STILL THE ELUSIVE DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY

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Abstract. Background, purpose. After examining construct limitations of well accepted definitions of creativity, it is possible to conclude that these definitions represent what can be designated as hetero-attributed creativity, to which the “little c” - “big C” continuum can be adapted; whereas the self-attributed construct, dealing with the criteria established by the person who creates, becomes limited to a continuous effort to improve and to interpret reality, to which the “little c” - “big C” continuum also applies, but in the self-perceived view. Creativity may be seen as the process of communication between the creator (or the product) and the audience (hetero-attributed), or between the creator and the product (self-attributed), while innovation seems more appropriate to designate the attribution made by the audience to the product. In the end creativity is proposed as a concept that people use in their implicit theories, reinforcing the need for the social scientist to be able to teach people to recognise and value forms of creativity that are outside a certain context, culture, or time, more than structuring and characterising what people already value as creative products.

Keywords: creativity; innovation; creativity definitions.

Researchers have often been led to agree with Brown (1989) that creativity is like a difficult love, in which all reasons tell you to quit, but you still keep going on; and that is why we often feel tempted to get back to the never-solved problem of the scientific construct of creativity.

One of the reasons why we surrender to this sort of fascination is because creativity seems one of those concepts that is so easily understood yet so difficult to explain. According to Woodman & Schoenfeld (1989), this is due to the difference between the terms “concept” and “construct”: the former carries meaning in everyday speech and, while imprecise, is
widely shared; as to the latter, the construct validity issues surrounding the term can be frustrating in the extreme for researchers.

As to the construct of creativity, it may be understood, as Tardif & Sternberg (1991) explain, through each of Rhodes’s (1987) accepted views of the creative processes, persons, products and environment. But as it becomes difficult to combine all approaches in a single definition, and as a creative person is always someone who makes or thinks something creative, it is easier to understand it through process/product-oriented definitions, like those of Amabile (1983), “A product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative. ... and it can also be regarded as the process by which something so judged is produced”, and Stein (1953), “Creativity is a process that results in novelty which is accepted as useful, tenable, or satisfying by a significant group of others at some point in time”.

Nevertheless, discussions about the concept of creativity (Isaksen & Murdock, 1993; Boden, 1994a, 1994b; Sternberg & Lubit, 1995, 1996; Runco, 1994, 1995; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994; Plucker, 2005; Richards, 2007) have contributed more to stressing its subjectivity, rather than its objectivity. Precise definitions, like those proposed by Stein and Amabile, have been called into question, especially by cognitive psychologists like Sternberg (1991), who declares that “assessments of creativity are in need of serious reconsideration and especially broadening”, introducing more and more doubts about the correct ways to interpret the construct. Precision and breadth, objectivity and subjectivity, concept and construct, seem then to be in constant struggle and, as Isaksen & Murdock (1993), or Smith (2005) admit, we are still far from fully understanding what creativity really means.

These facts, far from diminishing the scientific value of the construct of creativity, have been contributing to a better understanding of the phenomena involved, just by increasing its subjectivity. As Estrela (1990) states, “To distinguish between the objective and the subjective is, in itself, a valid form of objectivity”. That is why it is important to begin by examining the sources of controversy in the literature, even if it means coming up with more doubts, instead of solutions, because our aim is just to provide in depth reflections about one of the more intriguing and fascinating human biopsychosocial phenomena. By discussing the definition of creativity, we are forced to discuss a series of aspects conser-
ning human achievement and its recognition by society. Bringing about that discussion and making a literature review of authors and titles most contributed to it, it’s the purpose of this article.

**CREATIVITY WITH A “C” AND WITH A “C”**


Some authors, such as Dowd (1989), consider that only “big C” creativity may be seen as true creativity, stating that “the term ‘creativity’ should be reserved for activities or products that are truly original and break new ground”; and others, like Stein (1987), opine that “by applying the same word, creative, to every little thing that is novel or every minor deviation from the status quo, we risk the danger of erecting a tower of Babel”. Nevertheless, scholars like Johnson-Laird (1991) affirm that it is possible to maintain interesting argument and discussions at the “little c” level of creativity, which may provide us with an understanding of what is involved in this phenomenon. Still others (Weisberg, 1986; Gooding, 1966; Perkins, 1981) adopt an intermediate position, considering that there is a continuum between everyday and eminent creativity, which represent basically the same sort of phenomena, in clear opposition to those who consider that the two terms represent different phenomena.

