

CREATIVITY THROUGH THE EYES OF FIRST YEAR MARKETING STUDENTS - RESULTS OF A PRIMARY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

In our higher education institution, the Budapest College of Communication, Business and Arts, we have introduced an experimental creative thinking training programme spanning two days. The programme precedes all other subjects – as a matter of fact, this is the students' first contact point with the institution. In the first part of the course we examine how newly accepted students of the bachelor programme in commerce and marketing approach creativity, what they consider the most creative thing, and who is the most creative personality in their opinion. We also ask when was the last time they had a creative idea, and what their motivation was behind it. As we evaluate the results of the survey, we also touch upon the extent how student opinions about creativity reflect the statements of the bibliography.

KEYWORDS

Creativity, creative idea, training, marketing, commerce

INTRODUCTION

In our age, when business competition becomes more and more intense, the key to enterprises' success is the invention and marketing of original novelties, therefore creative thinking plays an increasingly significant role. Employers expect creativity from graduates of higher education, and it is also an extremely important factor in the success of marketing activities.

Therefore we have introduced a two-day training programme developing creative thinking for students newly accepted to our institution's bachelor programme in commerce and marketing, which precedes all the other subjects of these students, thus also serving as their first contact point with the institution.

The aim and content of the training programme

In the first part of the course we survey our students' views on creativity, find out what they regard as the most creative thing, and who they consider the most creative personalities. We also ask when was the last time they had a creative idea, and what their motivation was behind it.

After the completion of the survey students are provided various creative thinking tasks in order to acquire practice. The tasks are based on marketing and advertising: they design a car for women, prepare a poster advertising washing powder, or write copy for a specific television commercial.

During the two-day course students make photos and videos, and document their ideas and the atmosphere. They also prepare a summary presentation in the format of a mini-presentation or a video clip. Of course we also ask students about their satisfaction at the end of the course – that is, how they have felt during the programme and more importantly: how

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creative their self-image was before the training session, and to what extent their creativity increased by completing the course.

The essence and role of creativity

The meaning of the word create is to originate or establish something. Christian believers attribute the creation of the world to God; writers and artists create pieces of art that have not existed before; scientists set up new conceptual models and methods. In this sense creativity is the ability to procreate, that is, the individuals' ability to bring something into existence – independently of the character, content or usefulness of the novelty.

The literature of creativity covers a wide field ranging from the psychological background of creativity, the relevant areas of technical and business studies and philosophical-ethical aspects to social and economic usability. In order to create the theoretical foundation of our research we selected publications by renowned authors, which discuss the notion, content, aim and role of creativity, also providing insight into the driving forces and process of creation.

One of the key areas of international creativity research is the examination of the factors, conditions, steps and effects of creative thinking. It is the prerequisite of all instances of creation to detach ourselves from the usual in our minds as we can only work out new solutions afterwards. Creation begins with thought.

The question arises to what extent creativity may be considered an inborn talent, and what one can do in order to develop it. Edward de Bono, the guru of creativity, one of the most referred to authors states that creativity may be studied and developed by sharpening the creative mind, and offers several exercises for that purpose. According to the author first of all we must come out of our deeply rooted thinking schemes in order to free our creativity, because these are the sources of our prejudices hindering creativity. As stated by his model, the hats of various colours are different thinking paradigms, which facilitate common thinking, the acceptance of different opinions, and cooperation between people. Hats represent the association between our headgear and thinking. Using the six hats of various colours means that we are not limited by arguments if we focus on a single aspect of creation at a time:

- The white hat focuses on the gathering and selection of all necessary information
- The red hat gives way to creative anticipations, emotions and intuitions
- While using the yellow hat we are looking for advantages and values related to the topic
- The black hat is an effort to block difficulties and risks regarding the topic
- The green hat phase finally leads us to re-think options and find out the best ideas and solutions
- The blue hat provides the framework, and controls the whole process [1]

The phases of thinking symbolized by each hat represent the reasonable order of innovation or problem solving. The right and left hemisphere thinking of creative persons alternates between each phase, resulting in a significant increase in the effectiveness of thinking.

Creative thinking and the conscious use of creative solutions play a very important role in the fields of marketing and commerce, related to our students' choice of study field.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The Creative Thinking in Marketing Workshops for first year college students of commerce and marketing were organized in September 2012. In the morning session of the first day of the two-day workshop we mostly used open questions to gather information about our students' views on creativity, the people they respect as creative personalities, and the motivational and content experiences based on their own creativity. The current study focuses on this point.

Students received six questions on creativity altogether:

- What is a creative idea in your opinion? How would you define it?
- What is the most creative thing on Earth?
- Who was, or is the most creative person?
- When was the last time you had a creative idea?
- What was that?
- What motivates you to be creative?

