Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this paper is threefold: a) to provide a framework for a better understanding of the relationship between creativity, knowledge creation/sharing, and organizational change; b) to define the key elements at individual and collective level that may contribute to the development of organizational spaces that favour a climate for creativity and knowledge creation as precondition of “emergent change”; and c) to contribute to the development of a multi-perspective approach to creativity and knowledge creation in 21st century organizations.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper begins with a review of the emergent non-linear change theories and the change-related processes of knowledge creation. It uses the metaphor of dance to explore the relationship between emergent change and knowledge creation and sharing, and identifies the main factors that may impact this relationship.

Findings – Our framework suggests that the identified factors act as precondition to emergent change. These factors are critical for change management in organizations operating in today’s chaotic environment.

Practical implications – Our framework suggests that the identified factors act as precondition to emergent change. These factors are critical for change management in modern organizations. We propose guidelines and provide examples how to manage work spaces and facilitate the organizational dance.

Originality/value – Even though the academic literature already offers some evidence about the role and the centrality of spontaneous change, this paper provides a systematic, multi-perspective approach to the understanding and management of social, cultural and individual characteristics of bottom-up organizational change, focusing on its fundamental aspects of creativity and knowledge creation.

Keywords Knowledge creation, Creativity, Organizational flexibility, Complexity, Emergent change, Organizational space

Paper type Conceptual paper
Introduction

“And if it be my Alpha and Omega that everything heavy shall become light, everybody a dancer, and every spirit a bird: and verily, that is my Alpha and Omega!-“

Friedrich Nietzsche

Thus spoke Zarathustra

This paper proposes a conceptual framework for driving change in organizations operating in today's chaotic environment, based on emerging patterns of behaviours. The study is focused on the bottom-up and emergent side of organizational change. All days in every organization people discover new ideas and new ways to solve problems, do things, collaborate, communicate, negotiate, etc. and sometimes these new ways are distributed through the internal borders of the organization and transformed into shared routines and practices. This kind of organizational change is set in the context of knowledge creation and sharing within the so-called ba (space of knowledge). It is particularly critical for organizations operating in the turbulent scenarios of the 21st century that need to enhance their flexibility in order to become more adaptable to external changes and proactive toward technological and market transformations.

We explore the hidden dimensions of this process: creativity, emotional climate, intuition and organizational diversity, highlighting the critical role of organizational space; and argue that the metaphor of dance is apt to describe the complex and paradoxical nature of emergent organizational change.

The concept of emergent change has been associated with improvisation so far (Eisenhardt and Tabrizi, 1995). Similarly, Orlikowski and Hofman (1997) proposed an improvisational model for managing technological change, based on the results of a case study. To explain the ratio of this model, the authors (ib., p. 4 and 5) adopted the metaphor of jazz band that was proposed by Weick (1989). The jazz metaphor was supported by many others (Barrett, 1998, Hatch, 1997, 1999, Eisenhardt 1997) to explain how improvisation may affect bottom-up organizational learning, organizational structure and intuitive decision making.

The main difference between the metaphor of jazz band and that of dance is, in our opinion, that the latter provides for integration of organizational routines and practices that are a critical element of self-organizing processes, typical for complex organizational systems. We argue that the metaphor of dance describes effectively the dynamics of emergent change observable in complex organizations coping with a turbulent environment.
We do not see the two metaphors in contrast. On the contrary, we argue that they may be viewed as two sides of the same coin and could be integrated to offer a deeper view of 21st century organizations. The jazz metaphor captures the role played by free exploration, improvisation and self-organization. Every time a group needs to solve new problems, or to cope with the unexpected, they have to explore, improvise and create collectively new strategies and tools. The dance metaphor, on the other hand, describes the processes of adaptation and continuous improvement that are enacted every day in many organizations, to fit standardized procedures and shared routines into organizational variety and emergent change. The implicit corollary of this dynamic dis-equilibrium of complex systems is that organizations and their environment are supposed to evolve faster than policies, processes and procedures. This positions a complex organization right in the middle between coherence and differentiation. Such organizations need to balance creativity and routines, fluidity and definition, diversity and identity (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010), otherwise they may increase their rate of inner “schizophrenia”.

