



MANAGEMENT OF CREATIVE PROJECTS – CHALLENGES AND PARADOXES

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Abstract

Nowadays, the importance of creativity for social and economic development, including the development of individuals, organizations as well as sectors or regions, is taken for granted. So called creative industries (e.g. media, advertisement, video-games), seem to play more and more important role in the development of the economy (Banks et al., 2002; Seidel, 2011). What is to be underlined, all these creative industries are project-oriented as projects are the main way of carrying on the activities of enterprises (Simon, 2006; DeFillipi et al., 2007). Moreover, in traditional project-oriented industries, such as construction or IT, the growing expectations as to the novelty and originality of products and management processes seem to increase the interests in creativity of employees and teams (Dawson & Andriopoulos, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to discuss the significance of the creativity in contemporary project management and to indicate the challenges and paradoxes rising from creative ideas and actions. On the basis of literature review the main attributes of creative projects will be demonstrated. In the next part, the most important pressures, challenges and paradoxes of creative project will be presented and discussed.

Key words: *project management, creativity, paradoxes*

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Introduction

Although the creativity of an individual or an organization has started to attract attention of the scientists in the beginning of the twentieth century, it seems to be accurate to underline that recently in the management research this interest has been developed into a remarkable phenomenon. Inquiries on creativity, typical for philosophy or psychology, have become the domain of the researchers in the field of management, and consequently, in a vast number of papers, creativity is demonstrated and analyzed as a source of the growth and success of contemporary enterprises, a key for improving the work environment, and as the basis of R&D and innovativeness (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Amabile, 1996; Dawson & Andriopoulos, 2014). Moreover, it is noted that creative sectors, such as fashion, advertising, media or computer games, influence in more and more important way the economy of many countries (Banks et al., 2002; Seidel, 2011; Florida, 2005). Their share in the gross domestic product of many European countries grows constantly, resulting in the efforts of many governments to offer the conditions supporting the development of such industries. However, it should be emphasized that a huge diversity in the scope of research on creativity could be observed – the levels of concern include individual and organizational creativity, the creative projects and teams, as well as creative classes, cities, regions or sectors.

Unquestionably, project management does not remain indifferent to the matter of creativity: its significance, sources or paradoxes (Kozarkiewicz, 2016). A project – by its definition – consists in creating the unique product or service. Thus, it results in the lack of the routine and repetitiveness, but in the search of new, original ideas instead. The creative sectors are project-oriented; they carry out their activities through projects. What is equally important, in traditional project industries, such as construction industry, more and more expectations



appear in relation to the originality and the innovation, both with the reference to applied technologies or offered products, as well as management processes. It might be stated, consequently, that the management of creative projects constitutes nowadays a meaningful and current research topic.

This article should be regarded as a voice in the discussion described above. The aim of this paper is to make a contribution to the knowledge on creative project by exploiting simultaneously pressures, challenges and paradoxes related to the peculiarity of managing such projects. The paper is structured as follows. After a brief introduction, in the first part of the paper, the characteristics of creative projects are delineated concisely. Thereafter, on the basis of existing literature, the results of the analysis of diverse contingencies, especially the pressures for managers, are demonstrated. These pressures, for example new technological solutions or customers' expectations, might be considered as the drivers of creativity. Some other pressures, for example the expectations as to the financial effectiveness of the project, however, could also form barriers for creativity in projects. In the next section of the paper, the analysis of creative projects is focused around the concept of the paradox. The research investigates the primary categories of paradoxes of creative projects resulting from the ambiguous expectations towards the product, the management process, or the team composition. As research reveals, in creative projects paradoxes concerning exacting choices between art and business, product functionality or design, schedule or innovation, raise a substantial question not only for the practice of project management, but also for the scientific research focused on description and understanding the phenomenon of creativity.

What should be outlined in the introduction to this paper, the diversity of creative projects frames the complexity of issues connected with managing of such projects. Thus, the description and discussion require some simplifications, synthesis or even brachylogy. In this paper, the systematizing assumption was made deliberately—seven most important pressures, challenges and paradoxes were identified.

Creative projects and their categories

Indisputably, when defining the concept of creative project it would be impossible to omit even short discussion about the understanding of the term 'creativity' and delineating the contexts of some definitions.

