CHAPTER 2

Soft Tyrannies for Creativity in Management Education

INTRODUCTION

This chapter offers a detailed and critical analysis of how creativity, both as a phenomenon and as a domain of knowledge, is being dealt with in management education. A set of convergences including a dominant link between creativity and economic progress has fuelled our idea of what it means to be creative in management education.

As a result, we have creative subjects: people with a specific script to become creative, and when doing so, with little time to reflect or doing anything else. This situation arises because, far from being an imposition, this regulation continuously and softly ‘nudges’ us to align ourselves with it, under an overall idea that as free individuals, we are all contributing to the ‘good’ of society with our creativity (ies) and innovation(s).

As the reader can notice from this claim, the conceptualisation of this analysis is inspired by Foucault’s ideas on governmentality, power and ethics (Foucault 1978, 1991, 2009; Gordon 1980, 1991; Lemke 2002; Dean 2009). I have used many of these ideas previously when analysing the issue of work-life balance in the pursuit of creativity (Córdoba-Pachón 2019). I now take them to provide an analytical glimpse of the educational environments where I normally work and want to rediscover creativity now. I also hope that as management educators we could become more aware and stop, think and live a bit more fully and critically than we
currently do, reflecting this in our students and other stakeholders of our management educational systems.

The chapter begins by proposing three (3) elements of analysis: power programmes, technologies and functions, contributing to shape what we understand by creative subjects. I elicit them and their effects of their operation in my current management education practices. Further, I undertake a reflection to elicit what I call conduct and counter-conduct possibilities for the rediscovery of creativity in its ways of being, thinking and acting by educators, students and other stakeholders of management education.

**SOFT TYRANNIES: PROGRAMMES, TECHNOLOGIES, EMERGING FUNCTIONS**

Table 2.1 shows a diversity of definitions of creativity to date. Coming from different disciplines of knowledge, what seems to be common from the above manifestations is that they relate creativity mostly to individual selves with specific qualities, traits or motivations, and in interaction(s) with each other.

How these definitions emerge, both in theory or in practice, could be attributed to the operation of power relations in society, or what I call soft tyrannies. Drawing on Foucault and his work on governmentality (Foucault 1978, 1991; Gordon 1980, 1991; Lemke 2002; Rose, O’Malley and Valverde 2006; Noguera 2009; Foucault 2009; Dean 2009), it can be said that our social relations involve the structuring or setting up of spaces of possibilities for creatively being, thinking and acting, which we realise individually or collectively in our interactions with ourselves or others. These possibilities, inevitably, have to do with ensuring that society is (self) regulated.

‘Soft’ means that they are ‘nudged upon’ us as educators, students or other stakeholders involved or affected by them. They possibly emerged out of good intentions, presupposing ways of thinking and acting about ‘being freely creative’ (Foucault 1978; Gordon 1980, 1991; Rose et al. 2006). ‘Tyrannies’ mean that for individuals there is some (little) space for manoeuvre or for thinking of other ways in which we could do otherwise.

In our Westernised societies and according to Foucault (1990), the last two centuries have brought to the fore the idea that we are to care for, if not govern, our ‘bodies’ (minds included) and that doing so is necessary for the welfare of our societies. We are to pursue the acquiring of knowledge on
how to do so. This knowledge (implicit or explicit in spoken language) is knowledge *in relation* to things, people and ways of relating to both (including relationships to oneself) (Foucault 1978). Knowledge operates as embedded in ways of thinking and acting, which include how we are to influence ourselves and others, to govern, to administer our conduct (Foucault 1978, 2009).

