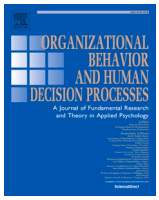
Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes 175 (2023) 104235

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/obhdp



Editorial

Escaping irony: Making research on creativity in organizations more creative☆

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A B S T R A C T

Like most literatures as they mature, the creativity literature has become—ironically—less creative. We spearheaded this special issue to encourage the bold new ideas we need to revitalize research on creativity in organizations and expand our capacity to build knowledge on this important topic. The ten articles included in the special issue inject a big dose of novelty into the creativity literature. We discuss the novel contributions of each article and how scholars can continue making research on creativity more creative.

1. Introduction

Creativity is vital to the survival and success of organizations. In light of its importance, scholars have now studied creativity for several decades. Like most literatures as they mature, the creativity literature has become—ironically—less creative (Kuhn, 1962). Ideas are creative when they are both novel and useful (Amabile, 1996). Many recent papers on creativity in organizations have offered incremental additions to old theories, variables, and paradigms, but novel perspectives have become increasingly rare. Given the richness, dynamism, and complexity of creativity in organizations, we believe the trend toward incrementalism is premature. We spearheaded this special issue to encourage the bold new ideas we need to revitalize research on creativity in organizations and expand our capacity to build knowledge on this important topic. The ten articles included in the special issue inject a big dose of novelty into the creativity literature—they break new ground, fuse disparate perspectives, and shake up longstanding assumptions. In so doing, the ten articles generate many promising opportunities for future research, paving the way for scholars to continue making creativity research more creative.

2. Novelty in the special issue: Pioneers, integrators, and mavericks

To characterize the ways in which the articles in the special issue introduce novelty into the literature on creativity in organizations, we divided the ten articles into three categories: pioneers, integrators, and mavericks. *Pioneers* have traveled to new theoretical ground, establishing a novel area that scholars can further explore and build up. *Integrators* have brought previously disparate ideas together to create a novel perspective that helps us see and solve new problems. *Mavericks* have bucked conventional thinking by challenging old assumptions in novel (and useful) ways. Although all articles in the special issue exhibit some degree of all three categories, we assign each article to the category that we feel best characterizes its novel contribution to the literature.

2.1. Pioneers

Four articles in the special issue are pioneers that chart out novel theoretical terrain, opening opportunities for additional creative development in a new area. First, Ellis (2022) introduces a new line of inquiry on idea theft, a common phenomenon that has been largely

☆ This article is an invited submission. It is part of the special issue 'Novel Perspectives on Creativity in Organizations; Edited by Justin Berg, Michelle Duguid, Jack Goncalo, Spencer Harrison and Ella Miron-Spektor'.

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2023.104235

overlooked in the creativity literature. The author defines idea theft as "an actor pursing, or taking credit for, an idea that is perceived to be owned by another" (p. 3). The article examines the interpersonal penalties that idea thieves suffer for their misdeeds by comparing the consequences of stealing ideas versus stealing money. The author theorizes that others are likely to make stronger internal attributions about idea theft than money theft. Using a series of several experiments, the author finds that idea thieves are judged to have worse character—and are less likely to receive help from others—than money thieves. Moreover, judgements of idea thieves are even harsher when they steal creative (vs practical) ideas. This article offers novel theoretical contributions on the interpersonal consequences of idea theft. But more broadly, this work pioneers a new area of research on idea theft, an important phenomenon that has been understudied by creativity scholars.

Second, in a theory piece, Lucas and Mai (2022) propose that people's beliefs about the creative process can be grouped into two distinct mental models: the Insight model and the Production model. The authors theorize how these two mental models each compel creators to approach the creative process differently, shaping the nature of the final ideas that creators ultimately produce. Creators who hold the Insight model focus on seeding the ground for their ideas to emerge, leading to final ideas that are high in novelty but vary widely in feasibility. In contrast, creators who hold the Production model use a more brute-force approach to generating ideas, leading to final ideas that are high in feasibility but vary widely in novelty. The authors propose that the same creator may hold both mental models, but for a given individual, one model is likely to be dominant over the other. As such, creators can be classified into five different archetypes based on whether they hold one, both, or neither of the mental models (and which model is dominant if they hold both). At the heart of this article is a simple yet profound insight: beliefs about the creative process matter. The article lays the theoretical groundwork for unpacking this novel insight through empirical research on the antecedents, consequences, and moderators of creators' mental models of the creative process.