In the literature, the existence of many explanations of creativity is being emphasized. The most repeated and quoted definition of creativity is the one introduced by Amabile (1996): creativity is the production of ideas and outcomes that are both novel and appropriate for the goal. Numerous authors pointed at two basic features of the creativity: the originality of solutions and their effectiveness in the sense of the efficiency and influence. Creativity is defined from a perspective of creating the positive effect (Amabile, 1996; Suh & Shin, 2008), and such attributes as originality and lateral thinking, novelty, innovation, exploration, experimentation and the imagination are repeated (Dawson & Andriopoulos, 2014). Moreover, defining creativity refers to the realms such as intuition or self-expression (Banks et al., 2002). The attention is being drawn to the potential and mental abilities (Whitfield, 1975), processes (mental) involving emotions, especially focused on the original and innovative results (Drazin et al., 1999), as well as the ingenuity and the originality of thinking, noticing and creating new involvements and associations, the openness to the new experiences (Weick, 1979). As a



consequence of such approving approach and the positive view of creativity, in many research papers creativity is presented as a source of growth and success of contemporary enterprises (Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Creativity is not only a key for improvements in the workplace, but also is described as one of the crucial resources of the organization (Dawson & Andriopoulos, 2014); it is the basis for research and development activities as well as for new products or technological and organizational innovations (Politis, 2005; Napier & Nilson, 2006).

However, what should be also underlined, nowadays researchers notice not only the advantages, but also weaknesses of creativity. It is argued that the relations between creativity and the effectiveness, competitive advantage or market success are not based on straight cause-and-effect relationships. It is pointed out that creativity might be the source of chaos, conflicts, frustration and rebellion, or perhaps even promotes some actions against organizational norms (Prichard, 2002; Sundgren & Styhre, 2003; Blomberg, 2014). From the company's perspective, creativity and flexibility could be seen as the sources of effectiveness, as well as the causes of costs and risk.

In spite of the ambiguity and controversy over the notion and the role of creativity, the interest in creativity has impact on the field of project management—certainly it is associated with the fact that new, creative or high-tech sectors are more explicitly project-oriented; in so-called traditional sectors, both the technology development and the increase of customer's expectations constitute the context for the creativity of products and processes.

The most direct way of defining a creative project is to refer to the term of creativity. Relating to the quoted definitions of creativity, it could be stated that in a creative project some new, original ideas and innovative solutions are produced, and their foundations result from the potential of project team—their creative and cognitive (mental) abilities and advantageous organizational conditions. While defining creative projects the focus could be put on characteristics of products or processes. Creative project is about creating valuable, useful, but primarily new and original products or services. And these products are outcomes of various creative processes, exploiting the improvisation and mutual comparisons of ideas by the members of a project team.

Creative projects could be also defined with the reference to the definition of creative sectors proposed by World Intellectual Property Organization or UNCTAD (*United Nations Conference on Trade and Development*). Creative projects include those creating products or services which require contribution of human creativity and from customer's perspective, are mediums of symbolic value, including for instance, intellectual property and are based on knowledge and orientated (not exclusively) on art. Moreover, creative projects are also conducted in various sectors such as advertising, architecture, art, design, fashion, film, music, publishing, computer games or software. Projects which are implemented by enterprises of indicated sectors, in the majority are creative projects although the remaining problem concerns both the affiliation in the creative sector and its limits, as well as the degree of repetitiveness of defined actions taken in these sectors.

A better understanding of the concept of creative projects could be achieved and communicated by the attempt of their categorization. At first, two most important categories of creative projects are:

- projects in creative sectors (e.g. in media, computer games production),
- creative projects in traditional sectors (e.g. in construction, consulting).



Next, as a part of further categorization it is possible to suggest the division of creative projects depending on roots of required creativity:

- projects in which the creativity is being determined through external factors (e.g. technology development),
- projects in which the creativity is being determined through internal sources (e.g. creative attitudes and new ideas of executives).

Other possible proposition of creative project's categorization is the classification based on the level of required creativity: requiring the considerable originality or relying on the previous experience.

The literature review allows to indicate some specific categories of creative projects. The peculiar categories are:

- market-based project MBP, typical for recording industry or film production, which are based upon contracts, external resources, freelancers, relationships networks and frequently on the specific geographical location (Lorenzen & Fredriksen, 2005),
- Large Scale Creative Collaborations, LSCC (Adler & Chen, 2011), comprehensive, complex projects implemented by a number of independent units, covering a number of interrelated sub-projects, (e.g. in airline industry, medicine-creating new medicines) or in large film productions.

