

Creativity Business Cultures: A Hermeneutic Examination in Advertising Agencies

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Abstract

A theory-building, exploratory study was conducted to understand how creative advertising executives make meaning of creativity in a cultural context. This study extends creativity research in advertising and creative cultures in general by using hermeneutic phenomenology. In-depth interviews were conducted with respondents, all in senior creative roles in advertising agencies. The results suggest that creativity in advertising incorporates a complex set of results-driven interactive components which simultaneously affect and are affected by the interaction of artistic, aesthetic elements and business strategy. The findings show that an understanding of creative cultures and processes can enable their replications in other business sectors.

Introduction

Creativity is considered to be the cornerstone of competitive advantage (Amabile 1988, 1996; Devanna and Tichy 1990; Shalley 1995). Creativity is a vital element of advertising, and advertising could not exist without it (Zinkhan 1993). Reid, et al. (1998) also mention that “creativity, indisputably the least scientific aspect of advertising, is arguably the most important”. Practitioners, too, consider creativity to be most important in advertising. Some advertising executives maintain that creativity is a prerequisite for advertising effectiveness (White and Smith, 2001). Further, Hill and Johnson (2004) agree with Kalasunas (1985) who wrote that, “Basically, what clients want from agencies is creative, is advertising itself, the advertising product... The other services an agency offers... are clearly secondary.” (Page 7).

Frazer (1986) points out that for most marketers, the selection of the advertising creative strategy is the most important marketing decision. He points out that of the four Ps, promotion (IMC) is the most differentiating for fast moving consumer goods. In IMC, Frazer (1986) asserts, the creative strategy sets the tone for the other promotional elements. Blask and Mokwa (1986) agree, and state that agency performance is ultimately judged by its creativity.

Prior research in creativity has focused on examining facilitators of creativity as either personal characteristics (e.g., general creative ability, domain-relevant skills, and intrinsic motivation) or organizational factors (e.g., job complexity and supervision style) (Johar, Holbrook and Stern 2001). Other researchers have investigated these facilitators jointly and have found that high levels of both personal and organizational factors encourage the highest degrees of creative performance (Oldham and Cummings 1996). More recently, researchers have examined “creatives” (Reid et. al, 1998, Koslow et. al, 2003, Hill and Johnson, 2004, Koslow et. al, 2006), creative products (White and Smith, 2001), and even attempted to define creativity (El-Murad and West, 2004). Surprisingly, despite these efforts creative processes in organizations are not fully understood (cf. Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin 1993). Johar, Holbrook and Stern (2001) explicitly discuss this by noting that that advertising creativity has barely been studied.

In this article, we focus on creative personnel in advertising agencies, how they make meaning of their creativity, and the process underlying creativity in advertising to explore and expose certain themes and characteristics of the creative process that may enhance the understanding of creativity’s role in advertising. Our findings contribute to the understanding of the creative process in agencies and suggest that the process of *creativity in advertising* is inseparable from *creatives* in advertising. Common major themes surfaced from the data analysis, which enable an understanding of the genesis of creativity in advertising creatives. In

the spirit of exploratory illustration within a limited, specific context, we suggest that creativity can be traced and tracked, as well as nurtured and developed in an advertising, business oriented, context. We end with conclusions and final comments focusing on the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings, as well as identifying and proposing future research opportunities.

Following this section, we present a brief review of creativity focusing on its importance in advertising, definitions, theories and typologies, and developing creative cultures. We then describe our methodological approach. The data consist of the participants' verbal protocols and of field notes taken during a series of in-depth interviews, analyzed by the authors. We then present the hermeneutic data collection and analysis section, including a discussion of sample and procedures. After presenting the results and their implications, we conclude with limitations of the research and suggestions for future research.

BRIEF BACKGROUND ON CREATIVITY

Various attempts have been made to define and delineate creativity and creative strategy in advertising. Frazer (1986) defines it as a policy or guiding principle which specifies the general nature and character of messages to be designed. Michael McCaskey (1996) observes that creativity "leaps, dances and surprises in ways that baffle and astound, delight and amaze the purely logical in us" (pg. 110). However, creativity might also be somewhat logical, comprehensible and manageable. This is certainly a predominant hope in the advertising discipline since "agency performance will ultimately be judged by the excellence and effectiveness of the specific advertising that it creates" (pg. . 180).

