

## Creative People in Portugal

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Numerous studies have been done about creative people. Some of these studies point to the importance of cultural differences between countries that might enhance or block creative achievement. The authors study Portuguese people whose work has been recognized as creative in the past 6 years, looking for particularities in their psychological makeup and work style. The current work presents the preliminary results that point to great similarities with the reviewed literature (teamwork, informal relationships, peer feedback, mentors or inspiring figures, action centred, intrinsic motivation, constant dedication, work life balance, match between the challenges and the growing competences, error acceptance, domain knowledge and humility). However the participants also refer that the quality of their work is much more easily recognized abroad.

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## Cultural Creativity

Several authors point to the relevance of the cultural environment for the development of creativity. Amabile (1983, 1996, cited by Weisberg, 2006) was the first to clearly recognize social and environmental factors in creativity development. The author recognized these factors not as confounding variables, but as factors must be understood and looked at if we are to fully understand creativity (Weisberg, 2006). Sternberg & Lubart (1995, cited by Weisberg, 2006), recognize the environment as resource that has to be taken into account in creativity. For Csikszentmihalyi (1996) and Woodman, Sawyer e Griffin (1993 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008), the creativity of the individuals is something that both emerges from and transforms the environment. On the other hand, it is the environment's response that evaluates and recognizes the quality of the creative ideas and acts (Simonton, 1999 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Sternberg & Lubart 1991, 1995 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Weisberg, 2006). Monteiro, Caetano, Marques and Lourenço (2006) tell us that it is the culture that allows the individual to construct a personal meaning for what he lives and experiences. The cultural environment is therefore part of the factors that might be at the birth of creativity, but that also act as the sphinx that decides what gets through.

Kim (2010) has extensively studied creativity in different cultures, namely eastern (Korean and Taiwanese) and western (north American). She has found some relationships between the type of culture and creativity, namely that adaptive creative style (creativity that coexists in the actual paradigm) and creative strengths suffer the influence of the culture and society where the individual lives and works. The same relationship was not found regarding innovative creative style (creativity that challenge the current paradigm), which apparently develops in a more independent and free way.

The creative strengths considered were emotional expressiveness, storytelling articulateness, movement or action, expressiveness of titles, synthesis of incomplete figures, synthesis of lines or circles, unusual visualization, internal visualization, extending or breaking boundaries, humor, richness of imagery, colorfulness of imagery and fantasy

Mason, Beltramo and Paul (2004) have also verified differences in positive and negatives aspects related to fostering organizational creativity (eg. openness and stability) between Britain and France. Therefore, Martin, Allwood and Hemlin (2004) suggest that different countries might need to take different measures to that respect – some cases might benefit from greater openness and flexibility, others from more stability allowing an economy of resources so that a focus on creativity can exist.

Despite these cultural differences, there seem to be a tendency to homogeneity between organizations and cultures (the convergence hypothesis). However, as Child's studies suggests, there seem to be cultural differences that still hold ground – this might be so because of the different variables taken into account in each study. Works on organizational variables (eg. structure and technology) tend to show homogeneity, whereas the ones focusing on attitudes, beliefs and behaviors generally show cross-cultural divergence (Child, 1981 cited by Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009).

The globalization occurring today seems not to be enough to homogenize the differences encountered by Hofstede's study on national cultures (Hofstede, 1980, 1983 cited by Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009). Hofstede's model, based on a study with 116000 individuals from 40 different countries, encountered four axes along which we can classify cultures: uncertainty avoidance (degree of comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity), masculinity–femininity (degree of independence, aggressiveness and

dominance versus interdependence, empathy and emotional openness), individualism–collectivism (main emphasis on individual versus group needs), and power distance (degree of acceptance of differences in status and power). A fifth dimension, long term–short term orientation (orientation towards the present versus the future), was later added to this model, according to the development introduced by Bond (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009).

The Portuguese values obtained in this model are: uncertainty avoidance = 104; masculinity–femininity = 31; individualism–collectivism = 27 and power distance = 63 (no measurement available for the fifth axis). As a term of comparison, we list the highest and lowest scores in the study mentioned in Table 1. Portugal has clearly a high level of uncertainty avoidance, a more masculine- and collective- type culture, and a medium power distance culture.

Table 1. Comparison of Portugal’s scores on Hofstede’s model with extreme scores

| Dimension                  | Minimum score |       | Portugal’s score | Maximum score |       |
|----------------------------|---------------|-------|------------------|---------------|-------|
|                            | Country       | Score |                  | Country       | Score |
| Uncertainty avoidance      | Singapore     | 8     | 104              | Greece        | 112   |
| Masculinity–femininity     | Sweden        | 5     | 31               | Japan         | 95    |
| Individualism–collectivism | Venezuela     | 12    | 27               | USA           | 91    |
| Power distance             | Austria       | 11    | 63               | Russia        | 95    |

Based on the results presented in Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009.