The variety of creative projects, as demonstrated above, causes the multidimensionality of research and complexity of managing such projects. Only taking into consideration unavoidable assumptions and simplifications, it is possible to explore the subject as well as to create a synthesis and to indicate some general properties of processes of managing such projects. As it was recalled earlier, some systematic simplifications were intentionally assumed, as seven major pressures, challenges and paradoxes were deliberately identified in the next part of this paper.

Seven pressures in managing creative projects

From the perspective of the debates around creative projects, the question about the sources of creativity appears to be one of the significant. What factors do determine the creativity of the project and its level? Which of these conditions, relating to individuals, team or the entire organization should be considered as essential? Or even more: which do have the greatest positive and negative impact?

It is commonly accepted that the pressures on creativity are two-sided—internal and external. Actions and attitudes of the customer or the development of new technologies are changing the requirements or characteristics of the products. Similarly important are the internal pressures that arise from the attitudes of the project team members or their need for experimentation and creative actions. In terms of outcomes, external and internal pressures could not only stimulate the project team to increase their creativity, but might create barriers or more passive and conservative attitudes.

The literature review (e.g. Lorenzen & Fredriksen, 2005; Simon, 2006; Sundstrom & Zika-Viktorsson, 2009) and the results of the previous authors' analyzes indicate that seven major drivers of creativity (positive pressures) in projects include the following characteristics and conditions:



- 1) art constituting the essence of the project (e.g. composing music under the creative inspiration of the artist, irrespective of the expectations of the audience or the director);
- 2) product per se (e.g. creating new, original product such as piece of art, marketing product, a book, or a computer game);
- 3) innovation and technological development (e.g. products of new technology, such as e-medical systems which are combining IT and the medical knowledge);
- 4) time or other limited resources enforcing the usage of new solutions, possible with the existing restrictions;
- 5) the principles of management, employee's autonomy, empowerment and the independence in actions;
- 6) participants in the project team, their potential, attitude, their need for freedom of actions, creativity and originality of thought, new options and solutions;
- 7) customer expectations for aesthetics, functionality, application of new technological solutions, etc.

In a similar manner, the analysis of negative pressures could be completed, i.e. the factors and conditions that limit the creativity of the team can be listed. By identifying seven major negative pressures, the following remarks are to be pointed out:

- 1) financial orientation, expectations as to the financial efficiency of the project, profit (margin), the objectives of creating value for shareholders;
- 2) client and his expectations for the financial effectiveness, restrictions imposed not only about the budget, but also to the product (e.g. the usage of the technology which is already known for client);
- 3) repeatability concerning the similarity of technology, design, functionality, etc., leading to the homogeneity of groups and taken actions;
- 4) formalization, rigidity of structures and management systems, top-down imposition of specific solutions concerning not only organizational matters, but also the project team composition, etc.;
- 5) supervision and control of actions and effects, imposing specific solutions as a response to the expectations of controllers;
- 6) risk aversion and, as a result, restrictions in experimentation and in search for innovative solutions;
- 7) continuity, regularity of actions, the focus on the exploitation of knowledge, experience, resources and ideas that have already been approved by other customers.

As it was discussed above, there is compatibility between factors causing the pressures—both the drivers and the limits of creativity. The activities conducted under these different pressures causes peculiar challenges for managing creative projects.

Seven challenges in managing creative projects

The complexity of the management of creative projects affects many challenges, i.e. questions or problems, which have to be solved; the difficulties and obstacles managers have to cope with, as well as confusions and dilemmas that require appropriate decisions. The literature review, analysis of topics of the research undertaken, as well as author's observations allowed to formulate seven key areas which present challenges for managing creative projects (Table 1).



Table 1

Seven challenges in the management of creative project

No.	Challenges	Characteristics	References
1.	The process of the management of creative projects	The required flexibility in the engaged activities and gathered resources due to the lack of predictability and the possibility of scheduling a number of activities based on creativity; the necessity for experimentation and prototyping, associated with the inability to characterize the product design (e.g. a piece of music); the need for acceptance of the attitudes of creative people, whose creativity goes simultaneously for instance with the lack of acceptance of the principles of cooperation; the necessity to combine different personalities, routine activities and creativity, efficiency and innovation, schedule and artistic license, etc.	Simon (2006), Sundstrom& Zika-Viktorsson (2009), Seidel (2011)
2.	Project management methodology	The lack of or the limited possibility of applying well-known project management methodologies (e.g. in culture or entertainment).	Hartman et al. (1998)
3.	Experimentation	As the basis for project implementation and product development, for example in music projects or graphic design, etc.; a response to the inability to formulate clear expectations of the client or the project manager (or supervisors).	Banks et al. (2002), Perretti& Negro (2007)
4.	Leadership (roles and competences of project managers)	Management of creative projects requires a common understanding; identifying and supporting individual creative talents and predispositions; creating various inspiring challenges for project team.	Politis (2005), Simon (2006)
5.	Acquiring and developing resources and competences	Key resources are intangible in the form of the potential of people, their experience and the relationships between individuals. In a large number of creative projects (in advertising, media, computer games), the most important resources come from independent developers (freelancers), working with many organizations. Issues in managing creative individuals result from other connotations such as eccentricity, self-admiration, lack of control, etc.	Lorenzen& Fredriksen (2005), Banks et al. (2002)
6.	Performance measurement	The measurement should combine the economic efficiency, customer satisfaction and the originality or novelty of the product, which in	Adler&Chen (2011), Kozarkiewicz



