CHAPTER 8

Summaries, Implications and Epilogue

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents two summaries of the book. First, the argument is revisited. Then, key insights are conveyed together in a summary of the argument, potential implications for the rediscovery of creativity in management education, and a guide of how to play a game called rediscovering creativity in management education. Finally, an epilogue.

THE ARGUMENT REVISITED

This book has developed a critical stance about creativity in management education, one which aims to inspire educators, students and other people interested in taking a step back, and venturing to reflect and act on what it means to rediscover creativity.

The stance has been developed by first providing an analysis of the operation of soft tyrannies in management education. This analysis, inspired by Foucault’s governmentality ideas, has shown how a sophisticated set of discourses and practices has contributed to narrow down ‘other’ options to be or learn to be creative than those contributing to economic growth or the disciplining of creativity as a body of knowledge. From this initial reflection, several counter-conduct possibilities were proposed. In pursuing them, a further review of current efforts to nurture creativity was undertaken.
There are several initiatives that currently nurture creativity, many of which could be reflected upon or adopted for management education. From encouraging people to pursue their inner passions and interests to setting up adequate learning, environmental or communication conditions to help them do so, in many of the initiatives the activity of play is also encouraged. A systemic paradox for individual selves was identified: we are encouraged to use our ‘inner’ energy to become part of ‘wholes’ (educational systems, organisations) whilst already being valued as members of these. We are to ‘self-develop’ or ‘grow’ to be ‘fully accepted’ within these wholes, nurturing our creativity to do so. To address the above paradox, a further exploration of Foucault’s ideas on governmentality is made. A systemic space for thinking and acting, now at a more micro (individual) level of governmentality, is proposed, one which is directed to governing ourselves, rather than being fully governed by soft tyrannies.

For our present time(s), Foucault’s proposed attitude to the Enlightenment era reveals that it is possible, if not essential, for people to assume different selves, and do so individually or collectively via roles and practices. With this attitude, enquirers can also become educators. We could become/show someone else (different selves including our old and precious ones), using practices like learning, writing or meditating, or doing them in a humorous way. A systemic space for selves could become a ‘house’ we can inhabit with creativity through roles and practices, whichever type of definition(s) we attribute to these companions.

A spirit of play (and seriousness) is also introduced to help individual selves inhabit the space previously proposed with creativity: a first start every time, where we try to articulate and set rules for how the space is to be inhabited, a continuous refresh or restart. Spiriting play and seriousness can help us iterate, refresh, articulate or even ground ourselves in realities made visible by soft tyrannies in management education. These and other practices, as well as different roles (individual, collective) for selves, could lead us to conceive of our lives as ‘games’ with norms, rules and improvisations. We can stop playing them to reflect, possibly adopt more ‘serious’ attitudes, reformulate rules or engage in other games we could define. Play/seriousness, their imbalance, could lead us to adopt a more palatable paradox to nurture creativity in ourselves and others in management education.
FURTHER IMPLICATIONS FOR THE REDISCOVERY OF CREATIVITY

There are several important implications derived from considering the above and narrated games in our current reality in management education, which could be used to revisit the (self) counter-conduct possibilities laid out in Chap. 2 of this book.

Firstly, I have revealed myself as an individual and public subject, one which has guessed where the muse of creativity has been or is in my life. I have revealed different and valuable selves, moving also from the individual to the collective and back, using practices like reading, writing, reflecting, mindfulness meditation, socialising, humouring or the support from others to engage with creativity and keep it alive.

Creativity, a muse, then a friend, now a partner (see epilogue later on in this chapter) with my different selves has been there playing key games. With the derived games’ rules, we have been able to identify limits and possibilities together. These limits and possibilities suggest that we need not to entirely abandon who we have been or are, but rather let our different selves flourish. We need not stick to one conception of creativity or who we are, but rather to adopt several which we could use to better help ourselves and others.

And we need to keep smiling or laughing about things, even on the face of perceived and serious success or failure. *These impostors*…

Secondly, by revealing my selves through the pursuit of creativity in its different forms, it has also been possible to reveal other features of soft tyrannies in management education. These mostly operate silently when it comes to letting us deal with the systemic paradox identified for creativity in education (it is me doing all the articulating and reflecting!). They could easily bring a perfectionist idea of who we are to become as creative subjects, reinforcing it with sophisticated and ICT technologies like student assessment and feedback (and now online teaching due to coronavirus and its aftermath). They leave us with the responsibility for nurturing creativity(ies) whilst they become better at perfecting the already perfect, which could often result in appropriations to suit short-term (economic, scale) needs to the potential detriment of better communications or reflections between ourselves and others.
And thirdly, soft tyrannies for management education could be currently reaching a threshold or status of self-producing technologies of government (Dean 1996). What this means is that soft tyrannies have started to offer glimpses of self-serving. Increasingly blind to or detached from ‘other’ governing programmes (better attention to students’ diversity), convergences of technologies of feedback and assessment could be increasing their focus on defining and correcting deviations from their own norms and rules. Like a big game that we are to inevitably play, soft tyrannies could then seek better standardisation, (ICT-based) assessment or better economies of scale, more ‘normal’ students with fewer educators or resources, less time to reflect, less creativity, less humanly oriented management education.

