



CREATIVITY IN COMMUNITY

exploring creativity & social innovation in non-profits.

make a difference



volunteering
queensland

Introduction

A need for social innovation in the not-for-profit sector is present and growing worldwide, with a growing recognition of the importance of creative thinking and solutions. Various not-for-profit organisations have successfully implemented innovative and creative practices while achieving tangible, often long-term goals, to effectively serve and improve the community. However, many organisations and communities have not made that step towards social innovation.

This research paper explores the ways creativity and social innovation affect the not-for-profit sector and community. Various definitions, dimensions and applications of creativity are discussed. The notion of creativity in the not-for-profit sector is then extended and connected to the social innovation concept. This is followed by further exploration of creativity and innovation within the organisational culture context. Finally, cross-sectoral collaboration as one of the major principles of social innovation is presented through a number of case studies that show practical examples of these concepts.

The research process consisted of a literature review, general observations and consultation with emerging not-for-profit leaders based in Brisbane. The overall conclusion is there is a growing need to move towards a creative and more flexible, explorative approach in the not-for-profit sector.

Credits

This research was undertaken by Volunteering Qld as part of Project Creatives. The research was authored by Ana Radovic and supervised by Mark Creyton.

Creativity is...

A new/different way of approaching something
EFFORTLESS PROCESS A response to a question or problem
Coming from a series of little sparks
CHALLENGING "NORMS" Erasing the boundaries
Fun/enjoyable
Defeat of habit
(re)connecting
SERIOUS PLAY
Talent PASSION courage innovation
OUT-OF-THE-BOX THINKING
Linking ideas with material world
COLLABORATION
Applying "normal" processed thinking to somewhere unusual
FEARLESS - DARING Pushing the limits
experiment... Unusual connections and disconnections
EPIPHANY
"Chaotic" or LESS Structured

Creativity dimensions and applications

Literature focusing on creativity is quite diverse, with significant areas of research yet to be explored. There are various disciplines in the creativity research field, which include behavioural, biology of creativity, clinical, cognitive, developmental, economic, educational, organisational, psychometric and social research of creativity. As Runco (2004) suggests, creativity research is best understood by considering various perspectives (interdisciplinary approach). This multidimensional potential of creativity clearly indicates a broad spectrum of its possible applications. Interestingly, creativity does not just play a role in the arts, invention and innovation; it is also a part of our everyday lives (Runco 2004). Creativity facilitates and enhances problem solving, adaptability, self-expression and health, expressed in different ways and different domains (Runco 2004).

As Dimock (1986) points out, without a clear understanding of the ingredients of creativity, high-tech societies are likely to lose their capacity to define problems in the first place and instead, they accelerate their capacity to solve well-defined technical procedures. Dimock (1986) also identified five major factors affecting creative process: intuition, synthesis, imagination, level of attention and conflict.

The above observations indicate an extraordinary potential of creativity which can be applied to community and the not-for-profit sector. However, in order to apply creativity efficiently, we need to further our understanding of its complex nature. Rather than attempting to define the complex nature of creativity, this research paper aims to explore the potential, forms and impacts of creativity in different contexts and interactions. Additionally, reflections about what creativity is and can be, obtained from the not-for-profit sector practitioners during the consultation session are noted.

Creativity in non-profits is...

ALWAYS EVOLVING AND DOING/ TRYING NEW THINGS Potentially providing a solution that is mutually satisfying rather than compromising
Broader engagement of people
DIFFERENT WAYS OF ENGAGING Establishing new relationships
GOING BEYOND NORMS
DEVELOPMENT OF NEW AREAS Improving policies and procedures
BORROWING CONCEPTS FROM OUTSIDE THE SECTOR
CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES Preventing loss of time, energy, resources
DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING VALUE Keeping up with the accelerated change