		itself, constitutes the mutually excluding triad. Measuring the performance of the individual team members is also very difficult due to the dependencies (e.g. between the results of work of graphics and IT specialists) and the reciprocal inspirations of individuals. Subjectivity in the evaluation of the performance, different perception of innovative products and original are also very relevant.	(2015)
7.	Inter-organizational cooperation and relationships	The cooperation in creative sectors is particularly significant as demonstrate the established ecosystems and clusters, such as Hollywood or the Association of Italian Artists from the Turin area. The feature of the groups participating in the creative project is the creation of guilds or communities of practice (CoP), as well as the cooperation within the creative environments based on relations resulting from the necessity of continuous development and inspiration.	Grabher (2004), Bettiol & Sedita (2011)

Source: Author's construction based on the analyzed articles.

Obviously, beside the major challenges listed in the Table 1, the others could be taken into consideration, especially in the case of specific categories of projects. For instance, in the live entertainment sector or in the music sector (the organization of the concert), the time is this element of project triangle that is absolutely not negotiable and cannot be changed regardless of other considerations—the concert has to start at a set time. Similarly, different challenges arise from the role of the client—some creative projects must be implemented in accordance with the requirements of the customer (e.g. advertisement campaigns) and others (e.g. creating a new album in the music industry) are carried out without the participation of the customer, who finally, after completion of the project, makes the decision as to the compatibility of the product with his or her expectations (by buying or not buying the CD).

Moreover, one of the challenges is the need to deal with paradoxes or situations of tension resulting from the existence of two equivalent alternative decisions. This specific challenge will be presented in the next part of the paper.

Seven paradoxes of managing creative projects

As the literature review reveals the concept of paradox has been more and more often used by researchers in the field of the management. The roots of growing interest in paradoxes have been placed in the increasing complexity of processes effecting contemporary organizations (Smith & Lewis, 2011). The paradox has become an important element of research in management since the Cameron and Quinn; they saw the paradoxes as a way to get around the simplified view of reality and the ability to perceive the complexity of organizational phenomena (cf. Lewis, 2000). The review of the management literature indicates that the paradox is defined as two opposing, but related elements, that exist simultaneously and



continuously in time; they seem to be logical if they are considered separately, but irrational and inconsistent, even absurd, when they are compiled and examined together (Smith & Lewis, 2011). According to De Wit and Meyer (1999), the paradox is a situation in which two seemingly contradictory or mutually exclusive solutions turns out to be correct at the same time. The problem that is seen as a paradox has no real solution, because there is no logical possibility of merging the two opposites in a consistent, unambiguous manner. According to many authors (e.g. Smith & Lewis, 2011), paradox is a response to the tensions arising in situations of coexisting alternatives and possible solutions which are at the opposite edges: cooperate or compete, work individually or in teams, provide organizational flexibility or the productivity processes. It is important to note that the multiplicity of paradigms in management leads to the lack of unity of views in the study of paradoxes, as to whether paradoxes are an inherent feature of the organization or rather they are socially constructed.

The managers of creative project have to confront a number of confusions associated with the possibilities of extreme decisions–situations, when the alternative choices lead to solutions that do not have a clear advantage. Firstly, they result from the characteristics of the project: the teamwork (collectively or individually), temporality of projects (project success or long-term development), implementation of inter-organizational projects (objectives of the organization or the objectives of the consortium), and the standardization of the project’s management (according to the methodology or to a new idea). Secondly, individual and team creativity might be the source of subsequent paradoxes: the effectiveness of creative activities (new design or costs), innovation (original or based on previous solutions) and motivation for creative work (the passion of employees or the objectives of the organization).

In Table 2, on the basis of the literature review, seven major paradoxes of creative project management are identified and presented.

