
Creation's Unique Managerial Paradigm

Long deemed exotic by the managerial world – both by practitioners and researchers – organizations falling under what are currently known as the creative industries (Caves 2000) have received increasing interest since the beginning of the millennium (Benghozi 1995; Paris and Massé 2021). And for a good reason: while the imperative of innovation was becoming increasingly pressing and increasingly structuring for a growing number of firms (Benghozi et al. 2000), companies which commercialized “creation” seemed to demonstrate notable know-how in their ability to manage different problems related to such imperative: talent management, repeated innovation, disruptive innovation, risk and failure management, etc. To such an extent, in fact, that these companies (which operate in a context known for its significant risk) even seemed to have stifled it, if we think of the major actors in the luxury sector or Pixar.

If they have long seemed exotic, it is because these sectors remain shrouded in a romantic representation, according to which everything boils down to individual genius (Becker 1982). The relentless success of companies relying on anonymous creators, such as Pixar, has challenged this view and evidenced that organization and management could be accountable for their satisfying performance. What's more, this pendulum swing may also have encouraged the emergence of another equally false representation of creation: the mechanistic vision. In this way, we tend to apply reading grids to this activity which end up being unsuitable. What actually happens is that firms thriving in the creative industries rely on organizations and management, but these managerial approaches are part of specific operating modes, which leads us to affirm the existence of a managerial paradigm specific to creation.

This chapter aims to present the characteristics of this paradigm. We do so first by attempting to define the challenges these organizations face. To create, of course! But what does this mean, namely in terms of management difficulties? We thoroughly explore the difficulties and challenges involved in organizing and managing creation. To conclude, we disclose the responses provided by organizations which consistently deploy creative expertise.

1.1. Creation as an organized social activity

“Please... draw me a sheep!”: this famous request could be a prompt issued to generative AI. Regardless of whether artificial intelligence is involved or not, the plea richly describes the context of creation, its reality and its challenges in terms of management. The narrator of the *Little Prince*, an aviator stranded in the desert, might as well retort something like “draw it yourself!”, especially considering that the rest of the episode shows how difficult it is to satisfy the little boy. The narrator could even ask for further explanations, insofar as the boy’s request is not perfectly explicit. This apostrophe, and the difficulties it brings, signals the entry of the organizational dimension into creation. In this section, we do our best to provide an actionable representation of creation.

1.1.1. Creation: from the romantic myth to organizational reality

Fiat lux and facta est lux! Let there be light, and there was light! It is remarkable that the first sentence spoken by God constitutes an act of creation. The creation of the world unfolded as an immediate act, whereby spirit (the mind of God?) imposes its conception over matter. Now, what is true in the Judeo-Christian cosmogony is also present in other cosmogonies. Among the Hindus, for example, the creation of the world took place in the blink of an eye.

Our societies have long supported a vision of creation similar to this first image. In our representations, creation results from a single, brilliant individual, who creates following an inspiration impossible to harness. The demiurgic dimension we often associate with this activity is found in a form of superiority – genius – creators are allegedly endowed with. It is also evidenced in the inspiration which turns the creator into the expressive vector of a higher force. According to this representation, there is no compromise: the creator creates whatever its genius dictates. There is no organization. As for matter, it is a perfectly malleable object over which the mind imposes a form, without much difficulty. Thus, the pangs of creation come down to material suffering (the genius hardly cares for comfort and is often misunderstood) and to the whims of inspiration. In a seminal book, the sociologist Howard Becker

showed how reality differs from this extremely widespread mythology (Becker 1982). We will return to this point.

Let us return to the early days of the world, not from a biblical perspective but an evolutionary one. The discovery of the Chauvet Cave in 1994 taught us that in 36,000 BCE, Paleolithic human beings were already creating. Although dance and pantomime developed in ancient times, some cave paintings seem to indicate that dance existed in prehistoric times. These early forms of artistic expression featured a sense of immediacy, akin to a divine act: nothing and no one stood between the desire to move our body and the execution of the action. Painting requires only – but still – the use of a tool and a material. “Still,” because as soon as the act of creation loses its immediacy, it can involve or require collaboration. The thousands of years that followed resulted in the multiplication of creation forms: the creative industries include painting and other plastic arts, drama and dance, music, publishing, cinema, video games, fashion, architecture, design, advertising, cooking, etc. The image of the creator on their own – alone with their body – has become marginalized. No longer is there any creation that does not require tools, materials or teams, and often, all three. Orson Welles pointed out the increasing complexity of the creative tool when he declared: “A writer needs a pen, an artist needs a brush, but a filmmaker needs an army.” Previously, Chaplin had been moved by the way in which the emergence of technology was transforming the work of the creator:

Cameras the size of a room lumbered about the stage like Juggernauts. Elaborate radio equipment was installed, involving thousands of electrical wires. Men geared like warriors from Mars, sat with earphones while the actors performed, with microphones hovering above them like fishing rods. It was all very complicated and depressing. How could anyone be creative with all that junk around them? (Chaplin 1964, p. 374)

These successive interjections of material, technological or human intermediaries between creator and production have effectively incorporated organization into creation, or more generally, an organizational arrangement (Girin 1995) bringing together individuals and objects. Just like in the *Little Prince*, as soon as the creator has to interact with a third party to create, it enters an organizational context. To such an extent, persons categorized as creators define themselves as organizers or managers. Vince Gilligan, showrunner of the *Breaking Bad* series, declared:

The worst thing the French ever gave us is the *auteur* theory. It's a load of horseshit. You don't make a movie by yourself, you certainly don't make a TV show by yourself. You invest people in their work. You make people feel comfortable in their jobs; you keep people talking. (Martin 2013)

The production of a series, even the most creative one, is built upon organization, labor division, routines or processes.

Over time, cooperation, technologies, tools and de facto organization have become part of various forms of creation. Today, different forms coexist, and the use of larger or smaller teams or labor division is essential for developing complex projects requiring multiple skills (video games, architecture, etc.) or a significant amount of work (series, animation, etc.) or when a creator or company wishes or needs to do more: bigger, more complex, more often, more numerous or faster. These days, architects can only be considered for the *Pritzker Prize*, the highest award in the field, provided that they are associated with a sufficiently substantial body of work, which is largely inaccessible to individuals working on their own. Organization, in this case, makes it possible for their work to be multiplied.