To these implications, the emerging rules and the space proposed in this book could help us continue devising ways to counteract the negative effects of tyrannies’ emerging functions. One of them could be to bring creativity and education to selves rather than the other way around, to devise governing programmes and technologies that reflect this, and do so in more compassionate ways for us all.

As educators in management, we could also carve out opportunities for (self) reflection whilst we keep the more and digital/ICT-mediated efficiency-focused ones at bay (i.e. we could humurously or graciously say no to them!); we could continue critically identifying and denouncing their power relations and their effects. We could let or continue letting ourselves and students express their creativities in different ways. We could explore other ways to fail or promote failure safely and meaningfully in ourselves, our junior educator colleagues and our students (Córdoba-Pachón et al, 2020). We could also cultivate our solitary and individual ways of being.

Moreover, there could be another possibility to become playful/serious about what goes on. We could remain silent or say no with a smile. We could also with a smile, become uncreative. This at times would need to be done for our own sake or sanity. But always in mind that at some point our most precious selves would like to seek and find creativity, engaging with individual or collective roles to do so in our societies, as if we were living more fully our lives. We could always have time to stop and reflect before deciding what to do or be next.

And a last rule for the reader, extended from musical songs and what has been ruled before from the games’ narratives:
• ‘Nobody said rediscovering creativity was easy. But so is life, our lives. Always be grateful for both your creativity and our lives. Let us restart/refresh, let us keep going, let us do so for our own sakes and those of our students’.

It might not be easy to start following this and the other and emerging rules in this book to rediscover creativity, let alone to continue. We should at least try and restart, keep going … Creativity is on our side.

A BRIEF SUMMARY GUIDE TO PLAY ‘REDISCOVERING CREATIVITY IN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION’

Students: You are (re) entering an environment where you are attracted by an ideal of learning with others (including people like me as educators).

On arrival, make sure you understand what your institution(s) have been and where they want to go. Some of them might pay lip service to nurturing your creativity. Spend time selecting the best place where your different selves have a greater chance of flourishing, not only getting a good job at the end. Enjoy, be grateful, restart, laugh. Take and do not take things too seriously.

During your visits as a student: obey, do your homework, do not expect miracles without some good work. Instead, expect some possibilities to reflect on who you have been, who you are or want to be. They will occur in the least expected places though. Keep your eyes open.

Take some risks, not every time. If you think is a good idea, accept invitations to venture in alleyways; self-protect but also nurture your talents, imagination and curiosity.

Caution You need to protect your best selves from becoming too (un) ‘creative’ according to institutional views of what it means to teach creativity, teaching creatively or becoming creative. You can always exert your creativity in different, unexpected ways.

To deal with the above caution, make sure you find someone like a mentor or good friends. Remember that all of us could be trying to protect ourselves from becoming too (un) ‘creative’. The more playful she or your other friends are, the better so that you can all keep smiling whilst also being serious or even mystical about life. And also remember that there could be limits to playfulness.
And the pandemic? Let us try to imagine new forms of compassionate interaction. Let us try to see what and who is behind the screen.

Be grateful for your visit(s) and for the people who have made them possible. There will be great and hard times, they are all opportunities to learn about your different selves and those of other people.

And when you finish or decide to finish your studies, I wish you all the best. Remember, life is very precious. Stay safe and sane. Be grateful. Restart, refresh.

**Educators:** If you are still thinking about creativity or doing something about it, it means you cannot live without it, despite your and my best efforts.

You want to rediscover creativity? First, you need to be willing to bring some of your ‘old’ selves (individual, collective) and things you used to love back to the present.

Second, you need to find or create a space for your different selves and your creativities, whatever definitions you have of the latter. The space could be a course, a workshop, a meeting with students, a video conference. Soft tyrannies still offer some of these spaces. Keep your eyes open.

Third, in such a space or spaces, prepare learning activities with simple rules. We are to pretend we are not who we are supposed to be or do. That takes some courage and optimism, bit of bending of norms, improvisation and a smile.

Some examples of activities: together with students and creativity, we are going to explore the basics of a subject, we are going to recycle, we are going to visit an organisation. To those, make sure you know and teach the basics of your topics, and playfully/seriously challenge or go beyond some of the established conventions and boundaries about them.