Importance of creativity

As Runco (2004) claims, creativity is now more important than ever before, being a useful and effective response to evolutionary changes. Runco (2004) believes creativity is a syndrome or complex and flexibility is an important part of it. Moreover, the flexibility of creative people is what gives them the capacity to cope with the advances, opportunities, technologies and changes that are now a common part of our lives (Runco 2004). Creativity is also seen as a reaction to problems or challenges. More importantly, creativity is also believed to be one of the engines of cultural evolution. It is not only a reaction to, but also a proactive contribution to change and evolution (Runco 2004, 659). Furthermore, the effects of creativity expand beyond the individual level towards organisations, businesses, communities and societies. Runco (2004) highlights that creativity plays an important role in technological advance, social and behavioural sciences, humanities, arts and culture. As can be seen, the presence of innovation, adaptability and creative knowledge is much needed in the 21st century communities.

Organisational culture and creativity

The organisational culture - deeply seated, often subconscious values and beliefs shared by personnel in an organisation - is manifested in the typical characteristics of the organisation and communicated through symbolism, feelings, the meaning behind the language, behaviours, physical settings and artefacts. "Rational tools and processes like strategic direction, goals, tasks, technology, structure, communication, decision making, cooperation and interpersonal relationships are designed to do things; organisational culture fills the gaps between what is formally announced and what actually takes place," (Hennessey and Amabile 2009, 65).

According to Hennessey and Amabile (2009), organisational culture appears to have an influence on the degree to which creativity and innovation are stimulated in an organisation. Therefore, organisations and leaders in some organisations are taking actions to stimulate creativity and innovation, aiming to create an institutional framework in which these will be accepted as basic cultural norms. The basic elements of organisational culture (shared values, beliefs and behaviour expected of members of an organisation) influence creativity and innovation in two ways: individual level and organisational level (Hennessey and Amabile 2009, 64 - 68).

Many authors and researchers believe that organisational culture has an influence on the structure and operational systems in an organisation. The structure seems to emphasise certain values, which have an influence on the promotion or restriction of creativity and innovation in organisations. In the organisational psychology field, previous research has firmly established that the social environment can significantly influence an individual's motivation, which in turn can significantly influence creative performance (Hennessey and Amabile 2009).

Of all specific aspects of the work environment, time pressure has received significant research attention recently from organisational psychologists studying creativity. In the research, Hennessey and Amabile (2009, 65) conducted, participants exhibited higher creativity in the task condition that matched their individual preference, and perceived time pressure mediated these effects. Psychological safety - an environmental condition in which people believe that others in their group will respond positively when they speak up about concerns, report mistakes, or propose new ideas - is another work environment aspect that can be important in organisational creativity (Hennessey and Amabile 2009). Freedom and autonomy in work, leading employees to feel a degree of empowerment, is considered an important feature of the work environment for fostering creativity. The theoretical argument is that to the extent that employees feel a degree of ownership and control over their work, they will be more intrinsically motivated and therefore more likely to fully engage (Hennessey and Amabile 2009).

Martins and Terblanche (2003) believe that values and norms that encourage innovation manifest themselves in specific behavioural forms that promote or inhibit creativity and innovation. The organisational culture supporting open and transparent communication and based on trust will have a positive influence on promoting creativity and innovation. Moreover, support mechanisms should be present in the culture of an organisation to create an environment that will promote creativity and innovation (Martins and Terblanche 2003). An organisation culture should allow employees time to think creatively and experiment; in creative processes, information technology as a support mechanism is an important resource for successful innovation (Martins and Terblanche 2003). Finally, Martins and Terblanche (2009) claim the origin of creativity and innovation lies in shared vision and mission focused on the future. Additionally, organisational goals and objectives reflect the priorities and values of the organisations and as a result may promote or hinder innovation.