### Table 2.1 Some current definitions of creativity

| ‘Discipline’ or ‘domain’ of knowledge | What is creativity? |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Psychology (Barron, 1968; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, 1996) | Developing or adapting oneself and ideas to one’s own psychological traits, skills, expertise and environments, potentially resulting in discovering and addressing new problems and redefining / being shaped by existing domains and fields of knowledge. |
| Early education and psychology (Craft, 2001) | Exploring, envisioning and acting on possibilities for positive self-adaptation and transformation in daily life situations and contexts, using self-efficacy or problem-solving capabilities. |
| Education (Oakley, 2014; Wagner, 2015; Robinson and Aronica, 2016) | A process of discovering our purpose in life, supported by flexible and adaptive systems. Such systems should embed cultural processes of ‘meme’ transmissions that could help nurture students’ curiosity and development of inner talents in interaction with relevant groups or audiences. |
| Literary writing (Pope, 2005) | A plethora of creativities, imbricating humans and their available (cyborg) technologies, leading us to become critical about what or how we mean by a creative human self and others and how we research on creativity. |
| Dance choreography (Tharp, 2002) | A life habit of bringing inspiration to life through continuous, routinely, ritual-based, performative, interactive, (self)-critical and (self)-honest work. |
| Science (Lehrer, 2012) | Searching for and/or bringing together separate ideas or domains of knowledge; the result of borrowing, friction, gaining and refining between ourselves and others. |
| Innovation (Amabile, 1998; Sawyer, 2006; Andriopoulous and Dawson, 2009) | A (systemic) process emerging from collaborative, ‘organisational’ or ‘cluster’ change tensions which also require appropriate identification and management of individual and collective skills, digital and privacy rights. |
| Artificial intelligence (Bostrom, 2016; Tegmark, 2018) | Modelling, generation of decisions in pre-defined ‘spaces’, together with patterns of association and using automatable and autonomous methods or techniques (i.e. machine-oriented learning). |
If we want to discern of ‘other’ (not structured) possibilities for thinking or acting within our available freedom in society, we could then identify several types of power relationships that we as individual or collective subjects are being subjected to, and which we could also influence with what we think is our available freedom. In this regard Rose et al. (2006, pp. 99–101, bold added) say:

[Government power] is not assumed to be a by-product or necessary effect of immanent social or economic forces or structures. Rather, it is an attempt by those confronting certain social conditions to make sense of their environment, to imagine ways of improving the, and to devise ways of achieving these ends. Human powers of creativity are centred rather than marginalized, even though such creation takes place within certain styles of thought and must perforce make use of available resources, techniques, and so on.

The operation of soft tyrannies could involve different types of power relations. The following are proposed for analysis: (a) Governing programmes; (b) Governing technologies associated to programmes; (c) Emerging power functions. As shown in Fig. 2.1, their resulting operation brings about possibilities for conduct and counter-conduct for individual or collective subjects.

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**Fig. 2.1**  Governmentalities in management education
Governing Programmes

In Foucault’s work, governing programmes refer to ‘visible’ (language discourse-based) ways in which populations become conceived of in terms of declared needs and goals to fulfil (Foucault 1978, 2009; Gordon 1980; Kendall and Wickham 1999). Needs and goals are declared as they are defined, meaning that such definition is embedded in the operation of power relations that constitute individual or collective subjects (Gordon 1980). Declarations of goals and needs are followed by ways of thinking and acting that aim to meet them.

According to Foucault (1994), it is when some initially ‘innocuous’ but potentially disrupting events occur, leading to the establishment of certain objectivity of needs/goals, the development of a politics and a government of individual or collective selves, together with the elaboration of ethics and practices, that governing programmes are established.

A Governing Programme: Education for Economic Growth

A main governing programme that has influenced how we think and behave (rushing, dividing attention) is that of being educated for economic purposes. In the global realm of education, Robinson and Aronica (2016, pp. 9–10) highlight the features of this programme as consisting of:

A high performing education system [or systems that] is [are] critical to national economic prosperity and to staying ahead of our [country] competitors. Standards of academic achievement must be as high as possible, and schools [among other institutions] must give priority to subjects and methods of teaching that promote these standards…it is essential that as many people as possible go on to higher education, especially four-year colleges and universities…government[s] need to take control of education by setting the standards, specifying the content of the curriculum, testing students systematically…and making education more efficient through increased accountability and competition.

