18. Creative management in practice: bisociation with ‘timely balance’
Zhichang Zhu, Chris Bilton and Stephen Cummings

Throughout this handbook, we and our contributors have highlighted the bisociative connections which lie behind creativity and its variants, and which also characterise the relationship between creativity and management. The dichotomous pairs of discovery–creation, diligent–dilettante, vision–action and loose–tight properties provide a pattern for analysing and understanding creativity and its management. But how can we now turn this understanding into action? How might the theoretical and empirical models and ideas advanced in this handbook be applied in practice? How can we turn the nouns – innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership, organisation – into verbs – innovating, ‘entrepreneuring’ (see Chris Steyaert’s Chapter 9 for an explanation), leading and organising?

Koestler’s notion of bisociation, the theoretical underpinning of the handbook, argues that the creative mind brings together two habitually disconnected frames of reference. But, interestingly, Koestler acknowledged that bisociation works differently in different settings. Scientific creativity, Koestler argued, works towards a resolution, following a dialectical process which ultimately resolves or reorders apparently contradictory phenomena. Artistic creativity, on the other hand, works towards juxtaposition – the two opposing ideas remain unresolved, a source of creative tension and mental stimulation for the recipient. Scientific bisociation ultimately works through the creative process towards a resolution, a harmonious order or balance. Artistic bisociation throws up thought-provoking problems, challenges and questions.

Probably the longest running debate in management circles has been whether management is more art or science. The closest thing to an agreement as to what the answer might be is that management has elements of both. This makes it interesting to consider how Koestler’s concept of bisociation might be operationalised in a management setting. Should managers attempt to find a balance between two opposing positions, or should managers switch between opposing positions, keeping a foot in both camps? To take the example of creative leadership, should a...
creative leader steer a course between extremes, as in Marcus Aurelius’s model of the ‘virtuous’ leader with which we began Part III? Or should a creative leader draw on a repertoire of styles and skills depending on the situation, batting between charismatic and transactional leadership, alternately deploying ‘soft’ and ‘hard’ skills? Marcus Aurelius’s model is closer to Koestler’s model of scientific creativity, adopting a stable, balanced ‘middle way’. In practice, the multi-tasking, adaptive leader described by Lucy Küng or Vikki Heywood in Part III may be closer to Koestler’s model of artistic creativity, juggling different apparently opposing mindsets (and risking accusations of inconsistency and contradiction).

We first proposed the idea of seeing creativity in organisational settings in terms of four bisociative elements – innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership, organisation – in a book called Creative Strategy: Reconnecting business and innovation (Bilton and Cummings 2010). In his review of that book, Zhichang Zhu (2010) identified a crucial omission in this argument, noting that managers need not only to understand the contradictions and paradoxes of creativity and strategy but to find a way of negotiating between them. In particular, Zhu was critical of the notion of Aristotle’s ‘golden mean’ or ‘right mean’ advanced in the final section of Creative Strategy. Managers were being advised to find a ‘balanced or middle way’ between two extremes of ‘loose’ and ‘tight’ organisation. At the same time managers were encouraged to ‘switch roles and relationships’ and to develop an organisational culture containing ‘just enough disunity for progress’, and so on. But how, exactly, would one achieve this? As Zhu noted in his review, ‘we would all love these “just enough” good things at “the middle way”, but one wonders how to get there in the first instance . . . You can’t have it both ways can you? Is [this] paradoxical thinking, or ambivalent thinking, or mystical thinking?’

Zhichang’s reflections on this and other related topics led to the creation of a book called Pragmatic Strategy: Eastern wisdom, global success, written with Japanese knowledge management guru Ikojiro Nonaka (Nonaka and Zhu 2012). In this book, he and Ikojiro grappled with how managers can act when faced with such paradoxes, by drawing not just on Western thinkers such as Koestler and Aristotle, as we did, but on Eastern thinkers too.

Subsequently, in seeking to develop a conclusion to this handbook, we were compelled to engage Zhichang, and he very kindly agreed to work on something with us. What follows is the result of our conversations on the topic of how to actively manage the bisociative paradoxes that underlie creativity.