Five questions out of six were formulated as open questions, thus students could answer them in any length, in a form suitable for content analysis. This way, in the spirit of the literature used, we strove to exclude the limitations of mind, that is, prejudices. The sixth question, inquiring about the date when the latest own creative idea occurred, helped interviewees to precisely recall one of their important creative experiences, and rethink the motivations stimulating their creativity. In our opinion our positive intentions were reflected in the answers. Several answers demonstrated a colourful way of thinking and rich inner experience.

The sample consisted of full-time and distance learning students, and 137 of them filled in the questionnaire. Regarding content analysis the answers given to the questions were so diverse that we used the full sample to examine the frequency distribution of answers in the first round. The research provides an opportunity for comparative analysis later on, enabling us to examine the difference between full-time and distance learning students' attitudes in view of their age group, personal workplace and life experiences.

The number of people answering each question showed some variation, and it could have been primarily related to the unusual and novel character of some questions. Therefore we have always indicated the number of persons during the assessment of results, and we have also explained results in percentages in order to provide comparability.

Answers were processed using methods of content analysis and the numerical assessment of frequency distribution. As five questions out of six were open questions, we recorded answers in a proper format, that is, Excel data tables. The 137 lines of the data table include each questionnaire, its columns include the six questions and the answers given to them, and the content codes of processing appear in the spans between the columns.

In the first step of processing we reviewed and categorized the answers to each question. Then we defined the content codes necessary for the evaluation of numerical frequency by setting up a logical order of the answer categories we defined for each question. Content codes were formulated in a way that we created categories including answers verbally identical or interpreted similarly, and their decimal serial number became the code. In order to define frequencies clearly we could only assign all answers to a single code; this also justified the importance of reasoned content analysis. Once content codes were assigned, Excel has gathered the frequency of mentions for each type of answer, then we calculated their percentage ratio and drew diagrams in order to demonstrate the results. While assessing results, we also tried to derive conclusions regarding the students' variety of ideas from the content of each answer, in addition to the mere interpretation of numerical data.

The size of the sample defined by the framework of education must also be mentioned among the limitations of the research. Another barrier was the fact that in order to provide information that could be processed numerically, each answer was connected to only one code, while many answers without a length limit were related to more than one category. We could overcome this problem with a verbal assessment of results.

THE RESULTS AND THEIR ASSESSMENT

What is the essence of a creative idea?

First of all, in this question we were curious to know what the participants of the programme with no prior knowledge of the field think about creativity or creative ideas. 135 people answered this question. The frequency distribution of answer categories is demonstrated by Table 1. The results prove that most of the interviewees highlighted that a creative idea is „new, original, different, unique” (37,8%). According to the second most frequent opinion a creative idea is not just for the inventor himself/herself, but also „affects others”, that is, it „touches them, they find it witty” (20,7%). An almost equal number of students’ responses emphasized that a creative idea „initiates something, something great is born out of it” (9,6%), or it is „colourful, humorous, funny, comical, spices something up” (8,9%).

Table 1. What is a creative idea in your opinion? How would you define it? (n=135)

Type of answer based on content analysis	Persons	In %
New, original, different, unique	51	37,8%
Affects others - touches them, they find it witty	28	20,7%
Initiates something, something great is born out of it	13	9,6%
Colourful, humorous, funny, comical, spices something up	12	8,9%
Other	31	23,0%
Total	135	100,0%

Source: „Kreatív gondolkodás a marketingben” (Creative Thinking in Marketing) workshop, 2011

The notion that creativity is the initiator of something is in line with the views of Jack Foster. The author refers to a definition by James Webb Young, which says that „An idea is nothing more or less than a new combination of old elements.” [2] Foster also adds that new ideas are the motivation behind all changes, therefore in his book he offers a five-step method and ten simple techniques to stimulate brainstorming [2].

György Kaszás mentions a wide range of surveys to point out that as creativity is the strongest in childhood, and it decreases dramatically as experiences are gathered, only a systematic, proper way of thinking that is free from prejudices may lead to success. His comprehensive methodological book sums up literature also applied in practice successfully, and offers 12 creative methods to stimulate creative problem solving. [3]

An acknowledged researcher of the topic, Michael Michalko, regards paradox thinking relying on the subconscious as the primary condition of creation, that is, to regain our natural creativity stemming from our childhood, also enabling us to avoid prejudices that are products of acquired analytical, logical thinking, limiting our creative thoughts and concealing important contexts. His book illustrates the possibilities of creativity development with well structured, multi-step exercises and examples [4].

Fredrik Härén discusses the role that motivation plays in the creative process in an interesting way – with the aim of facilitating his readers’ creative motivation. He provides instructions on how people must (and how they can) bring forward great ideas, and recommends exercises inspiring people to wake up the creativity dormant in them [5].