But what kind of dance are we referring to? We assume that in many organizations, with a varying degree of flexibility, the dance is neither merely pre-fixed steps, like in classic ballet, nor simply improvisation, like in tribal dance, but a precarious balance of both.

Since modern organizations are supposed to be a mixture of patterned behaviors and day-by-day emerging change, they need to reconcile routines with spontaneous and unplanned change, which involves horizontal processes of knowledge creation (Nonaka and Toyama, 2003). People discover and try every day new ways to adapt prescribed procedures and practices to an environment characterized by continuous evolution. In fact, they interpret endlessly a choreography, composed of a set of goals, processes and procedures established by the management, in order to dance harmoniously with other organizational members and act the plot of organizational routines. This choreography is based on a mix of structure and improvisation, management and autonomy, heteronymous and self-organizing processes. People ignore what their colleagues are doing in the partially de-constructed constellation of bureaucratic structures, teams and autonomous productive units that form the contemporary organizational reality: we could say, citing the well-known song by Bruce Springsteen that they are “dancing in the dark”.

As we know, all dancers need to adapt the choreography to their style and abilities, to specific conditions of the stage and to different characteristics of the market that changes continuously, also because technologies and products may vary dramatically across time and space. As a result, they are supposed to reinterpret the choreography on a daily basis. And sometimes one dancer creates new steps, sometimes a group of dancers create a new partition of the choreography. The dance thus becomes a mix of planning and improvisation that depends on the people but also...
on the place where it is performed. Until the choreographer (the organization) decides to change the
script and the dancers need to learn and reinterpret a new choreography. Then a new adaptation and
change process may occur. Paraphrasing Nietzsche (1999), we can assume that dancers are created
by the dance but, at the same time, are creators of the dance. We can thus achieve a better
choreography, and therefore a better dance, if the dancers are allowed to participate in the rendition
of the choreography: if people are involved and may contribute to the project of change.

The following paragraphs illustrate the key concepts of emergent change that may enhance
change-related creativity and knowledge creation in 21st century organizations. Particularly we
examine: a) the concept of “chaordic” emergent change; b) the main characteristics of
organizational flexibility; c) the dynamic structure of (social) organizational space and its
relationship with organizational change; d) the critical role played by creativity and knowledge
creation as enablers of emergent change; e) the main affective and cultural catalysts that might
foster emergent change: intuition, emotional and organizational climate and organizational diversity
and f) practical implications of the proposed approach.

Emergent organizational change

The literature about organizational change provides a wide range of theories and approaches that
vary from the “Prussian” philosophy of “business process reengineering” (see Willmott, 1994) to
the radical constructivism (see Weick, 1995). This paper focuses on a specific kind of change, based
on emergent phenomena which (according to the theories illustrated above) are critical for increased
flexibility in organizations with a resulting dynamics that can be compared to a dance.

Modern organizations could be described as complex systems (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003;
Thiétart and Forgues, 1995; Tsoukas, 1998; Stacey, 1996), in continuous search of equilibrium
between order and chaos. Therefore, according to complexity theory, they function in a non-linear
fashion through interdependence, self-organizing processes, continuous change, paradoxes and
ambiguity (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003; Thiétart and Forgues, 1995). Complex organizational systems are
characterized by the so-called “emergence” (Dooley, 2002), e.g. by “the arising of new, unexpected
structures, patterns, properties, or processes in a self-organizing system” (Goldstein in Zimmerman

Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (2001, p. 704 - 705) adopted the concept of “continuous
change” to describe an ongoing, evolving and cumulative process of change, based on the
emergence of "a new pattern of organizing in the absence of explicit a priori intentions"
(Orlikowski, 1996, p. 65). According to the authors, such continuous stream of minor adjustments
encourages improvisation, continuous adaptation and learning. This process occurs also when
change is not totally spontaneous but is driven by specific interventions of change management. According to Orlikowski (1996), change programs "work" only if they are fine-tuned and adjusted by organizational actors in specific contexts. Tsoukas and Chia (2002, p.568 - 569) defined this kind of change as “organizational becoming” that, we propose, could be likened to a newly emerging dance choreography.