Leo Burnett has defined creativity as "the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable and in good taste" (5:20-21). In an essay entitled "The Three Domains of Creativity," Arthur Koestler, defined creative acts as "the combination of previously unrelated structures in such a way that you get more out of the emergent whole than you have put in" (pg. 68). May (1975) portrays creativity as a "struggle of human beings with and against that which limits them . . . it is the struggle against disintegration, the struggle to bring into existence new kinds of being that give harmony and integration" (pg. 135, 169). Von Oech (1990) describes creativity as the mind power "to transform one thing into another . . . to make the ordinary extraordinary and the unusual commonplace" (18:7). He suggests that creativity is innate, but that it is bound and constrained by "mental locks." He proposes that breaking out of the routines, conventions and expectations that lock our minds generally accompanies, if not governs, creative breakthroughs and transformations.

In the search for a comprehension of creativity, a few themes are common. Creativity is a *process* — an important human process of imagination, expression and association. The creative challenge (problem or opportunity) involves *paradox* — an encounter with apparent limits, anomalies or conflict. The creative encounter is naturally *involving*, or at least enticing — confronting limits or conflict generates natural tension, emotion and even passion. The creative experience involves an integrative resolution, and typically a harmonious *transformation* — a breakthrough or breaking out to a new and exhilarating state of association and meaning. And in advertising, the creative individual must produce (in an environment of constraint and pressure) a concept, theme, advertisement or campaign that can break through the prospect's potential mental defenses and mesh the wheels of product attributes with that of consumer preference. Advertising creativity is, certainly, paradox under pressure. Gordon White (1972) summed up the beliefs of many when he called creativity "the great imponderable in the study of

communication." White stated that "creativity is the X factor in advertising and, as such, it escapes the scientific probe of the researcher and the decision-maker" (20:32).

Advertising creativity embraces both "originality" and "innovation" (Fletcher, 1990). A "winning creative idea," one that stands out from the crowd and is memorable, can have enormous impact on sales, may influence the hiring and firing of advertising agencies, and affect their remuneration (see, for example, Blair, 1988; Rossiter and Percy, 1997; Wackman, Salmon, and Salmon, 1986/1987). Koslow, et. al (2006) point out that for marketers seeking creative advertising, conventional wisdom holds that creativity is solely a function of advertising agency expertise (Elliott 2003; White 2003).

Johar, Holbrook, and Stern (2001) claim that creative processes in organizations are not fully understood (cf. Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin 1993), leaving some key unanswered questions. Koslow, et. al (2003) mention that considering the disproportionate role creativity plays in advertising practice, research has not adequately addressed it (Stewart, 1992). Many call for more research on the advertising creative process (e.g., Zinkhan, 1993) and the opinions of agency creative personnel (Reid, King, and De-Lorme, 1998).

The celebration of individual creative skill is often extended to advertising agencies and their offices. When an individual wins an award, his or her agency considers it a win for them, too. Some agencies are more "known" for creative skills (Na, Marshall, and Son 1999), and invariably some offices in larger agency networks are likewise "known" as more or less creative. Gross's (1972) model of creativity can be applied within a single agency by using multiple, independent creative teams, which is a common practice that is perceived to greatly improve the quality of creative work. Different agencies promote various creative philosophies (West and Ford 2001) or advocate alternative creative processes (e.g., Ensor, Cottom, and Band 2001; Ewing, Napoli, and West 2000), but in general, agencies frequently think of themselves as having more or less creative skill in terms of overall collective individual creative skills.

Marketers also appear to focus solely on individuals and agencies as the source of creativity rather than taking into consideration the social environment in which the creativity takes place. Griffin et al. (1998) review past research and empirically replicate the finding that agency creative skill is the most important factor in evaluating an agency. Client support for a creative cultural environment is not mentioned in these studies. Kulkarni, Vora, and Brown (2003) note how two bad financial quarters in a row frequently leads marketers to dismiss their advertising agency..

The creative design process in advertising exemplifies a general class of design problems also found in product development and other organizational domains. Design activity involves the creation of a complete set of specifications intended to ensure the performance of various functions by an artifact-whether a candy bar, a painting, or an advertisement-in which design problems are characterized by a task environment specifying a set of functional requirements and objectives, a collection of constraints, and a technology of components to be employed in design activity (Chandrasekaran 1990). These elements map onto concepts in advertising design, such as persuasion objectives, budgetary or media limitations, and visual or verbal components, that are combined to create an ad.