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So, how can we now help those charged with the management of creativity to turn the insights put forward in the *Handbook of Management and Creativity* into action? And how might the theoretical and empirical models and ideas advanced in the handbook be applied in practice?

Perhaps the best place to begin to answer these questions is to outline what not to do. We do not suggest that the practical response to the bisociative paradoxes that frame the contents of this book should be any of the following:

- Going for the middle ground. (Even if we could work out where that was and how to get there, we would likely end up with a mediocre muddle, or simply exhaust energy and rhetoric in pursuit of an elusive and illusory ‘best practice’.)
- Avoiding a ‘deficit’ or an ‘excess’ on either side of the bisociation. (Who would know what constitutes a deficit or excess *ex ante*?)
- Searching for the theoretical balance: ‘just enough’ tightness or structure and ‘just enough’ looseness or chaos. (Same problem: how to judge ‘just enough’ in real time.)
- Implementing both ‘extremes’. (In practice, this would be contradictory and confusing.)
- Hopping between opposites. (This would make momentum, efficiency and a clear sense of corporate identity impossible. It would also be extremely costly, in every sense.)
- Fitting equal amounts of balanced innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership and organisation into action plans. (This does not take into account that different situations call for different mixes.)
- Laying out innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership and organisation in a processual sequence, moving through one element and then to the next. (This would be to underestimate the interconnecting, systematic nature of creativity, and undermine the potential for learning through doing and double-loop learning – or questioning and adapting practices as one sees their effects.)

These seven possible responses to a paradoxical and bisociative theory of managing creativity will not do, because they can only lead to either overly mechanistic or mysterious undertakings, and consequently refer us back to an all-knowing, all-certain ‘one-best-way’ of doing things: a pre-determination that goes against the nature and possibilities of human creativity.

Unlike the concept of the ‘golden mean’ (certainly modern conceptions of what this means, at any rate), *timely balance* promises no quick fix or set, programmable response. Instead, it acknowledges uncertainty, complexity, ambiguity and emergence, and encourages managers to exercise their limited but significant agency so as to act wisely in the world. And in the context of this handbook, *managing with timely balance* can facilitate real value-adding creativity, which is by definition outstanding, novel, unknown beforehand and hence unpredictable. According to Nonaka and Zhu,¹ *timely balance* can be achieved via the following five simple practices:

I. do something, purposefully;
II. act upon practical certainties;
III. engage in gesture-response processes;
IV. learn through consequences; and
V. build adaptive capabilities through bringing substantial diversity to bear.

And, while all of these practices could be applied holistically to each of the four elements of this handbook, we have linked them to particular parts of the underpinning diagram with which we began the handbook in Chapter 1 (see Figure 18.1), in order to build a heuristic framework as an aid for people who want to actively promote creativity in organisations.

**Figure 18.1  Four ‘timely balance’ practices toward the practical management of creativity**
I. ENTREPRENEURING BY DOING SOMETHING, PURPOSEFULLY

The Chinese Taoist Zhuangzhi famously said: Tao is made in the walking on it. Similarly, contemporary Western strategic thinking increasingly stresses phrases such as having a ‘bias for action’ and ‘action rationality’. In management, as in creativity, wise managers place a premium on trying something, rather than endlessly analysing a situation to discern an optimal course of action. Claude Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist, even coined a special word for just doing in this manner: bricolage – use whatever materials are at hand to construct workable solutions as problems unfold.

Deng Xiaoping provides a good example. When China embarked on its economic and political reforms, no one knew how a market economy should work in that vast, undeveloped, socialist country. To wait for a proven, correct model would have led nowhere. ‘Cross the river by touching the stones’ was Deng’s mantra. Deng was not an all-knowing, all-powerful ‘chief architect’ – no one is; China’s economic reform succeeded chiefly because Deng allowed 1.3 billion people to experiment and edge their way along even without knowing how things would play out.

