

Taking the Propulsion Model of Creative Contributions into the 21st Century

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Abstract

This paper describes and updates the Propulsion Theory of Creative Contributions (Sternberg, 1999; Sternberg, J.C Kaufman, & Pretz, 2002). Theories of creative products need to be updated to reflect the new global world with such technological bounty. This theory describes eight different ways that someone can make a creative contribution (anything from a creatively-written e-mail to a revolutionary new communications device). The theory then categorizes these contributions based on their relationship to the existing domain. The first four contributions all represent achievements that stay within the framework of a pre-existing paradigm. The final four types of creative contributions represent attempts to reject and replace the current paradigm. New examples reflecting the technological advances of the last decade are presented.

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Creativity is a field often in flux as technology and society advance. Such world developments impact some theories of creativity more than others. Some theories emphasize the person, such as Amabile's (1996) Componential Model of Creativity, the Investment Theory (Sternberg & Lubart, 1995, 1996), or the Amusement Park Theoretical Model (Baer & J. C. Kaufman, 2005; J. C. Kaufman & Baer, 2004). Other theories study the creative process, such as the Creative Cognition approach (Finke, Ward, & Smith, 1992), Csikszentmihalyi's idea of Flow (1990), or the pioneering work of Wallas (1926). Yet the focus most dependent on the ever evolving modern world is likely creative products.

Creative products are getting quicker and simpler to make as technology allows people greater access to previously elite domains, such as composing music or re-

coding a video. Creativity may be found in something as simple and common as text messaging (Zaman, Rajan, & Dai, 2010). Theories of creative products need to be updated to reflect the new global world with such technological bounty.

For example, Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model (1996, 1999), focuses on the interaction between the creative person, field (i.e., the gatekeepers, such as teachers and editors), and domain (i.e., science or poetry). Gangadharbtlä (2010) updated Csikszentmihalyi's model to incorporate the increased importance of technology. Csikszentmihalyi's Systems Model still includes the person as a key component. A theory that exclusively considers the creative product is the Propulsion Theory of Creative Contributions. This theory was first proposed by Sternberg (1999) and then expanded with J. C. Kaufman and Pretz (Sternberg, J. C. Kaufman, & Pretz, 2001, 2002, 2003; Sternberg, Pretz, & J. C. Kaufman, 2003).

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Perhaps the most basic type of contribution that someone can make is replication. Replication tries to keep things status quo – to reproduce past work. Consider a scientific study whose sole goal is to show that an earlier experiment can be reproduced, or maybe a romance novel that is mighty similar to earlier novels, with different main characters and a new setting. Or think of the people who spend Sunday afternoons in a museum, trying to copy a famous painting. Are they creative? Absolutely, and they help create that nice ambience that make museums fun on the weekends. But these painters are not necessarily trying to advance the artistic domain.

In the 21st century, millions of replications can be