Most researchers posit a link between creative processes and products (Alden, Hoyer, and Lee 1993; Catford and Ray 1991; Csikszentmihalyi 1996; Dahl, Chattopadhyay, and Gorn 1999; Coleman, Kaufman, and Ray 1992; Holbrook 1984, 1998; Kao 1996; Koestler 1964; Kover 1995; Meyer 1956, 1967; Ray and Myers 1986). In this connection, one popular conceptualization classifies design activities as routine, innovative, or creative (Rosenman and

Gero 1993). In this scheme, a "creative" product is not only original, novel, interesting, and unique (i.e., innovative), but also useful and practical (Dasgupta 1994; Finke, Ward, and Smith 1992; Weisberg 1993). In other words, going beyond mere newness, a genuine creation also works. Anything less may be merely miscreation. Thus, an advertisement is not considered a creative success in the real world unless it achieves a client's communication objectives (Kover, James, and Sonner 1997).

In contrast, reductionist researchers propose that the creative process involves only ordinary mental functions and is, therefore, only quantitatively different from everyday thinking (Dasgupta 1994; Finke, Ward, and Smith 1992; Perkins 1981; Weisberg 1993), with creative thought more meticulous than ordinary thinking in "staying within the lines." Here, innovative idea generation occurs because (rather than in spite) of the constraints imposed by preformed mental categories. The underlying premise is that creativity works within boundaries, for only imaginative use of formulaic elements results in an elegant outcome. To compose a sonnet, for example, a poet must adhere to its strict stylistic rules (14 lines, metric structure, rhyme scheme, etc.).

A third perspective is integrative, as when synthesizers such as Hofstadter (1985) claim that the sine qua non of creativity is a balance between freedom and constraints. The process becomes unbalanced if there are too many restrictions or too much freedom (Finke, Ward, and Smith 1992). This integrative view is consistent with new product development programs such as Tauber's heuristic ideation technique (HIT), in which a person is given a structured framework for generating creative new product ideas and in which constrained idea generation often outperforms freeform association (Tauber 1972; see also Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon 1999a, b).

The definitions and processes described in the literature have been developed deductively. We believe that an inductive approach, which explores both the definition and process, as well as the meaning of the creative process as described by the actors in the advertising process is necessary. How do creatives view creativity? How do they make meaning of creativity in their work and lives? How do they make meaning of the process within their organizations? To inform such questions, we employ a hermeneutic research approach to elicit and explore these concepts from the perspectives of creatives.

METHOD

This study adopts a diverse methodological approach in order that data generated can be comprehensively interpreted and analyzed. We utilized theoretical frameworks developed by cognitive anthropologists such as Strauss & Quinn (1997), D'Andrade (1981), Colby (1996) and Tyler (1969). Hermeneutic-phenomenology, developed by Shutz & Luckman (1973) was carried out, exploring in detail, from the point of view of advertising agency creatives, the sequence and dimensions of the creative service-product and its development. This exploratory research was consistent with an 'interpretive' approach (Deshpande 1983) to the production of advertising creative work. Depth interviews were undertaken to explore in detail, and from the direct experiences of senior advertising practitioners, the actual processes followed in the generation and evaluation of creative work from their advertising agencies.

Participants

When recruiting participants, we also adhered to Reid et al.'s (1998) recommendation to explore the opinions of agency managers and creative personnel. An exploratory qualitative study was conducted using in-depth interviews with 8 creatives at various levels within advertising agencies. The interviews included three CEOs from leading agencies, three chief

creative directors, and two creative directors. This form of ethnographic interview method provided insight for the development of research categories. Once these common categories were identified in the first phase of qualitative research, the next stages were structured to probe further into specific categories.

Place Table 1 about here

Participants ranged in ages and work experience in creative departments. Educational backgrounds included degrees in English, visual arts, journalism, fine arts, psychology, and history. The small sample-typical of interpretive research in general (e.g., Thompson, Locander, and Pollio 1989) and creative research in particular (e.g., Goel and Pirolli 1992)-was a practical necessity stemming from the need to collect a voluminous amount of data from each participant. The study was conducted in participants' ad agencies during and after working hours, providing a familiar environment for the participants and requiring approximately two hours for each participant.