Make sure to do something, then, but not just anything. In managing creativity this doing must be done with a creative purpose. The late strategy professor Sumantra Ghoshal distinguished ‘purposeful action-taking’ and ‘active non-action’. While the former gets what matters done against all odds, with a clear purpose and persistent focus, the latter keeps running all the time, extremely busy, but fails to make a difference, not even knowing what is being done. Doing something purposefully is a realistic yet tough call; it demands skill, judgement and drawing on experience.

We think this approach relates well to the entrepreneurial element of creative management, combining the dilettante’s adventurous, open-minded willingness to ‘just do it’ and the diligent, purposeful attitude needed to take a new venture forward. In particular, Zhu and Nonaka’s approach here moves away from any assumption that there can be a perfect entrepreneurial opportunity or an idealised combination of entrepreneurial personality traits. Entrepreneurs make the best of things and draw on a repertoire of ideas, skills and attitudes to get the job done. In the context of timely balance, timing is all – making the most of the here and now rather than planning for the perfect moment, and recognising that the right balance of action and purpose here and now reflects the needs of a particular time and place, not a permanent recipe for success. At the very least, momentum is achieved and, even if the doing leads to short-term failures, that momentum and the active minds it engenders can help the
learning and adjustment process and build resilience and future agility (see timely balance practices IV and V, above).

There are echoes here of the ‘agile’ creative technologists in the Happenstance project described by Bilton in Chapter 7, or Chris Steyaert’s unemployed steelworkers in Chapter 9. Plunging into the world, following the mantra of ‘start entreprenuering, work out the details later’, takes an initial leap of faith (do something); Chris Steyaert describes this as the AH moment, a sensual engagement with the world around us which brings to light new possibilities. This is succeeded by focused action (do something, purposefully) as the entrepreneur commits to a course of action and rehearses and refines the idea (from AH to AHA). That initial entrepreneurial impulse to seize the initiative, even before the true purpose or direction has been discovered, remains purposeful. While such doing may appear random, unplanned or spontaneous from the outside, the entrepreneurial act is nevertheless framed by the entrepreneur’s sense of purpose: a purpose to create value in a particular way.

Pertinently, Kate Oakley in Chapter 8 reminded us that not all entrepreneurs enjoy the independent agency needed for purposeful action-taking. For many young entrepreneurs working in the cultural and creative industries, entrepreneurial activity is no longer an act of choice; it is forced upon them, or they internalise this feeling and it churns away uncomfortably inside them. The felt risk of ‘active non-action’ is reflected in the cultural entrepreneur’s precarious reliance on short-term and underpaid (or unpaid) work, raising the question as to whether what Kate calls ‘forced entrepreneurship’ can actually be classified as creative entrepreneurship. And this distinction helps up see further the importance of the unforced entrepreneurial spirit – the passion and joy in doing something despite the risks – as so crucial at the start of a creative process.

II. BEING INNOVATIVE BY ACTING UPON PRACTICAL CERTAINTY

We began our handbook with ‘innovation’ rather than ‘entrepreneurship’. But as Cummings et al. noted in Chapter 6, innovation still requires the entrepreneurial uplift to convert innovative ideas into sustained value-creation. Indeed, all creativity must be driven by an entrepreneurial spirit of purposeful action. Koestler defined creation as an ‘act’ and, while innovation may provide the raw material for creative management, entrepreneurial action (driven by purpose rather than planning) ignites it. As our diagram shows, innovation and entrepreneurship create this uplift in tandem (see the bottom left-hand corner of Figure 18.1). But a book is
read in a linear way and we put innovation first in our introduction. It is useful to demonstrate here in our conclusion, in concert with Nonaka and Zhu’s ideas, that entrepreneurship can just as correctly come first. But having covered the importance on entrepreneuring by doing something, purposively, we now turn to look at how innovation can be guided by acting on practical certainty.

Rejecting the quest for certainty and acknowledging that creativity cannot be managed by top–down planning and control, we do not need to accept an ‘anything goes’ mindset, or begin every time anew with a knowledge ground-zero. Here, the German socio-philosopher Jürgen Habermas’s notion of ‘practical certainty’ is useful. We step onto a bridge only when we know with practical certainty that the bridge is safe, suggests Habermas. Britain will not become a desert in a week’s time, Japan will not become an energy-rich country tomorrow, and Chinese firms are likely to continue using personal connections in business dealings for the foreseeable future. These are all practical certainties that we can act upon. And there are many others.

