Theories on Creativity

Liliana Alves

Part IV – What is to be Creative?

- **Chapter 1 – System Model**
- Chapter 2 – Propulsion Model of Creative Contributions
- Chapter 3 – Amusement Park Theoretical Model

Chapter 1 – System Model

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999): creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of **social systems making judgements** about individual's products

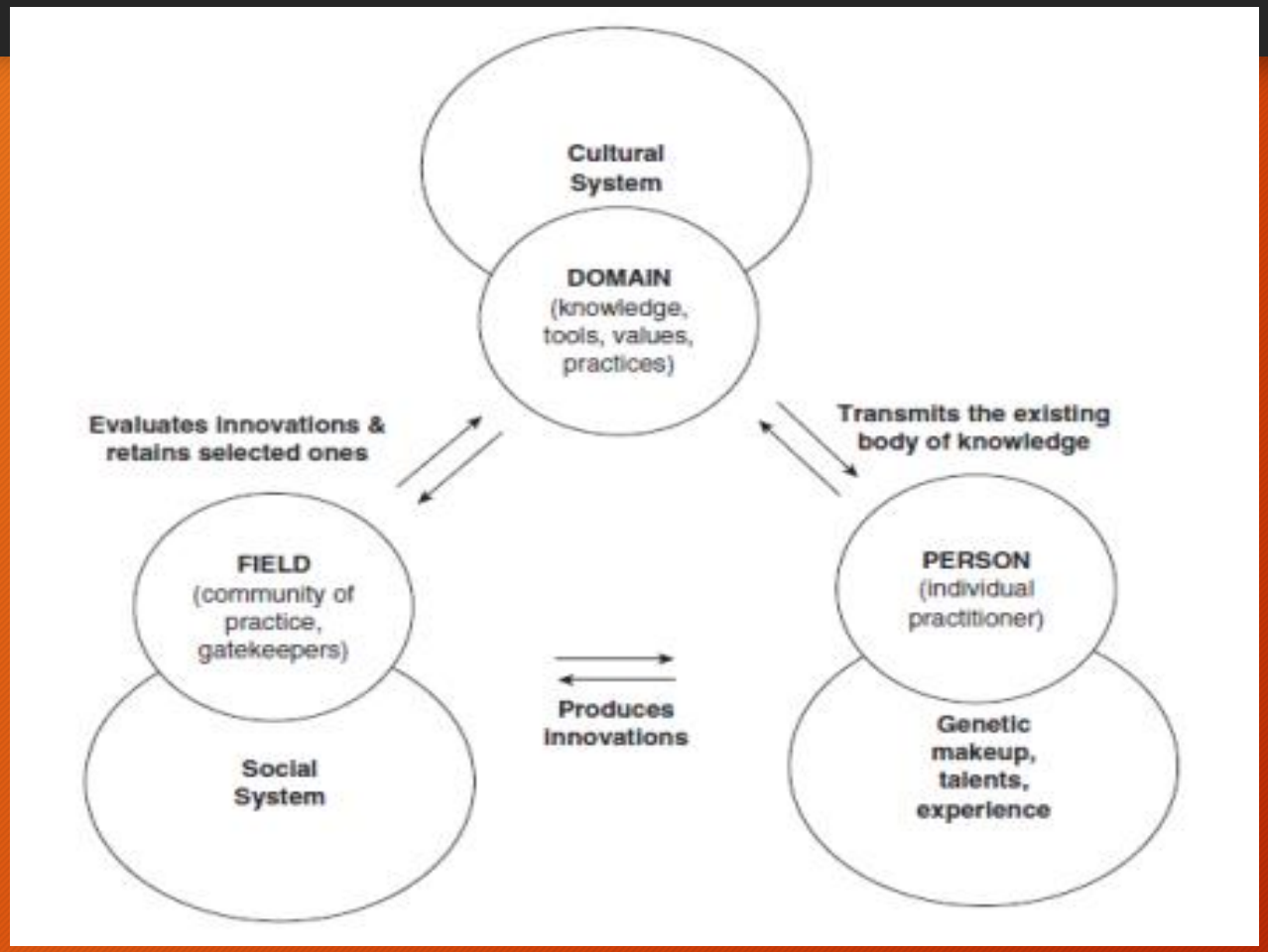
- Environment:
  - **Cultural** or symbolic - Domain
  - **Social** – Field

Chapter 1 – System Model

System Model of creativity

- **Cultural system** and the Domain
- **Social system** and the Field
- **Genetic makeup**, talents, experience and the Person

Chapter 1 – System Model



Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999, p. 4)

Chapter 1 – System Model

- For creativity to occur, a **set of rules and practices must be transmitted** from the domain to the individual
- The individual must then produce a **novel variation in the content** of the domain
- The variation then must be selected by the field **for inclusion** in the domain.

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- Creativity occurs when a **person makes a change** in a domain, a change that **will be transmitted through time.**

- However, changes are not adopted unless they are **validated** by some group ("**gatekeepers**") who decide what belongs to a domain and what does not.

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- **Gatekeepers** are the field. Here field refers only to the social organisation of the domain.
- **For example**: teachers, critics, journal editors, museum curators, agency directors, and foundation officers
- They **decide what belongs** to a domain and what does not.

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- In physics, the opinion of a very small number of leading university professors was enough to certify that **Einstein's ideas** were creative. Hundreds of millions of people accepted the judgement of this tiny field and marvelled at Einstein's creativity without understanding what it was all about.

- In the United States 10,000 people **in Manhattan** constitute the field in **modern art**. They decide which new paintings or sculptures deserve to be seen, bought, included in collections, and therefore added to the domain.

