Chapter 12

Accessing the Finest Minds: Insights into Creativity from Esteemed Media Professionals

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ABSTRACT

This chapter argues that the communications of organisations that present awards and prizes can help foster creative excellence. The communications feature expert, distinguished media professionals who share their insights and advice about work in various media industries or sectors. These significant remote models can help both present and future media practitioners hone their skills and deepen their knowledge of creative processes. The BAFTA Guru program serves as the case study for the chapter, which offers a range of creative insights applicable to different media sectors based on the reflections of the Guru experts, as well as advice for enhancing creativity in everyday life for individuals who do not work in media.

INTRODUCTION

Scholarship about creativity has grown tremendously over the last few decades. Although knowledge about this complex concept is constantly increasing, much remains to be understood about it. Everyone wants creativity, but relatively few people are able to explain and enhance it (Tanggaard & Glăveanu, 2014). Creativity is defined in this chapter, drawing on Plucker, Beghetto and Dow’s (2004) understanding, as the production, by an individual or group, of an outcome that is novel and valuable within a particular context.

Debates about creativity in media have long overlooked this multifaceted concept or treated it as a problem-free notion. As McIntyre (2012, p. 3) notes, it often “never occurs to many media scholars or media practitioners, in particular, to question the cultural assumptions on which their understandings of creativity are based.” Advice and guides about creativity in relation to media often focus on specific industries or sectors or equate creativity with artistic activity. They often do not discuss the concept explicitly at all.

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This chapter helps fill these gaps in knowledge by arguing that the communications of organizations that present awards and prizes can usefully provide models for fostering creative excellence. A number of awarding organizations around the world – such as the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the Nobel Museum, and the Screen Actors Guild Foundation – are developing media resources designed to help individuals and groups enhance their creativity. These resources can provide valuable models for achieving creative excellence. The chapter analyzes the British Academy of Film and Television Arts’ Guru program in depth and identifies a number of wide-ranging, universal insights for media practitioners from different fields.

The chapter begins with an overview of existing knowledge about creativity. It then focuses on debates about creativity in relation to media. Awarding organizations and their communications are outlined next, followed by a discussion of the usefulness of models for fostering creativity and excellence. Videos from the Guru initiative are then analyzed; the resulting, specific insights are generalized to provide a set of broad approaches to nurturing creative excellence in all areas of media, as well as in everyday life.

BACKGROUND

Bourgeoning scholarship about creativity is abolishing numerous myths and stereotypes about this concept that has long persisted in public discourse. Research is also identifying new dimensions of creativity.

Debunking Genius

One of the key myths being dismantled is the notion that creativity is achieved mainly by experts and geniuses. This view has often been romanticized throughout history, because the creative hero has often been cherished for having risen above countervailing forces (Montuori & Purser, 1995). However, creativity is increasingly being seen as a collaborative process, and innovation is being viewed as the outcome of group efforts (Sawyer, 2007). The view that creativity is a widespread, shared quality that permeates all human activity has been labelled “ubiquitous creativity” (Craft, 2000). According to this notion, anyone “who fulfills his or her potential, who expresses an inner drive or capacity, (and) who strikes out into unknown … territory” (Evans & Deehan, 1998, p. 37) is creative. Yeung (2012) even argues that everyone needs creativity. These types of insights lead to more universal, simplified definitions of creativity as occurring in situations when individuals “must start from somewhere and with something in order to create something” (McIntyre, 2012, p. 4).

In addition to the myth of creativity-as-genius being debunked, the importance of understanding the audience’s role in creativity is growing, as is the recognition that the broader social context matters. Csikszentmihalyi (2006, p. 3) notes that any definition of creativity must recognize the fact that the audience is just as important as the individual who is credited with having achieved it. Environmental or contextual factors have also become increasingly important (Boden 1994; Amabile et al., 1996) in viewing creativity as a context-based activity with multiple social and cultural factors (Zhou, 2014). Beyond individuals’ and groups’ immediate environments, a nation’s culture also matters. Creativity will be influenced differently by a culture that emphasizes collectivism and unity, compared to one that values individuality and competitiveness (Runco, 2010a). For example, while both Eastern and Western cultures consider novelty and cultural appropriateness to be important aspects of creativity, Eastern cul-
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