Hence, there is both uncertainty and certainty in organisational life. Such a balanced view allows us to get on with life wisely. We implicitly act on all sorts of practical certainties and only, albeit frequently, when encountering frustrations are we compelled to face uncertainty, to question what we have taken as unproblematic, and to seek alternative course of action. We need to justify knowledge claims; we need, too, to justify doubts toward such claims, the American pragmatist Charles Sanders Pierce reminded us. In this way, we can act pragmatically without falling into a paralysing scepticism. It is with such ‘disciplined commonsense’ that we value and act upon lessons from the experiences of ourselves and of others in order to enrich our pool of resources and hence our resourcefulness. And it is based on practical certainties that we judge what we should or should not attempt. Practical certainties particularly relevant to creativity management include good practices such as generating and reviewing real options, putting in place useful rules and getting out of the way and allowing them to work, investing in diversity, and so on.

Innovation is not only concerned with the generation ex nihilo of new ideas. Many of the innovations charted in this handbook build upon, extend or reconfigure existing knowledge. Previously we have identified several ‘degrees’ of innovation, beyond the straightforward invention of new ideas to variations in the way innovations are combined, packaged and experienced (Bilton and Cummings 2010). Others have described these variations in terms of ‘soft innovation’ or ‘hidden innovation’, acknowledging a range of practices by individuals and organisations which extend beyond and enrich the one-off generation of a novel idea.
Following Grabher (2004), Hearn and Bridgstock noted in Chapter 3 that the novel solutions generated by advertising agencies draw on an existing body of knowledge (and contacts) in the wider project ecology. The ‘embedded creatives’ they describe are more likely to innovate incrementally, building on practical certainties within the firm rather than operating outside it and applying their specialists skills as designers to a range of problems and issues inside the firm. In the past, this kind of incremental innovation may have been seen as a lesser form of innovation than the ‘big bang’ or ‘out of the blue’ innovation stories that often populate management books. But, according to Nonaka and Zhu’s practice of acting upon practical certainties, incremental innovation is an excellent thing for the creative manager to aim for. This dovetails well with an entrepreneuring that seeks to do something rather than getting bogged down in analysis. In our experience, organisations often fail to innovate because they are looking so hard for the big out-of-the-park ‘home run’ that they neglect the incremental possibilities that might get them at least to ‘first base’.

The notion of ‘practical certainty’ acknowledges that new ideas build incrementally on existing knowledge, and the practice of innovation itself builds upon some necessary building blocks. Interestingly, most of the ‘practical certainties’ highlighted by Nonaka and Zhu relate to ‘uncertainties’ – investing in diversity, experimenting and reviewing methods and practices, generating and reviewing options all require us to diversify our approaches to innovation beyond a ‘golden mean’ between two alternatives, and acknowledge a range and diversity of possibilities. In their chapter on the practice of film-making, Elizabeth Gulledge and her co-authors considered how improvisation and just-in-time innovation are framed by ‘minimal structures’ set by plans and budgets in Chapter 2. The interface between certainty and uncertainty recalls the ‘mind’s marshy shore’ between sleeping and waking described by Koestler (1970), where dreams and realities collide. Innovation needs a context – we cannot launch into invention without some known starting points – but we also need room for doubt and uncertainty.

As a scientist and writer, Koestler recognised that substantial creativity occurred at the intersection between scientific and artistic innovation as well as within each domain. Schematically, scientific ‘discovery’ reveals an existing reality; artistic ‘creation’ makes a new one. Yet both these processes, as outlined in the introduction to this handbook, can overlap. Passive discovery is animated by active creation; creation of the new recasts pre-existing elements. So artists are inspired to create by their discoveries, and scientific discoveries must be interpreted and directed by a deliberate act of creation. Very often the management and organisational
examples of innovation in this handbook combine deliberate and passive approaches, and occur between ‘creative’ and ‘non-creative’ activities.

