

# Practices of managing creativity of artists-employees of art institutions

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## **Abstract:**

**Aim:** The issue of managing creativity in organizations is an area of interest to both researchers and managers of diverse organizations although one has to admit that art institutions are a specific type of organization, where creativity of their employees is not only a desirable phenomenon but the one constituting the essence of their business appointment. In connection with the above, the aim of this paper is to present practices involved in the management of creativity of artists employed in art institutions.

**Research methods:** The first part of the paper presents a study of literature on creativity management in organizations and the functioning of local art institutions, as well as an analysis of the results of secondary research on the trajectory of artistic success. In addition, the paper presents the findings of the author's own research. The research was interpretative in its nature. Three in-depth interviews with native artists were conducted and analyzed.

**Conclusions:** The respondents indicated mainly the limitations resulting from the management of creativity endowing it with mystical significance. The surveyed did not address the creative management practices, for they saw them as unconscious actions.

**Originality/value of the article:** In their nature, the collected statements were respondents' reflections on creativity management. Despite the fact that the research results are merely subjective reconstructions of the opinions of only few respondents, their value lies in the exploration of research problems, which may then be successively deepened.

*Keywords* creativity management, creativity of employees, management in artistic ensembles, performing arts  
JEL: M59, O34

## **1. Introduction**

Managing creativity, understood as an “element” of human resources of an organization, represents an area of interest across a number of scientific fields and disciplines (psychology, pedagogy, sociology, management sciences). Moreover, the assumption today is that creativity constitutes a valid aspect in the activity of every type of organization. However, the findings of the research on creativity in organizations conducted amongst employees of various institutions suggest that generating ideas by creative persons is not yet a guarantee that actions will be implemented in a creative manner and thus yield creative effects. This is because the work process depends on the organization’s context and conditions for supporting creativity in the organization (Madrid, Patterson 2016: 413-414; Mizera-Pęczek 2016: 633). Hence, it appears necessary to design processes of systemic promotion of creativity in organizations. Art institutions provide particular examples of organizations where creativity is not only one of the aspects of their activity but it also constitutes the pillar of their functioning. It is assumed that they employ professional artists participating in the creative process of bringing work of art to life. Following that, we may assume that such organizations ought to endow the management of creativity of employees-artists with a special role. The literature study carried out by the author shows that there is a lack of publications on tools employed for managing artists’ creativity. It is therefore likely that these practices are applied by managers unknowingly and intuitively. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to demonstrate identified practices of creativity management in art institutions. The paper’s structure conforms to this end. The first part presents the findings of literature research, including the publications focusing on creativity management and the particularities involved in the functioning of art institutions. The findings of the author’s own studies are successively presented comprising the analysis of interviews carried out by the author with three artists from local art institutions. The subject of the interviews was concerned with the meaning of creativity in the artists’ professional life and their attitudes to creativity management.

## **2. The essence of managing employees’ creativity**

Management and creativity are concepts which many consider to be mutually exclusive. The reason for this state of affairs is the popular view that a creative person (most likely associated

with an artist, journalist, scientist, etc.) needs freedom and autonomy to act, while management tends to be associated with control and coordination. It seems therefore that the management of creativity, particularly if understood as a trait characteristic of an artist, cannot be realized (Sokół 2015: 243). In the meantime though, the issue of creativity management is becoming increasingly more often of interest to scholars, being referred to in diverse contexts as: creative management of organization, creativity management in organization, creativity management in processes or management of the creative workplace (Sokół 2015: 245).

Creativity management (creative process) – especially in diverse organizations – is complex and paradoxically it involves solving dilemmas which require the application of sustainable approach to actions of conflicting nature (Andersen, Kragh 2013: 83). A similar view take I.K. Mitchell and J. Walinga (2017: 1872-1873) who see creativity management as an instrument of sustainable development of organizations, contributing not only to the implementation of small changes in the field of product or process improvement but it also provides the opportunity to generate ideas and creative metaphors encouraging others to learning about new ways of thinking about the product or process that is being enhanced. A particularly valuable conclusion made by creativity scholars is that creativity contributes to solving problems in numerous organizations, even though practitioners see its assets mainly in the problem preparation. Creativity management should, however, be comprehensive whereas the creativity theories could successfully be adapted to the implementation stage of ideas, projects, including their ongoing improvement (Mitchell, Walinga 2017: 1881). Further arguments confirming that improvement of creativity management practices is well grounded are the observations made by scholars who have found, while analyzing the interdependencies between creativity, perceived as openness to experience and the need for cognition, and the sense of organizational fairness in the creative process, that there is no correlation between openness to experience and implementation of ideas when the need for cognition is high and the sense of organizational fairness low. The findings suggest that an organization may not benefit from its employees' creativity and need for cognition if they do not see that their efforts and engagement in the creative process are being awarded (Madrid, Patterson 2016: 413-414). An interesting concept of six paradoxes of managing creativity was demonstrated by C. Andriopoulos (2003). In analyzing the specificity involved in creativity management in three creative organizations, he characterized tensions occurring in the creative process: achieving the company's financial goals and supporting employees' individual passions;

providing opportunities for employees to be challenged (e.g. work under changing conditions) and building their confidence as the pillar of the creative process; fostering individual initiatives and ensuring that the creative process is shared within the team; encouraging team diversity and building cohesive project teams; learning from the past and designing the future; avoiding risk and breaking new grounds. It is interesting that in his conclusion Andriopolous's advice is embracing the tensions (accepting the paradoxes) rather than getting rid of them (Andriopolous 2003).