Sternberg & Lubart (1996), for example, show doubts whether the term “creativity” should be used for both levels, while Csikszentmihalyi (1991), Gruber (1981), and Gardner (1983), maintain that there are qua-
litative differences when pursuing both approaches as specific disciplines and in judging creative products derived from each of them. Ludwig (1995a) adds that the criteria for one may differ substantially from the criteria for the other, and brings into the discussion a series of clarifications of phenomena related to eminent and non-eminent forms of creative achievement, such as fame versus achievement, artistic activities versus creativity, nonconformity versus originality, productivity versus achievement, discovery versus creative thinking.

If both conceptions are different, as to their theoretical construct and phenomena involved, and do not stand in a continuum, then it is necessary to examine each one of them, in order to fulfil the purpose of clarification. What seems to matter, then, is to decide whether “little c” and “big C” are just two opposing poles of a continuous scale, representing basically the same thing or, if not, which one best deserves our attention as a sharable construct.

Against the aforementioned product/process-based definitions (Stein, 1953; Amabile, 1983), it is possible to find other authors who place the judgement upon the observer, while maintaining stable the remaining elements of the definition: process, product, novelty and usefulness. Johnson-Laird (1991), for example, claims that “the product of a creative process must be novel for the creator”; and a similar position is held by Welsh (1980), quoted by Isaksen & Dorval (1993): “it must meet the criteria of purpose and value established by the creator”. In a book review of Baer (1997), Runco (1998) agrees with the former in that creativity is simply “anything that someone does in a way that is original to the creator and that is appropriate to the purpose or goal of the creator”.

It seems though that one important element lies in the entity who makes the judgement about the process or product as revealing some form of creativity: the person, himself or herself, in an entirely subjective judgement; or, in a search for objectivity, someone else, either an individual, group, organisation, general public, or society, but normally experts in the field, or judges, as in Sternberg & Lubart’s (1995) statement: “creativity rating depends on the judges. It is a sociocultural judgement.”

Seen as a judgement, or attribution, about something, let us consider the construct limitations that arise when the evaluation is made by others.
CONSTRUCT LIMITATIONS OF HETERO-ATTRIBUTED CREATIVITY

Sternberg & Lubart (1995) argue that creative people are recognised by the products they produce but, as Gardner (1994) explains, a product is not creative in itself, before being judged by expert individuals. So, as MacKinnon (1978; 1987) argues, it is through the analysis of creative products, that is, through “a determination of what it is that makes them different from more mundane products”, that we must begin to try to understand the construct. Also Hausman (1987) mentions that “we must start with the product. It is by their fruits that we shall know them”; and Hocevar (1981) concludes that “a simple and straightforward inventory of creative achievement and activities appears to be more defensible than the more commonly used methods”.

“Criteria”, “experts”, and “social context” are therefore key words in the definition of the construct, which will be examined in the following paragraphs.

The Criteria Used in the Evaluation

According to Besemer and Treffinger (1981), suitable valid criteria, to judge a product as creative, are difficult to obtain, since novelty is only a necessary but not sufficient condition, as Isaksen (1987) pointed out, quoting Briskman (1980):

... the novelty of a product is clearly only a necessary condition of its creativity, not a sufficient condition: for the madman who, in Russell’s apt phrase, believes himself to be a poached egg, may very well be uttering a novel thought, but few of us, I imagine, would want to say that he was producing a creative one. (p. 95)

Furthermore, Isaksen considers that it needs to be relevant and appropriate, while Jackson & Messick’s (1965) add transformation and condensation, and Richards, Kinney, Bennet & Merzel (1988) insert adaptation to reality (outcomes must be meaningful to others). Amabile (1983) includes useful, correct, valuable, although mentioning that these criteria remain a subjective evaluation even if more factors are added, such as in Besemer & O’Quin’s (1987) Creative Product Analysis Matrix.
In contrast, authors recognise that it is an almost impossible task to set up objective criteria to qualify a product as creative. Amabile (1983), for example, says “for the purposes of empirical research, then, it seems appropriate to abandon the hope of finding objective criteria for creativity”; and Sternberg & Lubart (1996) reinforce her statement by stating that “there is no single objective standard for what constitutes creative performance”.