## Methodology

### Sample

Our sample consists of Portuguese individuals who have already been recognized as creative, either through creativity or innovation awards, as owners of patents or any prize or award in any achievement or activity that is inherently creative.

So far 3 creative Portuguese individuals were interviewed – one winner of the BES Inovação 2010 award, a winner of MedImmune Oncology Research Competition 2010 and a winner of the 2005 Peugeot Design Competition (in their citations referred as DC, AT and AC).

### Procedure

The participants were interviewed face to face, in a time and place of their own choosing. The interview was conducted based on an interview script that consisted of open-ended questions, developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1996). It contains four major topics around which questions were developed – Career and life priorities (e.g. of the things you have done in life, what are you most proud of? To what do you attribute this success? Any personal qualities?), Relationships (e.g. Has there been a significant person that has influenced your thinking about your work?), Working habits/ Insights (e.g. Where do your ideas from your work generally come from?) and Attentional structures and dynamics (e.g. What present task do you see as most important. The script was translated to Portuguese by Portuguese psychologists. However, even accordingly to the original use of the interview script, the interviewer was free to pursue clarification to any data provided by the participant, maintaining an open, flexible and

empathic attitude (Moustakas, 2001). The objective of the interviews was to obtain clues to possible relevant aspects of Portuguese culture to creative work.

The interviews were analyzed according to a humanistic methodology, the adequate for the search of understanding of the complexity and detail of the theme (Churchill & Wertz, 2001; Schneider, Bugental & Pierson, 2001). A heuristic research was done, looking for the ‘qualities, conditions and relationships’ at the heart of our question, according to the proposal of Moustakas (2001). This way, the analysis of the interviews included keeping an open mind and not limiting the results to what the literature presents, but instead extracting from the data the relevant topics, according to what the participants referred.

## Results

During the interviews, several aspects that are well documented in literature were cited by the participants as relevant to their work: teamwork, informal relationships, peer feedback, mentors or inspiring figures, action centred, intrinsic motivation, constant dedication, work life balance, matching challenges and growing competence, error acceptance, domain knowledge and humility.

Besides those common points to the literature, other aspects appeared as pertinent in the Portuguese society, which are particularly important to the purpose of the study.

## Here, There, Everywhere

### Teamwork

The participants noticed teamwork as relevant to their achievements. Even in the cases when they have to develop solo work, they look for ideas exchange and information sharing:

‘(...) I started to realize that some things I couldn’t do all by myself. And that I really needed to ask for help, and when I did ask for help, then it was all done in a flash. (...) It’s teamwork, it’s very important.’ (DC)

‘Work is always done in a group, be it internally or in terms of collaboration [with others outside the workgroup] (...) it is never the work of a single person, that does not exist, nowadays. Someone has to coordinate the work, but it is group work. (...) The team is absolutely essential.’ (AT)

‘If someone asks me how I’ve done it (...) I usually yes, give some clues, explain more or less how I’ve done it (...). Information sharing is always good, because some people have done the same to me too. And there is a community nowadays (...) and it is great, it’s the good thing about Internet, you can share everything.’ (AC)

### Informal relationships

The value of good informal relationships and a shorter power distance is recognized by the participants. At a minimum level, a non conflictual relationship is pursued, in order to keep the team involved.

‘There [abroad] we talked to a Professor (...) and we are on a first name basis. And they avoid that hierarchical barrier. If the idea is good, it does not matter who’s

idea it is (...) that [hierarchical] barrier harms the free idea interchange and makes growth difficult.’ (DC)

‘On a personal understanding level, people functioning in the same type of mode, and therefore managing to communicate more easily, and understand each other.’ (AT)

‘By getting along, the project was good. I have learnt (...) to work with the person you are [working] with (...) even if you don’t like them.’ (AC)

#### Peer feedback

Peer feedback is sought and considered relevant and crucial. It is used both as a validation of the work quality, but also as inspiration.

‘I was surrounded by very, very intelligent people (...). I have learnt what I was good at, and what I wasn’t good at, that made me know better my abilities.’ (DC)

‘I went to a large congress in Los Angeles and that was important because I was presenting my work and therefore get feedback from the specialists in that area, (...) it is important to hear their opinion.’ (AT)

‘It is good to have plenty of personal contacts with people from the area, that can advise you, (...) [it’s] excellent. (...) I talked to some people to advise me (...) What should I change? (...) If feedback is possible, it’s good to have feedback.’ (AC)

#### Mentors or inspiring figures

Having someone to guide junior’s work, or someone more experienced is highly treasured. The seniors also set high standards which the participants strive to achieve.