Seeking to unravel where and how innovation occurs in our global creative economy in Chapter 5, Lim and Oyama suggested that it is the product of intersecting relationships between Eastern and Western companies, between cosmetics creators and cosmetics brands, between and across musical styles and genres. Similarly, in Chapter 4, Sundbo and Sørensen showed how models of innovation from manufacturing and service industries can be combined in the ‘service lab’; the practical certainties of the R&D lab are tempered by the more responsive, adaptive approaches of user-led service innovation.

If ‘do something, purposefully’ captures the entrepreneurial impulse towards action, ‘acting upon practical certainties’ describes the innovative process which operates in tandem with that action to create lasting value. Working with the building blocks of practical knowledge, but also allowing for improvisation and doubt, innovation in this handbook is described as adaptive and multi-faceted, drawing on and extending a repertoire of knowledge and skills. Nonaka and Zhu’s first two practices suggest how the apparent contradictions between certainty and doubt, between passive discovery and active creation, can be negotiated by a manager employing the concept of timely balance and can light up new pathways for creativity in any organisation.

III. LEADING BY ENGAGING IN GESTURE-RESPONSE PROCESSES

Leadership provides the next step beyond innovative exploration and entrepreneurial action, setting the framework in which creativity can be managed and supported along those new pathways. So, how do leaders employ Nonaka and Zhu’s concept of timely balance to facilitate creativity where envisioning and interacting are both key?

Seen from the ‘conversation of gesture-response’ perspective, originated by the American pragmatist-sociologist George Herbert Mead, leaders make gestures in the form of vision statements, innovation agendas, and so on, which, to have meaning and effect, must be picked up, interpreted and acted upon by ‘local agents’ among the rank and file of the organisation. Local responses to leaders’ gestures are usually varying and surprising, partly because of the diversity among local agents and partly because no rule or policy can cover every contingency. The diverse and surprising local responses will then be picked up as gestures from ‘below’ by leaders for making their own responses – issuing further gestures. The responding
gestures from ‘above’ are seldom homogenous or consistent either due to differences among leaders as well as further unexpected contingencies.

During such ongoing ‘conversation’, leaders’ gestures can be deliberate and forceful, but they cannot generate effective outcomes alone. In settings where creativity is important, agency is distributed through intra- as well as inter-organisational gesture-response process. No one can deny the significance of Deng’s leadership, but without the creative responses from Chinese farmers, Deng’s leadership would have come to nought. 3M Corporation’s PostIt Notes® were not innovated by a single engineer let alone a CEO or a COO, nor through ‘teamwork’ or ‘joint effort’ in the conventional sense, but by distributed agency which made different kinds of contributions at different times and places, with different degrees of involvement and commitment. The upshot is that wise leaders not only lead, they get out of the way and let others lead as the moments come.

As noted above, the gesture-response process is comparable to the ‘leading from the middle’ philosophy advocated in the Leadership section of this handbook and the approach advocated in Wilson and Proctor-Thomson’s Chapter 11 to develop more creativity-friendly leadership theory. In all of these instances, leadership is not the preserve of the leaders at ‘the top’; others must be in on the conversation. Indeed, notions of ‘distributed leadership’ (especially in the arts and creative industries) and ‘followership’ (or ‘first follower theory’), if they are taken seriously, start to shine a light on the collective nature of leadership.

For distributed leadership to operate from below, leaders at the top need to provide channels and opportunities for creative ideas, and indeed leaders, to flow upwards through the organisation and influence top-level strategy. In Chapter 13, Vikki Heywood’s description of her stewardship of the Royal Shakespeare Company, alongside Michael Boyd, provided a practical model of how this might be achieved. In order for leadership gestures to be understood and acted upon, it is necessary to define a language and ethos within which gestures can be interpreted and embodied, and to trust the followers to shape the leadership agenda. Without an ‘agentic response’ from below, leadership from above can never be more than an empty gesture. As Wilson and Proctor-Thomson observe, ‘visionary, transformative’ leadership might not be the best way (and so should certainly not be the only way) to mobilise active, independent and creative followers; followers too must become ‘empowered’ and accorded ‘agency and freedom to act’ in order to take the initiative themselves.