This also leads us to identify the three main organizational contexts for creation (Paris 2013). An organization can be built to catapult the vision of an individual and thus present itself as an extension of the said individual: this is the case of architectural firms that bear the name of an architect, such as Jean Nouvel or Renzo Piano; of restaurant groups such as Alain Ducasse or Anne-Sophie Pic; of animation companies such as Studio Ghibli, which established itself as Miyazaki's tool of expression; or in the performing arts, as shown by the troupes of Ariane Mnouchkine (Théâtre du Soleil) or the late Pina Bausch (Tanztheater Wuppertal).

It can be a production tool placed at the service of projects executed by various external creators: see, for example, the Cirque du Soleil, or the animation studio Illumination which is developing the series of animated films *Despicable Me*. It can finally be a breeding ground in which different creators develop various projects: see the case of Pixar or the video game studio Ubisoft.

1.1.2. The unknown and incomplete mandates

Let us now get back to our sheep. "Draw it yourself!" the aviator could have replied. Yes, but I don't know how to do it, I don't have all the skills, it's impossible for me to do it alone, the little boy could have replied, depending on the nature of the creation requested.

"What sheep?" could have been another reply. The context in which the creative industries operate requires some form of differentiation. We tend to consider that the creative industries are prototype industries, in which each product is new, unique. Caves (2000) drew attention to the property of Infinite Variety, emphasizing that these sectors promote the expression not of 60 shades of gray, but of thousands or even millions of shades in writings, sounds, images, etc. In his attempt to debunk

the myth of the romantic author, Howard Becker (1982) developed another representation of creation as a complex outcome of a chain of cooperation in a universe of mutually shared conventions, which he refers to as the art world. This representation has considerable consequences from a conceptual viewpoint: the value of a creation will be constructed through its encounter with a market, via the decisions that a critic may make to defend a particular work of art, a programmer to present it, a performer to lend their image or voice to it, a bookseller or record store to promote it, the public to adopt it, etc. This means that when a team or artist is working on a piece or has just completed it, the piece in itself has no objective value. It is difficult to admit this when confronted with works considered to be major in the history of humanity. To be persuaded of this, let us recall that Proust had the greatest difficulty in publishing his *Remembrance of Things Past* and that Van Gogh sold a total of one painting in his lifetime.

This state of affairs brings us back to a second misrepresentation, which can be described as mechanistic. After many years of creation being relegated by management theorists to a kind of extraterritoriality, the rise of the imperative of innovation (Benghozi et al. 2000) led them to take a closer interest in organizations which seemed to have found the perfect formula for managing talent, creation, innovation and failure. Successful cases were analyzed to draw lessons, which were often erroneous. The fascination exerted by Pixar led reputable publications as *The Independent* or the *Harvard Business Review* to make the following analysis of success:

Instead of putting the bathrooms (and café and mailboxes and gift shop) off to the side, Steve Jobs placed them in an atrium at the center of the workspace. And “although some were more than a little annoyed to have to traipse to the lobby every time they needed the loo, something remarkable started to happen” writes *The Independent's* Archie Bland. “Pixar’s employees started to bump into each other. They shot the breeze. Sometimes, the chatter would yield something useful, and one of the participants would head back to her desk with a new idea. (Gavett 2013)

This reasoning, which contributed to the buzz around convivial spaces in companies and coworking, is based on a false view of creation, according to which ideas are a scarce resource. Ed Catmull’s presentation (Catmull and Wallace 2014) of Pixar and his analysis of the best creative companies (Paris 2010) show, on the contrary, that these organizations produce ideas abundantly. The mechanistic representation is generally based on the belief in a pre-existing market, implying the fact that good ideas have a self-evident value. Following that, the challenge for these organizations is to foster creativity from which good ideas will naturally emerge. In this model, to create amounts to organizing creativity, in the sense of producing a

plethora of ideas. This conception seems to be at work in the lesson that Eric Schmidt, former CEO of Google, draws from the success of his company, and in particular, of Google's AdSense product:

Google's AdSense product, which developed into a multibillion-dollar business, was invented one day by a group of engineers from different teams who were playing pool in the office. Your partner or roommate is probably great, but the odds of the two of you coming up with a billion-dollar business during a coffee break at home are pretty small, even if you do have a pool table. Make your offices crowded and load them with amenities, then expect people to use them. (Schmidt and Rosenberg 2014)

This reasoning is tainted by biases and misrepresentations: the retrospective bias (reasoning as if the sequence of events was known) and the survivor bias (making a generalization from an event which is a statistical exception). The representation that accompanies these two biases implies that an idea has an inherent value. But this is not applicable to the field of creation, where we are invited to design without any indications on the value of the projects underway.

On the consumer's side, the act of choosing is made in the face of an unreadable supply, insofar as they can only appreciate the value attributed to a work of art after having consumed it (listened to the concert, watched the film, read the book, visited the exhibition, etc.). This makes the creative industries exemplary cases of what Lucien Karpik (2007) calls the economies of singularities. They require the use of different schemes to help consumers make choices: prizes (Goncourt, Oscar, etc.), rankings (charts, etc.) or actors who establish a preselection and who can be called prescribers (Benghozi and Paris 2003, 2007). Among the schemes shared by consumers to find their way through an overabundant supply, word of mouth plays a significant role in cultural activities: creations become all the more valuable because they are important to our loved ones, with whom we can discuss them later. In that sense, creative industries integrate network externalities.

The creative activity takes place in a context where, on the one hand, there is no notion of objective value, and, on the other hand, there is an urge to stand out to counter an abundant supply. So... which sheep? Well, a sheep that cannot look like all other sheep, and therefore a different sheep, a sheep that will stand out from the crowd, a sheep that will break the mold. A creative sheep, then? Let us pause for a moment on this imperative for creativity.