The theoretical perspectives presented above may be integrated, in our opinion, adopting the chaordic change theory. Brown and Eisenhardt (1997) found that most successful innovative companies operating in the high-tech sector adopt chaordic organizational models, in order to facilitate innovation and continuous change. As they pointed out, this focus requires not only improvisation but also “rhythmically choreographed transitions” (ib., p. 33). We argue that this perspective could be applied also to other types of organizations that need to cope with a very turbulent and hypercompetitive scenario, which is consistent with our metaphor of dance. “Chaordic change” may arise from chaos as a result of the inter-play between managerial strategies and spontaneous change (Burnes, 2005; Fitzgerald and van Eijnatten, 2002; Hock, 1999; van Eijnatten and Putnik, 2004). Change is not only the product of engineered effort, nor solely the result of completely free improvisation of organizational players, but a complex process that happens somewhere on the edge between order and chaos. The dis-equilibrium point can also vary across time and (organizational) space.

Durant (2002) adopted the Jungian concept of “synchronicity” to describe a new kind of unintentional change stemming from a seemingly coincidental convergence of two events. According to the implicate order theory (Bohm, 1983), everything is interconnected on quantum level which creates interdependence of all components of a natural system. This concept could be applied as analogy to the organizational systems (Bohm in Jaworski, 1998, p. 78-83). In the metaphor of dance, goal alignment creates an intuitive connection among organizational players: through dance they sense the flow without being sidelined by rational constraints. As a result, when synchronicity occurs in the organizational setting, it leads often to a (rationally) paradoxical and undriven change that may bridge the boundary between inner self (including at the organizational level) and outer world (the environment), and therefore could facilitate creative, meaningful changes in products and processes.

The relationship between emergent change and organizational flexibility

According to Ashby’s (1964) Law of Requisite Variety, modern organizations need to increase the level of internal variety to cope with the complexity of environment. Moreover, the pace of environmental change requires the ability to live with, even thrive on ambiguity and uncertainty in
order to achieve more organizational flexibility and adaptability, which are typical characteristics of interacting dancers.

It is argued that organizations need to become more flexible to face environmental uncertainty and unpredictability. According to Aaker and Mascarenhas (1984, p. 74), organizational flexibility is: “the ability of the organization to adapt to substantial uncertain and fast-occurring (relative to the required reaction time) environmental changes that have a meaningful impact on the organization’s performance”. Volberda (1996) views organizational flexibility as a response to hyper-competition, which increases management adaptability.

Volberda (ib.) noticed also the paradoxical nature of organizational flexibility: it requires an ongoing compromise between conservation and change, planning and discovery of new opportunities and solutions. Organizational flexibility could be reached following different paths, it needs a healthy balance between external changes, internal capabilities required to face the new challenge and the responsiveness of the firm. According to De Leeuw and Volberda (1996), organizational flexibility requires both adaptability and dominance because it is important to maintain the system’s identity but at the same time it is necessary to assure that it evolves with the external environment. As Schreyögg and Sydow (2010, p. 1253) pointed out: “Reacting in a turbulent environment to any new event by improvisation and without any pattern implies giving up the distinction between inside and outside.” Organizations need to build internal schemes for understanding and interpreting the complex world in which they operate (Luhmann, 1992; Weick, 1995). Schreyögg and Sydow (ib.) concluded that the maintenance of the organizational system, its design and boundaries is a continuous and precarious activity: the “interpretation” of the environment is an ongoing process that requires continuous adjustments (see also Madsen et al., 2006). Using the classification proposed by De Leeuw and Volberda (1996) (to make a distinction between two ideal types of flexible organizations), we argue that controlled systems, based on managerial control, cannot predict what is predictable, i.e. the continuous change, and therefore need to adjust strategies, organizational design and internal capabilities continuously to external change. On the other hand, autonomous systems (ib.), based on organizational autopoiesis, may not adapt completely to external change because the velocity and the depth of internal change is limited by the necessity to save identity and some key internal schemata. The pace of external change is often too fast for the organization so organizational strategy, design and capabilities tend to lag behind. Nevertheless, emergent change is the key process that allows the continuous adjustment of an organization. Using the dance metaphor, one could say that organizational choreographies, differently from the classical ballet, co-evolve together with the dancers and the audience.
Whether its boundaries are considered stable or unstable, rigid or blurred (De Leeuw and Volberda, 1996), the liminal sub-systems of the organization, its bottom line, supply chain, sales network, etc. have to adapt strategies and routines continuously to feedback from the outer environment. Only if the organization is able to get and give value to the internal spontaneous process of change, it will be able to show a certain level of autonomy from external pressures and become really adaptive, coping proactively with external change and managing the environmental complexity. We argue that the metaphor of dance could help explain the dynamics making organizations more flexible and adaptable. As Volberda and Lewin (2003, p. 2126) concluded, organizations need to manage their inner rate of change to equal or exceed relevant external change (McKelvey, 2003), assure the right level of internal requisite variety, improve self-organizing processes (Anderson, 1999; Nonaka, 1988) and synchronize the complementary activities of exploration and exploitation (Lewin and Volberda, 1999).

Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992) suggest that the transition from organizational stability to flexibility implies the shift from structural to psychological boundaries. According to the authors (ib.), leaders should manage the authority boundary, listening, accepting constructive criticism and stimulating staff to challenge their opinion. They also need to manage task boundaries by motivating specialized workers to be informed and interested in others’ tasks in order to cultivate the sense of a common mission, one of the challenges in flexible work environments. Reconciling individual and collective interests, finding win-win solutions to balance personal, group and organizational goals, can serve as a means to handle political boundaries while the identity boundary could be built by a bridge between multiple identities (Schoemaker, 2003), that are typical of modern organizations, and a common framework that makes people feel to be part of a whole and share a sense of “we-ness”. This creates a connection among different professional, group, network and sub-unit, geographical identities (Bouchikhi and Kimberly, 2003) and cultures (Martin, 1992, 2004; Maimone and Mormino, 2012) that compose the modern organizational landscape. We argue that managers need to learn how to coordinate their effort, in order to perform in a synergistic way. Using our metaphor, managers have to teach workers how to manage their freedom of interpreting the dance, producing harmony from diversity. To show them how to be good dancers, managers as well should perform their ballet in harmony with their peers and superiors. Otherwise each manager could potentially create his own dystonic choreography.

Moreover, as Volberda and Lewin (2003) propose, to foster their flexibility, organizations need to develop a leadership style based on delegation and people’s commitment at every level of the structure. According to the authors (ib.), managers should become the stewards of the change process and focus their managerial role on value management, creating the necessary framework to
guide and enabling decision making on every level of the hierarchy. This approach (ib., p. 2127) “implies that management commits to guiding the evolution of behaviours that emerge in the course of interaction of independent agents and invests in implementing process controls whenever possible instead of relying on outcome controls”. We argue that to improve their level of flexibility and adaptability, organizations need to facilitate the shift from the management of behaviours that emerge in the course of interaction of “independent” agents, to the management of behaviours that emerge in the course of interaction of “inter-dependent” agents. For this reason, adopting again our metaphor of dance, organizational agents need to learn to dance together, in order to find a balance between chaos and order, identity and fragmentation. Therefore, we assume that managers need to pay attention not only to individual behaviour, but also to behaviour at inter-individual, group, personal network, unit and branch level. If the dance is only individual, it could produce misalignments that favour organizational fragmentation and schizophrenia. This might affect unfavourably the balance between adaptation and maintenance of identity traits, which is critical for organizational survival in the long run.

The concept of emerging change is even more central in the debate about new hyper-flexible organizational forms (see Dijksterhuis et al., 1999). As we know, hyper-flexible organizations are composed of semi-autonomous business units based on project teams and inter-organizational networks (Schoemaker, 2003). This kind of organizations is conceived to facilitate a quick and proactive response to environmental turbulence and a strong focus on market and customer needs, therefore they are “built for” hyper-flexibility (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2010). Schoemaker (2003), among others, affirmed that flexible structures and networks operate in a state of continuous change: hyper-flexibility allows them to adapt to it at all organizational levels. We propose that the metaphor of dance could be also useful to describe the process of mutual adjustment and mindful interplay among organizational players, necessary to trigger and maintain this interaction.