‘A mentor is highly important (...) or even more than one, if possible. (...) who you can call asking for advice. (...) To have a good network, people to ask questions (...).’ (DC)

‘A mentor is essential (...) someone to do the finishing touch. A mentor is essential to any professional path.’ (AT)

‘I keep some designs of other people in my computer for inspiration.’ (AC)

#### Action centered

The participants recognize the importance of ‘putting ideas into action’, to build it in the real world. There also seems to be a constant impulse to do it.

‘When you have an idea the first thing you should do is to test the idea. (...) testing as soon as possible, things, to move forward. (...) And fight this feeling of being happy with the idea inside your head. (...) To do, do, do.’ (DC)

‘You always have to have a practical side (...) always.’ (AT)

‘If there isn’t a practical side (...) making projects as if it was a real project (...) you get bored. (...) What I really like to do is to draw, to create, to imagine new things, if possible to make them real.’ (AC)

#### Intrinsic motivation

Work inspiration and motivation seems to be internal, coming from an inner will  
- from what makes personal sense, not from what is expected.

‘It’s not a job, it’s something you really, really want to do. That’s why passion is important. Because it helps to overcome (...) obstacles. (...) To put something of my own in the world.’ (DC)

‘It has to come from inside. There are things that people like to do, and things people don’t like to do. And that is completely different for each person.’ (AT)

‘If you like to do it [projects] come out more creative. (...). It came out that way, I liked it, I go on. Rationality sometimes blocks you, because you start to think (...) maybe they won’t like it. (...) that is what motivates me, to do more and better.’ (AC)

#### Constant dedication

There is a main focus on learning and keeping up to date with the field of work.

‘(...) you should keep developing yourself professionally (...). ‘ (DC)

‘You have to keep up with the latest literature, every day. We have to keep ourselves up to date.’ (AT)

‘The creative process has to be continuous over time. (...) new programs keep popping up, and keep up with them.’ (AC)

#### Work life balance

The participants strive for an equilibrium between personal life and work life. Some have learned over the years how important it is to allow time for non-professional activity.

‘Now I take off all weekends, or almost, which I didn’t before. (...) You have to have boundaries, things like not to work on weekends (...) and you have to make it a

rule, otherwise you'll do it less and less and work more and more and after a while you have no personal life.' (DC)

'The more you are organized the better you can balance both worlds [work and family]. So my advice is, do a good planning. And try (...) to dedicate some hours a day for other things [other than work], that's essential, otherwise you get exhausted. (...) it is absolutely essential for people's sanity to have some time for other things, like the family (...) to have that discipline. It is essential and very easy to lose that control.'

(AT)

'[Nowadays my biggest challenge] is to balance love life and work life.' (AC)

Match between the challenges and the growing competences

The participants' work is well suited to their psychological makeup. They recognize their strengths and have a work in which they profit from them. They appreciate challenges that make them evolve professionally, and continually look for improvement.

'(...) I have truly realized while I was doing all this, and today I'm even more certain of that, that my profile, my personal profile, and my talents, are much more in line with [this]. (...) yes, I think I am good [at this]. (...) I have been realizing that this is something I think I do well.'

(DC)

'Everything I do has to be on a good level. (...) Those colleagues of mine were good, I had to rise up to their level, then from then on, this is the level I want to be in'

(DC)

‘To follow an investigation of my own is a landmark.’ (AT) (the participant has just been awarded a grant for his first investigation as the coordinator).

‘A creative person wants to go further. For example, you want to design a fantastic scenario, and (...) you find out that that are things you don’t know how to do. From then on you have to learn to do them, to get to your goal. (...) you always want another goal. I have learnt that. Now I want to do that, learn a bit more.’ (AC)

#### Error acceptance

Error is seen as an opportunity for learning, as part of the process, and not especially important to avoid it.

‘Yes, I deal a lot better with error, I deal better with uncertainty (...) Those difficulties made me much more... to begin with, the ego is not so... fragile, right? When you fail – that is different from person to person, but – but when you fail, there’s always a big ego crush, and my ego is no longer so attached to the things I do. I do it because it has to be done. (...) It is no longer a threat (...) Less and less so.’ (DC)

‘To do something, and from those 10 ideas that came up, you choose one, go along that path and see if it fits. If not, go back and try with another. An error can generate another idea.’ (AC)

#### Domain knowledge

Having found the work domain they enjoy, the participants dedicate themselves to it and try to keep up to date with the latest knowledge and techniques. They wish to be very proficient in it.

‘This is the area I know best. (...) specialization, in my view, should never stop, it is a professional growth that, in the end, you end up with a set of very, very unique characteristics of your own, and that distinguish you professionally.’ (DC)

‘You have to keep reading the new literature, every day. You have to keep yourself updated.’ (AT)

‘I have won several awards, several first prizes, otherwise I reach top ten in the competition.’ (AC)

### Humility

In spite of considering themselves very good professionals, it is recognized that learning and personal development is a never ending process, that can benefit from others, even from juniors, or from people outside their field.