The results make it clear that the second most mentioned character of a creative idea (following originality and uniqueness) is that it „affects others”. Interviewees of this opinion had a clear vision of the social usefulness of creativity, in accordance with the authors’ statement

that creative ideas are the driving force of progress, and this is the interest of both humans and the society.

This student attitude is especially reflected in the various verbal answers given in other categories, whose recoding might have increased the % share of the second strongest category. The longer and more concrete answers given by students include several examples that are in line with statements on novelty, uniqueness, specialty, seen in the literature of creativity. The most appropriate answers explaining the essence of a creative idea include: „Creativity is characterized by the best and most colourful idea or thought raised in ourselves. In any case, it should be unique, something we have not seen before.” „An idea which is different from the others in the sense that it has more in itself... with a chance to evolve and create.” „Something which is extraordinary and attempts to create or solve things to make it memorable.”

What is the most creative thing on Earth?

The majority of interviewees connected creative things with some creation (that is, piece of art). Several of them highlighted technical innovations, especially the Internet. The third major group consisted of people stating that the most creative thing is human, human fantasy, or the everyday. Quite many interviewees answered that it is advertising, but maybe the reason of their answers was that they were all students of commerce and marketing, obviously possessing such interests.

The proportion of answers can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. What is the most creative thing on Earth? (n=134)

Type of answer based on content analysis	Persons	In %
Art, creation	38	28,4%
Technology, Internet, inventions	31	23,1%
Humans, fantasy, everyday	28	20,9%
Advertising	9	6,7%
Nature	5	3,7%
Systems, arrangement, processes	4	3,0%
Other	19	14,2%
Total	134	100,0%

Source: „Kreatív gondolkodás a marketingben” (Creative Thinking in Marketing) workshop, 2011

The ratio of answers belonging to the category „Other” is also significant here, and examples such as Disneyland, LEGO, the Rubik Cube or certain recycled products were highlighted. The most creative things mentioned by several students included notions related to novelty, that is, opportunities that can be utilized in commerce and marketing, and social spirit. Out of all the unique and appropriate answers given by students it is worth to quote the following ones verbatim: „Character, creation, humanity – all creativity arises from these. A most average person is also creative if the observer is able to notice him/her.” „A colourful programme organized from a spontaneous idea, welding together members of a community.” „Advertising. Its several types reach people in several different ways. And marketing also, as selling ourselves is an everyday thing”.

Who was, or who is the most creative person?

Another interesting fact we wanted to know was who young people newly accepted to higher education consider the most creative person today or ever. The categorization of answers was the most difficult in the case of this question. On one hand, several interviewees wrote no answer to this question; on the other hand, there was no category rising above the others. In the first round of the evaluation artists, designers and copy writers had the most frequent mentions and we were happy to see that family members were ranked second. This demonstrates that college students realize creativity in their everyday lives, too. The third major group is advertisement creators. This can be attributed to the fact mentioned before, that is, students taking part in the survey were students of commerce and marketing majors, with an interest in this field. It might be worthwhile to test another sample in order to see what results it provides.

Regarding this question we could see an especially high percentage of answers classified as „Other” – 70 answers out of 129 belonged to this category. This was partially attributed to the fact that each answer could be given only one category code in order to ensure the numerical evaluation of results. The other reason was that a great number of interviewees mentioned one or more persons by name, but these persons belonged to different categories. As the ratio of the category „Other” was very high, we had to reassess the result received from the processing the categorized answers. The number of answers that could be clearly categorized was 59, 56 other mentions by name were classified as „Other”, and 14 people gave general answers. 18 of the answers by name included more than one concrete person and 38 answers mentioned only one person. 8 questionnaires out of 137 did not answer this question, therefore we could evaluate only 129 answers. The result received from summarizing categorized answers and ones including mentions by name is represented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Who was, or who is the most creative person? (n=129)

Type of answer based on content analysis and mentions of names	Frequency of mentions	In %
Artist, writer, director	42	32,6%
Businessman, Internet guru and his work	25	19,4%
Family member, friend, personal acquaintance	17	13,2%
Scientist, designer, fashion designer	14	10,9%
People with a historic footprint, the writers of the Bible, pyramid builders	8	6,2%
Advertising professional	7	5,4%
Other	16	12,4%
Total	129	100,0%

Source: „Kreatív gondolkodás a marketingben” (Creative Thinking in Marketing) workshop, 2011

Among others, the answers of the category „Other” included „all people are creative in a different way” and „I want to be the most creative person”. They also featured well-known personalities, with five of them receiving more than one vote.

It is interesting that answers also mentioned God, Jesus, Pope John Paul II, renowned writers, composers, artists and designers. One of our students naming Lady Gaga as the most creative personality referred to her this way: „Lady Gaga. In a comparatively short time, she created

an own world that no one has ever dared before, or did not even meant to. And I do not mean music, but visuals and the whole phenomenon itself.”