Third, Harrison and Nurmohamed (2023) use an inductive qualitative study to build theory on a highly novel topic: how creators champion dirty creativity, defined as "novel and useful ideas or products that are considered to be stigmatized in the context in which they are introduced" (p. 1). Their study includes creators who are trying to introduce a variety of stigmatized products into the market, such as food made from insects or clothing made from algae. Dirty creativity of this sort is likely to become increasingly essential, as ideas that begin as stigmatized may be necessary to meet the grave sustainability challenges facing the world. The authors' findings identify tactics that creators use to relocate and recast the stigma embedded in their ideas, helping them win acceptance for their dirty creations. These findings develop theory on the championing stage of the creative process, which has been largely overlooked in prior work. In addition, this article originates a new area of research on dirty creativity, inviting scholars to investigate this novel and increasingly important phenomenon in future research.

Fourth, Xu, Mehta, and Hoegg (2022) pioneer a novel line of research on how the sensory experience of taste shapes creativity, focusing on how sweet taste facilitates creative performance. Although scholars have spent decades studying the physiological and psychological predictors of creativity, taste has been overlooked even though eating is a ubiquitous activity that may accompany or precede efforts to be creative, including at work. Using five studies, the authors find evidence that sweet taste serves as a positive implicit affective cue that boosts cognitive flexibility, which in turn facilitates creative performance (but does not impact non-creative performance). This article paves the way for future research to further unpack the relationship between the sensory experience of taste and creativity. Given the centrality of food in everyday life, we likely have much more to learn about this novel topic.

2.2. Integrators

Four articles in the special issue are integrators that creatively combine two or more separate sets of ideas into a novel perspective that reveals useful insights. First, Mannucci and Shalley (2022) integrate research on multicultural teams and paradox theory to explain why and when teams are able to translate cultural diversity into improved creativity. To do so, the authors introduce the concept of multicultural paradox mindset, defined as "the degree to which one is accepting of and energized by intercultural tensions, both emphasizing cultural differences and finding common ground" (p. 2). In an impressively rich experiment, the authors find that team members high in multicultural paradox mindset facilitate information sharing in their teams, thereby boosting the creativity of their team's performance. By creatively bridging the literatures on multicultural teams and paradox, this article produces a novel theoretical perspective that improves our understanding of how teams can leverage cultural diversity to enhance their creativity. Moreover, this work offers a novel construct—multicultural paradox mindset—that is sure to have other creative uses that scholars can pursue in future research.

Second, in Katz, Mann, Shen, Goncalo, and Ferguson (2022), the authors integrate research on creativity evaluation and implicit cognition to develop novel theory on implicit impressions of creative people. Whereas prior research has focused on explicit judgments of creativity, this article offers a novel perspective on implicit impressions of creativity. Using four studies, the authors demonstrate that when observers encounter a new person who has exhibited creativity, the observers automatically form implicit impressions of the person as creative. These implicit impressions predict behavioral intentions toward the person over and above explicit judgements. Furthermore, the authors find that explicit judgements of creativity are undermined when the creator works in a stigmatized domain, while implicit impressions of creativity persist even in a stigmatized domain. In addition to providing a novel theoretical lens for understanding implicit impressions of creativity, the studies in the article provide scholars with actionable tools for conducting further research on this novel construct.