‘(...) I still have a lot to learn. (...) I don’t think I do all well, there are things I am terrible at.’ (DC)

‘Each investigator is as good as its team. Just.’ (AT)

‘From all people you’ll learn something.’ (AC)

### Only at home

The participants also cited what, according to their perception, are the Portuguese particularities which inhibit or difficult their work. These include difficulty in working as a team:

‘(...) one thing that Portuguese people could well learn, there are no heroes, I mean, no... that story about wanting to be a hero and take all the glory for yourself, and

do all the work, that doesn't exist. It is teamwork, it's very important. (...) what I see here, which is problematic, its cultural, obviously (...). That hero story, for instance, in Portugal people prefer to take all the credits of something small that does not fully reach the goal, than sharing glory of a project that becomes big and fulfills the goal. Which is something very self centered.' (DC)

Also the early noted importance, of peer and mentor feedback, seems not to be so easily achieved in Portugal:

'They [in Boston] are always criticizing ideas. You get there, present your idea, they criticize it back and forth, back and forth, it's an exercise, they always do that, here it is harder. People (...) here in Portugal don't like to criticize; they think "oh, maybe they take it personally". No, no, no, if the idea is bad, you have to know. (...) I think that would be good, here.' (DC)

'That [hierarchical] barrier harms the free idea interchange and makes growth difficult. (...) it is something common to southern Europe.' (DC)

Education, fundamental for proper domain knowledge from early on, seems not to be as adequate as in other countries:

'Education abroad is more focused and they leave much better prepared than in Portugal. The courses in Portugal (...) are too generic.' (AC)

Creativity requires some perseverance and support from others, which seems not to be so usual in Portugal:

'And I see that here in Portugal, very often you say you want to do this fantastic thing, and they don't even know how to do it, or if it is going to be difficult to do it or

not, and they tell you right away no, it is too difficult. When abroad very often they don't say it, they say let's see how much it costs and then we talk. I mean, they don't cut it right away (...).' (AC)

Their work, and its quality is much more easily recognized abroad, and national recognition never preceded international prizes:

'It is also curious because following that award in the beginning of this year the university dean gave me a merit diploma, which means that internal recognition ends up coming after the external recognition (...) it is easier to be recognized outside than inside, which is a shame. (AT)

'You go abroad, get some recognition, and from that moment on everybody tells you you're the best thing that happened to Portugal.' (AC)

Therefore, participation in international trainings, congresses or competitions has been highly motivational, and pivotal in their careers. Even so, despite being internationally recognized as good professionals, apparently work quality is not so crucial when it comes to find work in Portugal:

'Favoring someone on personal grounds (...) it is not a meritocracy. (...) with a good curriculum, and if your dynamic, you can do a lot in Portugal. But with good political connections, a terrible curriculum, you can do much more. This is my experience. It's a little disappointing. (...) that is almost a cultural pillar.' (DC)

## Discussion

From the gathered data, it seems that Portuguese society nowadays is not the best type of culture to recognize creativity. Selection and evaluation of creative efforts, which is critical for creativity's survival, is an important role of cultural environment (Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Weisberg, 2006). Apparently Portuguese society is not well suited to fulfill its part in nurturing creative individuals, when highly creative individuals are not recognized as such, prior to international awards. The somewhat collectivistic society shown by Hofstede's model (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009) is perhaps not so conducive to support of individuals that stand out.

The free interchange of ideas and feedback, crucial to creativity (Hargadon & Bachky, 2006 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Paulus, 2008; Simonton, 1999 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Zhou, 2008) and domain knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg & Lubart, 1991, 1995 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008), seems to be difficult to happen often. The level of power distance type society as reflected in Hofstede's model (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009) is apparently still real in Portugal, and doesn't help in this respect.

A good work team is important to develop and support creativity (Gully, Devine, & Whitney, 1995 cited by Paulus, 2008; Paulus, 2008; West, 2003 cited by Paulus, 2008). The fact that the participants cite Portuguese culture as not prone to this type of work might be related to the more masculine type of society as reflected in Hofstede's model (Wagner & Hollenbeck, 2009)

Intrinsic motivation is clearly cited by several authors who study personal characteristics regarding creativity (Amabile, 1996; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Shalley &

Oldham, 1997 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008), and that is shared by all participants so far.

Domain knowledge, or domain skills are important in successful creative efforts (Amabile, 1983 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Sternberg & Lubart, 1991, 1995 cited by Shalley & Zhou, 2008), and this seems to be clearly persecuted by the participants.

Being action centered allows individuals to bring their efforts into the real world and according to Robinson (2001), it is by acting that you become creative. This characteristic, along with error acceptance, constant dedication, searching for a good match between their growing competence and the challenges chosen, a good work life balance and a humble stance was also found in Csikszentmihalyi's 1996 study.

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