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Sub-theme 01: Career Studies and their Context: Societal Impacts and their Impacts on Society

Extending the notion of boundaryless careers in the creative economy: evidences from Italian TV drama series industry

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to extend our knowledge on the boundaryless career theory by providing a quantitative study on how the diversity of career patterns accumulated by project workers affects the project team performance. More specifically, we analyze the dimension of diversity by investigating the different products on which project workers worked in the past. In order to address this issue, we focus on the creative context of Italian TV drama series production teams by investigating the career patterns of 1,736 actors who worked in this industry from 1996 to 2010. To quantify the diversity of career patterns, optimal matching analysis –OMA- is used.

Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed a shift into a “creative economy” based on intellectual inputs or human creativity, which is driving change in multiple areas: the economy, technology, and society in general. The new imperative is harnessing the creativity of the workforce, which means not to use innovation and design to create new products but to use them to upgrade creative work across different industries (Florida, 2006) because creativity is a strategic input to gain competitive advantage (e.g., Florida, 2002; DeFillippi, Grabher, and Jones, 2007). In this new scenario, the experiences of managers in cultural industries that are accustomed to addressing the dilemma based on the ambiguity (efficiency and profitability) and dynamism (exploration and flexibility) features of cultural goods may contain “an important lesson for other industries” (Lampel, Lant and Shamsie, 2000:264; Teece, 2003). More specifically, the study of the creative economy may help to better understand the current economic transformation, which includes project-based businesses, organizational architecture enacted through networks, and careers conceived as open systems, in which talent is not considered as a stock but as a flow, which can be continually nourished and developed with new experiences. In the light of this new conceptualization of careers, industries engaging in any business are required to rethink their career model either by attracting talented and creative people or by growing them (Florida, 2006).

Whereas creative industries demonstrate the flexibility and the proactivity of contract workers to generate innovative and creative outputs, managerial practice favors traditional careers based on rigid hierarchical structures (Baruch, 2004).

Careers in the creative economy become transitional and flexible, comprising a variety of options and possible directions of development. As a result, the present generation, by witnessing the blurring of boundaries in many facets of their life, is experiencing lateral job movements, and career experiences are increasingly likely to occur across, rather than within, firm boundaries (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996; Eby and De Matteo, 2000; Eby, Butts, and Lockwood, 2003, Dokko, Wilk, and Rothbard, 2009). Arthur and Rousseau (1996) synthesize and define this new concept of career as boundaryless to describe careers that do not unfold in a single employment setting but comprise sequences of jobs that may cross industry, occupational, organizational, role, and geographical boundaries. The boundaryless careers literature emphasizes the role of individuals as proactive creators of their own careers. This phenomenon is salient in creative industries where contract workers move frequently within and across organizations (firms or projects) and industries (e.g., movie, TV, theatre, etc.), as recently outlined by Vicentini and Boccardelli (2016). However, there is no evidence on how the diversity of career patterns is shaped by different products experienced

by individuals in their previous work experiences. In order to shed light on the diversity of career patterns, we adopt Bird (1994:396) definition, whereby career patterns are described such as “the accumulation of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise, and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time”. Therefore, the idea at the basis of this study is that project teams whose members are drawn from different pools of informational resources (i.e. experience) can translate greater information richness within a project into better choices and more specifically in products (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996).

Theoretical background

Arthur and colleagues (1989:8) originally define career as “the evolving sequence of a person’s work experiences over time”. Bird (1994) extends this definition by arguing that the term “career” conveys more than just a chronology of positions held by individuals. The Author states that the traditional definition of “career” was missing the value of the information and the knowledge acquired by a person as a result of an evolving sequence of working experiences. Individuals in fact, embark on continuous learning opportunities that shape their knowledge, skills, contact, and experiences. Therefore, their ability to contribute to organizational outcomes reflects the heterogeneous experiences they had during their career histories. This approach to a career as a “repository of knowledge” plays a pivotal role in the contemporary employment world, characterized by a shift from secure and stable careers with clear boundaries to more fluid careers marked by more mobility across professional industries and products. In this perspective, individuals embark on continuous learning opportunities that shape their opportunities and experiences. Accordingly, their ability to contribute to project team outcomes reflects the heterogeneous experiences they had during their careers histories. Prior studies have employed a wide range of methods to measure the diversity of career background in a variety of teams such as top executive teams and new product development one, but they have never investigated this issue in project teams.

When a new project team is composed, the project manager selects project team members on the basis of their past experiences, that may enhance the success of the new product. Past experiences in the development of products influences individuals’ expertise, which in turn contribute to the project team performance on current tasks (Taylor and Greve, 2006). Team members that take part to the development of a new product may complete multiple diverse projects enhancing their ability to recognize and implement new technical solutions and their potential application (MacCormack, Verganti, and Iansiti, 2001). Within highly dynamic competitive environments, previous experiences may play a pivotal role in influencing the project team performance. According to

MacCormack and his colleagues (2001:138), completing multiple different projects over different products generation is “likely to involve dealing with different/changing context and hence, results in a more abstract approach to development –applying the lessons learned in new projects–”. On the same vein, Hargadon and Sutton (1997) recognize the importance of prior product experience for the engineers involved in the development of new solutions at the product design firm IDEO. According to the authors, IDEO designed innovative products by moving its engineers over different projects rather than favoring the specialization on a specific products’ family. This process stimulates the combination of solutions developed in the previous products to new ones. Moving from these considerations our idea is that the product career diversity encountered by individuals on products developed during their career histories yield to expertise in specific knowledge domains that may influence the project team performance. Hence:

Hypothesis 1. Within a project team, a positive relationship exists between the products career diversity and the project team performance.