It was suggested at a Volunteering Qld consultation session with the emerging not-for-profit sector leaders that sharing stories of successful creative initiatives could motivate others to start thinking and acting creatively. It is also recommended to test and evaluate new ideas before implementing them. Moreover, various methods of strategic planning are proposed in order to stimulate creativity: '100 year strategic plan', externally led strategic plan, stakeholder perspective inclusion, consultative strategic plan, excluding 'usual suspects', scenario building ('what if'), and so forth. The consultation also revealed that creativity could be encouraged through the inclusive processes of ideas sharing, inclusive language and respect for other people's models of the world. Other creativity triggers are the informal atmosphere, ability to work outside the checkbox system, providing practical tools for channelling creativity and collaboration - both internal (i.e. internships, volunteering) and external (i.e. 'opening the organisation's mind'). It is very important to 'break creative misconceptions' and let the project participants know that everyone has the capacity to be creative. Finally, debating for and against an idea should be encouraged and the 'why not's' should be established within the organisational culture. These alternative planning and operational strategies have a strong potential to initiate paradigm shift and inspire creativity and innovative practice in an organisation.



**SHARING STORIES OF SUCCESSFUL
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Social innovation

Social innovation, as a widely used term in not-for-profit practice, is interlinked with the previously discussed creative thinking and approaches. Social innovation represents immediate results of creative intentions at both basic and strategic levels of not-for-profit initiatives.

According to Cahill (2010), social innovation is about new ideas that work to address challenges by applying new learning and strategies. Similarly, Huddart (2010) believes that social innovation opens up new approaches to addressing complex problems. He reminds us that we have now entered a period of significant social, economic, and environmental adjustments and that our horizons and our responsibilities have expanded accordingly. Moreover, he observes that social and economic systems are not suitable for our environmental and economic realities – on the contrary, they are unsustainable, unjust and inefficient (Huddart 2010). Social innovation has a potential to bridge this gap. “Social innovation offers us the means by which to re-imagine, recalibrate, and increase our resilience,” (Huddart 2010).

Pearson (2007) claims a growing number of social innovators and their supporters are becoming intentional about shifting structures, cultures and institutions; however, such practices are not yet widespread and the efforts have often been too narrow or short-term with uneven results. “We need a clear vision, firm commitment, and persistence to remove the barriers to enduring social change,” (Pearson 2007).

Huddart (2010) suggests some of the principles guiding effective work in the social innovation field:

- Work at scale requires long timelines and strategic intent (balancing focus with adaptability).
- Strategy is phase and scale dependent.
- Reflect (when innovating, we are often operating outside the conventional practice; reflection helps in documenting decisions and linking current strategy to greater purpose).
- Trust is essential and is founded on shared commitment to the public good, transparency and accountability.
- Learn to work across sectors (inter-sector collaboration is a rich source of innovation; differences between the sectors need to be considered for effective collaboration).
- Commit to social inclusion.
- Set minimum specifications when working at multiple levels of scale (allow freedom to adapt).
- Share information (being open and transparent creates new connections; working closely with academics links practice to research, accelerating learning and innovation).
- Work with diverse professionals.
- Effective use of the media helps to set the public agenda, creates a shared sense of identity and contributes to the creation of new mindsets and narratives.
- Acknowledge the personal dimension (Huddart 2010).

Moreover, Huddart (2010) identifies collaboration platforms, network, hubs, clusters and cross-sectoral collaboration as some of the technologies and organisational models for social innovation in the community sector. Amongst many social process tools for collective facilitating of social innovation, Huddart (2010) highlights the following ones: deliberative dialogue, open space technology, future search, world cafés, social analysis systems and design thinking. Finally, some examples of recent successful large – scale social innovations are: charter schools, community centred planning, emissions trading, fair trade, habitat conservation plans, individual development accounts, international labour standards, microfinance, socially responsible investing, supported employment (Phills, Deiglmeier and Miller, 2008).