The above programme now operates in what could be conceived of as ‘natural’, but there are disruptions. Some of these are currently more vocal and explicit, like for instance the student movements in Latin America or Hong Kong. Others are more subtle or now seen as ‘normal’, like recent academic strikes or earlier strikes regarding tuition fees in the UK. And many others are being disrupted by the global coronavirus situation and
its aftermath. In all these events, the critical historian or analyst has an opportunity to identify the conditions that have led the present to become what it is (Gordon 1980), and suggest ways to creatively redefine it by deciding what is (not) necessary anymore for the constitution of selves as governable subjects.

This book is an attempt to call into question the existence of this governing programme as well as the following one. Their effects are denounced and some possibilities to counteract them as well as their associated governing power technologies and emerging functions proposed. This is with the aim of rediscovering creativity as a systemic space of redefinition of relationships between us and others in management education.

**A Governing Programme: Creativity Disciplining**

According to Runco and Albert (2010), the twentieth century brought with it several questions that still gather the interests of researchers in creativity. Questions like: *What is creativity, who has it, who can benefit from it, can it be increased through conscious effort?* have influenced our understandings of creativity as portrayed above, and how we (could) nurture it through research and practice.

The pursuit of answers to the above questions has also contributed to distinguish creativity as a socially legitimate and scientifically rigorous field of knowledge (Sternberg and Lubart 1999; Pope 2005; Runco and Albert 2010). Currently, research in creativity is continuously characterised and progressed by courses, journals, journal articles, single or edited books (including this one), and conferences. Furthermore, three key elements seem to maintain it. Firstly, there are several **individual tests** that can be used to assess it at both the individual and collective level (the latter can overlap with the field of innovation). Secondly, there are **generic criteria** to assess creativity of a process, idea or a product. Criteria such as **novelty, value to others than the creators themselves and something that ‘works’** (Sternberg and Lubart 1999; Pope 2005; Runco and Jaeger 2012; Cropley and Cropley 2016). And thirdly, there are now a series of socio-cultural **principles** that aim to inform future developments in the field (Glavenau et al. 2019). Among those principles, the economic, psychological, cultural and social importance of creativity is highlighted, together with ways in which such importance is to be brought forth (Montuori and Purser 1995; Glavenau 2010).

These and other developments in the creativity field suggest that it is becoming more structured, recognised and disciplined, as newcomers to it
need to ‘know’ and act accordingly. Developments, however, could also limit the conduct of people enquiring, researching about or teaching/learning creativity, as well as of those who want to become creative.

**Governing Technologies**

According to Foucault (1991), for governing programmes to meet their declared objectives, it is necessary to design or make available governing technologies of power (Foucault, 1978, 1988, 1991, 2009).

These can be defined as procedures, scripts, ‘algorithms’ or norms that establish gaps between objectives and forms of human conduct, as well as ways to close them (Gordon 1980, 1991; Kendall and Wickham 1999). Governing technologies help constitute and operate power relations by (re)defining them in terms of who controls whom, by which means or procedures (often innocuous or just taken for granted), and for which purposes (normally although not necessarily aligned to governing programme objectives).

The above governing technologies are diverse. They include for instance those that ensure the population’s compliance with norms (i.e. surveillance, structuring of spaces and behaviours), as well as those that people use to work on themselves to also ensure compliance with a vision of the type of ‘subject’ they ‘want’ to be or become. In their operation, governing technologies can use information and communication technologies or ICTs to gather statistical knowledge about populations, implementing also activities of (self) education, monitoring, profiling, assembling, compliance and punishment (Foucault 1988; Rose et al. 2006). Moreover, through the operation of governing technologies, people’s conduct can also be revealed, and thus adjusted accordingly by those governing them or by people themselves. Hence the importance of knowledge in our societies to better understand and manage ourselves and others.

