

Artistic Freedom and the Shoal-Model of Intrapreneurship Management Lessons in Innovation and Creativity drawn from Fine Arts

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The Creativity Crisis

“All persons enjoy the right to freedom of artistic expression and creativity, which includes the right to freely experience and contribute to artistic expressions and creations, through individual or joint practice, to have access to and enjoy the arts, and to disseminate their expressions and creations.” (United Nations 2013: 18). While the United Nations General Assembly and related political decision-makers are concerned with the liberation of creative voices in societies, the topic of “artistic freedom” has hardly been touched by economic decision-makers and business managers. Indeed, at first glance, management and arts seem to be somehow contradictory. Most people will not automatically associate goal-orientation, strategy and structure with fine artwork. Likewise, inspiration, creativity and individual expression are not appropriately describing the everyday life of an average organizational manager – at least not in Germany and Western Europe. But also the United States, who have widely been regarded as being the world’s leading creative think tank in the business context, seem to struggle with a “creativity crisis” (Newsweek 2010). Apart from searching for the parties who are regarded as being responsible for the crisis – in the case of the lack of creativity, the US-educational system has been accused – the ones affected by the external turbulences gradually start to reassess their strategies. The same, yet to a larger extent, happened during the financial crisis around 2008. For companies, adaptability to change and the capacity to innovate and reinvent itself become central drivers of organizational resilience under critical circumstances (Wimmer 2011; Dewald & Bowen 2010). With regard to the creative crisis, educational and economic institutions are increasingly interacting with scientists in the field of brain research. Apart from the increased effort, which is put in the examination of creativity from a theoretical point of view, new practices that aim at stimulating the creative potential of individuals and systems are entering the economic sphere. Out of these methods, “Design Thinking” has turned out to be the most successful one (Plattner et al. 2009). Design Thinking is marketed as a novel approach to initiate and manage innovations by following a designer’s creative path of developing new ideas. The concept is not only in the startup-scene highly “en vogue”, also big corporations which may be rooted in traditional market segments (e.g. Deutsche Bank) are no longer an exception in forging new paths to strengthen its innovative capacity. Although design and arts are increasingly discovered by companies as an inspirational source for fostering their innate creativity, the apparent bipolarity of organizational routines and creativity is not dissolved yet. Hence, the core mission of this paper is to develop a conceptual model for managers for an enhanced creative potential in for-profit organizations.

Peter F. Drucker, a thought leader in management and leadership studies, once compared management to “liberal art”. Inspired by Drucker and the observable boom of design approaches, the key question of the article can be summarized as: “What can managers learn from fine arts?” To answer this question, in the first section, Drucker’s theories on innovation are enriched with actual insights from an artist who is, apart from her artistic work, active in management and academia: Gabriela von Habsburg, granddaughter of the last Emperor of Austria, professional sculptor, academic teacher and former ambassador of Georgia.¹ In July 2013, a semi-structured interview has been conducted and transcribed for the purpose of this article. Gabriela von Habsburg’s experience in working as an artist, in teaching art students and in managing an international organization have been picked up and expanded for the development of the conceptual model.



Gabriela von Habsburg
Source: www.ab-gallery.com

When Drucker points at the necessity for companies to innovate, he delineates the importance of entrepreneurial behavior in the corporate context (Drucker 1985). Hence, additionally to the artist, attention is drawn to entrepreneurship in general, and particularly to entrepreneurial behavior within organizations, a phenomenon also referred to as “intrapreneurship”. At this point, the initially introduced idea of “artistic freedom” enters the field and leads to an unconventional concept of an organization. The resulting new form is a non-hierarchical open system, comprising various intrapreneurial units which are moving freely but striving into the same direction, following a common goal: The Shoal-Model of Intrapreneurship. How such a model could be implemented and which challenges could arise is discussed in the final part of the present paper.

Artists and managers – two of a kind?

To see what managers could learn from artists, in a first step, the emphasis is placed on differences between the two groups.² Both, for artists and managers various *motives* may play a role, why they are doing what they are doing: from self-expression, fascination³, financial motives, a lack of alternatives, the fulfillment of expectations and many more. As the financial outcome in the creative market on average tends to be much lower than in non-creative markets, money for most artists is not the driver. “Only 20 percent (...) of art students will be able (...) to live of art”, explains von Habsburg (INT: 17). In her own case, she felt the urge to built and create something with her hands from early childhood on (INT: 25ff). While the majority of artists is likely to be intrinsically motivated, it could be asked if the same is valid for managers – an answer would go beyond the scope of this article. Nevertheless, a “push from inside” seems to be beneficial to creative processes.

When we have a closer look at the *behavior* of both groups, artists and managers, the differences become obvious. Differences are not merely linked to personality aspects, but to a large part, result out of the requirements of a certain professional role. Whereas artists are known for their rule-breaking (and sometimes chaotic) habit, managers are regarded as tending to behave more modest and systematic. In the Gabriela von Habsburg’s opinion, managers – although there are exceptions to the rule – are deemed more likely to “follow schemes” (INT: 186). Similarly, Steve Blank, one of the

¹ For information on the artistic work of Gabriela von Habsburg, see <http://www.habsburg.de>.

