

# Reflections on learning, organization and capabilities in the creative industries

## - Notes on the music industry

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*“Entertainment – not autos, not steel, not financial services, are becoming the driving wheel of the new economy”.* (Wolf 1999:4)

The point of departure of this paper is the spontaneous empirical observation that the creative industries in general are gaining importance on both an organizational and an economic level.

It is no coincidence that the creative industries recently have received attention in organisational studies (see for example the theme issues of *Organisational Science*, 1998) as well as among economists (Caves 2000). A few social scientists try to give explanations to the configuration and functions of the dynamics of the organization and innovation related to production and the products of these industries (Vogel 1998, Andersen & Miles 1999). Alone the empirical observation that Americans spend at least 60 billion hours and over \$60 billions on legal forms of entertainment each year is remarkable<sup>1</sup> (Vogel 1998), and seems to call for further analysis of both the single sectors making up this industry segment as well as some of the features of the firms involved. However, the relative modest considerations from organizational and innovation researchers, and economists might properly stem from the perception that the industries' end-product is supposedly more frivolous than cars, pharmaceuticals, guns, etc. (Andersen and Miles 1999).

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<sup>1</sup> Relative to this figure is for example the fact that Americans in 2000 only spend \$23.8 billion on candy <http://www.candyusa.org/Stats/2000.shtml>

The attempt here is to shed some additional light on issues of learning, organization and capabilities in the creative industries<sup>2</sup>. We do this by using the example of the music industry<sup>3</sup> as a main category of the creative industries.

In the paper we present a thesis concerning the development of firms in relation to learning, performance and creativity. Our thesis argues that it is in the business form of the creative industries that we find a form, which are one of the forms most oriented towards learning and the development of dynamic capabilities. Therefore, it is the creative industries that are the best paradigm of the types of business – firms, which we in the future more and more will experience - and recognise as some of the best performing.

Consequently, the aim is simply to contribute to an increase awareness of certain characteristics of the creative industries, which may offer valuable insights into a different organizational structure that appears to function innovative and creative. We claim that new organizational forms (Foss 2002) and accompanying certain dynamic capabilities (Teece et al. 1997) relating to issues like learning, strategy, and entrepreneurial behaviour have emerged in the creative industries and that these organizational configurations and distinct capabilities under the current circumstance for production of goods and knowledge may serve as inspirational and valuable bearing points for firms, which are engaged in more traditional manufacturing industries or 'ordinary' services. Yet, we underline that the relationship between the new organizational forms and dynamic capabilities is not a one-dimensional causality and thus, that the dynamic capabilities influence the organizational changes.

Moreover, we argue that we are witnessing a progression from a resource oriented - to a manufacturing - further through to a knowledge-based form of society and are converging to a form of entertainment capitalism (e.g. cultural economy, Scott 2001) where value-

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<sup>2</sup> Creative industries are currently defined as: those activities which have their origin in individual creativity, skill and talent and which have a potential for wealth and job creation through the generation and exploitation of intellectual property, These include: advertising, architecture, the art and antiques market, crafts, design, designer fashion, film, interactive leisure software, music, the performing arts, publishing, software, television and radio, heritage and tourism services (The British Government's Creative industries Task Force 2002).

added potential is even more dependent than earlier on the individual *experiences* of the context, persons, etc. than the content of the product or the manufactured qualities.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the products and production process of the creative industries is heavily influenced by two interesting elements. The first is uncertainty. This relates mainly to determining, which products that will be purchased by the demand side and in this way affect the activities of the artists and the firms of the industry. The difficulties to calculate sales (risk) result in a certain degree of uncertainty (Knight 1921), which can only be deal with by decision-making on the basis of judgement. This need to manage demand uncertainty have various consequences concerning the structure and dynamics of the organization of production and product development in the creative industries - ‘sleepers may unexpected turn into smash hits and sure-fire successes flop’ (Throsby 2001:957). Therefore, in this specific business segment particular organizational forms and capabilities have emerged in firms to cope with this condition of uncertainty. Exactly, the ability to function under a degree of uncertainty seems currently to be one of the key aspects regarding all forms of business.

Secondly, most products created by the creative industries – having a so called experience content - hold a kind of quasi public good character (Vogel 1998) since these products – a bit like knowledge - often hold the same value for the consumer, when used either by one, two or many individuals.