In the end, as Miller (1986) puts it, a creative product is “something easy to recognise but hard to explain”. In fact we can easily recognise a product as creative, especially in the arts, or in a domain that we know something about (Isaksen, 1987), but that does not mean that every one will make the same judgement, no matter what criteria we use, as to the level of creativity involved. Of course, what one person considers creative may not be considered as such by another person, as each one of us has different criteria for such judgements. This is why various authors (Hennessey & Amabile, 1991; Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) agree, on the definition of creative products, that their evaluation must be made by experts in the domain.

The Evaluation Made by Experts

A first doubt arises then, when we try to define what we mean by “experts in a domain”, domain meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) “the parameters of the cultural system in which the creativity takes place” or, as in the interpretation of Gardner (1994), “a set of practices associated with an area of knowledge”; and field meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991) “all those persons, rules and norms, that can affect the structure of a domain”, or “individuals and institutions that render judgements about work in a domain” (Gardner, 1994).

Sometimes it is hard to name a certain group of people rather than another, as experts in a domain, because there are a whole lot of groups surrounding a creative product. Take, for example, the people who may have direct influence in the recognition of a painting as a masterpiece: the painter, the gallery owners or museum curators, the art historians and art teachers, the art critics, the patrons and art dealers, the journalists or art specialists, the peer group of artists; and finally, the people who come to the exhibitions, buy the paintings, talk about them and collaborate in the process of adopting and diffusing creative products.
An interesting example is provided by Kasof (1995b), when he describes the case of the 20th-century Dutch painter Han van Meegeren, who decided to prove his value by painting an original work (*The Disciples of Emmaus*) and presenting it as an unknown Vermeer (one of the more famous 17th-century masters), which had been secretly owned by an Italian family for generations. The painting was considered a masterpiece, and the foremost expert at the time on 17th-century art, Abraham Bredius, declared it Vermeer’s finest masterpiece. Later, when van Meegeren was imprisoned for forgery, this one and other “masterpieces” were simply thrown away as “mediocre” works of art.

If we take another example from the science domain, which people may consider more objective than the arts, as far as creativity judgements are concerned, we may reach similar conclusions, as the production of science is a complex phenomenon, which does not rely only on the people who “invent” the theories and concepts, but on many more people. As Ludwig (1995b) puts it, “science has progressed thanks to the work of astoundingly mediocre men”, and “the individual genius is the functional equivalent of a considerable array of other scientists of varying degrees of talent” (Perkins, 1992). Kasof (1995b) provides another example, reporting the “experiment” run by Peters & Ceci (1982), in which they selected 12 articles published in psychology journals, by highly prestigious scientists, replaced their names and institutions and submitted them for publication in the refereed journals in which they had been published 18 to 32 months earlier. Of the nine articles whose true authorship was not detected, 8 were rejected, with 89% of the referees recommending against publication.

In the technology domain, product evaluation is also far from being a simple task: Quigg (1992), for example, mentions that in Japan more than 25 million inventions await recognition by the Japanese Patent Office. Reporting the objectivity of the criteria used to classify something as an invention (*newness, usefulness and unobviousness*), by the U.S. Patent Office, Huber (1998) explains how it is difficult for someone to be acknowledged without having the financial power to support the expense of several hundred thousand U.S. dollars, necessary to register and sustain the patent for a minimum period.

Even if we manage to define a set of field experts and a perfect scale, for the assessment of creativity of a certain product, we know that the experts may be, themselves, a barrier to the acknowledgement of true
creativity, either because they are not able to understand the importance of the creation, or just because of their holding on to power. If the originality, or uniqueness, of the products conceived is too far ahead of its time, or hurts any established power, the people who produced it may well not be recognised at the time, either because they are not understood, or because of the existence of serious impediments to the communication of the discovery. Because of that, public acknowledgement may come very late in the lives of truly creative people, or even only long after their deaths, which brings us to the final issue of hetero-attributed creativity - historical recognition.

Historical Evaluation

We understand that it is hard to recognise as creative, products whose meaning people do not have the ability to capture, and we know that the process of recognition of creative products must be submitted to rather complex ways of communication, because, as Eysenck (1994) puts it, “Creativity is a threat to the great uncreative majority”, and “there is nothing more painful than the pain of a new idea”. Many eminent people, like Van Gogh, were recognised very late in their lives or, like Bach, Rembrandt, or Mendel, only long after their deaths (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991).