The author of this paper agrees with the scholars who believe that there is no universal method to manage creativity nor is there a set of "good practices" (Sokół 2015: 243). The approach adopted for managing creativity should arise from the specificity of creativity in the organization where the suitable management instruments are to be implemented. Having said this, one should recognize that the integrated didactic programs proposed by scholars encompassing such aspects as shaping creativity in the business education process at the individual, group and organizational levels are very promising. The scholars point out that enhancing creativity at one level reinforces the other levels, strengthening the overall creative potential of the organization in which the recipients of the learning process will work (Levis, Elaver 2014: 236-237). A similar approach is taken by the scholars who deal with creativity management in organizations focusing on gaining insight into the factors enhancing creativity of employees working in various organizations, dividing them into three groups: individual and group factors, as well as those seen from the organization's perspective. The factors considered at the individual level encompass: specific knowledge, motivation and cognitive capabilities such as, for example, the ability to generate ideas. The collective factors are those focusing on the interactions between creative members of the teams. From the organizational perspective, the scholars discuss the processes, environments and cultures which foster creativity (Gabriel et al. 2016: 110-111).

### **3. Management of art institutions in the light of the secondary research findings**

Pursuant to the Act of 25 October 1991 on organizing and conducting cultural activity, "Art institutions are institutions of culture established to conduct artistic activity in the field of theater, music, dance, while engaging artists and performers, in particular: theatres, philharmonics, operas, operettas, symphonic and chamber orchestras, song and dance ensembles and choral ensembles". Currently there are 170 institutions of this type in Poland (theatres and music institutions having their own art ensembles working on a permanent basis) (GUS 2014: 2), with the number of

performances growing steadily since 2011 (56,7 thousand shows in 2015) (GUS 2016: 144). The vast majority of those institutions are located in Mazowieckie Voivodship, while their smallest number is in Opolskie and Podkarpackie Voivodships (3 respectively)

Although art institutions represent a substantial segment of the cultural sector, there are only few academic publications devoted to their management. There is a clear gap in the research on the particularities involved in the functioning of art institutions and the relationships between artists and management staff. A general outline of management in art in the context of managing orchestras has been given by M. Kostera and M. Śliwa (2012): “Managing an orchestra is full of internal contradictions and paradoxes. Not unlike in other undertakings of this type, we encounter here a vivid conflict between the artistic discourse and that of the market. On top of that, there is a discourse of condemnation surrounding any manifestations of power, mistrust of authorities and fascination with heroic leadership. A discourse of collective leadership sometimes emerges perceived as an ideal and the only sensible practice in these extremely paradoxical organizational conditions” (Kostera, Śliwa 2012: 205).

The gap in the research on the specificity of artists’ work is somewhat filled by the report “Trajectories of artistic success. Adaptation strategies of artists in the field of culture” (Bachórz, Stachura 2015), with the report being the result of the analysis of biographical studies of artists (recognizable and economically successful). The report suggests that “artists, being aware of the media and popular discourse surrounding them, try to defend themselves against it – so as not leave the impression that theirs is the demanding attitude – creating an image of themselves which shows them as people with the can-do attitude. Having internalized the narrative of the privatization of structural issues, they believe the story that responsibility for life success lies solely with the individual, while not expecting much in terms of the economic success” (Bachórz, Stachura 2015). The authors of the report cite stories of numerous narrators incapable of focusing on economic success, being used to competing with other artists over getting jobs in art institutions. These real-life stories suggest that artists are people who in spite of manifesting creativity tend to be modest, not dominating, with the sense of helplessness.

#### **4. Methodology of the research conducted by the author**

Drawing on the previous literature research and the author’s own professional experience (working as a singer in an artistic ensemble), the author has put forward the thesis that professional

artistic ensembles require a specific set of instruments for managing creativity, given that artists employed in professional ensembles are considered to be creative people. The author’s observations spanning many years and conversations with artists coming from diverse institutions propelled the need to gain a deeper insight into the issues surrounding managing institutions in which creativity can be both *raison d’être* and source of benefits, as well as an area entailing difficulties attributed to the management of the artists’ creativity. It is thus the author’s aim while conducting the studies to identify the practices used in creativity management pertaining to artists-employees of art institutions.

The author’s own research was carried out using the method of online individual interviews (Batorski et al. 2006). Artists employed in art institutions were the subject of the survey. Respondents were selected non-randomly with the following selection criteria: willingness to participate in the survey, employment in an art institution. The author tried to reach artists – representatives of a variety of professional groups. 61 persons were asked to be interviewed; however, only three persons have so far been willing to do so.