The most mentions by name (13) increased the frequency of mentions for the category „Artist”. The following people appeared here: Andy Warhol, Johnny Depp, Lady Gaga, Leonardo da Vinci, Monty Python, Marilyn Manson, Pink Floyd, Salvador Dali, András Wahorn, Woody Allen. Students mentioned the names of Kirkegaard, Kurt Vonnegut, Shakespeare and Dezső Tandori among writers, philosophers.

The category of scientists includes Graham Bell, János Neumann és Albert Szent-Györgyi. Darren Aronofsky, Guy Ritchie, Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg and Tim Burton were mentioned among directors. Beethoven and Wagner were mentioned among composers.

The names of Pope John Paul II and István Széchenyi appeared on the list of historical personalities. In the category of businessmen Steve Jobs got six mentions, while Mark Zuckerberg and Facebook got five. Bill Gates and Einstein had to put up with three mentions each.

Based on the frequency of mentions the category „Artist, writer, director” is the first, followed by businessmen and Internet gurus including the votes for Facebook. Personal acquaintances and family members form the category in the third place according to the frequency of mentions, but a positive aspect is that the category „Other” was significantly narrowed as a result the more unequivocal assignment of codes.

When was the last time you had a creative idea?

This question was unique in the sense that we set up answer categories defined previously. According to these most interviewees had a creative idea yesterday (38,8%) or during the previous week (25,5%). 14,7% had such an idea last month, and 17,0% had one that morning. Luckily people who had their latest creative idea last year formed the smallest group (3,9%).

What was that creative idea of yours?

The categorization of answers was not easy here, either. The creative ideas mentioned by students were mostly related to everyday problem solving. This was followed by a piece of art, or art activity. 14.3 % of students named some sort of organization activity as their own creative idea. A great number of answers mentioned creative ideas leading to business achievements or success – this was even more characteristic of distance learning students. Finally, creative ideas related to success in society or family got more than 10% of the mentions. The results are represented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. What was that latest creative idea of yours? (n=126)

Type of answer based on content analysis	Persons	In %
Everyday problem solving	41	32,5%
Creation, art	26	20,6%
Organization	18	14,3%
Business achievements, success	16	12,7%
Success in society or family	13	10,3%
Technical creation, Internet blog	6	4,8%
Other	6	4,8%
Total	126	100,0%

Source: „Kreatív gondolkodás a marketingben” (Creative Thinking in Marketing) workshop, 2011

What motivates you to be creative?

Students of the commerce and marketing majors newly commencing their studies are inspired to be creative by success. The categorization of answers is represented in Table 5 below.

Table 5. What motivates your creativity? (n=135)

Type of answer based on content analysis	Persons	In %
Environment, success	32	23,6%
Myself, achievements	29	21,5%
The aim, the problem, the motivating reason	29	21,5%
The sense of achievement	19	14,1%
Boredom	5	3,7%
Other	21	15,6%
Total	135	100,0%

Source: „Kreatív gondolkodás a marketingben” (Creative Thinking in Marketing) workshop, 2011

From the table we can see that the motivation of students originates from their external environment or from themselves. It is also important to have an aim or problem, that is, a reason for motivation. It is interesting to see that boredom also stimulates a few interviewees in order to unleash their creativity. In the category „Other” the notions of uniqueness, learning, meditation, independence, the wish to want, challenges, competitive spirit, acknowledgement, future prospects and the search for new experiences also deserve special attention.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of our survey was to find out our students’ attitudes towards creativity. Our conclusions support the students’ positive thinking, need for creativity, and respect for creation.

According to the majority of interviewees the essence of creative ideas can be found in novelty and uniqueness. However, they also associate it with the influence of the product of creative thinking also engaging others, and the social usefulness of creative ideas. This suggests that creative ideas „initiates something; something great is born out of it”.

As the answers of interviewees suggested, the most creative things were related to pieces of art, or technical inventions, with special attention to the Internet. Human fantasy was also named, but with a much lesser percentage. Putting advertising on the list of the most creative things can be partially attributed to the orientation represented by students of commerce and marketing towards this field.

The category of artists, writers and directors have the highest rank among the various notions of the most creative persons, which reflects the high social prestige of these categories. The category of businessmen, ranked second, is acknowledged by students mostly because of its income conditions and the attraction of autonomous creative activity.

The content of creative ideas was greatly defined by the fact that the creative solutions of everyday life may play a significant role in the harmony of studies, work and family life, while creative ideas leading to business achievements and success were more related to the workplace expectations of distance learning students. Success in the community and family is – even if less significant – also and important point for distance learning students.

Answers on the motivation of creativity clearly demonstrate that the three most frequent notions of motivation are related to the acknowledgement of the environment, the aim and autonomous internal motivation.

The results of the survey support the efforts of our institution to continue the programme and also elaborate the contents of the practice sessions used for the two-day creativity workshop.

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