The creative industries are often associated with creativity. It is important to point out that this notion is not operational. "Draw me a creative sheep..." But creative how? The challenge behind this imperative for creativity is to offer

creations that will have the capacity to stand out amid a profuse supply, in a given context. Thus, making a film for luring an audience to a movie theater is not the same as making a film that will have to stand out on a subscription video-on-demand platform. While in the first case, consumers pay for a movie ticket based on their impression of a film, in the second case they have purchased a subscription and can “try out” a film. In short, it is not enough to simply stimulate the desire to buy, it is necessary to offer a film that attracts viewers and entices them to keep watching the film until the end.

Now this framework has been established, the question remains intact. What sheep? Original, no doubt. And quite interesting, depending on the consumption context. But what sheep? We are confronted with a management situation, as defined by Jacques Girin: “A management situation arises when participants are brought together and must carry out, within a given time, a collective action leading to a result subject to external judgment” (Girin 2016, p. 166). The mandate that governs the “draw me a sheep” relationship is confusing and complex: the mandator’s expectation is not explicit and the activity to accomplish it is made complex (for it to comply with differentiation).

The organizational context that frames the creative activity is highly specific: it involves producing together something we do not know how to define and whose value will only be determined by the encounter with the market, which implies that there is absolutely no benchmark to rely on.

1.1.3. Designing without benchmarks: a specific context

The organization of creation is accompanied by difficulties specific to this absence of benchmarks, which places it in a singular frame of reference: the famous managerial paradigm referred to in the title of this chapter. While the worlds of creation have long been kept separate from other design activities, giving them an exotic status, the real demarcation lies elsewhere: it opposes design contexts with benchmarks and design contexts without them (Paris and Massé 2021).

Let us take some examples: a team is brought together to make a sequel to a successful film such as *Star Wars*, for instance. There are certain benchmarks: we know the audience, its social characteristics, its reactions, we know what it likes. An engineer or designer shows up at an Apple executive committee meeting and suggests working on what will become the iPad, which cannot be defined other than as “a big phone that doesn’t make calls” (Caussey and Paris 2011). Is the iPad a good idea? Impossible to say a priori, because we don’t know what it is. And despite the aura Apple projected at that moment, no one knew how buyers would receive it. In that sense, the design context of the iPad was very similar to that of *Inside Out* by

Pixar, when a director suggested making a film about “the emotions in a young girl’s head”. In either case, there was no pre-existing market, and no benchmarks. When Apple was working on a new iPad version, its teams were in a position as if they were working on a new *Star Wars* film.

When we are dealing with creation, we find ourselves de facto in an unknown context, lacking benchmarks. In the field of marketing, the question comes down to offering new products and having them adopted by the market. Samuel Fischer, founder of S. Fischer Verlag, stated: “Being a publisher is about publishing books that the public doesn’t want.”

Now, picture Decathlon teams gathering to try to offer a solution to hikers who have walked all day, who arrive exhausted at their bivouac where they still have to pitch a tent, and sometimes, when they are unlucky, under challenging weather conditions. In the field of design or business creation, we speak of pain or irritants. The teams’ mission: to reduce or totally remove such irritants. For that, Decathlon invented the “two-second tent”. In this configuration, we can talk about creativity in the sense that the challenge falls under the scope of problem solving and that the proposed answers can be assessed objectively. In creation, not only are there no benchmarks, but the proposed solutions cannot be evaluated through objective criteria. Picasso used to say: “When I don’t have blue, I use red”, thereby emphasizing the absence of an obvious good reply: blue or red? It makes no difference.

The absence of benchmarks is a distinctive feature of creation aiming to be daring. The same happens with radical or disruptive innovation. It translates into particular conditions for design because, until the end of the process, there is nothing to ensure the success of the product that is going to be launched. Caves (2000) theorized this, emphasizing the structuring property of “nobody knows” in the creative industries. In the design process, this gives rise to a situation which triggers maximum anxiety. Jean-Claude Ellena, one of the greatest perfumers of his generation, expressed this idea regarding his “First” project, which was a bestseller:

The most crucial, the most difficult moment was when the CEO of Van Cleef and Arpels said to me: “I’m going to launch this perfume (First), I’m going to spend millions, are you sure?” The only certainty I had was that I had worked, that I was happy with the result, that was my sincerity.¹

This context, once assumed, poses specific management problems. A video game studio owned by a major publisher is relentlessly working on the development of a

1 Ellena, J.-C. (2024). *Le nez au vent. À voix nue*. France Culture podcast.

new game, which has been proposed by the creative director. The man is passionate, he has the ability to fully engage teams. So, he has no great difficulty in getting them on board with his project, which has no other guarantee – as with Jean-Claude Ellena's perfume – than the conviction of its promoter. When the team presents the work in progress at the company headquarters, and receives a mixed reception as well as an invitation to correct the situation within two months, the artistic director wonders whether he will be able to rekindle the teams. Commitment is essential and fragile.

Brad Bird, director of the animated film *The Incredibles* for Pixar, describes the context of creation in similar terms, and insists:

Some of your things that you had the idea to do don't actually work, because it defeats this and this and this. And if you are ready to lose this one thing that originally was such a great part of your pitch that everyone laughed at or loved and you go like that and all these things click together, that's what you have to do. That's the organic part of the process, it's not a mechanical process. This is why businessmen hate the film business because when you're making a widget, you can measure it: here's the mold, it costs this much for ingredients, you put it on the line and you have to throw it out there. When you're doing a story, if you're really doing a story and not just repeating the last success, you're just "what the hell... I think this would be cool... I hope yeah... sounds great". I mean you're gambling, you're gambling².

A Pixar film involves several hundred people working around a director, such as Brad Bird, who describes his project as stemming from a confusing and complex mandate. In this case, he had invited his teams to work on the idea of the future as seen in the 1960s. The ability to develop a creative project in this context is actually a miracle, because while the organization is a necessity for an individual incapable of carrying out a project of such magnitude alone, it is also a permanent threat to creation.

