

## **Creativity: the issues surrounding its assessment in professional marketing courses**

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### **Introduction**

Creativity has been noted to contribute to entrepreneurship, foster innovation, enhance productivity and promote economic growth (Cooper 2009; Elsbash and Kramer, 2003). Today's corporations have shifted focus beyond quality and efficiency towards innovation and thus increased demand for managers who understand the "right – brain" creativity to enable them stay ahead (Nussbaum and Tiplady 2005). As noted by Jackson (2006), creativity is not only important to one's inventiveness, adaptability and productivity but also to the prosperity and functioning of our organisations and more generally to the health and prosperity of the society and the economy as a whole. With the ever-changing environment, it is imperative for a business to be creative. In order to achieve increased creativity, education must play its part as it is part and parcel of the economic growth strategy. Education has been criticised for failing to instil in students the creativity required for effective leadership and strategic thinking.

For Marketing professionals, it is important to be creative so as to develop creative products/services/ideas and strategies that can enable the organisation to beat competition. A Marketing executive has to be creative - "mixer of ingredients" as described by Culliton (1948) cited in Borden (1964). In Culliton's description, the Marketing executive is regarded as one who is constantly engaging in fashioning creatively a mix of Marketing procedures and policies in effort to produce a profitable enterprise. If the Marketing executive is required to be creative then the Marketing educational programmes have to not only incorporate creativity within the curriculum, teaching and learning but in also assessment.

The purpose of this article is to highlight the challenges in assessing creativity in professional Marketing courses and suggest possible ways to overcome some of the challenges.

## What is Creativity?

Creativity is defined or described differently in different subjects. Creativity can be defined as the ability to think of new, novel and yet valuable ideas, which may be new to the person concerned but not necessarily to the whole of human history (Ogunleye, 2006). It is also defined as “the production of novel thoughts, solutions or products based on previous experience and knowledge” (Gandini cited in Carter, 1992, p.38).

According to the UK Design Council, creativity comes from an ability to apply knowledge across contexts, to use knowledge and skills from one arena (subject domains) in another completely different arena (Ogunleye, 2006). And thus a creative person is someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain or establish a new one (Csikszentmihayli, 1997 pp.27-28).

Boden (2001) in Ogunleye (2006) broadened on the same idea and identified three types of creative thinking, which are:

- *combinational creativity* which involves producing ideas by combining old ones in an unfamiliar way;
- *exploratory creativity* which arises out of knowledge of, or familiarity with the requisite rules;
- *transformational creativity* which involves some significant alteration of one or more of the rules of the current conceptual space.

It is combinational creativity that is seen more in Marketing courses. Professional students on some of the Chartered Institute of Marketing courses are encouraged to use the acquired knowledge and combine it with experiences and examples from different sources and practices to develop a Marketing or communication strategy for their organisation. In so doing they are able to merge ideas from different sectors and come up with an innovative strategy or product for a particular organisation and justify their choice. Innovative organisational practice is more likely to be an outcome of adaptation – new re-combinations of what currently exists than a flash of an inspiration moment or the radical invention of something out of nothing (McWilliam, 2007).

The learning of creativity is achieved by using of teaching and learning methods such as small-group discussions, case studies, brain-storming, debates and role play. These teaching methods involve extended abstract outcomes of learning, such as hypothesising, synthesising, reflecting, generating ideas, applying the known to far domains and working with problems that do not have unique solutions (Jackson, 2006). Through brainstorming, students are able to change paths using different information and experiences and develop options that enable them to think beyond their known to the unknown as they find solutions that, in the end, enable creativity.

In Marketing where the purpose is to satisfy the consumer, creative ideas are required. In order to enable the development of creative minds, processes and products, we must be able to support creativity in class and to assess it. On the professional Marketing courses summative assessment is by exam or assignment and is individually produced. Formative assessment is produced both in groups and individually.

### **The challenges encountered in assessing creativity**

The fact that there is no definite viewpoint on how or whether creativity should be assessed (Cowan, 2006) offers one of the challenges to assessing creativity. In Jackson (2005)'s collection of teachers' views on whether creativity was being assessed, some teachers believed that creativity was evaluated through the assessment criteria. Others thought that there was little or no attention given to creativity. Yet others did not think that it was desirable to assess creativity because assessment is seen as a major inhibitor of creativity.