Table2

Seven paradoxes of managing creative projects

No.	Paradox	Characteristics	References
1.	The objectives paradox: art vs. business	The necessity of simultaneous implementation of conflicting and equally important financial and non-financial objectives (e.g. design, aesthetics, innovation, realization of customer expectations, etc.).	DeFillipii et al. (2007), Chang&Birkett(2004), Eikof&Haunschild (2007)
2.	The project team paradox: similar vs. diversified	Achieving a high level of originality requires the diversity of the team, including the acceptance of new employees and their original ideas, while management practice prefers experienced teams, often homogeneous due to the attitudes and expectations or decisions: „new” (juvenility, experiments, originality) vs. „old” (experience, knowledge but	Andriopulous (2003), Perretti&Negro (2007)



		also the resistance against changes), „normal” vs. „eccentrics”.	
3.	The organizational ambidexterity paradox: exploration vs. exploitation	The requirement of combining exploration (seeking for new ideas, models, technologies, customers, etc.), and at the same time, efficiency resulting from the gathered experience.	DeFillipii et al. (2007)
4.	The team architecture (structure) paradox: formal vs. informal	The team’s architecture should be both "rigid", based on a formal project teams and "soft", based on informal relationships, sharing ideas and experiences, creating the so-called communities of practice.	Chang&Birkett(2004), Bettiol&Sedita(2011)
5.	The product paradox: practicality vs. aesthetics	The product of the project (e.g. IT or architectural), should combine conflicting expectations for functionality and technological innovation, aesthetics and operating costs.	DeFillipii et al. (2007), Chang&Birkett (2004)
6.	The learning paradox: collecting experience vs. risking by entering new areas	The typical paradox for mass creative production (e.g. video games). There is a need to manage the artistic expression and the originality of the product, but also the need for accumulation of knowledge and experience resulting from the fulfillment of economic expectations.	Bakker et al.(2011), Cohendet&Simon (2007)
7.	The creativity and control paradox: to control or to allow the creative freedom	Ensuring the realization of the tasks according to a plan, but at the same time, not reducing the required creative freedom of team members.	Adler & Chen (2011)

Source: Author’s construction based on the analyzed articles.

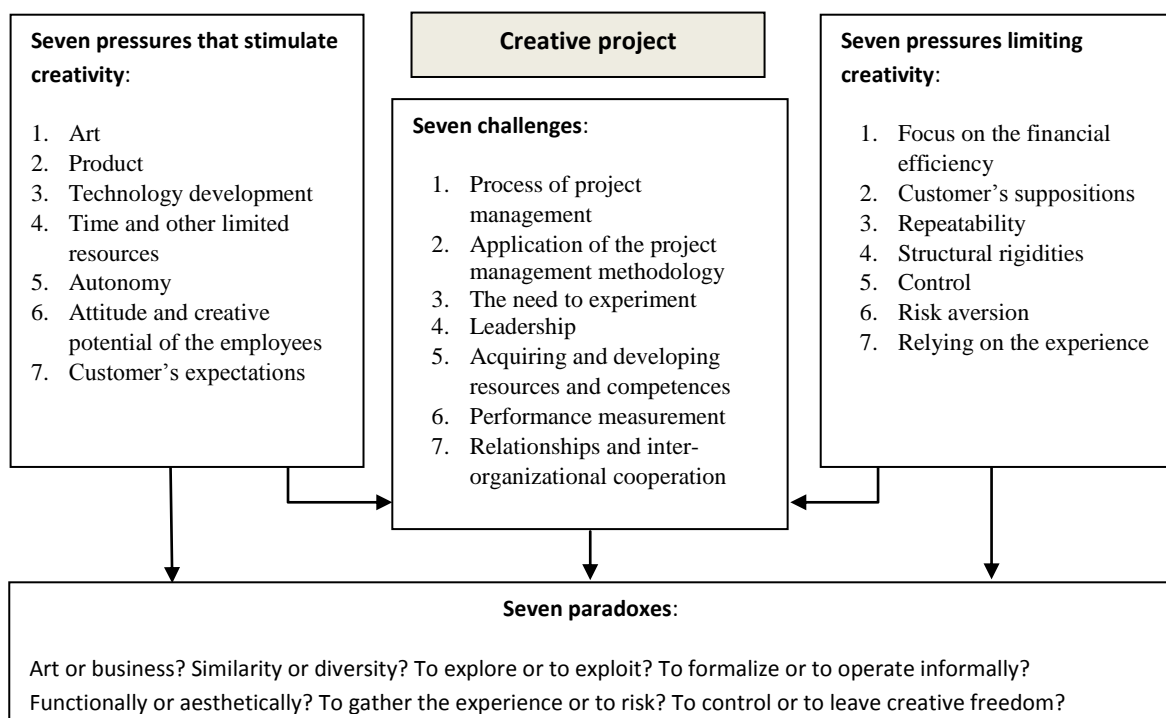
It is beyond question that in the management of creative project some other paradoxes resulting from the peculiarity of specific project category could be indicated. One good example are inter-organizational projects. The implementation of such joint creative projects is associated with tensions including project’s implementation performed by enterprises which have their own objectives and which operate in different economic, social and organizational conditions (Brensen, 2007; Van Marrewijk et al., 2008). Further example could be the paradox of functioning in the conditions of crisis when companies restrain their creative collaborations with other partners, which in turn, limit the originality of the product and causes further decline deepening the crisis (Von Bernuth & Bathelt, 2007). In the case of co-operation there is a paradox of resources in strategic alliances: they are commonly established because of the complementarity of resources, providing the ability to co-create synergies and value, though on