It seems, though, that only time and history can really do justice to creativity, especially the kind that is quite ahead of its time, which brings us to the problem of how to recognise creativity through a creative product when it is produced, and not only many years later. Various authors (Ludwig, 1995b; Albert, 1983) stress the fact that almost all eminent people were recognised as such before they died, even though they may not have been given as much credit as later on. A sort of correspondence between the creation and the preparedness of contemporary society to understand its full meaning seem to be the necessary ingredients for a successful promotion of a discovery, thus leading to a conclusion about creative products: its recognition is contingent on “some point in time”, as Stein (1994) and Sternberg (2006) explain, that is to say, it is, to some extent, context dependent.

But we also know that if we take history as the true judge of creative products and individuals, we may become suspicious about it, as each society creates its own heroes and villains, and it is easy to build images
far beyond the reality they represent. See, for example, the fame that Marilyn Monroe has nowadays, compared with others like Judy Holliday who, according to Albert (1983b), had a similar impact on the film industry, at the time.

The phenomenon of reputation (the opinion of contemporaries, revised by posterity) is dynamic and cumulative, and it is difficult to explain why people with similar creative productions, like, for example, Freud and Havelock Ellis, Leon Blum and Churchill, Daguerre and Talbot, the Wright brothers and Carlos Drummond are, at present, so differently known by the general public. Huber (1998) brings into discussion a particularly interesting case, concerning the attribution of the invention of the telephone to Graham Bell, who registered his patent just two hours earlier than Elisha Gray, who invented a similar apparatus and remains unknown to the general public.

As Kasoff (1995a; 1995b) explains, people tend to attribute creative behaviour to dispositional causes (personal abilities, traits, cognitive styles), rather than situational causes (external: environmental, political). Physical or financial handicap, precocity, simultaneous or collective discovery, early death, attractive pseudonyms or forename attractiveness and connotations, nationality, membership in the judges in-group or out-group, expressed opinions of other judges, market scarcity, adoption by certain age groups, are just a few of the mechanisms that may originate different social perceptions of creativity in people who produced similar creations. In fact, as this author maintains, the initial reception of the original product is perhaps the most outstanding area of ignorance about creativity.

We must still consider the problem of intercultural recognition. Even though there is probably some expert agreement, among people from various cultures, as to the evaluation of true historic creations (Lubart, 1990), the same does not apply to something less than historic, which leads to his conclusion that “raters and norms from a culture seem to be the most acceptable method for the analysis of creativity in a culture”. Different people, from different cultures, religions or races, show different criteria as to what they value as creative products, and if we take the people listed in an encyclopaedia, as an index of their eminence, we may find many more representatives of Western cultures, rather than other cultures, which at least represents a statistical impossibility of distribution of creative abilities among human beings. In a comprehensive study.
regarding eminent people, conducted by Ludwig (1995), he concluded that blacks constituted only 4% of the entire sample, and that Jews were over-represented. Creative products acquire meaning only within a social context, because they need social validation. As Csikszentmihalyi (1999) explains, it is not possible to understand creativity without understanding how it is decided, in a specific context, whether something new should be added to an existent domain.

As discussed in these three last paragraphs, the so called “big C” creativity seems far from being a universal, objective construct, and it is perhaps not worth striving for its objectivity, because it will always be possible to rate creative products within a specific context. Let us turn now to the remaining elements of the construct definition - process and novelty - to see how they stand up to criticism.

Creativity as a Process

Since the early model of Wallas (1922), which considered the process of creation divisible into four stages (preparation, incubation, illumination and verification), many others have come to birth, although more or less related to this one, like those of Vernon (1967), Motamedi (1982) or Stein (1994). This framework, although providing interesting discussions and arguments, has contributed to maintaining an aura of mystery around the process of creation, with a special emphasis on the primary processes (Stein, 1994; MacKinnon, 1987), dealing with free associative, disordered, reverie-thinking, unconscious processes.

Authors like Weisberg (1986), Fryer (1996) or Ochse (1990), claim that the illumination phase, or “stage”, of illumination, insight, or “Aha!”, are nothing but myths, and that no evidence has been found for the role of the unconscious processes, except in the subjective reports of scientists and artists like Paul Valéry (1972), Henry Poincaré (1929), or James Watson (1968), who, as in the words of Ludwig (1995a), tend to bring about literary or poetic descriptions instead of scientific ones, because it cannot be otherwise. In contrast, Shaw (1994), Runco (1994), Csikszentmihalyi (1996), Gruber (1989) and others, stress the role that emotion, intuition, insight and other non-rational processes play in creativity, leaving a large field of investigation and reflection, unfortunately outside the reach of natural quantitative science, but probably
much more interesting in the attempt to understand what creativity is really about.