1.2. The organization... against creation

With *Le Prince du Pacifique*, we made the mistake of producing a pale substitute for *Un Indien dans la ville* (*Little Indian, Big City*). The initial project was of a different nature, though, without Patrick Timsit and without children. Gradually, we imposed elements which should,

2 "The Making of the Incredibles (Disney Pixar)", documentary short film.

in theory, enable us to achieve the same success as with *Un Indien dans la ville*. (Lhermitte 2009)

The confession is from famous French actor and director Thierry Lhermitte. After having made a film which was a great national success working with a small team (*Un indien dans la ville*), the team decided to work on a new, different project. The success of the previous film was such that it ended up imposing its recipes on the next project. Creating without benchmarks is uncomfortable. There is nothing to hold on to except our own conviction, our subjectivity. It is hard when you are alone. When you are involved in a collective project, you take on responsibility for an entire team. When you are not the creator, you must be willing to trust blindly. The story of *Heaven's Gate* by Michael Cimino is well known for having revolutionized the history of Hollywood (Bach 1999). Once Michael Cimino had spent his entire budget and was far from having finished the film, what grip could the producers have over him? How good was his production? To what extent was he trustworthy as a director?

Rarely do organizations accept the discomfort induced by the lack of benchmarks and blind trust. More or less consciously – as in the anecdote retold by Thierry Lhermitte – they tend to cling to benchmarks they artificially recreate. It is a natural temptation for individuals to conform to what they believe to be the recipes for past success. At an organizational scale, this temptation only multiplies.

1.2.1. The structural opposition between organization and creation

The founders of Bonne Pioche Productions sought to create feature-length films to be broadcast on the big screen. Understanding that it was a highly competitive environment, they waited until they had a project likely to stand out from the crowd. When the future director of *La Marche de l'Empereur* (*March of the Penguins*) proposed his idea to them, they immediately knew they had found their project: it told the extraordinary story of the reproductive cycle of emperor penguins on the Antarctic ice floes. It was the most universal story there is, that of parents fighting for their child's life, set against the backdrop of sumptuous scenery. They weren't going to make a wildlife documentary but would stand out from existing films by telling the story of two parents and their child. When they confidently presented their project to potential financial partners, the latter listened to their story before asking: What is the pitch? Who are the actors? The project was rejected by everyone and only survived because they were forced to persist, as they had already sent two members of the team onto the ice floe to shoot the film (Darondeau 2007).

This story, which ended well since the film was a great success and won Oscars, illustrates the almost structural opposition between creation and organization.

Creating means differentiating ourselves, and therefore challenging conventions, when the organization capitalizes on knowledge gained from experience. This capitalization is done more or less formally: it goes through processes or is part of the organization's culture. Years of experience in the film industry have taught companies operating in this sector that having a pitch – the ability to generate interest in a matter of seconds – is an important factor in a film's success, and that the presence of big-name stars gives an idea of the film's potential.

With the notion of mandate, we discussed labor division, another characteristic of organizations, but how can we divide work when we do not know how to express the result? The challenge of building a common vision is undoubtedly one of the most important in projects in the creative industries. In a book that recounts the progress of various game development projects, the video game journalist Jason Schreier focuses on the challenge of reaching a “unified direction”: “Because video games have so many granular moving pieces – sounds, user interface, visual effects, and so on – every department needs to have a strong, consistent idea of where the game is headed. The larger a team gets, the more important this concept becomes” (Schreier 2018, p. 205). If “draw me a sheep” was already complicated with only one speaker, then “hey you all, listen to me, please draw me a sheep” involves exponential difficulty.

Finally, organizations have fixed costs and reporting responsibilities which result in economic or financial constraints, and often in risk aversion. They cannot wait for inspiration to strike. A large organization could not do what Bonne Pioche did, wait for an extraordinary project to present itself: it must come up with varied proposals, sometimes at the cost of compromise, and even force inspiration.

An organization is a group of individuals brought together in order to reach a goal. Its essence is labor division and cooperation, which operate in different ways. Mintzberg (1980) proposed a categorization of organizations around different dimensions: its various components, coordination mechanisms and organizational flows. He identified different organizational configurations. The extreme cases are the simple structure, which corresponds to young organizations which operate around a highly centralized power and a reduced hierarchical line. It is the natural organization used by an entrepreneur or a creator who relies on limited teams. A creator who assembles a team for a particular creative project engages a “blank slate” organization, whereas by having the project carried out by an established organization, it gives the project different structural elements from the onset. The video game company SuperCell, a huge entrepreneurial success story with a turnover close to 2 billion euros in 2021, and successes such as the games *Clash of Clans* and *Clash Royale*, was built on this desire not to hinder creativity by means of processes. The company operated around small cells of experienced developers who were given complete freedom in choosing projects, starting them or stopping them,

without any obligation to report and without a decision-making process outside the cell:

The core beliefs upon which we founded the company are stronger than ever. We still believe in the power of extremely small and independent teams of passionate people. [...] Being small means you need less management and fewer processes, both of which just make it more fun to work.³

At the other end, we find mechanistic bureaucracy, which emphasizes standardized processes. When an organization expands, decision-making is decentralized out of necessity, which translates into the implementation of processes, routines and management tools. Now, both management processes and tools convey a representation of the world, often based on experience. Claude Riveline (1991) has described management tools as summaries of good and right. These various elements, which define the framework within which creativity can flourish, prove to be extremely structuring. In other words, organization is constitutive of the capacity for creation. We can illustrate this through three examples.

The first is that of Pixar. Back in 2005, when the company was still independent, it showed remarkable creative capacity. All projects were commercial and critical successes, and the company's ability to constantly renew itself was vastly admired (Paris 2015). At the same time, Walt Disney was having a tough time remaking convincing films, even if both firms relied on talents trained at the same schools. One of the many differences between the two companies was that Pixar's organization was far less hierarchical than Disney's (Susman 2007).

A second illuminative example relates to the history of the Romance label, created within Universal Music following an experimental logic. The aim was to innovate in the way artists were supported by following them across the three axes of their career – writing (publishing), recording (albums) and performing (live) – at a time when labels were focusing solely on albums. The label's founders also wanted to bring out talent off the beaten track and who needed more time to find their audience. This involved managing each artist's development on a case-by-case basis, following a quasi-artisanal approach. Initial Artist Services was launched in 2016 within Universal when it signed its five first artists, including Eddy de Pretto, Angèle and Clara Luciani. The resounding success of the first led them to become a true label within Universal, taking the name Romance. In six years, the label achieved remarkable results in terms of sales and streams, as well as professional accolades (gold records and other certifications, Victoires de la Musique awards).