Methods for Gathering Evidence

In this study, we employ Seidman's (1998) Three Interview Series Model as well as Van Manen's (1991) conceptualization of hermeneutic-phenomenology. All data were collected via one-on-one communication, using informal, unstructured and undirected 'conversation.' Apart from specific data such as demographic information, questions directed at the participants varied from person to person. However, the collection of data was divided into three interviewing stages (Seidman 1998), with interviews designed to yield two complementary types of information: 1) a first-person description of the participant's history in context and 2) contextual details concerning the participant's lived experience (Seidman, 1998). Stories describing the genesis, evolution, and creativity in the participant's professional repertoire were elicited. In interviews, we strove for elaboration on the basis of participants' own words (e.g., evaluative expressions describing various interactions) and of ideas from the marketing literature. As expected, in these interviews participants mentioned and discussed multiple issues, which led to further probing and elaboration. Each interview stage had specific intentions in terms of data requirements. These stages are as follows:

Stage One Interview

Stage one of the investigative process involved obtaining as much data as possible regarding each participant's 'life history,' as they have experienced 'being' creatives and in relation to advertising. The first interview in this series seeks background information about participants as well as their definitions of the broad, subjective category of creativity and the in advertising specifically. This primarily involved participants 'telling' us about their past, going as far back in time as they can recollect, up until the present day. The purpose of this stage was to situate each participant's concept of themselves within the context of their own, unique life history, so that we could attempt to understand their life as it has been for them. It also functioned to place their current concepts of their creative selves within the context of their contemporary lives, asking for example, how they have come to their present understanding of themselves as such. Here, participants spoke of such things as their families, friends, workmates, and cultural affiliations, or groups, reconstructing their experiences and hence placing us in a position where we could begin to appreciate the backgrounds and personalities of each individual.

Stage Two Interview

This stage of the interview process required us to focus on getting participants to concentrate on the concrete details of their experiences. The second interview probed participants' specific experiences. Following the principles of phenomenological inquiry, this interview started with the prompt, "Tell me about a creative project that you would like to talk about." Participants thus were allowed to select a situation or recollection that is salient to them and to reveal their lived experience as it naturally occurred in their interactions with that particular situation (Fournier and Mick, 1998). For example, asking about their experiences in terms of a particular client or product in question, how they thought, behaved, felt and acted at the time. In order to place their experiences within the bounds of their specific social settings, we also asked the participants to reconstruct these details, asking them how it felt at the time.

Stage Three Interview

In the last stage of the research process participants were asked to reflect upon their experiences, what they felt that these reflections now mean to them and if they have changed the way they previously thought about their experiences. This meaning does not refer to any satisfaction or reward that may have been inspired by their reflections, although they may form a part of their thoughts. Rather, it addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants and their lives, as they experienced their relationship with creativity and how they think or feel about that relationship now that they have had the opportunity to reflect.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was chosen for this study as it has the following advantages over conventional content or textual analysis. First, it provides a fast and convenient means of finding meaningful themes in large amounts of text. Second, the themes emerge from the data rather than being 'imposed' by the researchers; and third, the techniques reveal the relative importance and interrelationships among themes.

Data were interpreted in two ways: 1) case by case by identifying the major themes related to creativity; 2) across cases, by analyzing the critical experiences of the participants. The analytical approach flowed from the study's objectives and followed Burawoy's (1991) call for using qualitative data both to challenge existing theory and to develop new theory. For building grounded theory, we adhered to guidelines articulated by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

Data analysis occurred both during data collection, to take advantage of opportunities to follow up on emerging ideas, and afterward, to collate insights in view of the entire corpus of data. We coded the transcripts using such a priori categories (e.g. originality, applicability, craft, talent) and emergent categories in order to generate thick interpretations of participants' experiences. Throughout we circled back to the relevant literature, a "tacking" strategy (Fournier, 1998) that extended into the review process.

An extensive process was used to identify and preserve key insights. The first step in the data analysis was open coding, an uncovering and identifying of interesting and important passages that help explain the decision-making and shopping experiences with the retailer and its brand. 137 different ideas emerged from the data. This was followed by process coding where the multiple discreet quotes from open coding were coded into in audio file clippings (Chricton and Childs, 2005). We searched for signaling threads and patterns among categories and for thematic connections among the categories (Seidman, 1998). While listening to the interview recordings and reading transcripts, we marked passages as interesting, and then considered whether they could be labeled. We then selected passages that connected to others, so an experience already mentioned in other passages took on weight (Kvale, 1996). Two additional

researchers served as peer reviewers and their coding found 82 categories that were unanimously agreed upon.