What 21st century organizations need is to incentivize people’s autonomy and entrepreneurship (Goss, 2005). Autonomy allows people to adapt to change naturally, drawing on their strengths, and to handle complexity in a flexible way that adjusts to change as part and parcel of the process. As people/dancers become more autonomous, they are free to express their entrepreneurial spirit (ib.), and thus rely more on intuition. Hence adaptability becomes the flip side of organizational flexibility expressed in human behavior: an organization able to respond proactively to environmental turbulence needs proactive people. At the same time, organizational dance shall not be an individual undertaking. We argue that only a collective choreography that reconciles autonomy and coordination, assuring the necessary balance between differentiation and coherence, may facilitate a sustainable change.
Organizational space: the place where the emergent change begins

Complex organizational systems may be unlocked through the study of the ongoing process of structuring, e.g. the dynamic process of organizing (see Strati, 2000). Organizing is based on social agency, social interactions, recursive pattern of behaviours, e.g. social practices (see Gherardi, 2000) and therefore is the consequence of the dialectic relation between routines and change (Barley, 1986; Giddens, 1979, 1984; Moldoveanu and Bauer, 2004). According to van de Ven and Poole (1995), the dynamics is shaped by a continuous interaction of diverse internal and external players, instigating asynchronous change in different parts of the organization. In the language of dance: by enacting the organizational goal, the dancers are co-creating it through their intuitive interaction. Organizing is facilitated by a participative leadership style and a collaborative work environment, based on trust, active listening and knowledge sharing. Organizations should improve their communication system, in terms of strategies, policies, tools and communication spaces, and develop people’s communication skills, in order to catalyze organizing processes and provide a smart interface for the proactive management of complexity. It will also assure the necessary level of coordination and coherence of the organizational system.

Organizational space is a typical emergent phenomenon of organizational complexity, strictly related to the process of organizing. Its configuration changes organically in response to the ongoing enactment of relationships among all involved players/dancers, within and across the organization. Organizational space does not necessarily correspond to a physical space. It is rather a topological configuration produced by social interactions, an inter-subjective dimension that could transcend the limits of physical boundaries and organizational structures (Wai-chung Yeung, 2005, p. 219). In this sense, it is relational and discursively constructed “through actor-specific strategies and practice” (ib.). The concept of organizational spaces is derived from the theory of social space Lefebvre (1991). Space can be viewed as a product of social relations that affect and change the environment (Natter and Jones, 1997). One organization may produce several organizational spaces and ICT, especially Enterprise 2.0 collaboration tools, that extend the dominium of organizational spaces beyond the organizational boundaries (Maimone, 2007). If we admit that one organization may host multiple organizational spaces, then we can conclude that emergent change may lead different parts of an organization either to convergence or to divergence. In the former case, the change dynamics may become even stronger; in the latter case, the change patterns could facilitate the creation of organizational silos and the spreading of organizational short-cuts and conflicts. According to the model of chaordic change (Burnes, 2005; Fitzgerald and van Eijnatten, 2002; Hock, 1999; van Eijnatten and Putnik, 2004), we argue that emergent change may be facilitated or, adopting the metaphor proposed by Wenger (in Wenger et al., 2002), rather cultivated, in order to
breed synergy and coordination and to manage the level of inner complexity. An apt management of organizational spaces may thus help solve the apparent paradox between control and autonomy, evidenced by Volberda (1996), as it would assure the maintenance of organizational identity and schemata. Using the dance metaphor, organizational space could be seen as the space of performance, a product of the interaction of the stage, the dancers, the audience and, if we refer to ancient Greek tragedy, the landscape that surrounds the hemisphere of the (outdoor) theatre.

Organizations need to facilitate the development of intra- and inter-organizational networks, provide a meta-narration and construct an inclusive and dynamic identity, in order to build a bridge among different organizational spaces, implementing ad hoc organizational communication strategies and policies (Maimone, 2007). Leadership, climate management, competence development, communication fluxes and network management could favour a managerial control based on proactive management of emergent change in flexible organizational spaces.