**SOCIAL INNOVATION IS
ABOUT NEW IDEAS THAT WORK TO
ADDRESS CHALLENGES BY
APPLYING NEW LEARNING
AND STRATEGIES**

Cross-sectoral collaboration: Not-for-profit, business and arts sector

Private, public and third sectors, as well as cultural, social and human capitals, along with several science disciplines, are all interconnected (Navale and Shafak 2004). As the cross-sectoral collaboration is regarded as one of the principles of social innovation, this section outlines a few successful case studies shared by Navale and Shafak (2004), representing collaboration between not-for-profit, business and arts sector. The projects were initiated as creativity channelled through artistic practice, in interaction with human development, youth empowerment, gender issues and the empowerment of women, health, peace building and community development, micro – enterprising, economic development, urban and sustainable development issues. These artistic community development, conflict resolution and peace building projects have been tremendously successful at uniting people, building a broad sense of ownership, creating synergies between sectors, redirecting public and private investments, and strengthening communities for change (Navale and Shafak 2004, 175).

1. WVSA Arts Connection program 'SAIL' uses non-traditional teaching and education methods to provide opportunities for students who have difficulties in learning, processing information, and demonstrating knowledge. The core idea behind this program is that arts are the core of the education that creates a bridge between all other disciplines, brings community resources together, and increases partnerships (Navale and Shafak 2004, 167).

2. The arts have also been helping women from self-recognition to providing opportunities for self-employment and economic independence. A good example of this is the project 'Voices of Women', coordinated by Create Africa South. The female participants were asked to create a record of their stories and experiences. Memory cloths with the photos and fascinating stories of these women were created, so they became representatives of women rather than just mere statistics. Today these works of art are exhibited in Netherlands and the US, and from the sales a fund has been created for women to develop self-employment industry that creates products for international market (Navale and Shafak 2004, 172).

3. In the South and Central Asia region there are organisations that explore the potential of theatre as an effective means of social mobilisation, especially in health-related issues. Theatre production is used as a method to ensure that the people's voices and concerns are incorporated into the design and realisation of programs that impact their lives. Theatre increases self-confidence of participants, encourages team building and promotes community income generating alternatives.

4. WVSA's 'ART is the heart' program places artists into the homes of children and families receiving health care services. A report on the program has shown that artists' artistic and therapeutic work (painting, music, dance/movement, poetry and storytelling) has promoted healing - thus the program has been replicated globally (Navale and Shafak 2004, 177).

5. In the environmental domain, recycle-artists have emerged, working together with communities to enhance living spaces, recreational parks, community centres and children's playgrounds, by creating environmentally friendly mural and sculptural projects. Worldwide concerts, art exhibitions, street theatres and numerous creative festivals bring together a wide range of stakeholders from government to non-government organisations to the general public, increasing awareness on ecological and environmental issues (Navale and Shafak 2004, 178).

In these projects, art has played a role of a universal link in interconnecting the social, cultural, political and economic spheres at local and global scale and while sustaining development. The impact of these projects has been immense and as such, it clearly demonstrates the significance of creative thinking and social innovation practices in the not-for-profit sector.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in the previous sections, creativity and innovation in the not-for-profit sector come hand in hand. Social innovation could not be realised without creativity and creativity would not be meaningfully channelled without social innovation. Both creativity and social innovation have become crucial in the not-for-profit sector. The presence of both is essential in the challenging times of social, political and financial transitions to sustaining the sector and moving it forward.

As practice clearly demonstrates a need for innovation, as well as many examples of how creativity and innovation can be successful when implemented, there is a large gap of creativity research that needs to be filled. The theoretical aspect of the research, which can be approached from various disciplines of psychology, behavioural and social sciences, needs to be enhanced. Moreover, creativity/innovation triggers and barriers in the organisational and not-for-profit sector need to be further explored. This information would be valuable in promoting organisational culture that stimulates and inspires good practice and encouraging innovation.

Moreover, practical examples of innovative practices and projects need to be better documented. Innovative organisations, initiatives, creative culture and projects should be more connected and shared. The innovative and creative culture and useful information generated through research and practice should be more widely shared and available. This would enable a more inclusive environment and will assist in demystifying creativity and social innovation, making them more accessible and common to not-for-profit practitioners.

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