Teachers/tutors are often ill equipped to develop, support and evaluate creativity (Torrance and Safter, 1986). The lack of know-how to assess creativity by the teachers is a hurdle to assessing creativity. Of course how can we assess it when we lack the ability to catch it?

In addition, assessing creativity is not a straightforward process, as noted by a Kleiman (2004), who asks:

- What do we really look for?
- What are we really assessing? Is it the product (result) or the process or both?

Moreover, in education there is no correlation between a good creative process and a good creative product (Kleiman, 2004). The creative process is always unexpected and difficult to catch, which makes its assessment complicated. Hence the tendency is to avoid the creative process as it is regarded as complex and slippery (Prentice, 2000). This is the case in some professional Marketing courses where the process is assessed for formative purposes only and the product is assessed for both summative and formative purposes. By ignoring the assessment of the process in summative assessment, two of the three components of creativity (Amabile, 1996) i.e. creative thinking and intrinsic motivation are ignored (Prentice, 2000) which makes the assessment of creativity incomplete and inappropriate for judgment in a professional course.

Since professional Marketing curriculums are outcome based, it means assessments are based on outcomes that are pre-determined. This makes it impossible to assess creativity because it is itself unpredictable (Amabile, 1993). Creativity is dependent on emergent learning outcomes which make it subjective and difficult to deal with

objectively. The outcomes of creativity can only be determined after the process of creativity. Hence in the absence of learning outcomes there is nothing against which to assess (Bourner, 2003).

Even though the creative effort is acknowledged in the examiners' reports and called for in the summative assignment brief, its importance is not explicitly acknowledged in the marking criteria. Some students decide to drop the creative endeavour since no value is attached to the effort. For example, I am aware of students who initially had a lot enthusiasm in a summative assignment task which included the production of a designed information leaflet. When they learnt that the marking criteria did not openly award marks for the creative effort, they focused on the content. Assessment is described as "the tail that wags the dog": students pay attention to what is assessed; if something is not assessed (like creativity) then they will most likely neglect it (Bourner, 2003).

The need to adhere to the notions such as validity, fairness and reliability that are part of the marking criteria and assessment protocols is not fully compatible with creativity. This is because creativity is subjective (Prentice 2000 as cited in Kleiman, 2004) and cannot be predicted in the pre-determined marking criteria.

The rules governing plagiarism and collusion in summative assessment affect the assessment of creativity, which develops through divergent and convergent thinking as students share knowledge and experience. Any group collaboration in the summative assessment is discouraged and regarded as plagiarism and collusion. Yet creativity is known to mushroom from piggybacking (Jackson, 2006).

Given that for formative assessments, the creativity does not contribute to the final mark causes students to be less enthusiastic about the creative endeavour. This makes the catching and assessing of creativity difficult. Grades are an important part of a student's motivation to learning and creative effort (Amabile, 1996), and by separating formative and summative assessment by grades, students question their effort in formative assessments.

Lack of time for both the students and the assessors makes the development and assessment of creative tasks difficult especially for formative assessments. Most of the professional students have full-time jobs, which affects their attendance levels and assessment of their work in progress.

### **Suggestions to overcome the challenges in assessing creativity**

The assessment of professional Marketing courses has to reflect what is in the curriculum design and what is taught. The curriculum should explicitly emphasise creativity as guidance to teaching and learning, assessment and grading. If the learning calls for creativity, then there is need to align the assessments with the

learning outcomes and teaching methods through 'constructive alignment' (Biggs, 1999).

One way is to provide several options of assessment products especially for summative assessment (e.g. presentation, portfolio, computer conferencing, messaging, vivas, concept maps and modelling) for the students. This can be done by the students themselves forwarding their best alternative for assessment which fulfils the learning objectives of the module (Thompson, 2007; Lester, 1995). This suggestion is particularly relevant to the professional Marketing courses which have several learning outcomes. The students can choose one of the assessment formats (microsite or information leaflet) to be creative. Then the assessment may involve assessing them on the product and the process, both formatively and summatively, through the use of vivas or presentation or reflective logs and portfolios. Such an effort would not only enable the achievement of more than the one learning outcome but also enable the students to look for better creative ways. However it should be made clear that both the process and product are assessed (Isaacs, 2002) and how much each contributes. In the effort, formative assessment will be playing its part in summative assessment (Knight, 2002).