The diversity of models and perspectives on leadership in this section of the handbook underlines a key argument throughout this handbook: there can be no perfect or ‘best practice’ approach to management and creativ-
Leadership behaviour draws on a repertoire of signals and symbols to communicate a vision; if gestures are ignored or misinterpreted, the leader cannot blame others in the organisation, he or she must offer something different to kick-start a new conversation. And such gestures are only meaningful or effective within a context. As with Lucy Küng’s analysis of Michael Eisner’s leadership at Disney, outlined in Chapter 10, the repertoire must move with the times, and what works in one scenario may become counterproductive in another.

There are obvious challenges here for how leadership is taught, especially as part of the typical business school MBA curriculum. Here Richard Hall and David Grant’s experiences described in Chapter 12 concur with Nonaka and Zhu’s argument that educating leaders is not about the transfer of best practice theories, but about seeking to put students in situations where they must lead and then help them mature as they develop their responses. By the same token, the first task of creative leadership may be to work as a team and stimulate creativity in others. In turn, the first task of a leadership curriculum is to stimulate a variety of leadership styles and approaches, and to develop an ethos which is ‘modest, measured, authentic, collective, collaborative and compassionate’.

We first proposed ‘leadership from the middle’ as an alternative to ‘top–down leadership’. However, Zhu and Nonaka’s formulation of ‘gesture-response process’ suggests an additional insight: that leadership is a process located in the channels between leaders and followers, drawing upon an exchange of diverse inputs and responses from both sides. The choice of styles and skills assumed by both leaders and followers will be shaped by their experience of being in the middle of events, not above or outside them.

This leads us to what we see as Nonaka and Zhu’s insights related to creative organisation: that it should be an adaptive process which is shaped by experience.

IV. ORGANISING BY LEARNING THROUGH CONSEQUENCES

Despite our best efforts, often what we try does not work and attempts at innovating, entrepreneuring, leading and organising to create lasting added value may be considered to have failed. This is a humbling admission, and one that might be demoralising, unless we recognise that such failures can be pathways to success, if we learn from them. Humans are failing and learning beings. To the neurophysiologist Warren Sturgis McCulloch, ‘To have proved a hypothesis false is indeed the peak of knowledge.’ To
the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, knowledge (incorporating learning quickly through failure) is a ‘higher form of evolution’.

Seen from such an evolutionary perspective, we act, the world resists; we construct, nature destructs; we propose, reality disposes; but during the process we gain ‘robust fits’ and accomplish valued novelty. As to those proposals that pass evolutionary selection and work (at that point in time, in that context), we keep them, and act upon them, until justifiable doubts rise and better alternatives emerge. Creativity is therefore not just evolution, it is humanised evolution; it is not just what emerges, it is emergence with a human touch. We act, then we learn, therefore we are.

Creative organisations, in this handbook, are organisations capable of acting, absorbing and processing a diversity of experiences, including failure, adapting and moving on. The arts organisations which ‘learned to fail’ through their experience of working with digital technology, described by Chris Bilton in Chapter 7, provided one such example; learning to fail and learning from failure, while described as elements of entrepreneurship, are also characteristics of a creative organisation. Giovanni Schiuma’s description in Chapter 17 of organisations absorbing and learning from ‘arts-based interventions’ provides further examples of this. These interventions add value to the organisation by helping to develop the emotional intelligence and openness to allow employees to look in different ways, express themselves differently and develop their intrinsic motivation to create.

The key, according to Nonaka and Zhu, as with creative leadership, lies in seeing organisation as a verb rather than a noun – an active, evolving organising process, not a static organisational chart or model. Failure is necessary in order to shape organisational processes and ensure a more robust, timely fit with the changing external environment. An organisation which cannot own up to and learn from its mistakes is liable to repeat them.