Third, Carnevale, Huang, Vincent, Farmer, and Wang (2021) bring together ideas on impression management and creativity-relevant helping to create a novel perspective on the consequences of building a reputation for creativity in organizations. The authors theorize that employees who develop a reputation for being creative will engage in strategic efforts to maintain this reputation. Specifically, these employees will give more help to others—but seek less help from others—with respect to creative work. The authors find support for their proposed theory across three studies, including a field study and two experiments. Their findings suggest that building a reputation for creativity is likely to backfire, as employees may need help from others to sustain their creativity but are less likely to seek help when they are concerned with maintaining their creative reputation. In this way, by creatively integrating prior work on impression management and creativity-relevant helping, the authors form a novel theoretical perspective that reveals an important problem that would have otherwise remained invisible.

Fourth, Lazar, Miron-Spektor, and Mueller (2022) integrate theories of attachment, self-construal, and creativity to devise a novel theory of when and why creators pursue novel early-stage ideas over more conventional ones, despite the extra work, uncertainty, and risk of doing so. The authors propose that creators can quickly form strong attachments to novel ideas early in the creative process, but only when they see themselves as an independent entity—they are less likely to become attached to novel ideas when they see themselves as interdependent with others. This is because the pursuit of novelty is more congruent with an independent self-construal than an interdependent one. The authors find support for their theory in a field study of early-stage hackathons and three experiments. This article illustrates how attachment theory is a novel and useful lens through which to view creativity,

and this theoretical innovation is likely to have important applications beyond the article's focus on early-stage idea evaluation. In future research, scholars could explore how creators' attachments to their ideas may shape other stages and aspects of the creative process to provide a more complete picture of how, when, and why attachment may be good versus bad for creativity.

2.3. Mavericks

Two articles in the special issue are mavericks that challenge conventional wisdom with a novel perspective. First, Haselhuhn, Wong, and Ormiston (2022) take on the assumption that organizational leaders ought to publicly extol the virtues of creativity and innovation for their companies. Given that creativity and innovation are well-known drivers of organizational performance, conventional wisdom suggests that leaders should benefit from discussing creativity and innovation in their public addresses. However, using an archival study of Fortune 500 companies, the authors find that the market responds negatively when executives speak of creativity and innovation in their quarterly earnings calls. This negative response from investors appears to be an irrational bias, as discussing creativity and innovation is positively related to subsequent financial performance. This article shows how the bias against creativity that has been demonstrated at the individual level (e.g., Mueller, Melwani, & Goncalo, 2012) can also extend to the organizational level, which is surprising given the strong societal narrative that creativity and innovation are good—and even essential—for companies' effectiveness. To upend conventional wisdom in this way, the authors used an archival dataset, which is a relatively rare method for the creativity literature and thus another source of novelty in the article.

Second, conventional wisdom suggests that creative people are often unpleasant co-workers. Popular culture is chockfull of creative people—both fictional and real—who are abrasive, mercurial, and excessively demanding. In their article, Foulk, Venkataramani, Cao, and Krishnan (2022) challenge the assumption that creativity and rudeness are positively related. Whereas the assumption that creative people tend to be rude is based on an individualistic view of creativity, this article takes a more social view that emphasizes the interdependent and collaborative nature of the creative process in organizations. The authors propose that when employees hold creative mindsets, they become more aware of their co-workers' contributions to their creative work and feel more social closeness as a result, thereby reducing rudeness between them and their co-workers. The authors find support for their theory across four studies, including a field experiment. This article provides a novel and important challenge to the growing body of research on the dark side of creativity (Khessina, Goncalo, & Krause, 2018) by highlighting that there are likely ways in which creative mindsets reduce—not just increase—deviant and counterproductive behaviors in organizations.

3. Additional opportunities to make research on creativity in organizations more creative

The ten articles in the special issue give the literature a helpful boost of novelty, but there remain countless untapped opportunities to creatively approach research on creativity in organizations. In the sections that follow, we describe future research directions that we see as promising. These thoughts are based on our observations of what was covered in the special issue, what was absent from the special issue, and the current state of the literature more broadly.