Secondary processes, related to rational, ordered, reality-oriented conscious processes, form the basis of study for cognitive psychology and cognitive science. The former by applying existing knowledge of psychology in domains like motivation, attention, perception, memory, learning, thinking and communicating; the latter by analysing information processes that may be applied to computers and to decision making, like the processes of induction and deduction (Newel & Simon, 1972; Johnson-Laird, 1993), either in normal people or in what is called “Expert Performance” (Chi, Glaser & Farr, 1988; Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Ericsson, 1996).

Other processes, such as imagery (Khatena, 1987; Finke, 1990) and visionizing (Parnes, 1988), and especially problem-solving (Hayes, 1990; Whitman, 1994; Isaksen, Dorval & Treffinger, 2000) and creative and critical thinking (Paul, 1993; Kim, 1994), have been a target for research and study in creativity, leading us to wonder if there are secondary thought processes specific to creativity, or if creativity is a part of these processes.

Authors who claim that there is no specific secondary process in creative thinking, which does not require extraordinary individuals, support this issue or extraordinary thought processes. Weisberg (1991; 1999), for example, reinforcing his previous statements (Weisberg, 1986), argues “there can be no thinking except creative thinking”. Also MacCrimmon (1994) says, “The processes are not unique to a particular creative occasion. ... common processes are used by multiple persons and are found in many different domains”. Ebert (1994) goes further by affirming that there is no single, generally accepted, definition of creative thinking - a designation that can be used interchangeably with “thinking”, “problem solving”, and “cognition”; and that “creative thinking may be considered as a characteristic of cognitive processing, and as such, as an attribute possessed by all who think. ... is not seen as something that one does or does not do, but rather as something that one does to varying degrees as a function of processing information” (p. 288). This may lead us to think that we enter the domain of creativity when the solutions that we find do not satisfy us, and then, by using exactly the same mental processes, we simply try harder. In an illustration provided by Abra (1997), Newton is said to have answered, “by thinking on continually” when he was asked how he had reached gravitation theory through the example
of falling apples. Garnham & Oakhill (1994), also agree that “the mental processes underlying creative thought are not essentially different from those underlying other kinds of thinking”. Also, contrary to the view of divergent thinking as a specific process of creativity, Barron & Harrington (1981) claim that it goes “hand in glove with convergent thinking in every thought process that results in a new idea”, and Cropley (2006) reinforces this statement, stressing the value of convergent thinking.

**Novelty as a Condition**

Getting back to what was left untouched of the initial definitions of Stein and Amabile – the need of “novelty” as a necessary condition for creativity – we may see that several authors do not support this proposition. Abra (1997), for example, rejects the need for a creative work to be novel, separating two types of creators: *innovators* and *perfectors*. Also, Kirton (1989) argues that people do not approach the defining of problems in the same way, but in a continuum that is anchored at one end by an adaptive approach (ideas under the known setting - doing things better), and at the other by an innovative approach (ideas often go outside the problem as initially defined - doing things differently). As Gryskiewicz (1987), and Rosenfeld (1989), point out, Kirton’s research has been widely expanded and has contributed to the demystification of creativity. Brinkman (1999) stresses the importance to the shift from the notion of *level* (how much ability does the individual possess) to the one of *style* (how people process information and experience; how they use their creativity). This notion of style, which, as Isaksen & Dorval (1993) maintain, has its origin in the study of perception, represents a considerable advancement in the study of creative behaviour. This notion is further developed as a constructivist view, by authors like Strzalecki & Targowska (1976), who see a style as a “superordinate construct that is involved in many cognitive operations and which accounts for individual differences in a variety of cognitive, perceptual and personality variables”, or as a cognitivist view of the intellectual styles (Sternberg & Lubart, 1991; 1992).

A story quoted by Albert (1983b), may illustrate this point better than further explanations:

I once saw a shepherd who used to divert himself by tossing up eggs and catching them again without breaking them: in which he
had arrived at so great a degree of perfection, that he would keep up four at a time for several minutes. ... for by his wonderful perseverance and application, he had contracted the seriousness and gravity of a privy-councillor; and I could not but reflect with myself, that the same assiduity and attention, had they been rightly applied, might have made him a greater mathematician than Archimedes. (p. 86)

It is very likely that the shepherd, in Albert’s story, perceived his behaviour as highly original, even though it was not novel to the observer. That is why authors like Johnson-Laird (1991) claim that “the product of a creative process must be novel for the creator”; and a similar position is held by Welsh (1980), Baer (1997), Runco (1998), and others, as described in the beginning of this work.