² This group profiling has to concentrate on the central characteristics which are important to work in a respective role.

³ Fascination of color is known as one of the key motives for driving Kandinsky’s artistic career.

most visible Entrepreneurship Educators from the Silicon Valley community, relates the manager to a scientific approach of repeatable methodologies and less of seeing “something no one else does” (Blank 2011). On the other hand, states von Habsburg, “an artist approaches things in a very open way and hopefully in a way that all possibilities are open”, a process that allows for ideas that have not been thought about before, that might come “out of the blue” (INT: 192ff). The artist’s open view on possibilities and the “adding whatever comes up of new ideas” (INT: 206) are further advanced by experimenting. Trial, error and new trial should be indispensable elements of creative workflows (INT: 206). Also in Drucker’s theories, making mistakes is an essential means to overcome mediocrity (Starbuck 2012: 63; Drucker 1954: 145). While managers in their actions have to regard the interests of several stakeholder groups (e.g. shareholders, employees, customers, public opinion) and organizational rules, artists are certainly freer in what they create and how they realize their works. This still remains valid taking into account obligations resulting from contracts with music labels, publishing houses or fairs. Artists have the liberty to play. Many artists use tangible materials or other ways of prototyping for realizing the ideas they have in mind. For fine arts, Gabriela von Habsburg alludes to the specific “language” of an artist (INT: 147). She states that this language is the artist’s means of expressing him- or herself and of communicating with others (INT: 218ff). The language thus consists of tangible or visible works and here we come to the working tools, which differ between artists and managers. In the business context, broadening the creative toolbox could be one possibility to facilitate the innovation process.

After shortly examining the motivational, behavioral and instrumental differences between artists and managers, the degree of freedom turns out as one of the dominant distinguishing factors. Moreover, the possibility to play, to experiment, to try and “see things from all dimensions” in order to know “that you are not cheating yourself”, like von Habsburg does it with her maquettes (INT: 74ff).

What about the entrepreneur?

Many artists have the gift to express the unexpressed by using novel elements and recombining existing ones in an (more or less) aesthetic constellation. This process is similar to what entrepreneurs are doing: Entrepreneurs, at least in the worldview of Schumpeter (1934) and Drucker (1985), are individuals who, creatively destruct established structures and or creatively imitate existing phenomena. Entrepreneurs apply innovations and start new combinations (Starbuck 2012:



Works in stainless steel
(Studio Gabriela v. Habsburg)
Source: Jessica Di Bella

38). “Entrepreneurship is an art, not a job” (Blank 2011), writes Steve Blank and researchers actually discuss the aesthetic dimension of entrepreneurship (Sherdin & Zander 2011; Weiskopf 2007). From Gabriela von Habsburg’s point of view, entrepreneurs have and “have to have” nearly as much creative power as artists do (INT: 174). The sculptor compares artists and entrepreneurs in their open-minded “approach to things” (INT: 184), which distinguishes them from managers, according to her. One reason may be rooted in the degree of freedom: “The big difference between entrepreneurs and managers is, that (...) entrepreneurs are capitalizing on their own ideas”, instead of

merely providing a service for others, states Gabriela von Habsburg (INT: 167ff). “Innovation is both conceptual and perceptual. The second imperative of innovation is therefore to go out to look, to

ask, to listen.” (Drucker 1985: 135). But are managers and employees in established corporations really free to go out and talk to potential customers, to competitors and other stakeholders?

According to von Habsburg, the starting point of creative processes can lie on both sides and independently if a company mandate or an inspiration leads to the creation of art, “in the end, you always need a concept in mind” (INT: 132ff). Apart from their valuable tendency towards creative problem-solving, for being sustainably successful, entrepreneurs and artists both also need managerial skills (INT: 175ff). But management principles cannot be applied one-to-one in the artistic environment, e.g. when we look at the concept of “productivity”, a cornerstone in Drucker’s economic theories (Starbuck 2012: 38). For artists, subjective and objective success is not necessarily going hand in hand with a high level of output. Gabriela von Habsburg proposes to replace the criterion of “productivity” through “energy”, thus the time and effort invested in the work (INT: 292ff). “Being an artist is 95 percent work and five percent inspiration”, and the best ideas come while you are working on a piece (INT: 49ff).

The entrepreneur is unifying the creative part of the artist and the rather scientific approach of a manager. Keeping alive or even implementing an entrepreneurial culture is a huge challenge for many companies. We will now have a look at a model, which frees the organization from inhibitors to creativity and enhances artistic freedom.

The entrepreneurial company: A shoal of intrapreneurs

Firms have managerial competence but lots of them urgently need to develop more entrepreneurial competence (Drucker 1985: 144). Drucker delineates five innovation principles (Drucker 1985: 133ff): Firstly, the analysis of opportunities, followed by recognizing the opportunities and focusing them. The fourth and fifth principle for him is to start small, but nonetheless to aim at leadership. Those principles are not only principles for managers, but also for employees. “Creativity in a company is certainly a combination of the creativity of the individuals.” (INT: 240f).