3.1. Creativity as an independent variable

The vast majority of research on creativity in and outside organizations has had creativity as the dependent variable. Recently, scholars have been paying more attention to creativity as an independent variable, focusing on the consequences (rather than the antecedents) of developing novel and useful ideas. Two articles in the special issue illustrate this growing trend: Carnevale et al. (2021) examine the consequences of earning a reputation for creativity, and Foulk et al. (2022) look at the downstream impact of creative mindsets on rudeness in the workplace. Although a small literature has emerged in recent years on the negative consequences of creativity (see Gino & Ariely, 2012; Khessina, Goncalo, & Krause, 2018), our sense is the field has barely scratched the surface of understanding creativity as an independent variable. This gap is critical to address because the outputs of one creative effort—not only the final product, but the leftover ideas that can be excavated for the next project (Harrison & Rouse, 2015), the social relationships that enable or disable new creative friction (Skilton & Dooley, 2010), and the meanings extracted from the experience of creating—become inputs for the next creative effort (Berg, 2022). Scholars likely have plenty to discover on the full range of positive and negative consequences stemming from multiple sequences of the creative process in organizations, and the mechanisms and moderators that shape the carryover from one creative effort to the next.

3.2. The role of time and timing in creativity

Creativity is an inherently temporal phenomenon. Creative ideas take time to develop. The creative process unfolds in a series of stages that creators may iterate between and cycle through many times (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). What was once a novel idea may become conventional over time, and what was once useful may eventually become useless. Scholars of creativity may benefit from remembering the old saying that "timing is everything." Two articles in the special issue have timing as an important theme. These articles each focus on a different stage of the creative process: Lazar et al. (2022) home in on early-stage idea evaluation by the creators themselves, while Harrison and Nurmohamed (2023) address the later stage of idea championing. These articles illustrate how focusing on a particular stage of the creative process can help make a novel perspective more tractable. Given the standards authors are expected to meet within the finite pages of one article, it likely would have been difficult (or impossible) for the authors to adequately develop their theories of attachment (Lazar et al., 2022) or dirty creativity (Harrison & Nurmohamed, 2023) if they tried to cover more than one stage of the creative process in these first articles on their respective novel perspectives. By focusing on a specific stage of the creative process, the authors could provide the depth required to introduce a novel theory, paving the way for future research on how these theories (attachment and dirty creativity) may unfold in other stages of the creative process. Scholars wishing to introduce their own novel perspectives may benefit from focusing on the specific stage that is most relevant and tractable for their theory. In addition, to build a more complete understanding of timing in creativity, we likely need more theories and studies that address the full life cycle of ideas, from inception through implementation (e.g., Berg & Yu, 2021; Kornish & Ulrich, 2014). In sum, scholars may find it helpful to zoom in on specific moments in the creative process or zoom out to consider how earlier and later moments relate to one another.

Another promising direction is analyzing how creativity changes over time in different contexts. For example, why do some employees and teams improve their creativity at a faster rate and sustain it over time, while others do not (e.g., creativity trajectories, Mannucci & Yong, 2018; Miron-Spektor, Vashdi, & Gopher, 2022)? Examining creativity over a long period of time may transfigure theory (Amabile & Pratt, 2016), leading to new discoveries and important implications for cultivating creativity at different phases and ages, including in older adults (Tromp & Glăveanu, 2023). In addition, research is needed to understand how the perceptions of creative ideas might change over time. Novelty and usefulness are inherently contextual and therefore temporally bounded. As a result, something that is creative today may seem mundane tomorrow. But it is also possible that creative breakthroughs maintain their initial evaluation of being "creative" even long after they have been broadly accepted. Exploring how and why

evaluations of creativity change over time offers the promise to understand why some creative ideas are so meaningful in the moment and how that meaning may persist (or not) over time, perhaps providing insights into how creativity can create sustained competitive advantages for organizations.