The final coding stage, axial coding, produced the thematic ideas of creativity in advertising being anchored in the point of view, or perspective, also described as leverage, while the individual background, education, agency and the interaction between them serve as central filtering prisms for understanding creativity in advertising. These initial categories were integrated into a further analytical procedure, using *domain analysis* (Spradley, 1980), a graphic representation of the entire coding and analyses processes seen in Figure 1.

Place Figure 1 about here

Trustworthiness and Interrater Reliability

We have adhered to two main conditions proposed by Marques and McCall (2005) in the application of interrater reliability in this study. First, the data reviewed by the interraters were only a segment of the total amount, since data in qualitative studies are usually rather substantial and interraters usually have limited time. The second prerequisite takes into account that there may be different configurations in the packaging of the themes, as listed by the various interraters (Armstrong, Gosling, Weinman, & Marteau, 1997).

RESULTS

The following section provides a detailed description of the main themes that emerged from the data. These themes allow an understanding of the underlying elements of the creativity process participants describe within the context of their position in an advertising agency. The participants describe a multiple set of creativity-driven professional, emotional and social benefits. In addition, creativity in general and in advertising in particular is much more than just its products, whereby the in-situ agency environment and the in-agency creative experience, as well as the chronological personal biographical experiences (childhood tendencies, educational choices, job seeking, etc.) provide hermeneutic value to participants.

Emergent Categories and Themes - Axial Coding

From the views and comments offered by participants on their meaning-making process and their perspective of creativity, its role in advertising, and its potential role in business, four main thematic categories surfaced which help define and structure the cognitive domain of content. They are presented in turn below (Figure 2).

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Making Meaning of Creativity

Participants' views on creativity's essence tend to center around three sub-thematic categories. The first is a fierce belief in its metaphysical nature, and its elusive nature. Creative managers not only appreciate this elusiveness, but seem committed to protecting it.

“People have been trying desperately to assign a value to it. It’s impossible”

“As long as an academic exploration of creativity makes no attempt whatsoever to quantify it...I’m totally in support of it”

“If you were to license everyone, and have a DC; a doctorate in creativity, I think there would be no creativity anymore. You would have these defined ways of doing things, and everything looks the same”

Despite this, the second sub-thematic category centers on the participants' efforts to understand, or at least capture the essence of creativity as they perceive it and make meaning of it.

“Creativity is just so subjective”

“The birth of creativity has been the sixties”

“It's where ideas come from”

“It's creative because very few people would come up with an idea, perspective, or insight like that. It usually comes along with ‘God, I wish I came up with that’” (laughs)

“A clever ad...catchy...humorous...gets attention”

Finally, when trying to articulate how they believe creativity manifests itself in business in general and advertising in particular, participants manage a few prescriptive suggestions, emphasizing the importance of originality in facilitating creative products.

“That's not someone else who copies, it's the originator”

“It should be simple...it's just the twist on it”

“Take the objective...and work a little magic into it”

“You need to back up, get fresh eyes on it, think about it much bigger, and then come back with ideas”

Facilitating Personal Antecedents of Creative Managers

A fundamental requirement in exploring and making meaning of creativity, is exploring and making meaning of creative people. Managers who by title and self definition are considered “creative” provide a natural participant pool for such an exploration. The hermeneutic methodology employed in this study allowed for a deep introspective probe into what participants believe is required to develop into a creative manager. This major axial theme is comprised of two sub-thematic categories. The first relates to personal traits and abilities. One observation most participants made is a short attention span they seem to share.

“My theory is that one of the things that are common to many people in advertising is a pretty healthy dose of ADD...I think we are all stimulated by change and difference”

“Most really good creative people have the attention span of hamsters”

“I get tangential all the time...”

“And my ADD kicks in and I’m done, I want to start something new”

In addition, participants were able to reflect on and make meaning of the significance of having an occupation for a creative outlet. Some describe this as a revelation they did not expect.