Creativity, knowledge creation and emergent organizational change

Since emergent change is the result of a continuous process of adaptation of existing organizational processes, routines and practices and the creation of new ones, creativity and knowledge creation can be considered its key factors (Ionescu et al., 2012; Isaksen and Lauer, 2002). Emergent change is based on bottom-up spontaneous behaviours and therefore, like in an improvised dance performance, it implies a creative act that may lead to the production of new knowledge. When we use the term “new” we are not (only) referring to the creation of brand new knowledge but also to the adaptation and the active re-combination of “old” knowledge (see Holden and Glisby, 2010).

According to Amabile (1997, p. 39), creativity is “the production of novel appropriate ideas in any realm of human activity.” The collective power of creative individuals is shaped by organizational spaces and their social structure, which in turn emanate magnetism for creative people, similar to Florida’s (2002) characterization of creative cities. This can be achieved by a leadership style that incentivizes greater autonomy, corporate entrepreneurship (Thornberry, 2002), critical and creative thinking (Amabile, 1996; Sofo and Kayrooz, 1994), and information and knowledge sharing (Holden and Glisby, 2010).

Creativity tends to be stimulated by challenging (or empowering) work, free-flowing interaction, freedom to experiment (and to fail), organizational and supervisory encouragement, resource availability and work group support (Amabile et al., 1996). Creativity as dance is a learning process that needs to be practiced and encouraged. The famous choreographer Marta Graham used to say: “Whether it means to learn to dance by practicing dancing or to learn to live by practicing living, the principles are the same” (1992, p. 3). Similarly, organizations can practice
creative behaviour through sympathetic leadership and support systems. Hence they should incentivize the expression of new ideas and divergent thinking, nurturing unconventional problem solving and exploratory thought.

Personality, cognitive preferences and relevant knowledge play also an important role in the creative process (Woodman et al., 1993). Farooq and colleagues (2008) emphasized the role played by organizational environment that may foster creativity if it is effectively managed. Creativity in a workplace dance needs the “right place” to be incentivized and nurtured; it does not happen by itself but is rather the outcome of hard work.

Many authors argued that knowledge creation is the flip side of creativity (Campbell, 1960; Gurteen, 1998; Hogarth, 1987). According to Nonaka and von Krogh (2009, p. 638): “(…) knowledge can momentarily take on different forms. Human creativity affords these alternating forms for the purpose of effectively interacting, discovering “truth,” justifying observations, defining problems, and solving them”. Therefore creativity, at individual, group and organizational level, plays an important role in the process of knowledge creation (Gurteen, 1998) where change occurs through individual and environmental interactions in a space generating knowledge that Nonaka calls *ba* (see e.g. Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Nonaka et al., 2000, 2006). Metaphorically speaking, *ba* is the place where dance is created and diffused through the process of socialization (ib.). This could be a physical space (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995), or it could be also a cyber *ba*, e.g. digital media. As we know, personal networks are critical for the process of knowledge sharing (Holden, 2002; Nonaka et al., 2006). These rely on communications and relational factors to share new interpretations of the choreography and/or new steps, e.g. to enable organizational dissemination of changes. Organizations can encourage this by developing communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002), creating Web 2.0 communication infrastructures, like corporate social networks and digital tools, such as knowledge wikies (Fitzgerald, 2007). Next step would be an integrated and participatory design (Schuler and Namioka, 1993) of physical and virtual work spaces, aimed to foster collaboration, relationship building, knowledge sharing and collective intelligence within and across organizational boundaries. Sensitive leadership may also nurture trust (Finestone and Snyman, 2005) that it is necessary to facilitate knowledge sharing and, using our dance metaphor, to choreograph the dance so its interpretation and the proposition of new steps by interacting players can yield their full potential.

**The role of intuition**

In the fluidity of a dance, intuition as a form of direct knowing (Sinclair, 2011), becomes vital for organizational players to notice new opportunities and mutually adjust their responses to the
emergent change. Dance is a kinesthetic process where actions and impulses are sensed non-verbally and responses are often immediate (which creates the fluidity of motion), too quick for rational processes. That is why intuitive communication is inherently more suited. We therefore argue that these seemingly impulsive responses are in fact synchronicities (Durant 2002), anchored in the interconnectedness of all involved players on quantum level (Bohm in Jaworski, 1998), surfacing into their consciousness intuitively (Sinclair, 2010). Since their productive interaction defies a rational explanation, its unfolding will likely appear to an outsider as unexpected and therefore creative.