3.3. Multiplicity and singularity in creativity

It has become a truism that creative ideas come from recombining previously disparate ideas. As Mark Twain famously wrote, "all ideas are second-hand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources" (Twain, 2004, p. 46). To produce creative ideas, creators take parts from multiple separate ideas and arrange them into one coherent whole. This process is often depicted as a funnel or described in Darwinian terms, such that multiplicity at the beginning is streamlined into singularity at the end. However, creators must also do the reverse to generate multiplicity in the first place—they need to extract components from old singular ideas so that they have multiple components to recombine into a new singular idea. Thus, creativity is a paradoxical fusion of multiplicity and singularity, joining the many other paradoxes that pervade organizational life (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

As researchers of creativity, we often measure the singularities outputted at the end, overlooking the multiplicities from which the outputs originated. The creativity of an idea or person is often simplified in our research into a single Likert-type score, a count of the number of uses for a brick, or the consensual assessment of a panel of experts. While these measures and methods are helpful, what is missing is a sense of how recombination actually occurs in creative work and how and why it is evaluated as creative. That is, what allows multiple disparate ideas to adhere into something that seems to be one singular idea? Researchers are becoming increasingly adept at teasing out the differences between novelty and usefulness, but what is missing is theorizing that explains the alchemy of how and why some ideas fit together to eventually be deemed creative (bubblegum + vitamins?), whereas other recombinations are simply a mess (bubblegum + peanuts!). We know recombination is important to creativity, but how it works is mostly a black box. To open this black box and demystify the role of recombination in creativity, we encourage researchers to explore the interplay between multiplicity and singularity in the development and evaluation of creative ideas.

Moreover, as creators progress through their careers, they accumulate portfolios of multiple ideas, works, or products. The concepts of multiplicity and singularity may be important for understanding the evolution and implications of these portfolios. After all, a creator's portfolio could be seen as a singular collection of coherent inputs or an incoherent hodgepodge of diverse outputs. What are the benefits and costs of singularity versus multiplicity in creators' portfolios, and can creators reap the benefits off both at the same time? How and why do creators impose singularity or multiplicity on their portfolios? For example, research shows that some creators use their identities to evoke signature styles that they impose on their products again and again (Elsbach, 2009), or leaders can be directive in imposing their preferred style on their followers (Rouse & Harrison, 2022). Thus, both identity and leadership might be mechanisms that shape the singularity versus multiplicity reflected in creators' portfolios. Portfolio-level perspectives are relatively rare in research on creativity (cf. Berg, 2022; Sternberg & Lubart, 1996), so we have much more to learn about the dynamics that govern creators' portfolios, including how multiplicity and singularity may play out in creators' portfolios over time.

3.4. AI and creativity

Given the recent advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), we would be remiss if we did not address the opportunities for novel research at the intersection of AI and creativity. As the mainstream media has recently highlighted, the latest AI tools—such as ChatGPT for text and DALL-E 2 for images—can mimic human creativity to an impressive extent (Metz, 2022). These powerful AI tools are already widely available, and AI tools aimed at creative tasks are poised to continue advancing and disseminating at a rapid pace. These trends invite creativity researchers to tackle new questions about how AI might be incorporated as a tool for enhancing, supplementing, evaluating, or in some cases replacing, human creativity. This makes it a very exciting time for scholars to study the intersection of AI and creativity in and outside organizations, perhaps with a focus on interventions that might increase creativity. Below, we offer some thoughts and possible questions for scholars to consider in studying the dynamics between AI and creativity. For additional thoughts and guidance on this promising area for future research, we recommend Amabile (2020).

