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The role of communities of practice in creative projects

Summary — This research is underpinned by the Community of Practice literature. In particular, it focuses on developing understanding of the different roles of professionals and organisations in creative projects and offers insights into how Community of Practice can facilitate creativity, innovation, knowledge and learning in creative projects. The research can provide a multidisciplinary perspective and contribute to our understanding of Community of Practice in the creative industries. This study will be shaped by using case study research design.

Key words: community of practice, creative industries, creative projects, creativity, innovation, knowledge, learning

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Introduction and Background

After the global financial crisis of 2007-2008, which has had an impact on all types of organisations, the dynamics of innovation and creative effort have changed (OECD, 2012). The scope and nature of manufacturing and service firms have changed, and they now rely more on their innovation and creative capabilities, skills, inter-organisational partnerships and networks, and collaboration to survive and thrive. Innovation, in the form of new goods, services, processes and business models plays a key role in firms' competitiveness.

The generation of creative ideas and their implementation is vital for firms to thrive in today's dynamic, uncertain and competitive business environment. The service sector, and in particular, the creative industries have grown exponentially, and research has evolved and progressed with the increasing importance that services have had to the economy of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries over the last 50 years. The creative industries sector comprises of sixteen distinct industries, namely: advertising, architecture, visual art, crafts, fashion and textiles, design, performing arts, music, photography, film and video, computer games, radio and TV, writing and publishing, heritage, software/electronic publishing and cultural education (DCMS, 2017).

According to the Office of National Statistics, the creative industries contributed to the UK economy £101.5 billion in 2017 from £66.3 billion in 2010, which is an increase of 53.1% (ONS, 2017). The UK Government identifies the creative industries as the fastest growing economic sector and as part of the Government's Industrial Strategy provides investment and funding to support and increase the sector's productivity and growth. Yet, the study of the organisational forms and practices in the creative industries that drive innovation, creativity, knowledge and learning for ultimately the development and launch of goods and services in the market place are largely disregarded, both in the innovation and business literature. In particular, the creative industries are seen as "*hubs of managerial innovation and experimentation*" (Lampel and Germain, 2016) and early adopters of new organisational and business practices (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000). Moreover, innovation and creativity are central to organisations' success, performance, and productivity.

In economies of creativity, the production of goods and services in creative industries is realized through very specific, temporary and project-driven organizational approaches (Bettiol and Sedita, 2011). The creative project is an emergent course of interdependent action whereby multiple actors kick-off and coordinate change into a social milieu. Such change may involve notable departures from pre-existing patterns of action (Obstfeld, 2012). Creative projects are the means through which organisations get new things started. Such projects tend to be nonlinear and filled with ambiguity (Harrison and Rouse, 2015). In a design-based economy, creative projects are becoming a strategic necessity (Hitt, Keats and DeMarie, 1998). Managers and leaders are getting more concerned about the management of creative endeavors (Dess and Picken, 2000).

Therefore, the study of organisational forms, practices and projects in the creative industries can provide useful cases, examples and insight that can be applied to other industries. This paper aims to contribute to the BAM2019's conference call and track 13 within the Cultural and Creative Industries SIG by focusing research endeavor in the context of the creative industries.

Literature

This research is positioned with the theory of Communities of Practice which provides a theoretical lens for our study of organisational forms, practices and projects in the creative

industries. Lave and Wenger (1991) were first to define the concepts of Communities of Practice for a group of people who come together to share common interests and goals, share information as well as develop knowledge and themselves both personally and professionally. Communities of Practice have successfully served within many different contexts (e.g. Cruess, et al., 2018; Johnston, 2017; Tate and Jarvis, 2017). Sharratt and Usoro (2003) identified that Community of Practice members develop common sets of codes and language, share norms and values, carry out critical reflection, and engage in dialogue with each other at a professional level, generating an environment characterized by high levels of trust, shared behavioural norms, and mutual respect and reciprocity.

Wenger (1998) identified three structural elements of Communities of Practice – mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. Different professions can form an effective inter-professional community of practice through such processes (Sterrett, 2010). A year-long qualitative study by Sherrett (2010) aimed at developing leaders found that the cohesive nature of Communities of Practice is built on respect, collegiality and informality. However, the study did not look at the impact of involvement in the inter-professional Communities of Practice on the collaborative ability of a professional. Pyrko et al (2017) notes that without “thinking together” Communities of Practice cannot exist and it is thinking together about real-life problems that people genuinely care about that gives life to the Community.