If true, this conception leads us to a much broader distribution of the phenomena among the population, and reduces the élitist character to which, sometimes, research in creativity tends to become limited, thus including many more individuals and activities that are usually left out of the field, such as athletes, performance artists (actors, dancers, musicians), craftsmen, or even the illiterate. Weisberg (1999), for example, presents findings related to the similarity of practice and immersion in the discipline of artists, scientists, musicians and athletes. Striving for improvement, or even perfection (the goal of life, as Sanford [1998] explains), whether it may be perceived or not as novelty by others, is always an act of creativity, with which Nickerson (1999) also agrees.

As in the words of Runco (1994) “the concept is indeed in a turning point towards generalisation and democratisation, which deserves the attention of creativity theorists”.

**HETERO - ATTRIBUTED CREATIVITY AS COMMUNICATION**

Creativity recognition includes many people in various roles of production, mediation and recognition, whom Stein (1974; 1993; 1994) names as creators, intermediaries and appreciators, making it very difficult to determine who should judge, why a certain judgement is produced, and when is the ideal time to make the definitive judgement as to a product’s level of creativity.
A story told by Patton (1987), about the comments that Halcom makes on a dispute between two students, who claimed to have invented the same concept, may illustrate what may be involved in the recognition of a creative product, and the roles that each actor plays in the process.

There are many who pass through the world without seeing a certain thing. Then there are many who see the thing, but for one reason or another, never name or label it. Then there are those few who see this certain thing and name it, thus calling the attention of others to it. Then still there are those who see it, name it, and convince their fellows that the label is worth preserving and that the thing is worth seeing, thus giving special importance to the concept. Finally, there are many who follow the newly labelled concept but fail to really see or understand the thing and its importance. ...Being present at this time and in this place it is not our role to pass judgement on which of these deserves the greater credit. (p. 82)

As Simonton (1995) realises, sometimes the attribution is made out of behaviours that have nothing to do with creativity, and this, in turn, can influence the person’s behaviour, producing what the author calls a “feedback loop”, in a dynamic linkage between behaviours and attributions.

And what sometimes is designated as creativity is little more than the ability to communicate and convince others, which, according to the words of Runco (1995), is not a good indicator of the ability to generate ideas, because the intrapersonal process of creativity may be independent of the expressive and attribution processes. Heizen (1995) goes further by arguing that “impression management is the sworn enemy of creativity”, stating that “we adjust our personality to manage the impressions we make on others, for the express purpose of gaining social power”.

To these statements, Kasof (1999) objects by referring to creativity as a form of “persuasive communication” in which the creator is the source, the original product is the message, and the judge is the recipient or audience. This agrees with Simonton’s (1995) view that “as a source cannot be highly persuasive without having influenced large numbers of recipients, so a creator cannot achieve eminence without having had exceptional personal influence”.

This communication view of creativity is also developed by Sawyer (1998), who sees it in its interactive domains of teaching, parenting, leadership, and mentoring, following Simonton’s (1984; 1995) considerati-
ons that creativity and leadership represent the two most forceful routes to the display of exceptional personal influence, with creativity being “just another guise of leadership, with many of the same processes appearing in both phenomena”.

The issue of the appreciator as a creative entity is further developed by Jones (1997), for whom what is created cannot itself come into being without those who preserve it, as understanding is always understanding differently, and the act of interpreting what is created, and making that interpretation meaningful to others, is also an act of creativity. Mace (1997) looking at art, also supports the social constructivist view that:

... theory and investigations are directed by those who are intimate with (produce, think about, describe) the phenomena in question - artists. In this way creativity and our thoughts about creativity are seen to have multiple, self constructed meanings that are actively created in a variety of ways through those individuals who engage in, and talk about, creativity. It is in this reflexive and person-construed way that phenomena gather their reality, rather than that reality being imposed objectively on individuals. (p. 266-267)

HETERO-ATTRIBUTED CREATIVITY AS INNOVATION

According to the previous paragraphs, we may then have to study areas pertaining to the process of communication of creative products, either in their production, adoption, implementation, diffusion, or commercialisation (Kaufman, 1993; Rogers, 1983; Spence, 1994), in order to understand the totality of the phenomena involved. But then the doubt arises whether creativity theory also includes the materialisation of the idea (the invention), and its communication and application (innovation), as in Kaufman’s (1993) distinction.