The interplay between experience and action extends into networks and relationships beyond the single organisation. Especially in the creative industries, as Doris Eikhof reminds us, ‘transorganisational’ learning and knowledge transfer have become increasingly important. The First World War-style military analogy of the organisation as a kind of fortress, buttressing its internal structure and culture against the world, is replaced by a more fluid interaction across boundaries. Deadlines and constraints may provide necessary scaffolding and boundaries for the creative process, but these are not fixed and are a product of temporary relationships and collaborations towards a particular goal. Relatedly, it is overly simplistic to assume that ‘open space’ equates with creative freedom and structure with constraint. As Thanem and Värlander noted in Chapter 15, our relation-
ship with an organisation, and the physical environment which embodies it, is more nuanced and ‘tactical’ than this straightforward assumption allows. Through their analogy of free running (parkour), they argue that rather than trying to design and construct organisations to shape creative behaviour, organisations should plan less and allow workers to ‘transgress’ the organisational space, finding channels through boundaries and moving between open and closed space. There are echoes here of Eikhof’s transorganisational networks and of Levi-Strauss’s ‘bricolage’, with organisational dynamics emerging from interactions and relationships between and outside organisations rather than from a single, fixed entity.

All of our contributors to the creative organisation section of the handbook advocate a mix of ‘open’ and ‘closed’ organisational spaces and practices, and blur the boundaries of the single ‘stand-alone’ organisation. Boundary-crossing has long been associated with creative thinking in the work of Margaret Boden, Keith Sawyer, even Edward de Bono. Oliver, Heracleous and Jacobs in Chapter 16 argued for a fluidity and pragmatism in the design and application of organisational structures and processes which in turn can shape different ways of thinking, from divergent to convergent. They relate this paradoxical combination of divergent and convergent processes and structures to ‘hybrid thinking’ and ‘serious play’, an approach capable of opening up to diverse inputs but also of focusing and integrating these elements towards a common purpose. The combination of thinking styles described in their cases of serious play and the learning gained through the experiences and outcomes of their simulations are great examples of the adaptive learning process promoted by Nonaka and Zhu in action.

V. BUILDING ADAPTIVE CAPABILITY THROUGH DIVERSITY ACROSS THE SYSTEM

So, from a practical point of view one can aim to manage the paradoxical elements underlying creativity through the first four practices of timely balance:

1. One can actively acknowledge that the entrepreneurial spirit is absolutely key to the creative organisation, do something entrepreneurial in line with an overarching purpose, rather than analysing the spirit out of things, and encourage others to do the same.
2. One can encourage innovation that builds out from already existing practical certainties, that gets the ball rolling incrementally based on previous experiences.
3. One can see leading creativity as a conversation involving people from all parts of an organisation and seek to encourage others to lead creative initiatives where possible and open up channels where such initiatives can be discussed.

4. And, one can seek to create an organisation where learning through different experiences, perspectives and challenges (including failure) is highly valued.

These are all useful things to do and they can realistically be done with a little confidence, skill, good judgement and support.

But the fifth practice takes us back to the heart of Zhu’s critique of the bisociative model of creativity and management described at the beginning of this chapter. How are managers, practically, to sustain an organisation that encompasses seeming contradictory elements over time? Because the balance we seek for all elements of creativity will not be timely unless they adjust as the contexts shift and times change, the key to the process overall and to all the four paradoxical elements within it lies in ‘adaptive capability’.

The institutional economist Douglas North argues that in an uncertain world where no one can fully know future concerns, economic performance over time depends on adaptive efficiency that stems chiefly from sufficient diversity of options and resources. The same applies, we would suggest, to creativity and its management. To put it another way, for evolution to work there must be variety to select from. Enriching inputs at hand is hence the key for survival because it supplies more capability to answer to unpredictable challenges. In market economies, in order to select rather than being selected by environmental forces, firms must generate internal variation, or what old-fashioned cyberneticists called ‘requisite variety’. As 3M CEO George Buckley puts it: ‘in a creative company, you want to give as much variability as possible.’