³ See: <https://supercell.com/en/about-us>.

But after six years, the label's founders resigned, worn down by the constant tensions between their approach, their practices and the structure under which they operated: processes, reporting, evaluation, decision-making, etc. This example can be viewed through the lens of the classic opposition between exploration activities and exploitation activities, which by nature are difficult to reconcile within the same organization (March 1991).

The world of perfume provides a third example of this structural opposition, this time with a systemic logic. The mainstream perfume industry is made up of brands owned by large corporations, fragrance houses engaging perfumers to develop fragrances and compete with the ones created by other brands, a distribution system based on large specialty stores, and significant marketing efforts to support fragrance launches, often at a global scale. It is within this organizational context, comprising several levels, that creation must evolve. This system is incapable of offering innovative or bold fragrances, even though it relies on the most renowned creators in the world (Paris et al. 2020). These influences or restrictions on creation are based on multiple mechanisms, one of which is the use of market testing. This leads us to conclude that not all organizations involved in creation take a forward-thinking, daring, or innovative stance.

1.2.2. The temptation of the market

"Draw me a sheep." If we expect a creative sheep, one with a chance of standing out in the immense flock of sheep drawn by aspiring creators, it will have to be distinctive, and challenge existing codes. But when we create and evolve in an environment devoid of benchmarks, there is a strong temptation to invent them. One of the qualities of creative profiles is their ability to accept this lack of benchmarks and to trust their own subjectivity, but this is a fragile position, especially within an organization where few of them share such ability to take risks. Organization tends to stifle creativity. One of the qualities of organizations that demonstrate sustained creativity is that they resist the strong temptation to respond to unlikely demand.

While creation occurs in the absence of pre-existing demand, many creative organizations see past successes as signals of demand. When *La Môme* (*Life in Pink*) triumphed in movie theaters, it kicked off a craze for biopics. The establishment of committees also aims to objectify decision-making and to harness risk in relation to a future market. If a manuscript convinces all members of a reading committee, this is an important indicator of its reception. Some organizations go even further by entrusting part of the decision to the market itself: this is what happens, for example, with talent detection programs, such as *Star Academy* or *The Voice*. By submitting artists to the public's judgment, we assure their future reception.

There is a strong temptation to take the path of least resistance in terms of risk limitation, by trying to comply with the supposed expectations of the market. Earlier, we mentioned the German publisher Samuel Fischer. Paul Gauguin recalled the alternative that tips the balance one way or the other: “Art is either revolution or plagiarism.” As regards innovation, Henry Ford observed: “If I had asked my customers what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse.” And Steve Jobs added: “We have a lot of customers, and we have a lot of research into our installed base. It’s really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don’t know what they want until you show it to them.”

Ignoring people and offering them innovative products is easy to say! In real life, you have to imagine the situation. Agreeing to embark on a new project that could be not plagiarism, but a revolution, requires evolving without any benchmarks. For long and costly projects, this means that project leaders must remain committed to their vision; their teams must be fully engaged and confident; and those controlling the purse strings must also place their trust in them. For everyone, this implies accepting to evolve amid uncertainty, the very essence of creative work (Menger 2009). Marionette artist Jim Henson was determined to pursue a project he had tried unsuccessfully to sell to all the American networks for long. Although he was systematically told that puppets were for children, he persisted and finally found an English producer who agreed to test his idea. The result was *The Muppet Show*, a worldwide success, broadcast in more than 100 countries and seen by 235 million viewers. The artist described the difficulty of leading such a project:

When you’re running a whole several-hundred-person unit, you have to keep everybody else enthusiastic, you can’t really express great doubts, whether or not this whole thing is a good idea or not. (Jim Henson)

These creative situations are uncomfortable for all stakeholders. Despite the fact that the creator may well succeed in managing discomfort and gain the trust of creative teams, it is more difficult for management and finance managers to turn a blind eye and hope apprehension will disappear all by itself. Rare are the situations in which the creative process is cut off from the world until the release date. This happens in *haute couture*: the strong prescriptive power of brands and the attention generated by fashion shows allow them to present their collection without having tested the market, or having done so very little. Whether it be perfume, where market tests intervene throughout the process to manage the risk of release (Paris et al. 2019), or *haute couture*, many tools and schemes are implemented during projects or by organizations undertaking bold creations to ensure they remain connected to the market. One example is the concept car principle, which involves

presenting vehicle designs created with complete freedom to the public and observing their reactions. Nintendo's creative director, Shigeru Miyamoto, had a reputation for watching gamers play at trade shows to study their reactions. These approaches are close to *Design Thinking* methods (Brown 2008), which relies on observation and empathy to understand the latent needs of users.

Actually, Gauguin was wrong. Between plagiarism and revolution, there is another possibility: the failed revolution. A creative company may start out with an ambition for innovation, but this ambition comes up against the different elements of the organization: processes, risk reduction tools, temptation to reproduce existing patterns. The collaboration between Cirque du Soleil and its perfect production machine, the Lyric (Broadway's largest theater), and the creative French choreographer Philippe Decouflé was bound to be mind-blowing. The press release for *Paramour*, scheduled to premiere on May 25, 2016, stated:

The best of Broadway with Cirque du Soleil's signature style. Set in the glamorous world of Golden Age Hollywood, this groundbreaking event spins the tale of a beautiful young poet forced to choose between love and art. Featuring a cast that blends the best in circus arts and musical theater, *Paramour* will transport you to a world of sublime beauty and emotion as it walks the exhilarating tightrope of the heart. (Paramour Press Release)

The reality of production revealed the difficulty of committing to innovation. Against this backdrop, the theatre's operating costs, amounting to approximately \$800,000 per week, required a high and sustainable occupancy rate. This led company managers to put safeguards in place, more or less consciously. Thus, the course of production revealed the existence of beliefs or rules which structured production. These were related to public expectations:

I sell the tickets and know the typical audiences: primarily female, over fifty years old, affluent, well educated, and Caucasian. Without a story that is accessible to them, you can't last on Broadway. Artists express themselves, of course, but they must never be esoteric. (Scott Zeiger, head of the theater branch of Cirque du Soleil)⁴

They also translated into rules or procedures. At Cirque du Soleil, the quality of a show is measured by a wow factor: it must count a certain number of wow moments and a few super wow moments. And given the amount of money involved,

4 "On Broadway, the acrobatic assault of Philippe Decouflé and the Cirque du Soleil", *Télérama*, May 24, 2016.

the show is tested during previews, to monitor the audience's reactions and adjust the show.