“The thought that I had was ‘oh, my God! You can be sarcastic for a living’”

“Seeing things a different way, and being OK with taking some risks...is a good thing”

“Smartass...so many creative people are like that...talking about how they were secretly miserable...the bitterness showing up as humor”

“It’s horizontal versus vertical thinking...looking at something from a different perspective”

“Genius...in other words: creative. I’m equating the act of being able to think horizontally with being intelligent”

“I think we are just open to new things”

The second sub-thematic category we found is anchored in participants’ childhood, early adulthood, pre and extra-professional manifestations of creativity. Specifically, they describe the genesis of creativity in their personal life and trace it back to early childhood.

“When I was 10 years old I wrote the camp skits...I just had this ability to look at a situation and observe it in a productive way”

“I wanted to write plays in the first grade, I used to put on puppet shows”

“I can remember as a kid playing commercials, making stuff up and acting them out. I was always the mastermind behind those sorts of things. Playing with dolls and having them be in commercials, the glamour of it all (laughs)”

“In 5th grade there was a contest for fire prevention week. And I had the award winning poster”

In addition, participants describe a common experience of being slightly different and not excelling as students.

“I was always, growing up, what teachers and parents have called ‘a creative kid’...I wasn’t a prodigy at anything...but I have a modest amount of talent in a lot of different things...I could draw passively well, I could write and communicate passively well, even have a modest amount of musical and theatrical talent. None of it was world class in any one area, but I found enough satisfaction in all of those things”

“I have a low proficiency in math and I don’t know what the correlation of that is to advertising”

“Always good in English. Total right brain, my left brain skills are marginal at best”

Consequently, the college experiences participants describe are unsurprisingly similar.

“I went to (an Ivy League Business School), but I actually minored in creative writing”

“I got here accidentally. I went to a liberal arts college...with no direction, so I became a sociology major”

“I ended up going into journalism with an advertising sequence. I picked it because I ran out of electives”

Upon graduation, participants seemed to almost stumble into advertising. However, once in advertising, they describe an immense sense of self fulfillment.

“I always liked to write”

“My gift has always been language and flow of writing and stating things differently and unusually. It comes from a need for attention and prove how smart I am. I always had to be the smart one, the sarcastic one”

“It was in high school that I learned the elements that made it easy for me to learn how to write well”

“I realized that there aren't too many writers that are much older than me, its kind of a dead end”

“something began to click in my mind that this could be a really cool career for a creative person, because there is constant stimulation, you never work on the same things twice, you get to learn about everything, and you have an opportunity to put your creativity to work and make money at it...you are not going to be a starving artist”

Creativity's Central Role in Advertising

As mentioned in the literature review, there is little doubt among practitioners and academics about creativity's central role in advertising. What is lacking, however, is the creatives' perspectives themselves and how they make meaning of that centrality. A close analysis of participants' narrative produced two sub-thematic categories that comprise this fundamental emergent theme of our work. The first is definitional in nature, but goes deeper provided the hermeneutic nature of the investigation. Primarily, participants reflect on creativity's role in advertising, and how they play a part in facilitating it.

“Creativity is indeed the cornerstone of competitive advantage”

“I don't think you can be an advertising agency, and not be a creative organization”

“Creativity is total leverage. It’s our motto, it’s our business motto”

“This is a business that rewards you from when you are 22 to when you are 42, that’s your window. Eventually your brain gets hard-wired, and creativity becomes contextual to yourself. It stops having its own freshness”

“Creativity is constantly redefined. It’s the holy grail, its core to running a business”

The second sub-thematic category involves an introspective reflection on how creativity plays out in their careers and in advertising in general.

“We have accepted a role of anonymity, our work is not signed. But our creativity goes out under the client’s name, and we accept that. That’s why we have the award shows, so we can say ‘I did that’”

“It’s my job to polish information, I don’t create it. I make it interesting and relevant. Creatively”

“Creative people in advertising don’t really think they are capitalists. Of course we are, it’s by default. I guess we don’t like to think that we are as whorish as a salesman who so obviously is doing that. The ability to be creative provides a shield against the reality of what we really do. Like a little umbrella. We do it; we want to sell a lot. But we are not sales guys. But we are”

“Taking information and serving as a conduit to consumers is just as important a part of creativity than anything”

Creativity’s Potential Centrality in Business

A number of business disciplines, including marketing, general management, HR, operations, etc., are manifesting the flattening and commoditization evident in the products marketing arena. Moreover, since the nature of advertising is predominantly B2B, while the creative elements are consumer focused, the potential of applying creativity to management practices seems infinite and timely. When making meaning of their own creativity, participants offered many observations that lend themselves to the possibility of adopting creativity in other business areas, mainly management practices and innovation creation.

