Workshops as Tools for Creative Collaboration: Finding a Balance between Constraints and Potentialities

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Abstract

Educating to creativity is one of our greatest contemporary challenges. In architecture, design or engineering education, two communities of thoughts co-exist. On the one hand, teachers believing that creativity can be learned by practice, structured by tools and methodologies, creativity as such becoming consequently at anybody's reach (see for instance de Bono's books [1], David Kelley's work at d.school, or more broadly broadcasted online booklets or tutorials [2]). On the other hand, ardent defenders rather seeing creativity as some mysterious, un-explainable, un-learnable and often "misunderstood" spirit (see for instance [3]).

Without taking any prior stand in favor of one or the other point of view, this paper will analyze four settings of so-called collaborative "creative workshops" (their methodologies, organization and logistics) and provide peepholes on their respective outputs (projects as well as participants' evaluations), with the informed goal of first defining criteria for comparison and finding common denominators.

Each of the four workshops takes place in an academic (but voluntary) environment, 3 of them nevertheless involving professionals. The number of participants; their backgrounds; the workshops lengths and timing; their organization, collaborative modalities and announced goals; the potential sensitization to creative techniques and the constraints will be amongst the criteria used to systematically compare the settings and draw conclusions about their respective pros, cons and overall "efficiencies".

The paper will discuss several points:

- the essence of what makes such workshops "creative", whether and why the creative tools and methodologies constitute an essential component of those workshops;
- the interrelation between organizational aspects and the nature of collaboration, questioning how internal team strategies, respective contexts and creative methodologies impact each other;
- and, more specifically, the overall impact methodological constraints (in terms of tools used; of timing of use; of autonomy level etc.) have on such creative workshops.

The paper will finally conclude on perspectives for future "creative workshops", in terms of possible alternatives, of positioning towards the "expert and mysterious" viewpoint on creativity, and of transferability to the entrepreneurial world.

References

[1] de Bono, E. (2007). How to have creative ideas, Vermilion Ebury Publishing, Berkeley,178 p.
[2] Byron, K. (2009). The creative researcher – Tools and techniques to unleash your creativity. Published online on www.vitae.ac.uk/researcherbooklets
[3] MacKenzie, G. (1998). Orbiting the giant hariball: a corporate fool's guide to surviving with grace. Penguin Group Publishing, New York, 224 p.