Measuring Creativity in Organizations

The literature on creativity in organizations—initially defined as the generation of novel and useful outputs (e.g., ideas, products, processes)—has boomed in the last 40 years. However, creativity is a subjective concept, often hard to define with precision and to pinpoint. The large majority of creativity studies in the organizational behavior and organizational psychology literature has measured creativity in one of three ways: (1) with the evaluation by external (expert) raters of some productions (e.g., drawings, ideas, …) made by focal subjects along specific or general criteria (see the consensual assessment technique pioneered by Amabile, 1982; or the assessment of idea generation experimental tasks through the dimensions of fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration proposed by Torrance, 1965); (2) through survey ratings (self-reported in some cases, but nowadays mostly rated by the employee's supervisor or peers, using validated scales such as those developed by George & Zhou, 2001 or by Oldham & Cummings, 1996); or (3) through experimental tasks, such as the Remote Associates Test (Mednick, 1968; see Huang, Gino & Galinsky, 2015 for a recent example) and the Duncker candle problem (Duncker, 1945; see Gino & Ariely, 2012 for a recent example).

All these methods to assess creativity have shortcomings, especially when measuring creativity in a workplace context. Regarding the first method, asking participants to generate new ideas or to produce drawings (and other outputs) is a good way to measure their creativity, as the reliance on external (expert) raters gives a somewhat more objective evaluation, yet these productions are often unrelated to workplace and business activities. Concerning the second method, while supervisors and peers are in a good position to rate a worker's creative performance, a single rating by an external agent is not always reliable, especially are supervisors (and peers) might often be knowledgeable only about the output of a worker or a team, but not of the process that leads to such output. Finally, measures such as the RAT and the candle problem have the benefit of being more objective, but they are not direct measures of creativity, rather they measure related concepts such as divergent thinking and cognitive flexibility; while these constructs are related to creativity, they cannot be associated to creativity unquestionably, especially as the tests are often unrelated to workplace activities.

Given the shortcomings of existing measures of creativity, the organizational literature would greatly benefit from the development of a new measure that captures the benefits of all the existing measures, such as the objectivity of test results and the workplace-domain relevance of supervisor ratings. Students interested in writing a master thesis on this topic could focus on an in-depth analysis of existing creativity measures and propose new measures that tackle such shortcomings.