#### *New organizational forms*

We use the label new organizational forms to put focus on new modes of governing transactions, particular with respect to the internal organization of firms but also referring to how firms structure dealings with other firms. In other words new organizational forms denote firms experimenting with their governance of transactions, that is, adopting new ways of structuring their boundaries and their internal organization. An example could be the increased use of various forms of project organization, which seems to blur the boundaries and organization of the firm since this arrangement for performing different tasks combine elements of the market and of collaboration. ‘New organizational forms’

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<sup>3</sup> We use the label the music industry referring to the actors and activities involved in relation to the production of recorded products like CD. We employ the music industry concept indicating mainly retail

signals that economic organization is not static but changing through organizational innovation. Moreover, the concept is considered to point to characteristic ways of organising in the knowledge age.

New organizational forms are of caused embryonic by technology pushes as, for example, the internet as well as by the necessary organizational innovation - demanded of firms in order to evolve to adapt to changes broad about by elements contained in terms like networking, globalisation, outsourcing.

### *Dynamic capabilities*

By dynamic capabilities we refer to "the firm's ability to integrate, build and reconfigure internal and external competencies to address rapid changing environments" (Teece et al. 1997:516). The issue of capabilities constitute a key concept of the knowledge-based perspective of the firm emphasising the primacy of assets that are valuable, rare and inimitable. These are intangible assets such as skills, routines, information and knowledge, which tend to contain these characteristic since they are partly a result of a particular heterogeneous path dependent development. According to Richardson (1972). The concept of capabilities is defined as:

*“It is convenient to think of industry as carrying out an indefinitely large number of activities, activities related to the discovery and estimation of future wants, to research, development, and design, to execution, and co-ordination of processes of physical transformation, the marketing of goods, and so on. And we have to recognise that these activities have to be carried out by organisations with appropriate capabilities or, in other words, with appropriate knowledge, experience, and skills”.*

The knowledge-based or resource-based view (see for example Foss 1997) holds that we must understand the primary determinants of firm performance to be organization-specific capabilities, assets and the existence of isolation mechanisms. Furthermore, Teece et al. (1997) emphasises that the concept of dynamic capabilities invites for consideration about how firms continuously over time develop new capabilities. We hold that these most often

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sales and as such do not include music ordered for TV, films, computer games, etc.

co-evolve with new organizational formats and application of, for example, fresh technological possibilities. Therefore, the organizational position to facilitate or just support a constant processes or state of mind of alertness and renewal on both the individual and social level demand the ability to learn. This refers both to learning new things and processes and to learn do things/processes better. As such, we can in a knowledge perspective of the firm assert that the ability to learn as an organization is a key condition for capabilities and therefore may be recognised as the prime dynamic capability for firms to have and hence, the foundation for continuing innovative and entrepreneurial activities. The latter might also necessitates us to demand a portion of something surprising, radical new or even sometimes irrational – perhaps like creativity. The individual and the organization must be able to develop a kind of interpretation of itself as an entity positive to change - and develop a suitable and to them rational reason for this openness to stay in a changing process. This organizational state of the unstable environment and the never finished organizational position or configuration of the firm seem to characterise the activities of the firms constituting the creative industries.

#### *Different concepts of 'economies'*

We have seen a series of suggestions concerning different labels of so-called "economies" coming in to dominate society. We have had – and to a large part still have – what might be termed, an industrial economy. It may be described as shaped by factories - firms, mass-production, the market, financial institutions and a division of labour between the private and the public sector. In the industrial economy the creative arts are either private or public. In the public domain - it is labelled "culture", a sector very much part of the creation of national or class identity. As such, it can be interpreted as a continuation of the relation between the arts and the state in the form of a prince or a king. The state overtakes the function of the former maecenas and supports the arts. For an extensive analysis see for instance Hauser (1951).

When perceived in the domain of the private, this element is coined to be "entertainment". With the emergence of salaried employment and a working day, there also emerged free time. One worked hard to earn money to spend on having a good time when off work. Eight hours of work, eight hours of rest and eight hours of free time was a classical demand of the labour unions. The entertainment industry provided content and activity for

the eight hours of free time. So, at the same time Henry Ford created the assembly line in Detroit, Hollywood created an important entertainment industry. And the technical development also created the conditions for a mass music industry with the record and the record player and with radio.

