

Chapter 53

Connecting the Dots: Bisociation, Collective Creativity, and Sustainable Business

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ABSTRACT

Calls for businesses to act with concern for the environment and society create new operating scenarios in which sustainability concerns must be taken into consideration along with the primary objectives of profitability and competitiveness. These additional obligations contribute to dynamism of the marketplace and make it important for businesses to draw on creativity and innovation to find connections between the unrelated in order to establish new efficiencies that can create competitive advantage and differentiation in the environment they find themselves. The central theme of this chapter is how bisociation informs collective creativity and innovation, and influences sustainability for business organizations competing in an environment that is in a permanent state of flux. This chapter trails a series of concepts to find the relationship between the concept of bisociation, collective creativity and sustainable business practices. The aim is to show how consistent creative thinking and exploration of information in different spaces of thought can proffer innovative solutions organizations require for their long term survival and prosperity.

INTRODUCTION

A considerable level of creativity and creative capacity leading up to innovation and innovative aptitude is needed to create new approaches and skills vital to create sustainable business models and improve corporate ethics and responsibility in the current operating environment. There is a high level of uncertainty, turbulence and complexity that characterize the current business landscape. Globally, fast-paced and across-the-board change has become the norm rather than an anomaly, which makes adopting a sustainable business perspective a valuable approach for managers and organizations as a whole. The days of predictable future are over and the implication for business organizations is that they cannot be static in their bid to meet market demands. Businesses must invent their own future by developing the ability to anticipate change. They must also have the kind of fluidity which supports swift and necessary adaptation to external environmental shifts while maintaining their strategic vision, identity and opera-

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tions to accomplish their primary goals. Creativity and innovation are powerful elements in this regard. They have become increasingly important attributes companies need to achieve desired organizational performance, success, and long-term survival (Anderson, Potočnik & Zhou, 2014). Creativity and innovation encompass the ability to look beyond the obvious, to explore what is possible. In Fields & Bisschoff (2013), creativity is said to create new economies and social forms as solutions to some of the complex challenges in an uncertain environment. An organization able to succeed at this continuously establishes a foundation for its on-going sustainability.

It is understandable that a business' primary interests are its own viability and profitability. However, there are increasing calls for organizations to act with concern for the long-term environmental and social impact of their operations. There is mounting pressure and increasing demand for new ways of doing business to achieve equity, social change and preservation of the physical environment. These challenges present opportunities to the forward-thinking organization to devise new ways and forge new paths to create new products, new services and new processes that plug identified gaps in the market. The dynamic marketplace makes it a necessity for businesses to draw on creativity and innovation to find connections between the unrelated in order to establish new efficiencies that can create competitive advantage and differentiation in the environment they find themselves. An innovative organization will be able to invent its future, and keep up with (and sometimes possibly be ahead of) the pace of change occurring in the dynamic marketplace it finds itself. Knowing that innovation is primarily driven by creativity, it is necessary for companies to understand what drives creativity and use their strategies, people, systems and processes to facilitate it.

The objectives of this chapter are to discuss creativity in the context of need for creativity and individual creativity versus collective creativity; to present the concept of bisociation and its relationship with collective creativity; and finally, to establish a connection between collective creativity, innovation and sustainable business practices. The contribution of this chapter is that it shines light on an important model of creative thinking to promote an understanding of how finding unexpected links between seemingly unconnected information and concepts powers the processes behind creativity. The value in application of bisociative reasoning – finding new useful connections where they did not exist before – is vital in business because organizations are able to draw parallels between different domains to discover new links, new insights and new perspectives in their creative processes. Also, they will be able to see how parallels and unconventional thinking can be source of innovation to give sustainability to the organization.

Background

What Is Creativity?

Creativity is the initial step in innovation. It is a precursor to innovation. One may ask, what is creativity? Robinson (2001) refers to human creativity as imaginative processes of the mind with outcomes that are original and valuable. Boden (2004) defines it as the ability to come up with new, surprising and valuable ideas or artefacts in different spheres of life. The three key words in Boden's definition: new, surprising and valuable present the context in which creativity is viewed. Firstly, creativity is said to involve newness. Most definitions of creativity agree that novelty is a key element of creativity. Amabile (1997) hinges novelty on a creative act being different from what has been done before. Fisher & Williams (2004) linked novelty to originality. To distinguish between levels of originality Boden (2004) elaborated

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