Exercise

Theories in Practice

Chapter 1 – System Model

Cultural system

- Cultures as systems of **interrelated domains**
- Cultures differ in the way that **memes** (i.e. technical procedures, kinds of knowledge, styles of art, belief systems) are stored. **New media of storage and transmission** (e.g. books, computers) **will have an impact** on rates of novelty production and its acceptance.

- **Accessibility of information**: when knowledge sources are rare, less likely it becomes that potentially creative individuals will be able to contribute to a domain.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Cultural system

- **Cultures differ in the number** of domains they recognize and **in the hierarchical relationship** among them. Example: Nobel Prize in Literature for Bob Dylan was not well received by some authors

- When the **diffusion of information** is almost instantaneous, useful new ideas are likely to arise from centers where people from different cultural backgrounds are able to **interact and exchange** ideas. Example: Co-creation on the internet

Chapter 1 – System Model

Cultural system

The role of the domain in the creative process

- **Cultures are made up of a variety of domains**: music, mathematics, religion, various technologies…
- Innovations that result in creative contributions do not take place directly in the culture, but **in one of such** domains: Nobel Prize in Economics, Medicine, Literature, …
- There are times that it is almost impossible to determine whether a novelty is or is not an improvement on the status quo.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Cultural system

<u>The role of the domain in the creative process</u>

- The **attraction** of a domain depends on several variables: its centrality in the culture, the **promise of new discoveries** and opportunities that it presents, the **intrinsic rewards** accruing from working in the domain.

- Domains also vary in terms of their accessibility (**sometimes rules and knowledge become the monopoly of a protective class or caste**)

Chapter 1 – System Model

Cultural system

The role of the domain in the creative process

- Some **domains are easier to change than others**. Some topics in the social (and even in the physical and biological) sciences are considered **less politically correct** than others and are given scant research support as a consequence.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

- In order to be called creative, a new meme must be **socially valued**. Without some form of social valuation it would be impossible to **distinguish** ideas that are simply **bizarre** from those that are **genuinely creative**.

- As long as the **idea or product has not been validated**, we might have **originality, but not creativity**.
- **Van Gogh** would not be considered creative without social validation

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

Societal conditions relevant to creativity

- **Wealthier societies** are able to make information more readily available, allow for a greater rate of specialization and experimentation, and are better equipped to reward and implement new ideas than **subsistence societies**.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

Societal conditions relevant to creativity

- A different and more controversial suggestion is that **egalitarian societies** are less likely to support the creative process. Aristocracies or oligarchies may be better able to support creativity than democracies or social regimes, simply **because when wealth and power are concentrated in a few hands, it is easier to use part of it for risky or 'unnecessary' experiments.**

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

Societal conditions relevant to creativity

- **Societies located at the confluence** of diverse cultural streams can benefit more easily from that synergy of different ideas that is so important for the creative process. It is for this reason that some of the greatest art, and the earliest science, developed in cities that were centers of trade. The **Italian Renaissance** was in part due to the **Arab and Middle Eastern influences** that **businessmen** and their retinues brought into Florence and the seaports of Venice, Genoa, and Naples.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

The role of the field

- Some domains may have a very small field consisting of a **dozen** or so scholars (gatekeepers) across the world. Others, such as electronic engineering, may include many **thousands** of specialists whose opinion would count in recognizing a viable novelty.

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Social system

The role of the field

- For **mass-market products** such as soft drinks or motion pictures, the field might include **not only the small coterie of product developers and critics**, but the **public at large**. For instance, if New Coke is not a part of the culture, it is because although it passed the evaluation of the small field of beverage specialists, it failed to pass the test of public taste.

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Social system

The role of the field

- The field's access to **economic resources** (to build a cathedral or to make a movie)
- A field is likely to **attract original minds** to the extent that it **can offer scope for a person's experimentations** and **promises rewards** in case of success

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

The role of the field

- The **centrality of a field in terms of societal values** will also determine how likely it is to attract new persons with an innovative bent
- Films and popular music are **accessible to the general public**, so it's harder for the field to impose a decision on what the creative works are (most of the Nobel Prizes in literature are not recognized as creative)

Chapter 1 – System Model

Social system

The role of the field

- The extent to which the fields are **ideologically open or closed** to new memes
- Some of the most influential new ideas or processes seem to occur even though there is no existing domain or field to receive them (Freud's ideas, …)
- New ideas will not be recognized unless the field is able **to recognize which of the new ideas are good and implementable**, and so include them in the domain.

Chapter 1 – System Model

Person

<u>The background of creative individuals</u>

- A child is likely to be discouraged from expressing curiosity and interest if the **material conditions** of existence are too precarious

- **Ethnic and family traditions** can have a very important role in directing the child's interest toward specific domains

Chapter 1 – System Model

Person

The background of creative individuals

- **Cultural capital** (i.e. home learning, schooling) is essential for a child to develop expertise in a domain
- **Tutors, mentors**, and connections are often indispensable for advancing far enough to have one's ideas recognized
- **Marginality** (social, ethnic, economic, religious) seems to be more conducive to wanting to break out of the norm than a conventional, middle-class background

Chapter 1 – System Model

Person

Personal qualities

- Have the **ability and inclination** to introduce novelty into the domain (internalize the rules of the domain and the opinions of the field)

- In certain domains (e.g. music, mathematics) **genetic inheritance** may play an important role

Chapter 1 – System Model

Person

Personal qualities

- A great deal of **intrinsic motivation** is needed to energize the person
- **Cognitive ability** such as fluency, flexibility, and discovery orientation seem necessary to engage successfully in the process of generating novelty
- **Apppropriate traits** – which may vary depending on the field and the historical period. In general, one must persevere and be open to experience, as well as adopt apparently contradictory behaviors.

Main Bibliography

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- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1999). A systems perspective on creativity. Edited extract from Sternberg, R. (Ed.) (1999). *Handbook of Creativity*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 313-335.