All this points to increasing investment in diversity, but investing in diversity is not cost-free, hence it needs to be handled wisely. Many organisations today invest heavily in demographic, or what we might call ‘surface’, diversity in terms of sex, age and national origin. However, it is useful to reflect on what really adds to creative responses, and that is ‘substantial’ diversity: diversity in experiences, insights and mindscapes. Recruiting two young computer science graduates, one from MIT in Boston and another from Tsinghua in Beijing, you may get only limited diversity. Encourage a marketing professor from IIM in Bangalore, and a medical surgeon and a factory owner from the same suburb and ethnic background to work together, and the responses to problems and subsequent capability development could be eye-opening. Hence, what is
important is not diversity per se, but the depth of diversity and, above all, purposeful interaction and recombination within and between diverse bodies. Not just one set of experiences, not just one type of process, not just one type of space.

We began this handbook by contrasting the monoculture of a group of financiers on the board of Arsenal FC with the diverse collection on the board of Bayern Munich. A creative model of human evolution and adaptation depends on variety; just as ‘natural selection’ proceeds through mutations and deviations, not perfect repetition, a creative model of selective adaptation requires what Chris Steyaert calls ‘anomalies’. So an organisation which can encompass different perspectives and people – in innovating, in entrepreneuring, in leading and in organising – is more likely to adapt and learn and to achieve timely balance over time than one where everybody agrees.

The key criterion here, as Zhu observes, is that diversity should be ‘purposeful’, just like the doing something (rather than doing just anything) that represented the entrepreneuring spark. It should be geared towards achieving new combinations and relationships, not atrophying into separatism and opposition. The costs of investing in diversity are human as well as financial, and need to be weighed against the benefit of meaningful difference. Here differences in experience and expertise are more likely to yield new insights than demographic variations. A truly diverse workforce – referred to by Richard E. Caves as the ‘motley crew’ principle of creativity – can generate new options and allow creative management to adapt and evolve. Variation and diversity allow managers to pick different elements from the creative management system, from innovation and entrepreneurship to leadership and organisation. Diversity-driven adaptation allows us to build new purposeful combinations from these elements and apply them to the task in hand. And this fifth practice, building capability through promoting substantive diversity into each dimension of the creative process, should feed into everything.

While we are not saying that things will be as tidy and linear as Figure 18.2’s attempt to represent the five timely balance practices to the creative management process, we hope that it may provide readers with a simple heuristic device that can be remembered and adapted in practice.

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We have outlined five practices for promoting timely balance in creative management and the management of creativity. Unlike many of the seven possibilities we ruled out early on, here they add up to a philosophy that is not mystical but realistic, that is not merely about talking creativity but
actioning it. It is not a quick fix, but rather aimed at long-term systematic development and success. Where the bisociative framework developed in our introduction and used to organise this handbook might appear as a set of alternatives, extreme positions to be avoided or switched between, in this final chapter Nonaka and Zhu’s model of pragmatic strategy has injected some dynamism. The blending of diverse options, the wise selection from a palette of possibilities, is above all purposeful – driven by the needs of the enterprise – but also adaptive, learning from experience rather than attempting to plan and predict every possible outcome in advance. In the design of this handbook we have tried to achieve this eclecticism, but we hope that readers also make purposeful connections between chapters and sections. The aim is always to avoid a one-sided view of management or creativity, or any single formula such as the ‘golden mean’ or ‘just enough’ tension or ‘perfect balance’. Readers can judge for themselves which elements are most useful to them right now and in the future.

Management and creativity are not as straightforward as you may have expected when you began this book or as they are sometimes presented in others. But, after all, they should not be thought of as mystical or exceptional either – they are best defined through practice, by plunging into the world, trying things out, making mistakes and learning from them, to find out what works best – for you. This might entail what Van der Heijden (1996) called ‘strategic conversation’ – a dialogue between theory and practice, between the models and methods we have enumerated through this handbook and your own particular experiences and contexts. Through conversations and experience we can bridge between divergent perspectives and ideas and choose wisely from the options available to suit the times we are in. The role of the creative manager is to engineer and facilitate these strategic conversations, between what is theoretically possible and what is practically achievable. Creativity and management bring together apparently contradictory mindsets and processes which defy any
single, definitive summary – in the end we must choose, as wisely as we can, act and adapt.

NOTE

1. For more detailed elaboration and case studies on each of these philosophies, see Nonaka and Zhu (2012).

REFERENCES