Regular thinking together in Communities of Practice about real-life problems is to be encouraged but cannot be imposed (Pyrko et al., 2017). Bardon and Borzillo (2016) investigated a large customer-oriented Community of Practice set up by the management of an international western European airport. They found that tight control of members can negatively affect spontaneity, enthusiasm and self-reliant professional development in Communities of Practice. Rivera (2011) recognizes that the Communities of Practice can possibly be the best way to manage tacit and explicit knowledge in businesses as they can integrate technology, strategy and the cultural or behavioural dimension. Virtual Communities of Practices have become more popular in recent years and are seen as a way of capturing and managing knowledge. For example, results from a study by Al-ghamdi and Al-ghamdi (2015) indicated that Web 2.0 Communities of Practice play major roles in capturing tacit knowledge, facilitating innovation and knowledge sharing and collaboration.

The creative industries have been found to closely resemble a community of practice (Fritsch, 2008). Fritsch (2008) in a study of the application of a community of practice framework to the creative industries found that creativity was seen much more as a process than a product, people were very aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and viewed collaboration as key to addressing them. Bettiol and Sedita (2011) analysed how projects are organized and developed in the creative industry in Turin, Italy. They found that creative projects are developed within a social structure and the Community of Practice is the place where creative projects are nurtured. The sharing of a common identity and knowledge amongst members of the Community of Practice was a basis for project development. Board members sustained knowledge circulation and established bridges amongst members of the community. Moreover, a study by Bashouri and Duncan (2014) suggests that creative professional service firms need to use Communities of Practice strategically to contribute to the firm’s competitiveness through a balanced strategy of personalization/codification of knowledge. Therefore, to inform creative projects for the development of goods and services requires a greater understanding of creativity, innovation, knowledge exchange and learning within the creative industries organisational forms and practices.

Research Aims and Questions

The purpose of this research project is twofold. Firstly, the creative industries are seen as hubs of managerial innovation and experimentation, which pioneer the adoption of new business practices (Lampel and Germain, 2016), however, it is not clear how the different creative industries organise their practices to drive innovation, creativity, knowledge and learning for the development and launch of creative projects and innovation outcomes (e.g. goods and services). Therefore, the first research question is – *How do creative industries organise their practices to drive or discourage innovation, creativity, knowledge and learning within their creative projects?* In this way, insight into the organisational forms, practices, enablers and inhibitors in the creative industries will be discerned. Secondly, there is clear evidence in the literature of the importance of Community of Practice, however it is less clear their integrated role in the development and delivery of creative projects. Therefore, the study will look in more depth at – *What is the role of different creative professionals and organisations within the creative projects?* - which is the second research question of the study. In this way, through the theoretical lens of Communities of Practice the creative projects will be studied, which will lead to an overall understanding of the role of the Communities of Practice in creative projects.

Methodology

This exploratory study is shaped through the use of a case study research design (Yin, 2009). Data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews (face to face or by telephone and will last between 45 and 60 minutes each) and document analysis (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016) from three case organisations in UK based organisations in the creative industries sector. The participants will be selected based on their experiences of engaging with creative projects. In this way, rich and in-depth data will be generated, seeking the views and opinions of the participants in the practices for the development of creative projects and innovation outcomes in order to assure an in depth understanding of the phenomenon. The data will be thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) by identifying themes, patterns and categories emerging from the data.

Originality/Contribution

The contribution is related to providing in-depth insight into the different roles of professionals and organisations in creative projects. Furthermore, to generate insights into how community of practice can facilitate creativity, innovation, knowledge and learning in creative projects. The proposed research project can provide a multidisciplinary perspective and contribute to our understanding of community of practice in creative industries.

Future plan for paper development

Our plan is to carry out review of the literature on Community of Practice and creative industries. Three case organisations in the creative industries sector will be studied in some depth to understand how they organise their practices to encourage or discourage creativity, innovation, knowledge and learning in creative projects, and map out the different roles of professionals and organisations in these creative projects. Initial results of the findings will be presented at the BAM2019 conference. Following, from the case research we intend to carry out a large-scale survey to improve the generalisability of our findings. This study's findings will contribute to theory by building upon community of practice for the development of creative projects. The findings will provide a richer and more complete multidisciplinary perspective.

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