Even though Besemer & O’Quin (1987) regard invention and innovation as included in the creativity theory, they provide a clear framework to understand the distinctness of each of these concepts. In fact, once we speak of an idea, practice or object, whether in arts, science, technology or other domains, which is perceived as new by someone else, other than its originator, then we are probably talking about innovation, because communication is added.
Of course, as various authors (e.g. Torrance, 1962; Stein, 1994; Simon-nton, 1984) state, communication itself may be creative performance, but just as part of the process of putting an idea into use. Creativity does not end with an idea; it starts with it, says Parnes (1988), and Stein & Heinze (1994) reinforce Parnes’ statement by arguing that creativity deals with the process, which does not have to end in an observable product but only with the idea. Here, innovation starts and ends using creativity as the process. Communication may even be viewed as occurring first within the individual, as a capacity to shift roles (Stein, 1974), in which the creator develops a dialogue with his or her work, as a sort of anticipating the audience; but then there is still no perception of it by other people, and the idea cannot be considered as an innovation by anyone else but its author.

Rogers (1983), for example, defines innovation as something “perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption”, and VanGundy (1987) as a “process of proposing, adopting, and implementing an idea”; Kanter (1983) addresses the concept as “the putting to use” of an idea; West & Farr (1990), in turn, define innovation as “the intentional introduction and application within a role, group or organisation of ideas, processes, products or procedures, new to the relevant unit of adoption”.

West & Altink (1996) hold that although innovation has been considered the domain of economics, it is within the discipline of psychology that the study of innovation perhaps most appropriately fits. This does not mean, as already stated, that it means the same thing as creativity. As social concepts, both creativity and innovation are applied at various levels - individual, group, organisation, society or culture - but while the term “creativity” appears related to the conditions that favour or hinder creative performance, or how it develops (Amabile, 1992; Ekvall, 1996), innovation appears connected to putting creativity in use. Thus creativity appears connected to the individual, only, while innovation is used at the various levels. As West & Farr (1990) propose, innovation is a social process, while creativity is a cognitive individual process.

Even though authors like VanGundy (1987) state that innovation is not always creative, it seems that the former cannot exist without the latter, no matter what the level, context or degree of resemblance of the innovation, comparatively to what has already been invented, adopted or made an object of diffusion. If, for example, one decides to use a computer slide-projection as a tool for work presentation, which is a com-
mon device in places other than one’s own, and that is perceived and adopted as an innovation by other people working in the same place, then, even though the initiator did not invent computer slide-projection, some creativity was needed to put to use and convince others to use a piece of equipment that had no already installed support system (e.g. adaptation between the computer and the projection system, room arrangement, need for additional budget, breaking away from normal slide projection), thus implying some creativity.

In the field of management innovation, even the Japanese way of adapting others’ inventions, by refining them and achieving high commercial successes, is now being considered a valid form of creativity (Bolton, 1993), even though not a very innovative one. This way creativity is given a wider sense, in order to understand the phenomena involved, together with what is connected with self-attribution of creativity, as discussed in the following section.

**CREATIVITY AS A SELF-PERCEIVED CONSTRUCT**

These views leave us perhaps at Galton’s initial construct of “motivation and effort”, also supported by Runco (1995), although without its inherited nature, or personality-based trait definition. In this perspective, creativity may be seen as a matter of will, as the *trying to do better*, or *to be better*, leaving its process as a fully subjective concept, even though producing a series of sharable constructs. Albert (1983b) also advocates a “definition of creativity that does not depend on failure or success but on intention and effort”. Or, to put it more simply, as in the words of Kokot & Colman (1997), “creativity is a way of being”.

If, as Abra (1997) proposes, human beings are driven by nature to seek the Better and the Best, then we must search for all understanding of what is beyond creativity only in deep human motives, and in the ways each individual organises and incorporates the perception of reality in his or her self. And if, as this author claims, creativity is a natural drive of mankind, then, as he says, it “cannot be enhanced but avoided to undermine”, with which Magyary-Beck (1998) agrees, when referring to creativity as deeply related to motivation and the kind of perceptual blocks so simply described by Adams (1986). Seeking for the “Better and the Best” involves a search for the ethical, and even though, as Mena-
ker (1996) explains, any ethical formation of the character begins with the internalisation of traditional moral codes, it tends to end with autonomously expressed ideals derived from the individual, which may not coincide with socially accepted moral codes. According to Heinze (1995), and also to Nickerson (1999), this is perhaps the main reason why people must not expect to acknowledge any inherent ethical value in other people’s creativity, as its perceived ethical value depends only on the outcomes toward which creativity is being exercised and, therefore, on our likes and our dislikes, even if it means dealing with terrorism acts and crime (Cropley, Kaufman & Cropley, 2008).