**Standardisation, Segmentations, Self and Moral Development**

In management education, standardisation constitutes a current and very influential way by which the above government programmes become implemented. Standardisation of education and its associated practices has helped to increase the scale and scope of management programmes. Alongside standardisation, categorisation of types of creativity that could be identified from individuals (Craft 2001; Kaufman and Beghetto 2009; Hanson 2013) helps to fill existing gaps of creativity understanding, education and acting.
From ‘little’ to ‘big’ creativity types, an enabler of their categorisations or transitions between them is the notion of ‘self-development/efficacy’ (Craft 2001), which could lead individuals to identify where they are at and decide where to go next. This can potentially generate the idea of a creative process as progressive and linear as portrayed in Fig. 2.2. Self-development/efficacy is linked to other ideas like ‘intentional’ and ‘moral development’ (Gruber 1993; Runco and Nemiro 2003), which could contribute to reinforce the idea that creative subjects need to ‘morally grow’ or ‘develop’, and thus exert ways of conducting themselves (i.e. by practising their learning), in order to be considered as such, or succeed in their creative efforts.

**Practice**

As shown with the different definitions about creativity at the beginning of this chapter, there is a strong relationship between creativity and practice. For instance, Wagner (2015) acknowledges that creative individuals have a positive outlook about situations, ‘a belief that through trial and error a deeper understanding and better approaches [to solve problems] can be discovered’ (p. 15, brackets added). This also relates to what Wagner advocates as a design thinking mentality, in which failure is
considered just another iteration in learning towards succeeding, and where nothing in our world stays the same. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1996) considers that individuals first need to learn (by trial and error, in other words failure) the specifics of a domain of knowledge in order to be able to generate something novel within it.

Other authors like Sternberg and Kaufmann (2010) and Oakley (2014) identify different types of cognitive processes that assume that individuals immerse themselves in trying and failing in their creative journeys (i.e. selective encoding, combination, comparison, focusing or diffusing). Lehrer (2012) also considers how individuals who master one or several domains of knowledge can then generate creativity by integrating their previous knowledge into a new domain, and Tharp (2002) highlights routines/habits (i.e. having a box to think outside of the box, rituals) to help creators shape and test their ideas.

What transpires from these and other takes is an inherited assumption that practice is to be made iterative, explicit or rationally/morally managed mainly by individuals themselves (possibly with the help of tutors, mentors or work groups). However, it is them who are responsible for carrying it out to attribute meaning, to then reveal its results or outcomes to (educators) audiences, transforming themselves in the process, and assume the consequences of their practice.

Whilst practice could be considered an essential attribute of human learning, what seems to be lacking in creativity education is the need for creators to take a step back (i.e. by failing or just stopping) and reflect on the type of creative subject that is emerging as a result of practicing, so that they can decide to pursue it or be/do otherwise via different (not only structured or planned) practices or roles. In this regard, links between practice, reflection and failure in creativity education are yet to be fully understood as part of systemic creative processes and situations, some of which might inhibit rather than nurture creativity (Hanson 2013).

Assessment Technologies

Figure 2.2 also shows how the convergence of standardisation, self-development notions and practice could be monitored or corrected via assessment technologies. Among others, the proposed creativity assessment frameworks of Cropley and Cropley (2000, 2016) and Pefanis-Schlee and Harich (2014) in education assume that it is necessary and desirable to ‘test educational’ subjects (individually or in groups) on their creative abilities or traits (i.e. boundary challenging, unconventionality,
metaphorical or prospective thinking, incubation of ideas, originality, flow, perspective-taking), to then provide some sort of ‘corrective’ support (creativity training, lecturing, mentoring) and to then assess them in relation to their performance or gaining of knowledge or skills.

And also with the (post) coronavirus situation, all of this can be made more efficient or immediate via online, information and communication technologies or ICTs, potentially generating a perceived lack of time for solitary, slow, non-purposeful but meaningful reflection that is currently and badly needed to nurture our individual and collective creativity (Rose 2013; Berg and Seeber 2016).