Let us connect with others from inside or outside and encourage our students to do the same.

Students and others might be asking: and the pandemic? Let us try to imagine new forms of compassionate interaction that go beyond our screens. There will be times to be playful and serious. Let us keep our curiosity, compassion and assertiveness open and together.

**Educators:** Who said that we cannot break the silos of knowledge? Who said for example that we cannot talk about maths and music together, recycling and digital innovation, recycling process management and social enterprising?
Fourth. We are to improvise, humour, tease, smile, laugh or cry. We are to tell our students that we also fail, and we will try to correct mistakes as soon as possible. We are to let them know we are there for them as mentors if they think we can help them rediscover themselves. We are to act on failure, but not take all the blame for it. There are soft tyrannies behind whatever we do. Let other people play their part, in the good and not so good of management education.

Fifth. We are also to be serious or even uncreative in this game. Whether we are conscious of it or no, we are to be somehow mentors of our students. We are to receive feedback from all sides (good, bad) which we will find difficult to swallow. Let us take time to digest feedback. Let us sit on it whilst we decide what is best for all of us.

Sixth. Let’s not ignore these or the use of ICTs in education, their opening and constraining potential. Let us look at them beyond monitoring or assessment, and with an eye of (self) compassion and better understanding.

Seventh. We are to make sure we continue educating by engaging, not only instructing or assessing ourselves or others.

Let us play. Let us listen, let us observe, let us slow down, let us talk, let us keep going. Let us look for and support companions and people who cheer you up on the way. Let us make our own well-being a priority.

Let us continue playing. Let us be patient with ourselves and others. It might take some time and sweat to (re) create or defend ourselves and our creativities from soft tyrannies. But every small step, failure or achievement will be worth it. Let us celebrate creativity, let us be serious and grateful, always.

**Educators and Students:** Let us accept we cannot play this game as lonely figures. There are still possibilities to exert our freedom and become (more) creative within them.

**Other Game Participants:** This game cannot be played without your direct or indirect participation.

One only instruction please. Let us not take the other games you are playing (more students, larger cohorts, more assessment, more economies of scale, rearing successful children, world-famous research) too playfully/seriously please.
Otherwise, where are the fun, the pain and the joy of educating? Or living?

I know other educator colleagues, or you also might be asking: And the pandemic? My answer is, let us continue imagining and designing new forms of compassionate interaction. Our world has changed, and so could we. Let us be grateful, always.

AND AN EPILOGUE

On our honeymoon and shortly after our wedding, creativity and I toured around. We arrived in Colombia where things were open but formal: students there are like me, perfectionist-anxious, hardworking and open to learning. The Ricardos and the Luises.

On our way back to Europe, we stopped in Spain to work on different uses of plastic cups with students. We met great characters there and our host Teresa was wary of creativity being packaged in engineering and business education. We met some engineering students who said they would be happier by practising what they were learning.

We then went to France where they said creativity was a process, and that I should make my ideas more digestible and practical for audiences like them (information systems and corporate social responsibility educators). One of the attendees to our presentation kindly suggested I should investigate how institutional structures were a key influencer of creativity in individuals. I kindly replied they are funny settings where knowledge is continuously borrowed.

We then went to the North of England to visit old friends of mine (Amanda, Gerald). I was asked for specific definitions of creativity by Mike. Somehow, I was forced to concede that in order to become creative, one has first to know something about something, and that I could be rejected if sending my writing to creativity or systems thinking journals. I said to him that I wrote my books without an idea to convert them into journal articles. I just wrote them. I found a good voice. I was sweating when answering his questions. Then, I stopped playing and reflected, finding that there was another game I did not want to play.

Still, I sometimes have my doubts. Has this journey really been about creativity rediscovery or simply an ego-driven typewriting and surviving/politicking effort?
Another visit to a friend on our way home left me thinking that I already had a path to follow: to continue promoting creativity in my courses and to accept responsibility for the consequences, being more self-compassionate.

And since coming home I can hear creativity saying, with a calmed voice:

My dearest, welcome to married life. I chose you because of who you are when you write and when you despair or smile. I love your curiosity, when you write your notes and your books that neither I nor close family (or students!) understand.

And that is OK.

Count your blessings. Listen, pay attention and observe; mindfully meditate. Work on your perfectionism and anxieties. Be kind to yourself and others.

Let us be all safe.

And let us restart, let us keep going, always grateful!

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References

Córdoba-Pachón, J. R., Mapelli, J. R., Al Taji, F., & Donovan, D. (2020). Systemic creativities in sustainability and social innovation education. Systemic Practice and Action Research, forthcoming. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-020-09530-z, accessed July 2020.

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