In 1973 Daniel Bell pronounced the coming of post-industrial society (Bell 1973). This heralded an information economy, and later a knowledge economy. It is considered in essence as a form of society much based on the elements of science and technology. This form of society seems today to a certain extent to exist as an advanced industrial part of society. However, we are also experiencing a marked tendency towards a form of economy based on culture and experience.

An experience economy is founded on a want and a willingness of consumers to pay for having certain experiences for a certain period of time. They do not pay for a product or a service but consumers pay for an experience. The type of industry, we recognise, to hold an important role in an experience economy is the creative industries. Furthermore, elements of the creative industries appear indirectly in the context of more traditional industries increasingly to play a more significant part.

According to Scott (2001), drawing on the French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu, we may classify the creative industries including the music industry, as a fragment of an emerging cultural economy. This comprises all sectors of production in modern capitalism that supply consumers demand for amusement, ornamentation, self-affirmation, cultivation of spirit, social display and differentiation, outputs marked by a high symbolic value relative to the utilitarian purpose. As such, creative products emanate from a range of crafts, fashion, media, entertainment and service industries.

Here, the creative industries are defined widely as a segment of firms that supply the market with goods and services that we generally accept to have a degree of content of a certain cultural, artistic or simply entertainment value. It may be difficult to delimit the creative industries precisely.

Inspired by Caves (2000) the creative industries include at least: book and magazine publishing, visual arts (painting, sculpturing), the performing arts (theatre, opera, concerts, dance), sound recordings, cinema and TV films, even fashion, toys and games. Contributing, Scott (2001) remarks that there exist a considerable overlap between creative products and 'purely' utilitarian objects. A

broad range of products and services may be identified as complex hybrids between archetypes of the symbolic (aesthetic) and the utilitarian. Examples of this blurring include: luxury cars, clothes, downtown office buildings, advertisement or super market music, etc..

Two main ingredient combined in the constitution of most of the activities of the creative industries might be clarified. On the one hand is the artists, producer, remixer etc. engaged in creative processes and tasks that come to completion - we can term this according to OECD (1997) as content or artistic content - and on the other, what is by Caves phrased ‘humdrum’ (or ‘ordinary’) partners and perhaps other artists. The humdrum activities refer for example to art dealing, publishing, or in the music industry to record companies, A&R managers<sup>4</sup>, recording studios, etc.

Pine and Gilmore (1998) suggest a more theoretical framework concerning an emerging experience economy. They state that to produce goods and services is no longer enough for growth. They pose the question, which business should you be in:

- If you charge for stuff, then you are in the commodity business.
- If you charge for tangible things, then you are in the goods business.
- If you charge for the activities you perform, then you are in the service business.
- If you charge for the time customers spend with you, then and only then are you in the experience business.

The conclusion to be drawn from this is in their view easy; *customers want—and will pay more for—experiences*. Goods and services, according to Pine and Gilmore, are no longer enough. Experiences and transformations are the basis for future economic growth. Economies exist together, so that industrial manufacturing is of course still very important. But what are important are the marginal development, the tendency that we see, and especially the tendency in the distribution of value-creation in society. We may look at absolute figures, but what is really interesting are the “differential”, the changes that are perceived.

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<sup>4</sup> The artist & repertoire manager is often a person who selects interesting demos, who combines elements from many artistic inputs (e.g. a song, a lead singer) related to the band or artist - but does also suggest producers and recording studio, other musicians to join in, etc.



Accompanying this development of various and co-existing forms of economies, we may identify a development of certain matching forms of organization. We know of hierarchies and of firms with assembly-lines - industrial types of organization. These were shaped by Taylor's ideas and the influence of scientific management. Efficiency in task-solution was the essence. And the criterion of efficiency was productivity. Later, we have seen other organizational forms emerge. Research and development is, for example, typically organized in projects and done by interdisciplinary teams. This form of organization has spread with the increasing influence of knowledge and knowledge creation. Also network forms of organization have been of greater and greater importance.

### *The project-based organization*

Now, let us take a look at the important characteristics of the project-based organizational form, since this configuration for both some intra-firm and at least many inter-firm interactions seem to be the most used organizational arrangement in the context of producing creative products. Of course the project-based form of organization is not as such a new way of co-ordinating and accumulating knowledge or to produce products or other elements, but the way in which the project is currently used - and the extent and utilisation appears novel. Therefore, it may in this perspective be regarded as a new organizational form.