The interviews with the artists were concerned with the role of creativity in their professional lives. The author wanted to find out what meaning respondents attributed to creativity in the context of their professional life, how they use their creativity (understood as potential) and how their creativity is managed in the art institutions in which they work.

**5. Creativity management according to artists studied**

The artists shared their reflections with the author on creativity and its management. The rephrased responses of the three artists (two instrumentalists and a vocalist) are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Artists’ comments on the role of creativity in their professional life**

Instrumentalist-employed in an orchestra	Instrumentalist-employed in an orchestra	Vocalist, instrumentalist-employed in a vocal ensemble
For me creativity means <i>my own contribution into the field I’m engaged in. It is also hours spent on improving my skills, my technique</i>	For me creativity means <i>a realm to which access is not granted to all. It is also a way for me to give something to the world.</i>	For me creativity means <i>the way in which one expresses oneself, their hobby, work and passion, all at the same time</i>

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While working in an art ensemble I need creativity to <i>express my emotions</i>	While working in an art ensemble I need creativity to <i>add my own contribution to the greater whole</i>	While working in an art ensemble I need creativity to <i>act, to constantly improve myself while drawing on the material of other artists or that developed by myself</i>
My creativity is managed in the way that <i>puts constraints on it.</i>	My creativity is managed in the way that <i>is standardized and is not beyond my acceptance.</i>	My creativity is managed in the way that <i>is satisfying, on the other hand, however, given the size of the industry and its oversaturation, it is rather difficult to encounter a sound management of an individual artist's creativity. If an artist does not take care of his or her own artistic assets, certainly no one is going to offer any help in this respect. Today you have to be your own manager.</i>
Managing creativity is like <i>running a business. But then again, should art be treated as business?</i>	Managing creativity is like <i>selling stuff at a market square – sometimes there are no buyers.</i>	<i>I'm not entirely convinced as to whether creativity should be managed.</i>

Source: Self-reported data based on the survey.

Based on the conversations with the artists, one could argue that they see their work as downright missionary in that they share their creativity with others, with the creativity itself representing the potential which not everybody is endowed with. One of the respondents went so far as to view it as an element of his intimacy which some people might not be capable to comprehend. The three men interviewed by the author spoke about having adverse feelings towards creativity management, setting a clear dividing line between art (creativity, artistic merit) and management. Their past experiences which they shared during the interviews allow for the conclusion that management constraints creativity and that artists should draw the line on their acceptance of management. One of the respondents noted the importance of managing one's career by oneself saying outright that "you have to be your own manager". On the other hand, one should refer to the peculiarities involved in the artists' work and tensions arising therefrom. The hardships endured by the respondents with respect to obtaining art education and the long process of shaping their creativity, as well as the high level of work engagement arising from this sense of mission and passion for art might all become a barrier to building positive relations with the managers of art institutions. Artists as workers who are highly specialized in their disciplines might find it difficult to accept new practices of management and interference with their way of work.

In the course of the survey, the artists indicated a number of issues associated with creativity management. The author believes that these issues could be explored more deeply within the framework of further conversations with respondents.

**Table 2. Research issues reconstructed during interviews**

Conversation topic	Research question:
Creativity as an attribute of the artist’s work	Can creativity be considered exclusively in terms of art in the artist’s work? What is the relationship between the artist’s creativity and entrepreneurship? What, in the artists’ opinion, are the attributes of creativity that are not “for sale”?
Creativity management practice	Why do some artists reduce creativity management to the act of selling their works, failing to see in this concept actions that support their creativity/potential? Should artists be prepared to manage creativity by themselves while studying art? If so, then how? Why do the issues surrounding creativity management cause objection and resistance on the part of some respondents? What do the artist’s expectations regarding creativity management depend on?

Source: Self-reported data based on the survey.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings obtained based on the research allow one to make conclusions not unlike those outlined in the literature on management. It is not that unlikely for specialists in their own fields to disassociate themselves from management, viewing managerial activity as a sad duty. And yet, this is the management knowledge and skills which determine whether or not a specialist is successful professionally. A great artist may be defeated by a mediocre one if the latter can smoothly organize conditions that are conducive to the development of his or her ideas. “Moreover, we can see everyday interesting and valuable initiatives, e.g. of people involved in art and culture, fail or slowly falling into stagnation because of the lack of management skills... (Koźmiński et al. 2014: 13-14). It therefore seems that the management of art institutions should shift towards self-actualization organizations, that is, such which provide suitable conditions for their employees’ self-actualization through freedom, appreciation of their unique individuality while simultaneously ensuring the implementation of the collective aims (Kostera, Śliwa 2012: 176). The self-actualization organization, unlike the managerialistic and the one managed modestly, is



characterized by a positive relation towards uncertainty and ambiguity. In this kind of organizations employees are expected to develop their individuality. It is the organizational roles that should be tailored to an individual and not the individuals to the roles. The main objective of the self-actualizing organization is the change unfolding both in terms of individual employees' growth and in terms of the group (Kostera, Śliwa 2012: 177).

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