Chapter 14
Creative Management, Technology and the BBC

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ABSTRACT

The past decade has witnessed increased attempts by managers, scholars and policy-makers to stimulate the creativity of organisations. The practice of stimulating organisational creativity has led to a paradigm shift known as creative management, the focus of which is to use these practices to achieve competitive advantages. Such creative stimulation can come in a variety of forms. These include identifying and influencing environmental conditions that can increase the chances for creating new and significant products or services. In order to stimulate creativity, current creative management literature proposes the use of technology as a disseminator of knowledge and ideas. This chapter offers a literature review of creative management and technology use for creativity. It next introduces a case study of how technology is used as a creative management tool at the BBC. The findings of the study indicate that although the BBC’s yearly revenues are under sustained pressure, the organisation has invested heavily in technology in order to maintain its high creative standing. In conclusion, supported by the findings of the case study, this chapter corroborates and further advocates the use of technology as a significant component of creative management practices.

INTRODUCTION

There is currently a massive proliferation in how organisations in developed societies deploy and manage creativity in order to attain a competitive advantage. Yet due to varying perspectives on how creativity can best be fostered and put into use, creative management discourses could be mistaken for an amalgam of all that is confusing in the study of creativity. Nevertheless, what seems to be endorsed by scholars, regardless of their discipline (e.g. Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995 for knowledge management studies; Florida, 2002 for Urban Studies; Bilton, 2007 for communica-
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This chapter highlights the growing significance of technology to how the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), the UK’s main public service broadcaster, stimulates and manages creativity in television production. The significance of choice in the BBC is twofold. Firstly, due to the BBC’s role as a bastion of public service organisations across the western world (Born, 2004), many of its practices are often duplicated, studied and implemented from across many academic disciplines and within a wide range of diverse organisations. Secondly, the BBC is a media organisation, and while many sectors are only now beginning to grasp the importance of managing creativity, media organisations have always regarded creativity as an essential element in their survival and everyday function (Davis & Scase, 2000). The making of a television or radio programme – the main functions of the BBC – implicitly entails a creative process that is paramount for the programme to be considered successful.

The chapter is divided in three sections. In the first, it addresses the major theoretical frameworks of organisational creativity management and the role technology plays in the creative management paradigm. This section begins with a brief introduction of the role creativity currently plays in organisations. It follows a series of four previous paradigms in organisational studies that have ultimately led to creative management. It next addresses the social context of creativity and the theoretical underpinnings that support creativity as a phenomenon that can be fostered through proper environmental measures. The second part of this section reviews some of the environmental changes that can be made in organisations in order to foster creativity. The final part of this section examines the technological tools and methods that support the creative management paradigm. It is noted here that there are no limits to how information technology and communicative technological tools can be used to allow creativity to flow, not only from within the organisation but across a broader social context beyond the organisation.

The second section focuses its attention on how the BBC has attempted to use technology as part of its creative management strategy. This section discusses the various changes implemented at the BBC since Mark Thompson was appointed Director General in 2004. It describes the BBC’s Creative Future strategy and the significance given to technology by creating a larger, more inclusive technology department that impacts the whole organisation. The section looks in detail at two aspects of the BBC and the role technology plays in both. These are, the changing nature of how audiovisual audiences interact with media through different platforms, and the commissioning process of audiovisual content.

Finally, before moving on to the conclusion, the chapter offers a smaller third section on future research directions of the creative management paradigm.

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF CREATIVE MANAGEMENT

It is important to acknowledge that interest in creativity derives from numerous academic disciplines such as communications, organisational studies, psychology, sociology and urban studies. There are two main reasons for the present attention afforded to creativity. The first is that a growing number of knowledge-driven societies are determined on becoming ‘creative societies’. A ‘creative societies’ theory, to a large extent, stems from the broader theoretical strand regarding information societies (Webster, 2006). Researchers from this approach prefer to concentrate on the study of how contemporary societies as a whole aim to shift creatively (Bilton, 2007), and how creativity has become an integral part of their lives. In Richard Florida’s well-known work on the rise of the creative class (2004) he notes,
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