The fundamentals of the project can be characterised briefly with the words: temporarily, multi-skilled workers participating, and predominantly containing a well defined one-task related job description.

The project-based organization is further defined simply as a form of production process - a co-ordination mix of the relations of collaboration and the market - that suggests an alteration of the way we understand and explain economic organizational patterns. The understanding of organizational change related to project-based work organization simply seems to propose a different centre of interest, where we move from a strongly inter-firm perspective of interpretation towards a more inter-personal view as it is often persons more loyal to their project or network (peers) than to the firm, who are engaged in the projects (Grabher 2000). This seems to challenge our perception of, how knowledge interaction for

the parties involved in the projects results in an increased knowledge-base for the firm. We argue that the knowledge created or transferred during the project work is embedded in persons and the project does in this view not open up many possibilities for this recognised or created knowledge – the knowledge-interaction - to sediment in the organization/firm. This pose the idea that the project organization arrangements must be investigated not alone with theories orientated towards inter-firm relationships but rather concentrating on inter-personal relations. Again, this signifies the importance to take in for example theories of communities of practice or communities of interpretation (Grabher 2000) to explain knowledge-interaction in a project-organised environment.

Firstly, the project organization appears to change the explanation framework as the project organization offers quick response and flexibility to client needs but also holds implications concerning the time usually needed in inter-firm relationships to build personal trust, understanding of each others' contexts, etc. as a foundation for knowledge-interaction. This indicates that reputation and 'know who' in the community that you are part of, gains increasing importance more than your or your firms know how. This also implies the importance to be able to decode, and thus, interpret metaphors used and stories told between these players.

Secondly, the project-based economic organization is not self-organising as it is sometimes presented but there still seems to be an overall strategic unit, which for example select who should participate in the particular project? How and why is the project organised strategy for organization of work gaining holds certain conflicts between the persons involved - different logic/rationalities for success (business, art, scientific) - the deadline in the projects establishes a kind of disciplinary power forcing the involved persons, at a given moment, to speak with a common voice.

The project-based economic organization poses questions to, how we grasp the economic organization and knowledge governance mechanisms predominant in, for example, the Marshallian industrial district. The project organization in fact seems to contain some common features of relationship with concepts like flexible specialisation and clustering.

Moreover, if the project organization is a prevailing structure of inter-firm collaboration in advanced economies in different sectors - mainly perhaps creative industries – apparently solving the same problems of coordination and production, how come this trend of project organization has gained significance in very different industrial sectors, which do not have the same characteristics? The advertising industry appears for example to have ‘exact’ client needs to fulfil by means of projectification. The construction sector has for years been structured as project organised work. The music industry on the other hand – also strongly project organised – do not directly have defined client needs and the input for project parties cannot easily be expected, categorised etc. still it is project-based. How come the qualitative different conditions for very different industrial sectors - still they all seem to favour the benefits of the project organization? Also, how does the firms find out what the consumers want more specifically? - The industry (firms) seems to employ intense knowledge-interaction among peers as well as drawing on the knowledge of the artists who via live performances actually meet the consumers.

Finally, the project organised structure for economic relations seems to provide the possibilities for many spin off possibilities for new firm start-ups as people with different skills meet more frequent in a project organising setting than in other economic organising forms.

### *Project structure, creativity and learning*

If we look at the creative industries – especially the music industry – we see a situation where projectification has taken a specific form. We find a stage of actors that are available. We find a focus – a focus on the artist. The artist may from this viewpoint be a person or a group. The actors and the artist form temporary alliances – projects – and are able to create economic activity on a market - actually quite a large activity. The temporary teams are as mentioned interdisciplinary, but with a focus and a gestalt-structure. The artist is at the forefront – as figure – and the other actors are the background. But the artist is not able to create the economic activity without the other actors, as such; the activities of the artist and of other parts of the music industry (e.g. producing, studios, marketing, management, publishing etc.) are interdependent connected to each other’s activities and thus, each other’s capabilities. Therefore the creativity of the artist, expressed for example on a CD, is rarely to be understood isolated with the concept of the genius. Creativity