Below are the four sub-thematic categories that are included in this axial theme.

Creativity and creative cultures:

“Its true, innovation comes directly from creativity”

“Ad agencies are creative cultures, but that could be replicated to other businesses. But there are companies that are built on command and control, and that isn’t going to work for a creative culture. I mean, the essence of a creative culture is we as a business asking our employees when they come in every day, to take risks, throw themselves out over the edge, expose themselves. And if you are going to ask an employee to do that, you cannot then turn around and slap them if they don’t follow a certain protocol, or if they don’t do things the way

you think they ought to be done, or if they don't show up when you think they ought to...you cant have it both ways. You can't say 'we want you to be risk takers for us' and then say 'don't do this and that'"

Creativity and management:

"Advertising agencies are always concerned about how big they will get before they get bad (laughs), as if there is some inherent limit or some bad ratio between size and creativity, inverse proportions between the two. There very well might be."

"A manger's job is to help figure out this incredibly interesting balance between how creative an idea is, or a concept is, versus the clients' ability to see and accept such an idea."

"The explosion of technology has brought on a period now, probably not dissimilar to the period of the early 50's ...when advertisers are trying to figure out new media and interactive communications. That has created a greater sensitivity on the client's side to creativity and its application in their businesses"

"As creative managers, we are always aware that there are a number of ways to skin the cat, and that the number of solutions is not finite, it's limited only by your own resolve."

"the managerial process is the classic creative process: fill your head with as much background information as you can, let it stew around in there for a while, go do something and let it brew and bubble to the surface, have a sort of a eureka! or epiphany moment, test it, and then refine it. Everyone in any business should be doing that."

Creativity in B2B:

"Sometimes there is some tension between creativity and its business application, but it really depends. There are clients, of course, who get it. All creative people divide the world, the people in the world, into two categories, and two categories only: those that get it, and those that don't. Those that get understand the importance of seeing things a different way, and that taking some risk is a good thing. There are people who understand that the only surefire way for failure is to try and please everybody."

"Strategy is an essential element of a good creative person's craft, being able to understand and develop it along with a client"

Creativity as competitive advantage:

"But really, its (creativity) standing in a different place. Archimedes said 'Give me a place to stand and I could move the world', that's what we do for a living. We stand in a different place. And we look at our clients' products from a different place."

"What being creative in business is all about is being noticed."

"Creativity really is leverage, it is absolutely leverage"

“Demanding creativity from managers puts more of their skills to use, it challenges them”

“One of the things that set creative managers apart is their ability to see shades of gray, to make all kinds of connections among things that might not be connected.”

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF EXPLORATORY FINDINGS

In contrast to the view of creativity as a mysterious "spark" that is difficult to pin down, our analysis suggests that the creative process involved in advertising can be interpreted and understood. In addition, creativity as a craft, a managerial skill and process, can most likely be replicated in many sectors of business, both in consumer and in business markets. Creativity is not the result of some magical process but rather can be linked to specific underlying facilitating factors and situations. Moreover, creativity as a business orientation seems to provide not only a competitive advantage, but a more innovative and positive business culture, with happier, more productive employees and channel members. Finally, the notion of creativity as dependent on sampling from a large, unquantifiable number of ingredients coheres well with the ideas popularized by Wallas (1926) and with the aspects of "divergent thinking" discussed by Guilford (1956). Our exploratory findings lend further tentative support to this argument.

LIMITATIONS

With respect to limitations, our results are based on a focused observation of eight creative executives in advertising. We utilized qualitative methods to more closely specify relationships among originality, strategy, artistry, and creativity for different agency roles. In-depth interviews may involve interview effects that influence the information elicited, even when care is taken to hold the interviews *in situ* at the workplace, and in a detached, impartial manner. Also, the domain analysis undertaken is not easily amenable to objective interrater reliability testing (Kassarjian 1977), as would be the case if simple categorization of discrete events had been the objective of the analysis. Independent practitioner validation confirmed the analysis and synthesis undertaken and the technique seems appropriate during the exploratory stages of research where transcripts are to be assessed for similarities or differences between the respondent described processes.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For various reasons, we do not claim that the meaning of creativity participants provide in our study reflects the extent to which creative advertising personnel are collectively creative as a profession nor do we mean to pass judgment on the creativity of the participants in the study. Rather, our interest was in exploring the process and hermeneutic meaning underlying creativity and the outcome of this process in the context of the participants' life stories. Our tentative exploratory descriptions of such questions represent only a starting point in the investigation of creative processes and creative outcomes in advertising.