Although the show got off to a good start, it was then torn apart by critics, suffered from underattendance, and was cancelled after a year. While this is a classic case of the inability to guarantee the success of a production in the creative industries (*nobody knows*), this story also shows the difficulty of maintaining a bold and ambitious approach. It would have been impossible to guarantee the project's success. On the other hand, the logic of compromise under which it was framed could have prevented the project's innovative dimension from being fully realized, while also undermining its coherence.

1.2.3. *The delicate equation for organizing creation*

Organization is necessary in order to create – or often is! Insofar as creation is not achieved on one's own, but involves multiple decision-makers, it is necessary to organize the work, frame it and articulate the decisions of each party. The organic model, a creator with a team, limits the constraints imposed by structured organizations, but not all the pitfalls of organized creation. This model is not the most common: project size and the temptation of renowned creators to exploit their know-how by delegating part of their activity and focusing on components with higher added value mechanically triggers processes, reflexes and routines. Every creative industry features productions and companies that create within a measured risk-taking framework, in what Gauguin would caricature as plagiarism, whereas others, even when not seeking to revolutionize their art, at least dare to be bold and assume that they have no benchmarks.

We have seen that this last position is not easy to maintain, given the numerous forces pulling the organization back towards the certain, the already accomplished, the known and the proven. When it is maintained, other issues arise. Crucial issues. What ideas should we commit to since we do not know their potential? How should we organize work? How will the process be followed? How can we limit the temptation to reproduce? In short, how can we create without recurring to benchmarks? Some organizations seem to succeed at this, so let us take a closer look at them!

1.3. Organizing and managing creation

Please draw me a sheep...

– Listen kid, I have an entire organization here that can draw you an original sheep, a sheep that might stand out among the countless sheep that are drawn every day and offered on the many channels that broadcast sheep. I'm not going to draw your sheep all by myself, immediately, in an inspired and brilliant gesture. I will spend time on it, engaging teams with varied and numerous talents, I will rely on a structured process.

Sorry if this imaginary dialogue has broken the poetry of the *Little Prince*; that was not the intention. The idea was simply to take a step back from the romantic representation and look past individual talent to the concrete functioning of the organizations that support creation, through their processes and labor division. We can do so in two stages: first, we focus on the processes, on their generic dimension; then, we highlight some of the characteristics observed in these organizations. We conclude by trying to focus on what makes these organizations unique.

1.3.1. The creative processes

Creative processes have been studied extensively at an individual level, either by observing the routines of artists and creators (Currey 2013), or by examining creativity processes (Lubart 2001). The first case implies placing ourselves in a romantic perspective and trying to draw lessons from how the great minds work, even when recognizing that everyone has their own way of functioning. In the second case, we note that creative activities involve different stages, but this applies on an individual level and in contexts which are not always those of the creative industries. The most common definition given to creativity in management research is that of Teresa Amabile: “Creativity is the production of novel and useful ideas by an individual or small group of individuals working together” (Amabile 1988). In the creative industries, we do not produce ideas, but productions embodied in objects or media in different forms, whose usefulness is undecidable.

Observation of how activities are organized in these entities reveals several patterns.

First, processes are most often collective, even when an individual is considered the creator. This creator plays a particular role, which presents certain similarities with that of the project manager in the innovation processes (Paris and Ben Mahmoud-Jouini 2019). Nevertheless, the creator relies on teams which are sometimes large, which can mobilize specific technical skills and are fully engaged in the creative process. Labor division is organized around four different tasks: inspiration, framing, formatting and validation.

Inspiration, or ideation, involves feeding the project with multiple ideas. One should not get obsessed with finding the right idea, but rather start with an initial idea, which can serve as the project's backbone, and work it out until reaching a final product in which a huge number of ideas have been injected. Thus, for a Pixar film, once the more or less developed concept has been validated (the story of a rat in a kitchen, the future as seen in the 1960s, the emotions in a young girl's head), the next step is to write the script in detail, draw the sets and characters, animate the characters, construct the scenes, etc. The initial idea is only a starting point, and the first version of the project is only a rough draft (Catmull and Wallace 2014). Inspiration engages different collaborators: in Renault's design department, under the direction of Patrick le Quément, several dozen designers contributed to fueling inspiration by proposing ideas for vehicles, and then for certain parts of the chosen silhouette. They also draw on a variety of schemes, such as inspirational trips, cooperation projects and studies of materials or technologies. When drones began to appear on the market, Cirque du Soleil partnered with the Technical University of Zurich to explore their possibilities. A team from the circus and a team from the university worked together and designed a prototype show lasting a few minutes. This prototype was then presented to the artistic teams working on a new Cirque du Soleil show, and Philippe Decouflé integrated it into his show *Paramour*.

Framing refers to specifying the project that the teams are involved in. The "future as seen in the 1960s" was the framework given to the teams working on Pixar's *The Incredibles* to enable them to work on the sets and characters. Architect Jean Nouvel guided his teams towards the idea of "a shower of light like in an oasis" for the Louvre Abu Dhabi project.

Formatting involves breaking down the process by creating numerous objects that will gradually give it shape. These are pitches, drawings, scripts, 2D models, 3D models, etc. In the processes studied, the speed of the back and forth between ideas and their implementation is key. This is similar to what has been popularized in innovation or the world of start-ups when they coined the notions of rapid prototyping (Ries 2011), intermediate objects (Jeantet 1998) and prototypes (Ben Mahmoud-Jouini and Midler 2020).