The Research

TV drama series productions are normally produced on a project basis, with duration between several days and several months and with high customized and project-specific results. Each TV drama series production, especially in Italy, “generally belongs to a small, independent, and legally constituted organization that is financially responsible for the failure or success of the project” (Soda and Bizzi, 2012:100). Additionally, they are based on a modular structure of occupational roles, which allows project teams to be easily assembled (Bechky, 2006; Whitley, 2006; Bakker, 2010).

TV series are grouped in market spaces called genres. As other creative industries (e.g. comics, movie), the genre creates a shared context or set of understandings shared by writers that are the creators of the TV series, actors, and audience (Marks, 2004; Taylor and Greve 2006). A genre both prompts the expectation of the audience and provides a stylistic vocabulary for the TV series’ writers and actors that need to adapt them. Genres represent a well established forms and product expectations, and the shift from one genre to another requires an actor to learn and apply different domains of knowledge. The actor who attempts to experiment and integrate multiple genres has the promise to generating valuable products that the audience will evaluate positively.

The present study employs Italian TV drama series productions, produced from 1996 to 2010 by some leading Italian TV drama series production companies: Publispei, Media Trade, and Publispei coproduced with RAI Fiction. For each TV drama series produced, there have been collected the following information: 1) the complete composition of the team in terms of the seven main actors –

team members-involved in the episode production; 2) the complete career history of each team member in terms of genres they have experienced before entering in the focal project; 3) project team performance in terms of audience share generated by each episode.

Data used in this study were retrieved from different sources: 1) International Movie Database (henceforth IMDb), which is the most powerful and authoritative database storing data on the world's film and television productions (Ferriani et al., 2005; Ferriani et al. 2009; Zaheer and Soda, 2009); 2) Auditel, which is an independent Institution that sells the service to broadcasters. This Institution monitors the Italian broadcasting market using a panel of 5,101 families and more than 14,000 individuals, stratified by various areas' residential populations (Soda et al. 2004). The sample includes 1736 team members for the period observed and 248 TV drama series episodes.

Variables

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable is the project team performance, which we measured in terms of stock of awards, won by the TV drama series. In creative contexts, such as TV drama series, it is possible to distinguish between commercial and artistic success (e.g., Delmestri, Montanari, and Usai, 2005). By analyzing the institutional structuration of the music industry, Anand and Watson's (2004) adopted the Grammy Awards to measure the artistic performance. As the authors, we calculated the artistic dimension of TV drama series performance by considering the total number of awards that each TV drama series won. It can be considered a measure of project team performance because it evaluates the quality of the product.

Independent Variable

To compute the variable of heterogeneity of patterns followed by individuals included in a team along the dimension of products in which they have worked on during their career histories, we adopted the Optimal Matching Analysis (OMA) technique. OMA is an algorithmic analysis introduced into the social science by Abbott (1990) and Abbott and Tsay (2000) mainly as a descriptive tool for representing sequences of social events. In order to track career patterns heterogeneity, products sequences will be constructed on year of release of the TV drama series' episodes. This procedure allows evaluating the career path of team members included in the TV drama series production team along these dimensions by composing 1 sequence of career path for each of them: "Job and products' genres" (e.g. comedy; adventure; romance; drama). For each history, the year of origin was set to $t=0$, when the career of the actor/actress started. Following Skilton and Bravo procedure (2008:388), where there were gaps in the history has been assumed

that the preceding genre would carry forward, and assigned the preceding genre to the gap years. To construct the square symmetrical dissimilarity matrix of diversity careers has been used the Stata program -SEQCOMP-. As diversity careers sequence will be computed, we will collapse across observations in order to make a single record for any episode.

Control Variables

Besides the diversity of careers histories for which effects have been hypothesized, a number of other factors may reasonably affect the project team performance. Accordingly, some control variables were used to account for these factors. First, not all the Italian TV production companies are specialized in the production of TV series since they can produce movies, TV movies, and other TV formats (e.g. sitcom). As a consequence, this lack of specialization may affect the audience share. The variable is named *Experience of the producer in the TV series production* and is measured using the average of TV series produced by the production companies before the focal project. *Project team size*: Because project teams may vary considerably in size, we controlled for the number of project team members enlisted in the crew (Zaheer & Soda, 2009; Reagans & Zuckerman, 2001).