Emerging Power Functions

For Foucault (1978, 1991; Gordon 1980, 1991), the operation of governmentalities also generates certain and emerging functions that some actors within networks of power perform in order to meet specific objectives. Such objectives might not be necessarily aligned or like those explicitly declared by governing programmes. A critical historian could identify and elicit such functions in order to raise awareness about their consequences for the freedom of individual or collective subjects, and thus show possibilities for subjects to counteract them.

The Creative Subject(s)

A result of the above is that a type of creative subject is emerging from management education: one supposedly being highly sought and valued by employers worldwide. According to Wagner (2015, p. 16), the essential qualities of this subject are:

(i) Curiosity, which is a habit of asking good questions and a desire to understand more deeply.

(ii) Collaboration, which begins with listening to and learning from others who have perspectives and expertise that are very different from one’s own.

(iii) Associative or integrative thinking.

(iv) A bias towards action and experimentation.

The shaping of this creative subject also affects educators. Under the above image of and assumptions about practising creators, I myself have been able to create my own power function by taking on several courses
(i.e. quantitative methods, digital innovation and a creative process management course); I have been able to author several publications on systems thinking and creativity; students have been able to complete their degrees. As an educator in management, I feel that I need to continue learning new things so that I can instil them in my students. In my courses, I have promoted the importance of acknowledging paced and reflective practice, self-assessment and failure (Oakley 2014). Although some students value self-assessment as a way of preparing themselves for summative testing, sadly, not many seem to link practice (structured or unstructured) with reflections on what makes them curious or passionate in life (Wagner 2015). This and other insights will be later discussed in the book.

For now, it seems that the pressures of employability and ‘economic debt’ in management education (students nowadays take a loan to pay for their tuition fees and other expenses) could push people to focus on passing or obtaining good results at the expense of everything else. However, not all of us are to ‘succeed’. Only 20% of the 20% of students that graduate in countries like the US or elsewhere end up working in career-related jobs with top salaries (Dobelli 2013; Wagner 2015). In this regard, Wagner (2015) also claims that of those individuals that work in career-related jobs, many end up following very similar paths, in other words, going for similar jobs at companies that are considered the ‘elite’. A not very creative result!

A similar claim can be levelled for management educators: Academic structures of different institutions end up resembling each other, in order to facilitate staff mobility and homogeneity in the knowledge that is both transmitted to students and rediscovered via disciplinary competition (Abbot 2001). Although one could consider that the above managing of creative conduct in management education is necessary for the regulation of societies (Foucault 1994), a by-product that needs to be critically addressed is that for institutions, educators and students, creativity education is currently generating a limiting set of options, career paths and outcomes in our societies.

**Lack of Time**

A good number of my undergraduate management students in the UK—mostly in their late teens and early twenties—spend their time looking after their appearance, working part or full time, chatting with friends, attending family gatherings, checking their social media before or during class if not missing them. Without sounding too patronising with this observation, there seems to be no time for anything else. Myself, I strive
to effectively manage my time between university and fatherhood, let alone be creative about my own well-being and at work (Córdoba-Pachón 2019). Teaching or learning, preparing for them, seeking funding opportunities, reading or writing, meeting students formally or informally, chatting to colleagues in the corridor or in a café, hosting visiting researchers, all of this whilst keeping a healthy body and mind (i.e. doing mindfulness meditation).

It takes time and encouragement for all of us to change ‘the academic routine’, for instance, to take things slowly and talk about it as genuine human beings (Berg and Seeber 2016), or to spend some time in individual solitude and reflection (Rose 2013). It takes courage for me not to be checking email, to spend time walking around a park, reading something that does not have anything to do with my research interests, to not think about work, promotion, collaboration or funding when I am with my close family, or to laugh at how serious I am. I can notice mine or other people’s anxiety rising when things take a different course in our daily lives. I can also see anxiety in my students. We all seem to be running around with no end in sight.