In addition, the use of portfolios of creative work and the reflection upon the work as an assessment method, which is used by Insead Business School to enable creativity for their MBA students (Howarth, 2005), can be adopted for professional Marketing courses. Such assessment methods lead to active and deep learning and enable the use of skills and knowledge and also change attitude, which is important to practising students (Hartman, 1995).

Howarth (2005) and Jackson (2005) emphasise the need to engage the students in the assessment by letting them come up with criteria against which they make claims and by which they are judged. This makes it possible to facilitate creative capability, which makes creativity socially constructive (Jackson, 2005; Prentice, 2000). The teacher's role would then be to equip the students with "know-how" to do this and assess them against their own criteria.

Formative tutor, self and peer assessment should be adapted in the summative grading. This will not only enable students to improve their commitment, learning and creativity through self-evaluation (Poce, n.d.), but also help reduce the gap between formative and summative assessment. We need to encourage creativity by explicitly providing learning agreements (for commitment) and constructive feedback, especially during formative assessments, which is crucial for the learning process and creativity (Guard, Richter & Waller, 2003).

It is also necessary to encourage risk-taking, even if it means failing and putting value to failure as a result of the creative endeavours (Jackson, 2006). This approach is currently facilitated by the primary school curriculum in the UK, which has

embraced creativity (Jackson, 2006). Teachers/tutors can model creativity for their own students to catch (Jackson, 2005; Thompson, 2007). Making space for trial and error via non-contributory formative assessment will allow students to take risks, but without risking their grades.

Marketing professional bodies need to change the summative assessment guidance by allowing for group effort in the summative assessments. Since creativity is built if students work in groups rather than as individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999), and the goal of the course is to encourage creative thinking and collaborative learning, it is important to include grading based on group tasks (Isaacs, 2002). Plagiarism can be dealt with through guidance on ethics (Jackson, 2006). How can the importance of group work be ignored, when in practice we know the benefits of teamwork and brainstorming in enabling creativity?

When assessing students' work, we can spot evidence of the use of questions for creative thinking (Bourner, 2003) and then conclude that the student has been creative. We could use the list in the appendix, adopted from questions for critical thinking (Norris and Ennis, 1989; Bourner, 2003), which can be used to assess creativity. These may be added to the factors to consider when assessing creativity as per those cited in Cole, Sugioka and Yamagata-Lynch (2007). These include the students' creative solution to the problem, how well the students executed the solution, how much work the students put into the assignment and the students' written analysis of their creative processes.

A good model is the assessment of project work. Students are left to select the topic and content of their projects and yet we are still confident in marking their project reports (Bourner, 2003). In project work, the concern is how the student conducted the work more than the content of the project outcomes. Hence for creativity we need to be concerned about how (process) and grade it.

## **Conclusion**

As advocated by the educational literature and successful initiatives in other contexts, we need to embrace creativity at the professional level by understanding the underlying issues concerning creativity, facilitating it and developing appropriate methods of assessing the creative processes and products in a way that is valid, fair and reliable, without falling into the tendency of just ticking the box. Allowing for variety in assessment format, using trigger questions to stimulate creativity and (non-contributory) formative assessment to support risk-taking, are among possible ways forward.

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### **Questions as tools for assessing creativity**

(adapted from questions for critical thinking Bourner (2003))

1. What explicit assumptions are being made? Can they be challenged?
2. What implicit/taken-for-granted assumptions are being made? Can they be challenged?
3. How logical is the reasoning behind the assumption?
4. How sound is the evidence for the assertion(s)?
5. Whose interests and what interests are served by the assertions?
6. What values underpin the reasoning?
7. What are the implications of the conclusion or strategies being made?
8. What meaning is conveyed by the terminology employed and the language used?
9. What alternative conclusions can be drawn from the evidence?
10. What is being privileged and what is off-the-agenda in the discourse?
11. What is the context of this discourse? From what different perspectives can the discourse be viewed?
12. How generalised are the conclusions?