the other hand, the cooperation based on the resources could lead to the erosion of the specific resources, which were the principal source of the competitive advantage (Gander et al., 2007).

Discussion

The investigation presented above has indicated the multiplicity of challenges and paradoxes in creative projects management. The research pointed, among others, at the sources of these challenges and paradoxes which are generated due to the pressures caused by internal and external conditions. These pressures could have a stimulating effect, however, they might limit the creativity of individuals and teams. Therefore, they require proper identification and response. Figure 1 presents the summarizing model of the deliberations demonstrated in the paper. As it was previously mentioned, a respective number – seven, was intentionally assumed to systematize and simplify the complex nature of creative projects.



Source: Author's construction.

Fig.1. Seven pressures, challenges and paradoxes in the management of creative projects

The managers of creative projects are regularly faced with various tensions associated with the need to answer to numerous challenges, and are required to make decisions in terms of paradoxes, simultaneously recognizing alternatives of their decisions on the opposite directions. The focal point, thus, is to find the answer to the difficult question: how to deal with the



paradox? In the existing literature (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011; De Wit & Meyer, 1999) some solutions as to dealing with paradoxes have been suggested. However, it is easy to predict that these suggestions have a very general nature. Proponents of the contingency theory indicate the need to adapt to specific internal and external conditions by choosing alternatives with a certain advantage over the others in these instances. According to Smith and Lewis (2011), the manager's response to the paradox situations is the accommodation, and it could be understood as the ability of continuous, dynamic, iterative movement between alternatives. What is equally important, and what has also been highlighted in Table 2, various paradoxes of creative project management occur at the same time and require the integration and the cope with tension resulting from their simultaneous existence. As it was pointed out by many authors (e.g. Bloodgood & Chae, 2010; Smith & Lewis, 2011), the acceptance of the existence of paradoxes and the ability to function flexibly in this situation is also very important.

What is noteworthy, the reflection about paradoxes, their understanding and the acceptance, their creative usage in the dynamically changing conditions, as well as their division or integration, constitute a very complex issue that requires from the managers the appropriate cognitive abilities (Lewis, 2000). On the other hand, tension and attempts to cope with paradoxes stimulate processes of learning, the search for new solutions, creative problem solving and, as a result—the development of the organization.

Conclusions

The scholars interested in the field of management have been searching for the answers to a crucial question about the sources of the enterprise's success. Creativity has been one of the categories that gained particular interests in recent years. Project management increasingly refers to the importance of creativity, thus researchers are frequently willing to dedicate their studies to various aspects of creative projects.

The aim of this article was to review and present the most important issues of creative project management: the pressures, challenges and paradoxes. The paper certainly have not discussed all of the threads of this vast research area, it indicated only the most important, potential challenges for both theorists wishing to explore and discover new research issues, as well as practitioners, who face these problems on a regular basis. The research undertaken had a number of limitations resulting from the scale and the approach of the study. However, it is demonstrated that the subject matter is highly interesting and inspiring and it is worth to take next steps of research, which will extend the range of identified pressures, challenges and paradoxes, confirming or denying their occurrence, and importantly, will improve the accuracy and reliability of the results.

Unquestionably, the management of creative project requires the creativity from managers of such projects. Apparently the research on the creative projects requires creativity from researchers—regardless of the subject or scope. And it makes the research on creativity even more inspiring.

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