As Ackoff and Rovin (2005) claim, with educational systems as they currently operate, we could be educating students to just get a job in which their ‘real’ learning will really kick-off, with a net effect that only some educators are able to reap benefits within the whole educational systems that have been set up. Ackoff and Rovin (2005) say:

The principal [emerging power] function of a university is to provide its faculty members with the quality of work life and standard of living they want. Teaching is the price they must pay, and like any price, they try to minimize it [to have time for ‘other’ things, but what are they?]. The more distinguished faculty members, the less teaching it requires of its faculty… Tenure, clearly, is no longer primarily a way of protecting academic freedom, its espoused function, but [also] a way of protecting incompetence. (2005, pp. 19–20, brackets and italics added)

Using the power function of not having enough time, I sometimes have been able to make ‘rushed’ decisions towards achieving a ‘better’ work-life balance including taking some time to look after myself during working weeks (Córdoba-Pachón 2019) or writing books like this. But I still experience important dilemmas. I keep asking myself: is ‘saying no’ all there is in the pursuit of creativity nowadays? What about myself, the one who needs to be (un) creative at times to keep my own sanity and that of students or people around me?
POSSIBILITIES: (SELF) COUNTER-CONDUCTS

To the above consequences and dilemmas about creativity in management education, it becomes necessary to propose ‘other’ forms of operating within the skeleton of power relations for creativity education presented above. Like the above personal reflections, it might be time to let go of the imperatives of economic growth and no time, or at least loosen their grip over us, by addressing what we could consider the main ethic-political danger that we face in our societies (Foucault 1982), and by enabling people to address them within existing power relations as a way to exert our available freedom (Foucault 1984a, b, 1991, 1994). Some generic possibilities for (self) counter-conduct are proposed as follows.

Firstly, creativity as a phenomenon and as a field of knowledge could be considered as non-essential in societies. If its promotion is excluding other ways of thinking or acting, we as educators might not need to continue pushing for its establishment within the landscape of social science knowledge, or if doing so, we would need to establish new objectives for it. As mentioned before, there might be no need to explicitly link creativity with economic growth via the current shaping of creative subjects in education, or advance creativity knowledge for its own sake. There could be other forms of being (un)creative.

Secondly, existing governing technologies of standardisation, categorisation or self-development could be redirected to enable diverse and process-based interactions between management education stakeholders, and with a view that (information) technologies’ monitoring role could be shifted towards better (self) understandings or interactions. Management educators and students could be allowed to exert their creativity in co-creating assessments, in taking them forward to practice-based contexts and reflecting on their insights (i.e. critical problem-based learning), inventing their own assessments or even not being assessed at all!

A key challenge for educational systems and institutions is to allow the above or other learning and assessment options to flourish and still be able to regulate our and students’ conducts.

Thirdly, it becomes important to go deeper in enabling self-reflection in management education, so that the ingrained discourses, mentalities or technologies of conditional practice for creativity could be challenged. In his historical analyses of sexuality and the operation of power over ourselves (Foucault 1984a, 1990), Foucault shows how it was possible—and within the grids of practice made available by power relations—to be or become someone else than who was expected to be at the time.
Foucault did not aim to ‘normalise’ the above possibility or any historically emergent way of being or thinking (i.e. humanism). Rather, his aim was to encourage us to see that it is still possible to do so as a way of living in our present times. In this book, we first take up this possibility to explore in more depth how we could become different selves with creativity and its nurturing or rediscovery in management education. From the reflections gathered throughout the book, it would then be possible to ascertain more clearly the first and second possibilities for (self) counter-conduct at the end of it, providing some specific guidance to help us all ‘play the games’ of creativity rediscovery in management education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, a first and critical glimpse of management education has been provided. Michel Foucault’s ideas on governmentality have been used, to reveal how the unfolding of creativity in education is contributing to feed and reinforce images of creative subjects that fit within broader economic and knowledge disciplining purposes, and thus narrowing our thinking and acting about it.

To address this situation, some generic possibilities for (self) counter-conduct have been put forward. These possibilities are to be refined later by exploring in more detail how the nurturing of creativity continues resurfacing in education (next chapter of the book), and how we could provide more in-depth insights about our ideas about ourselves and others in management education.

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