AI tools align well with the academic literature on creativity. The models underlying AI tools are often classified into two fundamental types: generative and discriminative (Jebara, 2004). Generative AI models are used to produce content like text, images, songs, or videos (e.g., ChatGPT). Discriminative AI models are used to make predictions and categorize content (e.g., Spotify's recommendation system). Conveniently, this distinction maps nicely onto the distinction between idea generation and idea evaluation that is often made in creativity research. This overlap may make it easier to conduct research on AI and creativity, as AI tools are likely to treat idea generation and idea evaluation as separate processes, and many AI tools may focus on one and not the other. Thus, when conducting research on AI and creativity, it may be relatively easy to build on what we already know about idea generation and idea evaluation from prior research. For instance, how might the assistance of AI influence the serial order effect in generating ideas—i.e., the pattern that individuals' ideas usually get progressively more novel before eventually levelling off (Beaty & Silvia, 2012)? Or regarding idea evaluation, how might AI be used to reduce implicit biases against creativity (Mueller et al., 2012)?

For many employees and managers, AI promises to have a profound impact on creative work in organizations. Understanding the evolving challenges and opportunities at the intersection of AI and creativity should keep organizational scholars busy for many years to come. How can organizations provide the necessary support and resources to ensure that AI is used to enhance, rather than decrease or replace, human creativity? What impact does AI have on the way organizations recognize and reward creative contributions, and how can organizations ensure that the use of AI does not undermine the intrinsic motivation of their employees? How can organizations foster a supportive organizational culture that encourages and leverages human creativity in conjunction with AI? Advances in AI are taking organizations into unchartered waters, and organizational scholars are well positioned to conduct novel and useful research that helps provide guidance to organizations on managing the complex dynamics between AI and creativity.

Some historical perspective may help inform how scholars think about and research the relationship between AI and creativity. While AI as a tool for creativity may seem relatively new, it has actually been around for several decades. For instance, the first song composed completely by computer algorithms, titled "Illiac Suite," was generated in 1957 by two professors at the University of Illinois (Hiller & Isaacson, 1959). The quality of the song is well below what songwriting AI tools can produce today. However, looking back, one could argue that this first computer-generated song was more creative than any song that the latest AI tools can generate today. After all, the two professors' pioneering work laid the groundwork for the songwriting AI tools of today, and they had very little computing power to work with by today's standards.

This historical example illustrates how understanding the dynamics between AI and creativity can be a moving target. The way people view and experience the relationship between AI and creativity is bound to change as the technology advances and people use it more. Perhaps the most important questions for creativity scholars to study lie in the

potential long-term impact of AI on the human experience of creativity. The relationship between AI and human creativity may be characterized by both collaboration and competition. As AI technology advances, it will likely become increasingly integrated into the creative process, leading to new forms of creativity that blur the lines between human and machine. Given that AI can already mimic human creativity to a convincing extent, it is easy to imagine how AI has the potential to fundamentally change the meaning of human creativity over time.

For most of history, creativity was not attributed to humans (Runco & Albert, 2010). For centuries, "to create" was a verb reserved for the gods. The word "creativity" itself is less than 100 years old in the English language (Meyer, 2005). Humanity waited thousands of years before finally acknowledging the role of human agency in creativity. What will it mean if we increasingly share this agency with machines? Some argue that AI can augment human creativity by providing new capabilities and insights, while others worry that it could lead to a devaluation of human creativity and the abilities that are uniquely human. These debates and thorny questions highlight the need for continued exploration and reflection on the meaning and value of human creativity in a rapidly changing technological landscape.

4. Conclusion

Similar to other scientific fields that have become less disruptive in recent years (Park, Leahey, & Funk, 2023), the creativity field is confronting the challenges of saturation, which make it difficult to introduce novel perspectives and approaches. This special issue was designed to push back on the incrementalism that comes with being a mature field. We do not wish to imply that all recent research on creativity in organizations is uncreative—we appreciate that some relatively novel work has come out in recent years. Moreover, we do not believe that all research on creativity in organizations can or should be highly novel. Incremental, paradigmatic progress is an important driver of scientific advancement. At the same time, we see the literature on creativity in organizations as trending too much toward incrementalism and believe that the field would benefit from more novelty. We see this special issue as a step in the right direction and hope the momentum keeps building. As scholars of creativity, we study an exciting, rich, and ever-changing set of phenomena. It seems only fitting that we strive to make creativity a goal of our research, not just the subject of it.

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