The qualitative nature of this study has facilitated development of an image of the creativity described, capturing considerable subtlety and nuance. We suggest that subsequent studies, both qualitative and quantitative in nature, may now use the foundation established by this elucidation of the creativity genesis process. What may at first glance appear as a strongly intangible and even unfathomable quality may be amenable to empirical examination.

Further research is needed to examine the relationship between a consideration of multiple approaches to creativity in advertising and the potential reflection of this in the creativity of the resulting advertising products. Toward that end, future studies should include depth interviews of advertising creatives in all levels concerning their approaches to creating

advertising products and reflections on the creative process and larger samples of creative individuals and teams. Clearly, in these and other ways, more work is needed to build on the exploratory study reported here in the direction of understanding the elusive processes leading to creativity in advertising.

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Creative Cultures					
Advertising Agencies	Creative Managers	Art Vs. Craft	"Raw" Categories	Creativity's Meaning	Elusive Subjective Original
		Strategy		Creative Facilitators	Personal Traits Professional Position
		B2B		Creativity in Advertising	Definitional Introspective
				Creativity in Business	Creative Cultures Creative Mgmt B2B Competitive Advantage

Figure 1: Domain Analysis

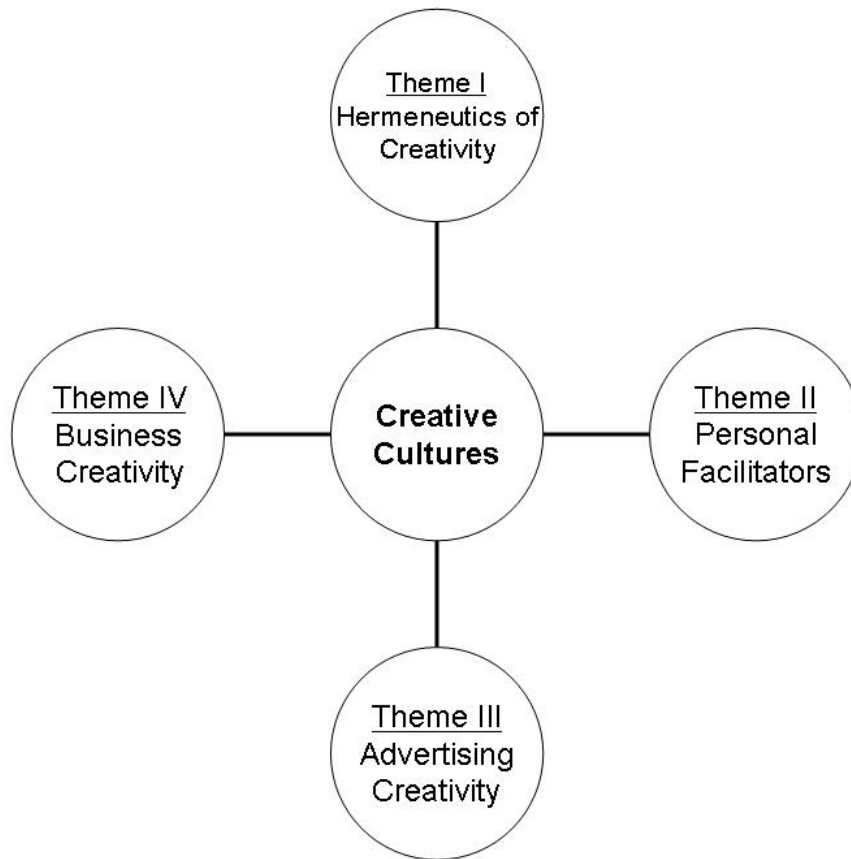


Figure 1: Creative Cultures' Axial Themes

Pseudonym	Title
Bill	Chief Creative Director
Tim	Creative Director
Leah	CEO
Geoff	Chief Creative Director
Barney	CEO
Chuck	Creative Director
Dominic	Chief Creative Director
Sam	CEO

Table 1: Profiles of Participants in Study