Creativity at the individual level needs space. The key to entrepreneurial behavior in enterprises is



Shoal

Source: www.gettyimages.com

thus seen in expanding personal freedom. Building on Drucker’s preference of decentralized structures and task force groups for fostering entrepreneurial behavior in established enterprises (Drucker 1950, 1954), the introduced idea of artistic freedom is combined with theories of swarm intelligence (Bonabeau & Meyer 2001), resulting in a model of an organization as a shoal of intrapreneurs. The Shoal-Model of Intrapreneurship decomposes established organizational hierarchies and structures. It empowers the individual and broadens its creative space. Exemplary, the artistic freedom goes along with flexible working environments and time arrangements. What is needed for a shoal of

intrapreneurs, is a degeneration of organizational bureaucracy. As an individual, following the direction of a swarm is voluntary, but highly influenced by common goals and appropriate surroundings. An overlap between personal and organizational goals as well as offering attractive working conditions are regarded as central motives for an individual to be part of an organizational shoal. To ensure though that all elements of the systems tend to the same direction, organizational

and individual goals have to be integrated in an ongoing process of Management by Objectives and Self-Control (Drucker 1954).

Similar to Drucker's call for a managerial attitude from all members of an organization (Starbuck 2012: 53), the Shoal-Model of Intrapreneurship requires an *entrepreneurial attitude* of the people involved. The intrapreneur in this model has many characteristics of a freelancer. Though the person is integrated in a team, there is a higher degree of individual freedom in terms of time, place, budget and tools. Individuals in a shoal-organization should feel the urge for continuous learning and relearning (Drucker 1985: 263). The new organizational form demands from individuals to constantly reinvent themselves, by being sensitive to change and social mobility (Starbuck 2012: 96). The more, the flexibility in working time and location requires a high responsiveness in order to ensure the quality of communication. Transparency tendencies and the socio-technological progress facilitate such arrangements. One of the central questions will be how to recruit intrapreneurial individuals, which have the skill to attract and liberally manage the intrapreneurial employees. A second challenge will definitely be to inure employees to the greater extend of freedom which goes along with a higher degree of personal responsibility, risk-taking and tolerance. Not everyone is an artist, not everyone is an entrepreneur. Naturally, individuals differ in their willingness to engage in creative and innovative activities as well as to act in highly uncertain environments. As Steve Blank puts it: "These types of people are rare, unique and crazy" (Blank 2011).⁴ In reality, the organizational shoal will therefore rather consist of a bulk of intrapreneurial units than of single intrapreneurs. The intrapreneurial units describe dynamic subsystems within the swarm, comprising individuals that freely move around the subsystem's core: the intrapreneur.

The advantages of the presented models on the individual level are: 1) strengthening the individual competences, 2) accordance of personal and organizational goals and possibly 3) positive effects on job satisfaction. The creativity, which results out of group work is, due to the instrument of artistic freedom, nourished with additional creative energy on the individual level. To be fruitful though, there has to be a framework – an organizational shoal is certainly not an anarchic system. In the final sequence, practical implications are more closely examined.

Leading with liberty

The main functions of an entrepreneurial manager are: 1) managing the output by leading the intrapreneurial employees, 2) communicating with the stakeholders and 3) guiding the development of the employees by individually granting creative space. This could be done via different stages of artistic freedom based personal preferences, experience and on the observable development within the intrapreneurial unit. With each employee, objectives, space, time and tools are the four aspects that have managed by the intrapreneurial leader. In Gabriela von Habsburg's perception, time pressure, and the phenomena of having more ideas in mind than she can actually realize, have a positive effect on artistic work (INT: 117ff). Overall, the manager should be a role model for the employees by effectively living artistic freedom.

At the beginning of such an organizational change stands a radical reduction of bureaucracy, formalization and planning. "Planning' (...) is actually incompatible with an entrepreneurial society

⁴ The question if this is because of a lack of individual aptitude, motivation or experience is still unsolved and leads to the discussion if entrepreneurship (and creativity) can be learned and taught.

and economy”, states Drucker (1985: 255). In order to breaking up also rigid structures, the start should be constituted by a series of workshops where the members of an organization creatively destruct the existing institutional framework and step-by-step agree on the rules which should constitute the new shoal-organization. As the rules of the game are changing, communication with internal and external stakeholders plays a key role in ensuring that the swarm is conglomerate moving effectively in one direction. In this regard, Gabriela von Habsburg states that a good communication will further help to solve problems that arise from heterogeneity within groups (INT: 252). Training in mental and practical methods, e.g. of time and complexity management, of creativity approaches and techniques, can support the process to accustom the people that are part of the open organization to flexibility and continuous change. Inevitably, the implementation of Management by Objectives has to be accompanied by the encouragement of self-reflection processes on the individual level. To ensure this, the availability of personal coaches for intrapreneurs and intrapreneurial employees would be an important success factor for the sustainability of a shoal organization.

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