Total hours of TV series broadcasted by the channel in the year. Not all TV channels show the same potential to reach high audience levels. The Italian broadcasting market is characterized by two main leaders: RAI (the state-owned television corporation) and Mediaset (the major private competitor). Both of the broadcasters have three main channels through which they provide TV programs. Consequently, there is a huge variation in terms of number of hours broadcasted by each channel and number of hours of TV series yearly transmitted that may affect the project team performance. The variable is measured by counting the number of hours broadcasted by broadcasters. These data have been gathered from GECA Italy, an Independent Italian company which tracks all data relating to the television industry.

Results

The descriptive statistics and correlations of the variables used in this study are reported in Table 1. The number of the observations is N=248. None of the correlation coefficients raises potential problems of multi-collinearity.

-----Insert table 1 here-----

The results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression methods are reported in Table 2.

-----Insert table 2-----

Table 2 reports the control variables, which together explain the 26 per-cent of the variance (adjusted R^2) in the dependent variable (awards). More specifically, the experience of the producer in the TV series production positively and significantly ($p < 0.10$) affects the project team performance.

This result is extremely important since no prior contributions (e.g. Soda et al. 2004; Zaheer and Soda, 2009) have introduced this type of the variable. Specifically, the results confirm that the stock of awards can be affected by the production strategy implemented by the producer. TV series production companies specialized and focused on the production of this TV format positively influence the awards received. On the same vein, the total hours of TV series broadcasted by the channel in the year is positively and significantly ($p < 0.001$) associated with the awards won by the TV drama series, while the size of project team affects positively and significantly the project team performance.

To test the hypothesis 1, the independent variable –product career diversity- was added in Model 2. On the whole, the model is significant ($p < 0.001$), explaining 25% per-cent of the variance (adjusted R^2). The coefficient is positive and significant ($p < 0.100$), therefore hypothesis 1 is supported.

These results confirm the intuition that team members that have encountered different products' experiences patterns during their career history may positively influence the stock of awards won by the TV drama series. Accordingly, the product career diversity yields to expertise in specific knowledge domains that are favorably accepted by the juries that provide the TV drama series with awards.

Conclusion

Addressing Inkson et al. (2012) call, this study provides an interesting and dynamic representation of the objective movements of career patterns of actors in the Italian TV drama series production industry. Overcoming some prior contributions that have investigated the effect of diversity only on a slice of individuals' career, this study investigates career patterns in terms of the definition proposed by Bird (1994:326), who identifies a longitudinal dimension of career patterns in terms of the “accumulation” of new knowledge, skills, and contacts in time.

Specifically, the career pattern analyzed is related to the past experiences experimented by actors in different products. The findings show that actors that have encountered multiple diverse projects are more likely to introduce innovativeness to the focal project, increasing the project team performance. Completing different projects allows team members to deal with highly dynamic

competitive environments, exploiting the benefits associated to the expertise. Accordingly, the results seem to confirm that the boundaryless career model features the Italian TV drama series industry since the actors move on to some other industries, whereas there are no evidences that the self-determination and self-management characterize the careers of the actors that play in this industry. The results extend the boundaryless career literature introducing the newness that actors have to move also on to some other products in order to deal with the opportunities and benefits coming from the expertise. Consequently, the results confirm that in TV drama series context being typecasted in dealing with the same type of product is not a winning strategy for the actor. The experimentation with different products instead, may help the actor/actress to develop different skills and expertise that the market may recognize by providing the award.

A future research should include a further investigation of awards by distinguishing for type of the award (e.g., peer, juries) as suggested by Gender et al. (2008), because it may provide a better analysis of the process through which awards are assigned.

The insights would generalize well not only to other creative industries –e.g. video games, music-, but also to all project-based organizations where role structure and hierarchy are well defined. The widespread diffusion of project-based organizing encourages the combination of specialized skills and experiences in smaller units such teams and crews (Vicentini, 2013; Ferriani et al. 2009, Arthur and DeFilippi, 1994), therefore experiencing diversity careers in terms of industry and products may be the criterion through which selects team members.

Despite the importance to use secondary data into the analysis of career patterns (Inkson et al. 2012), this study suffers from the usual limitations of archival research. The data do not provide insights in terms of the process through which industry career diversity and product career diversity patterns are changed. In order to overcome this issue, the future research should include some qualitative data that provide a further comprehension about the process through which actors involved in the TV drama series industry change industries and products during their career.

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TABLE 4. INVESTMENT AND FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Investment	Return	Standard Deviation	Beta	Alpha	1	2	3	4
1. INVESTMENT RETURNS	1.12	1.08	0.9	0.1				
2. INVESTMENT RISK (STANDARD DEVIATION)	1.00	1.00	1	0	0.0001			
3. INVESTMENT AND RISK MEASUREMENTS FOR THE 1990s (STANDARD DEVIATION)	1.00	1.00	1.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000		
4. INVESTMENT RETURNS	1.12	1.08	0.9000	0.1000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	
5. INVESTMENT AND RISK MEASUREMENTS FOR THE 1990s (STANDARD DEVIATION)	1.00	1.00	1.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000

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4. INVESTMENT RETURNS	1.12	1.08	0.9000	0.1000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	
5. INVESTMENT AND RISK MEASUREMENTS FOR THE 1990s (STANDARD DEVIATION)	1.00	1.00	1.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000