Leveraging continuous, organic change in modern organizations requires an entrepreneurial approach to management (Hagedoorn, 1996), which in terms of intuition calls for a unique set of abilities (Coget and Sinclair, 2012), both from participating players and their leader (who guides the organizational dance in the set direction and makes sure that the creative element does not sidetrack the process). Shared intention is of paramount importance, making sure that all players are following and reinforcing the organizational goal. When they learn how to hold the concentrated focus clearly in their mind, it becomes easier to spot goal-related future opportunities, which is how organizational foresight is developed. Intention goes hand in hand with passion (Bradley, 2011) which infuses the dance with enthusiasm and self-motivation, and provides the extra energy needed for full involvement. This may be the winning formula for unleashing creativity and harnessing it into knowledge creation. Passion motivates the players to engage more with each other (Kickul and Gundry, 2011), enhancing flexible maneuvering through the organizational complexity. The resulting dance can thus utilize the existing resources more creatively.

Lastly, we would like to draw attention to mindfulness (Bryant and Wildi, 2008) that was adapted by management science from contemplative disciplines to teach us how to be fully present (Dane, 2011). By raising their alertness, the players are able to register subtle goal-related cues that would go otherwise unnoticed. This way their dance becomes self-directed, with a mindful leader acting as a conductor, setting the pace and fine-tuning the performed choreography synchronistically. The end result is high-level team synergy (Lynch & Al Huang, 2010) that creates a sense of excitement enabling (organizational) dancers to explore collectively and individually, but also a sense of psychological comfort that gives them freedom to act on their insights. The ensuing entrepreneurial atmosphere thus heightens the organizational ability to foresee new opportunities and respond to them proactively.
Emotional climate as enabling factor

Organizational climate gauges how employees perceive policies, practices, processes and values engendered by their organization (Ashkanasy et al., 2000). Its emotional aspect has been increasingly recognized as an important performance indicator (e.g. Patterson et al., 2004). In this respect, employees’ emotional perceptions of work environment are an integral part of the context that influences also levels of creativity. De Rivera (1992, p. 198) describes this phenomenon in terms of “how people of a society” (i.e. organization) “emotionally relate to one another.”

Previous research (Maimone and Sinclair, 2010) identified several emotional conditions that appear to be present when the organization values and encourages creativity. An important role plays psychological comfort, stemming from freedom to express one’s emotions and personality in the workplace as well as perceptions of a pleasant and safe environment. Other relevant factors are management focus on employee welfare and employees’ contentment with structural efficacy, the sense of satisfaction with relationships and communication. Such environment requires smooth social interactions (Chen and Huang, 2007) and an effective emotions management (Brotheridge and Lee, 2008). In order to achieve these results organizations have to nurture and manage emotional climate actively through selection and development of appropriate staff, and emphasis on effective communication (Maimone and Sinclair, 2010, p. 325). They also need to pay attention to physical and emotional attributes of the organizational space so that staff can remain comfortable and “true to themselves” (ib., p. 326).

The role of diversity

Another set of issues arises for heterogeneous environments in multinational and global organizations. Diversity encompasses all attributes that can be used to notice individual differences (Mannix and Neale, 2005). There is a common belief, supported by some research evidence (e.g. McLeod et al., 1996), that diversity is a hidden dimension that might increase creativity because of a larger pool of ideas and different perspectives organizational players can tap into and utilize, leading to unusual or novel outcomes. On the other hand, diversity has also its “dark side” which can create social divisions that impede productivity (Mannix and Neale, 2005). Therefore, it appears that diversity has to be properly managed (Jehn, 2000) in order to yield positive – and creative – outcomes. We argue that mindful leadership and intuitive communication might be helpful in this respect.

To manage proactively diversity, organizations should incentivize recruitment, retention and career of culturally intelligent people (Thomas et al., 2008), providing managers and key figures
with ad hoc training on intercultural competences and opportunities of learning by doing, such as multicultural team management and international mobility.

