure 25: Regression model creativity and centrality (own illustration).....	197
Figure 26: Centralization of Creative Actors in Centrality Tables (own illustration).....	200
Figure 27: Creative Sub-groups and De-central Creatives (own illustration).....	201

Figure 28: Proposition Factor Model Expertise (own illustration)	203
Figure 29: Factor Model Expertise (own illustration)	205
Figure 30: Proposition Factor Model Motivation (own illustration).....	206
Figure 31: Factor Model Motivation (own illustration).....	208
Figure 32: The Role of Creativity on Levels of Learning (own illustration).....	211
Figure 33: Factor Model on Collective Creativity (own illustration).....	216
Figure 34: Centralization of Creative Actors in Centrality Tables (own illustration)	221
Figure 35: Creative Sub-groups and De-central Creatives (own illustration)	222

Index of Tables

Table 1: Expertise Judges in the CAT Study	99
Table 2: Idea Split on Workshops	103
Table 3: CAT Descriptive Results	103
Table 4: Reliability Test CAT	105
Table 5: Cronbachs Alpha CAT	105
Table 6: Correlation Creativity, Value, Fit.....	106
Table 7: Factor Loading	107
Table 8: Correlation Ranking Workshop vs. CAT.....	108
Table 9: Descriptive Statistic Self-assessment Creativity	109
Table 10: Correlation of Creativity Self-assessment and CAT Indicators.....	110
Table 11: Age of Participants	121
Table 12: Gender of Participants.....	121
Table 13: Project Split of Participants.....	121
Table 14: Network Density per Project.....	133
Table 15: Percentage of Formal and Informal Contacts at T0	133
Table 16: Network Ties per Project	135
Table 17: Descriptive Statistic for Network Centrality Measures.....	136
Table 18: Correlation Freeman Degree of Centrality.....	138
Table 19: Correlation Closeness Centrality	139
Table 20: Partial Correlation Freeman Degree of Centrality.....	139
Table 21: Partial Correlation Closeness Centrality.....	140
Table 22: Correlation Freeman Degree of Centrality and CAT Indicators.....	142
Table 23: Correlation Closeness Centrality and CAT Indicators.....	144
Table 24: Partial Correlation Freeman Centrality T2, CAT Creativity Controlling for T1	146
Table 25: Partial Correlation Freeman Centrality T2, CAT CreValFit Controlling for T1	146
Table 26: Partial Correlation Closeness Centrality T2, CAT Creativity Controlling for T1.....	147
Table 27: Partial Correlation Closeness Centrality T2, CAT CreValFit Controlling for T1	147

Table 28: Regression Model for CATCreativity_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman T2.....	149
Table 29: F-test for CATCreativity_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman	149
Table 30: Regression Factors CATCreativity_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman T2	150
Table 31: Regression Model for CATCreativity_Sum and nCloseness T1 on nCloseness T2	150
Table 32: F-Test for CATCreativity_Sum and nCloseness T1 on nCloseness T2	150
Table 33: Regression Factors for CATCreativity_Sum and nCloseness T1 on nCloseness T2.....	151
Table 34: Regression Model for CATCreValFit_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman T2	151
Table 35: F-Test for CATCreValFit_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman T2	151
Table 36: Regression Factors CATCreValFit_Sum and Freeman T1 on Freeman T2.....	152
Table 37: Regression Model for CATCreValFit_Sum and Closeness Centrality T1 on Closeness Centrality T2.....	152
Table 38: F-Test for CATCreValFit_Sum and Closeness Centrality T1 on Closeness Centrality T2	153
Table 39: Regression Factors CATCreValFit_Sum and Closeness Centrality T1 on Closeness Centrality T2	153
Table 40: V Centrality Table and Illustration 1	162
Table 41: X Centrality Table and Illustration 2	163
Table 42: B Centrality Table and Illustration 3.....	164
Table 43:P Centrality Table and Illustration 4.....	165
Table 44: U Centrality Table and Illustration 5	166
Table 45: G Centrality Table and Illustration 6.....	167
Table 46: Correlation Self-assessment Creativity and Centrality Measures.....	168
Table 47: Descriptive Statistic Expertise.....	170
Table 48: Correlation Expertise and Centrality Measures	170
Table 49: Correlation Expertise and CAT Indicators.....	171
Table 50: Expertise	172
Table 51: Correlation Expertise in Marketing and Sales and Centrality Measures	173
Table 52: Correlation Expertise in Marketing and Sales and CAT Indicators	174
Table 53: Descriptive Statistic IIMI	175
Table 54: Overview Cases Reliability IMI	175
Table 55: Reliability IMI.....	175
Table 56: Correlation Components IMI.....	176
Table 57: Factor Analysis, Commuality Items IMI	177
Table 58: Factor Analysis, Component Matrix Items IMI	178
Table 59: Correlation Intrinsic Motivation Inventory and Centrality Measures	179

Table 60: Correlation Intrinsic Motivation Inventory and CAT Indicators	180
Table 61: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop V	242
Table 62: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop V	242
Table 63: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop X	243
Table 64: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop X.....	243
Table 65: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop B.....	243
Table 66: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop B	244
Table 67: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop P.....	244
Table 68: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop P.....	245
Table 69: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop U	245
Table 70: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop U.....	246
Table 71: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity Workshop G.....	246
Table 72: Ideas CAT Indicator Creativity, Value, Fit Workshop G.....	246

Abstract

Creativity in organizations and creative organizational structures have become key topics of organizational research (e.g. Mumford, 2002; Pettigrew & Fenton, 2001). However, to assess creativity on the social level requires a new type of interdisciplinary research (Chen & Kaufmann, 2008).

This work aims to expand on existing research on organizational learning and creativity by exploring creativity in the dynamics of social networks. In this context organizations are proposed to actively shape themselves and their environment (Palonen, 2003; Gardiner, 1999; Weick, 1995; March, 1999). Drawing on recent social-network studies and theories, such as the work of Perry-Smith and Shalley (2003), the theoretical argument leads to the factor model of collective creativity. Collective creativity is introduced as a central part of organizational learning. It is defined as pro-active social network adaptation and seen as the expression of creativity on the collective level. The model adds a new perspective to research as it has the potential to assess creativity in the development of social networks.

For the assessment of creativity this work applies a longitudinal study design by combining social-network analysis (e.g. Burt, 1997) with creativity studies (e.g. Hennessy & Amabile, 1999). The approach makes it possible to relate creativity indicators with social-network measures. The research is based on an empirical study of innovation projects in the automotive company BMW Group. In the research, social-network data are gathered and related to creativity measures in accordance with recent social-network studies (Bkörk & Magnusson, 2009). Further, actor-level measures are taken to complete the theoretical model and to gain insights into the role of creativity in social-network dynamics. The design provides an example for future studies in this area. Furthermore, the research is able to empirically assess creativity in the development of social structures, which has not been undertaken until recently. The research thereby extends existing research and theories on creativity, social-network dynamics, and organizational learning.

Keywords: Collective Creativity, Organizational Learning, Social Network Analysis, Innovation.