Validation refers to the process of evaluating the various elements produced by formatting in relation to the project: whether a particular intermediate product is heading in the right direction or not, whether a particular element is selected for inclusion in the final result or not, etc. It is this "sorting station" activity that constitutes the creator's prerogative. In short, it is this station that enshrines the creator. This may seem paradoxical and echo the unease we sometimes feel when we discover that a Renaissance painter relied on workshops, or that a renowned chef spends very little time in the kitchen. Actually, this assembly function is the most critical, because it ensures the project's consistency. When designer Patrick Jouin

was asked to redesign a chain of hotels, he instructed his teams to adopt a classic design method based on observation and empathy, while asserting a highly subjective approach for “designing solitude” and thus enabling guests to enjoy a very good night’s sleep with high-quality bedding. This represented a real compromise, due to the limited funding available for the project. In order to make ends meet, he was obliged to accept trade-offs in terms of budget allocation. Prioritizing bedding in a low-end hotel forces the company to find savings elsewhere (Jouin 2011). Another designer might consider that the guests of these hotels need, above all, to take their minds off their problems.

Since validation is not based on anything objective, but solely the creator’s conviction, as Jean-Claude Ellena expressed it, it is also the most difficult function to assume. So when Patrick Bertron, sous chef to famous French chef Bernard Loiseau, was offered the chance to take over from his mentor following his death, his track record showed that he had proven himself to have all the necessary qualities. It is said that he outperformed Bernard Loiseau himself, creating signature dishes, managing the kitchens, etc. However, he himself called into question his ability to rise to the challenge. The only activity he did not assume was validation, in other words, trusting his choices, in the absence of certainties and benchmarks, and assuming a responsibility that affected the entire company (Paris and Leroy 2014).

These four activities do not take place in a linear sequence. The reality of creative processes is that they articulate the world of ideas and the world of forms in an iterative manner. Studies on design management have brought to the fore the innovation funnel (Wheelwright and Clark 1992). The creative process resembles this funnel, alternating between phases of divergence and convergence, between a logic of openness (inspiration) and a logic of choice (validation). This balance would appear critical and can translate, for example, into the protection of development and maturation time for companies that are committed to creative ambition. Converging too quickly is detrimental to the project’s quality. But trying to be too creative could jeopardize its conclusion. Thus, the director who had brought the idea for what would become the film *Ratatouille*, brilliant in his vision of the film and his ideas, was withdrawn from the project due to his difficulty in making choices that would allow for convergence (Susman 2007).

Creation flourishes in a context of abundance. Not only an abundance of time to mature projects, but also an abundance of ideas injected into the process, many of which will not finally be put into practice. On the eve of an *haute couture* fashion show, for instance, the artistic director chooses which of the many garments and accessories that have been created will be presented on the runway.

This also refers to the abundance of initial ideas, among which only a few will be developed. At Pixar, directors are salaried employees and, when they are not

working on a film project, they have plenty of time to develop ideas for future projects. These ideas, developed in a comfortable environment by experienced filmmakers, will mostly remain just ideas, because the film production process at Pixar begins with a pitch to the Braintrust, which decides which projects to invest in (Catmull and Wallace 2014). The same initial selection is observed in publishing, where hundreds of manuscripts are submitted to publishing houses every month, or in architecture, where agencies, even the most prominent ones, invest enormous resources in responding to contests, which ultimately result in the selection of a single project.

This abundance is a necessity. Patrick le Quément, Renault's head of design, had all the studio's designers work on each new vehicle project (Le Quément 2005). This competition was a source of emulation, and particularly necessary in a context where quality is not objective in order to identify projects which had the capacity to stand out. Insofar as a creative project must stand out in a crowded market, it is deployed in processes according to a criterion of quality that is not absolute, but relative. The best projects are those that have the greatest ability to stand out in a highly competitive environment.

1.3.2. *Management and creation schemes*

When working with a creative enterprise, there is a strong temptation to look for easy keys to success or recipes. That is exactly what happened with Pixar. An analysis of Pixar's organization reveals a keen awareness of the nature of creation and sensitivity to management and organization, as well as to the challenges we described earlier in this chapter. At Pixar, collaborators understood that every decision made, from the smallest to the most structuring, could have an influence on the process and the result of creation (Catmull and Wallace 2014).

There is no absolute recipe, because no two contexts are identical. Creators are all unique, their teams evolve, as does each person's trajectory. The aspirations, constraints and challenges faced by individuals and organizations are not the same when it comes to asserting ourselves or gaining recognition, when a company is trying to establish itself in a market and when it is expected to deliver on each of its projects. The challenges of differentiation are not the same when consumers have to purchase a product or when they have access to it for free as part of a package deal. Creating is not the same when it comes to persuading a sponsor, such as a project owner or a streaming platform, or when it involves seeking out consumers one by one, whether in a B2B or B2C market.

Reflecting both the difficulty of this combination and the heterogeneity of situations, highly creative organizations develop numerous models, which involve

several dimensions, notably the integration of key resources, among which the most prominent is the creator (Paris 2013; Mainemelis et al. 2015; Paris and Massé 2021). In addition, other dimensions come into play, which can be linked to the structuring dimensions of organizational designs identified by Mintzberg (1980).

Regardless of this diversity, some regularities appear. We have discussed decision-making processes and the importance of validation as the keystone of a project's consistency. This means that the most daring projects, or the most creative ones if we adopt a point of view a posteriori, are based on a centralized decision in the hands of one individual. Pixar projects are entrusted to a director, when the primary temptation is to limit risk by engaging committees to make decisions.

Forms of organization which appear modern, such as the liberated company or participatory management, which is reflected in creative activities in notions such as co-creation, are the opposite of the forms of organization at work in the reality of creative organizations that produce unique works: the latter are structurally collective, but highlight an individual who plays a prominent role. These individuals assume validation, which entrusts them with significant power over production and the result produced. Scandals have erupted in recent years, emphasizing the excess of this power. It can be virtuous provided that it remains confined to the scope of the project and the production of a specific artwork. The underlying model is perhaps more humanistic, in most cases, than more democratic models (Paris 2017, 2018), even if this state of affairs is often described with negative terms such as “dictatorship” or “tyranny”:

A film director is one of the last dictatorial posts left in a world getting more and more democratic. (Francis Ford Coppola)⁵

Centralized decision-making also translates into short decision lines, for two main reasons. The first one, in line with the above, aims to limit the number of decision-makers on a project in which compromise is antonymic to innovation. The second one aims to maintain speed in the process, which seems crucial when handling bold, and therefore fragile, ideas.