**Practical implications**

Consistent with the theoretical framework proposed above, we provide suggestions for the improvement of organizational dance. As recommended by Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1992), managers should adopt a leadership style that encourages active listening and stimulating staff to challenge their bosses; use managerial communication as a tool to make people feel as part of a team and a process, and employ managerial negotiation to reconcile individual and collective interests, finding win-win solutions to balance personal, group and organizational goals with a shared identity. Moreover, Volberda and Lewin (2003) suggest that for organizations to foster their flexibility, they need to develop a leadership style based on delegation and people’s commitment at every level of the structure. Leadership style should also incentivize autonomy, corporate entrepreneurship (Thornberry, 2003), critical and creative thinking (Amabile, 1996; Sofo and Kayrooz, 1994), information and knowledge sharing (Holden and Glisby, 2010).

We further recommend that managers need to learn how to communicate effectively, establish trust-based relationships and construct a common value and identity framework, mediating among different identities, interests and world views. They should also pay attention to their relationships with peers: only if managers dance together, it is possible to achieve the necessary balance between organizational control and bottom-up emerging change. At organizational level, it is necessary to encourage creative behaviour and develop knowledge creating organizational spaces through sympathetic leadership and support systems. Then organizations can breed creative environment through attracting talent, incentivizing the expression of new ideas and divergent thinking, nurturing unconventional problem solving and exploratory thought, encouraging receptivity to ideas, providing supporting technology and implementing effective leadership.

Emotional climate has to be also actively managed through selection and development of appropriate staff, and emphasis on effective communication while nurturing physical and emotional attributes of the organizational space that make staff feel comfortable and “true to themselves” (Maimone and Sinclair, 2010). In order to leverage diversity, organizations could favour recruitment, retention and career of culturally intelligent people (Thomas et al., 2008) at every level of the organization, design and deliver ad hoc training in intercultural competences, adopt appropriate policies and programs to incentivize international mobility and globalized career. Lastly, organizations can create knowledge through spaces for change, communities of practices (Wenger et al., 2002) and Web 2.0 communication infrastructures, like corporate social networks.
and digital tools (Fitzgerald, 2007). Through ad hoc communication strategies and policies, an integrated and participatory design (Schuler and Namioka, 1993) and an effective management of physical and virtual work spaces, they may provide people with an inclusive and unifying meta-narration, a smart interface and the necessary scaffolding to facilitate collaboration, relationship building, knowledge sharing and collective intelligence, within and across organizational boundaries.

Conclusion

The proposed theoretical framework highlights the relationship between emergent change, creativity and knowledge creation, and argues for the critical role of organizational space in 21st century organizations: a social space, both physical and virtual, that facilitates emergent change, fosters creativity and favours processes of knowledge creation and sharing. An organizational space where players can interpret freely their dance and may propose new steps and choreographies, enacting creative processes at individual and collective level that shall drive double-loop (Argyris and Schon, 1974) or deutero learning (Bateson, 1972) in organizations. At the same time, following Amabile and Khaire (2008), we argue for the role of a mindful leader who nurtures a favourable climate and creates a dynamic organizational space for productive diversity that can be channelled into creativity and emergent change.

The proposed framework suggests that creativity is an emergent phenomenon that can be facilitated but not rigidly planned. A flexible, adaptive, "knowledge creating" company is a dynamic complex system that is able to find over time its point of equilibrium between order and chaos, in a continuous search for excellence. A company that lets dancers improvise, finding harmony and coordination through creativity and intuitive attunement, and tries to learn from them. This results in a dance in which leaders and organizational players cooperate to cope proactively with the turbulence of societies and markets and with technological change.

A mindful leader will be able to create bridges between the global and the local dimension of an organization, building a framework that facilitates free expression of differences and mediating among different identities and cultures to produce an inclusive narration that makes people feel united in diversity. Such leader will enhance conditions for the emergence of creativity and adopt a participative and bottom-up approach to management, enabling the organization to set up good organizational spaces for emergent change and knowledge creation. Thus, a better place for the organizational dance is born. As Jose Luis Borges said: “Without the streets or dusks of Buenos Aires, a tango cannot be written.”
References


Coget, J-F. and Sinclair, M. (2012), “Are all intuitions the same?”, manuscript in preparation, Griffith University, Brisbane.


