Introduction to Part I: Creative Innovation

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The final stages of putting this handbook together occurred at the same time as Peter Jackson’s first instalment of the Hobbit movies hit cinemas. Illustrative of the love (if not the understanding) that the business world has for the ‘creative’ industries, a number of articles appeared in business magazines that profiled Jackson’s approach to the creative process.

Jackson’s words reflect the bisociations that we outlined in our introductory chapter: a tight diligence and focus on the plan, combined with a loose dilettantism that continues to seek new influences; a singular leader’s vision, while interacting with and including others in developments; a tightly controlled organisation that at the same time unleashes creative talent. But, mostly, they reflect that eye for innovation with a tight focus on making sure that a product gets created with the open mind that allows for further discovery. For example, Jackson is well known for his intense logistical planning and attention to detail in advance of shooting, but as he noted (KiaOra 2012: 27): ‘There always has to be spontaneity. You have to be thinking in a flexible way . . . you have to be flexible and craft what you’ve got.’ Even during the shoot things can be changed if one is mindful of the possibilities. According to Jackson (KiaOra 2012: 27): ‘You can’t have an idea that requires a character that hasn’t been brought to the set or a particular prop or location that’s not in front of you. But so long as
you are working with what you have that day, you can be flexible . . . . I always try and have that voice in my head that keeps saying, “Is there anything we can do we haven’t thought of that can improve the scene we’re shooting?” That includes directing the actors, camera angles, lighting, the way the camera moves.’

It is fitting, then, that the first chapter in this section on creative innovation explores this philosophy further by examining the genre of low-budget horror movies, a world where Jackson first learned his film-making craft. Elizabeth Gulledge, Gail Greig and Nic Beech’s contribution, ‘Improvvisational practice and innovation: shock, horror and confounding expectations in film-making’, considers how film-makers manage unpredictability, and how ‘ad hoc’ and improvised decisions draw on a repertoire of resources and experiences. They develop an approach for planned/improvised innovation through an ‘activity theory’ perspective that we believe could be applied to organisations in any industry where creativity is a factor, whether it currently is regarded as a creative industry or not.

Indeed, the next chapter, Greg Hearn and Ruth Bridgstock’s “The curious case of the embedded creative: creative cultural occupations outside the creative industries’ questions the very notion of splitting industry into two and dividing it into ‘creative’ and, therefore by definition, ‘non-creative’ categories. By examining the activities of what they call ‘embedded creatives’ (people charged with being creative whether they work for organisations in the so-called creative industries or not), they make a case for this transdisciplinarity, which embedded creatives live every day, as an engine for innovation and growth. In so doing, they broaden out the arguments already advanced in our introduction to the handbook, Peter Jackson’s words, and Elizabeth, Gail and Nic’s chapter: that being bisociative – discovering and creating; planning and improvising; working with those situated in both the creative and non-creative disciplines – helps innovation and, by association, the management of creativity. Greg and Ruth’s thread in this regard (promoting transdisciplinarity and transgressing traditional defined boundaries and outlining how this might be managed) is picked up again towards the end of this book in Doris Eikhof’s and Torkild Thanem and Sara Värlander’s chapters in Part IV of this handbook – on good organisational practices to support creativity and innovation.

Jon Sundbo and Flemming Sørensen take the idea of bisociation as a driver of innovation further still. Innovation in service firms is usually characterised as unsystematic as it often results from ad hoc encounters with customers. Innovation in manufacturing, on the other hand, has traditionally been more systematic, based on sustained investment in scientific and technological resources. On the other hand, the manufacturing
approach is relatively expensive and time-consuming, and may result in innovations which are not well aligned with market needs. In ‘The lab is back – towards a new model of innovation’, Jon and Flemming seek to achieve the best of both worlds in their model of a ‘service laboratory’: a more systematic approach to innovation which still retains the strengths of the user-centred service model.

After Jon and Flemming’s chapter on how innovation might be operationalised more effectively, Lorraine Lim and Shinji Oyama’s challenging chapter looks at a bigger picture. Most that has been written about innovation has been written from a Western perspective. It has even been suggested by some that Eastern cultures are just not as innovative as Western (despite the fact that Japan has for decades topped league tables of patents divided by population among large countries). In ‘Beyond conventional Western views of creativity and innovation’, Lorraine and Shinji question these attitudes and explore what might be learned by looking at Eastern approaches to innovation. In particular they consider the ways in which innovative content is packaged and branded in the cosmetics and music industries. They show how innovation occurs through global networks of production, distribution and consumption which can no longer be separated out into ‘creative’ Western firms and ‘uncreative’ Eastern ones.

One thing that all the chapters in this section of the handbook have in common is that they develop their views from outside of the management mainstream. This is not to say that this mainstream is not an important element to blend with or build upon, only that we expect that there are many other places in which you can find this. If you have not looked at Joe Tidd’s books on the subject or John Adair’s or other recent Edward Elgar handbooks on innovation, for example, you would benefit from doing so.

And, it is interesting to note that a key aspect that lies beneath the current trend for ‘design thinking’ (although it is not always recognised) is that it too draws from the kind of bisociative elements that we are describing here. The diagram below (one of the best – certainly one of the simplest – expressions of design thinking that we have seen) shows good design’s relationship between the tight focus on user needs, a loosening thinking out or idea generation from this, and then tightening again as ideas are made sense of and refined towards an effective innovation.

While there is much that is good that has been written on innovation before, we have sought to add to these works by encouraging provocative writers to view innovation from a different angle, exploring practices and models of innovation beyond the established methods of R&D laboratories and the familiar ‘creative’ industries. Innovation highlights a central paradox of management and creativity, the combination of the deliberate and the spontaneous, the so-called ‘happy accidents’ which spark new
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Visory’s design thinking ‘fish’

ideas. We believe this opening collection of chapters in the handbook reflects this paradox and opens up a series of connections which will be revisited in the sections which follow.

REFERENCE

KiaOra (2012), Air New Zealand in-flight magazine, December.