Another remarkable element in creative organizations is the evaluation of projects during their development. The testimony of Jean-Claude Ellena recalled that such an evaluation was impossible at the end of the process. This is even more so during the process and at its beginning. Evaluation and control – reporting – are other structuring elements in organizations. Ambitious creative organizations accept this impossibility. Here, evaluation and control mainly concern the ability to meet

⁵ From the documentary *Heart of Darkness* (Fax Bahr, Georges Hickenlooper and Eleanor Coppola, 1991).

deadlines and not see costs explode. As for the rest, the choice of ideas to develop depends on our ability to stand out, and on our maturity. Cost accounting has no place in processes that will generate a lot of ideas and produce elements that will ultimately be abandoned:

Our approach to management is simple and pragmatic. For example, we have never practiced cost accounting. What matters is to make a profit and pay dividends at the end of the year. It doesn't matter whether we are in deficit on the small Ronchamp project or on the maintenance of the Pompidou Centre, as long as we are sufficiently in surplus on an American museum. (Goubet and Vincent 2011, managers at Renzo Piano's RPBW architecture firm)

Innovative projects in creation are not immediately accepted. The public does not want that, Samuel Fischer would say. These projects need time to find their audience and require support. As shown by the example of perfumery, support is not always available in cases where an innovative fragrance represents a major challenge (Paris et al. 2020). But when a company assumes creative ambition, it implies that it cannot evaluate the success of a project in the short term. When a new voice was broadcast at Radio Nova, a pioneering French radio station, the management accepted that the audience would drop for a few weeks (H'Limi 2006). The evaluation of a project once it is on the market must therefore take into account the long term for creative projects.

1.3.3. *The unique paradigm of creative organizations*

An organization often imposes itself as a necessity for creation. By nature, it will tend to restrict creation or innovation, as James March (1991) has shown. This is due to the nature of organizations, underpinned by the logics of labor division, processes, control and therefore risk limitation. An organization is a system geared towards achieving a goal, which is often part of a quest for efficiency. The history of modern organizations was written by Babbage, Fayol, Taylor, Weber and Ford, largely in the wake of the industrial revolution, in a context seeking efficiency in mass production. There have been, and still are, many voices advocating other forms of organization, but we must admit that, regardless of whether they are a legacy or the result of a natural structuring process, organizations remain deeply imbued with this history. Let us mention in particular individual goals, a direct legacy of Taylor's theories. A task can be defined, measured and controlled. Financial incentives will increase productivity. How can we measure a creator's work when 90% of what they produce will be thrown in the trash? How can we assess a creator's work when what they generate has no intrinsic value? The bureaucratic model, theorized by Max

Weber, has also informed organizations: it is based on processes that make decision-making objective and predictable.

By assuming the value of individual subjectivity, the possibility of failure, the absence of objective value, single truths or a pre-existing market, creative organizations distance themselves from these models. This translates into unique organizational forms, which recognize, for example, the black box. Creation is not a linear process that transforms inputs into outputs via a production line, along clearly identified and controllable stages. It is a process that feeds on a huge amount of inputs without being able to trace their use – and therefore their value – and produces outputs that will be sent to the market with a structurally high failure rate, without these failures being the sign of any dysfunction. Accepting this black box amounts to accepting failure, not being able to control the activity on a day-to-day basis, having confidence in an individual to whom we have entrusted the keys to decision-making. The difficulty for an organization to cope with these situations stems from the weight of traditional organizational culture: an individual understands the importance of letting go of a creative entity for which they are responsible. But they also know that if there is failure, it is likely that this will backfire on them. This is why ambitious creative entities are more protected, with a high-level reporting line: this limits the number of people who have to accept this uncomfortable situation. The *Guignols de l'info* (a French satirical TV show, broadcast daily with long-term success) and Renault design were both black boxes attached to the general management of their respective companies.

Ed Catmull, Pixar's technical director, probably understood the extreme fragility of organizations working in the creative sector when he declared:

That fundamentally successful companies are unstable. And where we have to operate is in that unstable place. (Catmull and Wallace 2014)

His role at Pixar was undoubtedly decisive. He was mainly in charge of ensuring that the conditions were met for creation to flourish, regardless of possible failure. This is an essential role that relies on keen awareness across the entire organization, and requires an ability to assume the vagueness imposed by creation.

Organizations capable of carrying out a bold creation must face considerable challenges, due to the quasi-structural opposition between organization and creation. Regularly, some stand out, drawing particular attention from many companies wishing to be inspired by them. Although they are based on different models, they all have identical keystones. They can limit the scope for processes and hierarchy. They may require a creative individual committed to key decisions all along the way, or a non-creative individual who demonstrates an ability to take on risk and

ensures that the organization maintains its fertility. Finally, many of them rely on an individual who emerges as a key person, someone who stands out from the crowd. A genius? The romantic model must still be banned. Nevertheless, creation does not rule out the need for talent, for exceptional individuals.

1.4. Epilogue

As the *Little Prince* narrative continues, the aviator finally grows tired of the little boy's dissatisfaction and draws a box, explaining that the sheep he has wished for is inside it. And the boy becomes surprisingly happy about it.

Perhaps, the boy suspects that drawing the box – the name sometimes given to companies⁶ – amounts to drawing the very possibility of a sheep. They sure come from another planet.

Please draw me a sheep...

– What kind of sheep?

– A sheep.

– Do you know what planet we are on? Because depending on the planet we are on, your sheep will not be the same. Your sheep will be the result of the planet it is born on. And on this planet, the best way for your sheep to surprise you, the best way for it to be successful, is to raise it in a box away from most of the inhabitants.

Finally, my patience at an end, as I was in a hurry to start dismantling my engine, I scribbled this drawing:

And I exclaimed:

– That's the box. The sheep you want is inside.

But I was very surprised to see my young critic's face light up:

– That's exactly how I wanted it!

(Saint-Exupéry 2015)

⁶ In French, the term *boîte* translates not only as box (rigid container) but also as company in informal speech.

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