seems both to involve the creative person, the domain and the peers judging the creation (Csikszentmihalyi 1996). Consequently, there is a different time and space structure. The typical project organization tends to make things linear and manageable. In the creative sphere things evolve in parallelism and in a continuous interaction. In an engineering type of project one thing follows another with a specific and specified goal. The whole structure and organization is aimed at a result which is already specified. Thus in time one can say that the result is known and in terms of interaction the parts should be non-interacting, because they should be planned beforehand. All this is different in the creative process. The focal and gestalt-structure of creation is essential. There has to be a multiplicity of actors with relevant capabilities available and the artist as the potential for focalisation. It is like a crystallization. Without the idea – the figure – of the creative artist, the crystallization does not occur. But just as with the crystallisation it might be that the object causing the process and also at the same time being the centre, might be very different from the result. As when a grain of sand in a fluid causes the crystallisation of beautiful blue crystals around it. The point is that the “mere” availability of the capabilities does not in itself create anything, whereas the focal structure made possible by the presence of the artist makes things possible. And because all involved parties are necessary for the creative and economic activities and no one separately can do it, there is an enormous potential for learning.

Two things follow from this. Where projects normally take place in firms and firms that are present on a market, we see a different structure in the music industry. There we’ll also find the traditional firms, agents and a market. But the form of firms is different. We have temporary alliances that when formed have the capabilities of firms but the individual partners have not such capabilities. Thus, we do not have a market with firms acting as “containers” of projects, but rather temporary alliances that take the form of projects. Hence, there is both flexibility and great interdependence. This gives an optimal situation for learning. The situation is to a certain degree similar to a community of practice (Wenger 1998), but where such a community is a community of individuals we can say that in the music industry we both identify individuals, semi-firms and firms forming the community. By semi-firms we mean an organization like a rock-band, which is able to be a brand, to create intellectual property rights and thus be a factor on a market, but not able to be a firm as such. We can say that we find the market structure more integrated in the industry. This is different from the “classical” situation where firms are “suspensions” of markets but organizations acting on a market (Chandler 1977).

This also, secondly, means that the activity of the artist is not to be understood in the traditional entrepreneurial sense of Schumpeter (Schumpeter 1934) but rather in the terms of the Austrian economic school echoing, for example, the theories developed by Kirzner (Kirzner 1997). In this view innovation and entrepreneurship is to be grasped as a discovery and learning process by participation on a market, where coordination of knowledge takes place – entrepreneurs learn of the future or actual plans of other market participators - and as such - opportunities are present and are being exploited. We can say that in such a type of market situation it is essential that a multiplicity of possibilities is always kept available. Ambiguity is essential. This is of course very different from a situation where certainty and disambiguity is seen as the essential trait of economic activity and projects. It is also different from the Schumpeterian concept of entrepreneurship. He pointed out the multi-dimensional form, for instance that to make an invention economically important it took many forms of other "inventions", related to processes of production and forms of organization. But basically they were all processes of disambiguation. In contrast to this the Kirznerian concept emphasises the constant ambiguity related to exploitation of opportunities – and in essence highlight the market as a place in a Hayek'en sense where dispersed knowledge is coordinated and accumulated (Hayek 1945). This is very close to the form of creation we find in the arts. This is both socially structured as mentioned earlier and essentially connected to the handling of multiple interpretations – to ambiguity. One can create a thing in the sense of making it. One makes it according to a plan or to fulfill a certain function. This is not the way things are made or created in the arts. There is always an ambiguity in the sense that it is not specific what is being made and how it is to be understood. A portrait could be just a picture – in the sense of a photograph – of a person. One might need it for certain purposes such as getting a passport. But when the portrait is art, it is not like this. Then there are a number of potential interpretations of the picture of the person. It is like a set of scenes. One interpretation shows how the person looks, another how the person is or was, and in principle one could continue. The picture creates a multiplicity of worlds. (It is of course also possible for a photograph to do this, but then it is exactly also transformed into a work of art.)

## **Conclusion**

Above, we have tried to show some specific traits of the creative industries in relation to organization and learning. We have done this on the basis of the – in our opinion – well-founded

hypothesis that the creative industries are paradigmatic of the business form of the future. We have tried to give the rudiments of an analysis of the central form that capabilities take in these industries and thereby also give an opinion on how we think the form of capabilities will tend to be in the future.

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