Chapter 11

Stakeholder Positioning and Cultural Diversity in the Creative Sector: A Case Study of the London Modern Architecture Scene

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the antecedents of stakeholder positioning in the creative sector, a sector well known for its diversity in organizational cultures. Drawing from empirical data collected at the heart of London’s modern architecture scene we analyze the interactive process of commissioned artwork among architects and professional modern artists. We examine how positioning by artists and their commissioning architects relates to bringing creative outputs to the market, while taking the diversity of organizational cultures into account. First, we show that an accurate understanding of one’s positioning and the positioning of one’s counterparts in a commissioned artwork process is critical to steer creative collaboration. Second, we provide an overview of positioning criteria to take into account by artists or commissioning architects operating in a culturally diverse environment. The insights rendered illustrate a gap in the heart of our understanding of positioning and leadership.

INTRODUCTION

The ‘creative sector’ is an important driver of ongoing innovation and economic growth (Cooke & Lazzeretti, 2008; Jaw, Chen & Chen, 2012). Jaaniste (2009) defines the creative sector as “the cluster of creative arts, design, media and communications which all deal with cultural, aesthetic and/or symbolic content in some way (p.218)”. Based upon activities that have their
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origin in individual creativity, skill and talent, the creative sector combines the creation, production, and marketing of goods and services (Jaw, et al. 2012). Frequently ignored, the creative sector is by definition involved in the process of new value creation, as business opportunities and value-added by those partaking in the scene are rendered from the novelty and innovation added to other sectors to which the creative sector provides its various services (Potts, 2009). Yet, in contrast to other fields that embrace leadership for innovation as a prime approach to secure competitive advantage and economic growth (Davila, Epstein, & Shelton, 2012; Christensen, 2013), our understanding of leadership in the creative sector, a sector that is innovative by nature, is lagging behind.

This is not to say that creativity - the root of innovation - and leadership have not been linked before. An increasing number of studies for instance suggest that climates fostering creativity may be facilitated by leadership behavior (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002; Christensen, 2013). Along these lines, a recent study by Bock, Opsahl, George, & Gann (2012) points out that leaders of organizations with a creative climate are more likely to achieve strategic flexibility and innovation. While the link between leadership and creativity within the firm seems apparent when focusing on more traditional industries, scholarly understanding of leadership within the creative sector remains scarce (Wilson & Stokes, 2005; Hotho & Champion, 2011). Insight in collaborating across organizational boundaries for creative outcome under conditions of diverging organization cultures as encountered in the cultural sector is falling short as well. Empirical research is warranted to help us better understand the leadership principles in the creative industry (Wilson & Stokes, 2005). In this study we follow Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey (2007) as we view leadership to exists in, and be a function of, continuous patterns of interaction, taking a network view to the firm. Building on earlier work on strategic positioning within collaboration networks in more traditional industries (e.g. Ahuja et al., 2012) we opt to examine motivation and ability to shape relations in the interactive process of commissioned artwork among architects and professional modern artists from a network stance.

The empirical setting of this chapter focuses on ‘modern architecture’ as an exemplary creative segment within the creative sector, characterized by its plurality of strongly networked organizations with ties to both arts and engineering and its highly diverse organizational cultures (DCMS, 2007; Harries, 1975). We explore the collaborative cross-cultural stakeholder process that drives stakeholder positioning in the London modern architecture scene. Our research employs a multiple-case design in which we compared a series of independent arts commissioning cases to generate insight into the relations between the parties involved in the commissioned artwork process; artists, architects and others (Langley 1999; Yin, 1984). Our study is based on empirical data collected at the heart of London’s modern architecture scene to allow us to analyze the interactive process of commissioned artwork among a culturally diverse set of architects and professional modern artists operating at the forefront of the modern architecture scene.

Our research primarily contributes to the literature on cross-cultural collaboration and leadership in modern organizations. We stipulate the thought to consider stakeholder positioning in a culturally diverse environment as a condition for effective leadership in the creative industry (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999; Mumford et al., 2002). By exploring the creative artist’s positioning process in a descriptive manner we show that an accurate understanding of one’s own positioning and the positioning of one’s counterparts in a commissioned arts work process is critical to steer and sustain creative collaboration. While artists in the creative sector appear to struggle to position themselves effectively within the selection process regarding the commissioning of artwork by architects, architects seem better equipped to leverage