Otto Rank’s conception of creativity, as described by Menaker (1996), presents the human will as a central cause of action and creation. To him, “each individual is unique and carries within him or her the potentiality of creating something new, different and unexpected out of past experience (via the human capacity to internalise experiences of the outer environment) and making it a part of the self”, and that “there are in the human being two contradictory wishes: to be differentiated as an individual and to lose oneself by merging with a larger whole”. To this Viennese psychoanalyst, who broke away from Freud in the early 1920s (rejecting the notion of creativity as a sublimation of a sexual impulse), one fears the loss of the self and longs for immortality, and either by creating, procreating or identifying with an ideology one reduces the fear of death. Suffering (derived from the sense of guilt for separateness of the self from the larger whole) would then be the conscious awareness of death, which can be reduced by creating, which in turn increases guilt. And so the greater the artist, the greater the vulnerability to the feeling of guilt for separateness. This guilt can also be reduced by merging with the whole (e.g. by identifying oneself with a specific organisation, a religious or political ideology shared by others, or a scientific community), but then creativity, as individuality, suffers.

Abra (1997) also sees creativity as a sort of compensation for the lack of something, in which the individual enters and starts to compete with no one else but oneself and one’s personal standards, in a quest for identity and individuality.

The doubt remains as to the intentional nature of creativity, because, as Bruner (1979) holds, creativity is “an act that produces effective surprise”, i.e. the product created by the individual appears as a surprise,
made out of discernment and choice among many possible combinations, and driven by a passion that drives the attention to a superior discernment.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In the end, Amabile and Stein’s definitions of creativity seem then to apply only to the hetero-attributed construct, to which the “little c” - “big C” creativity continuum can be adapted, whereas the self-attributed construct becomes limited to a continuous effort to improve, either as a human being, or what the person does. Again, to this latter construct, the “little c” - “big C” continuum also applies, but in the self-perceived view.

As pictured in Figure 1, creativity seems then to be the process of communication between the creator (or the product) and the audience (hetero-attributed), or between the creator and the product (self-attributed); innovation seems to be more appropriate to designate the attribution made by the audience to the product, or when we speak of creativity at group and organizational levels. Quoting Csikszentmihalyi (1991), “creativity is located in neither the creator nor the creative pro-

![Figure 1. The construct of creativity](image-url)
duct but rather in the interaction between the creator and the field’s gatekeeper who selectively retains or rejects original products”.

As to creativity as a scientific construct or as a people’s concept, this article ends by proposing creativity as a concept that people use as implicit theories of creativity, either as creators, or as Stein’s (1994) intermediaries and appreciators, in the way they consider a specific product, person or process as representative of their conceptions of creativity. This subjective view is being supported by authors like Runco (1993; 2007), and Sternberg & Lubart (1996), who have entered what may be called the “art” field of creativity, introducing the implicit theories as a means to explain the subjectiveness of a person’s own conception of creativity.

As proposed by Runco, Nemiro & Walbery (1998), the bridge between creativity as a subjective concept, and creativity as a theoretical construct, may then rely on empirical techniques used by researchers to identify clusters of concepts among people, as a kind of transformation of stable personal implicit theories into personal explicit theories about creativity, and then in consensual explicit theories. Chan & Chan (1999), for example, use this methodology to characterise the ways that teachers see the creativity of their students. Nevertheless, the attempt to make generalisations from what represents the sheer affirmation of each one’s individuality, different from everybody else, may seem a bit like a loss of time, at least from a psychological point of view.

Following Sawyer’s (1998) conclusions, instead of trying to structure, characterise and find designations to what people already know and recognise, in a certain context or culture, the social scientist will probably provide a better service to creativity by teaching people to recognise and value forms of creativity that are out of that context, culture, or time. Going back to Albert’s (1983b) example of the shepherd, instead of regretting that the man’s qualities had not been used to make him a great mathematician, the social scientist would probably provide a better service to mankind by being able to explain that what the man was doing was as important as a great mathematician’s activity.

References


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