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**Creativity in numbers and words:
The analysis of divergence in creative project perception**

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Abstract

Aim/purpose – The main purpose of this paper is to identify the necessity of distinguishing a particular taxonomic group termed creative projects. Is it a peculiar, distinctive type of projects, or nowadays every project can be denominated ‘creative’? The research aims at comparing the ways of understanding and defining this term in prior literature and in the opinions of practitioners involved in everyday project management and realization.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper is divided into main parts corresponding to research objectives: first, the results of literature research is demonstrated briefly, and next the results of empirical research are delineated. The empirical research was conducted with mixed methods. The quantitative part conducted as CAWI was supported by Poll Everywhere platform, the qualitative investigations were supported by MAXQDA software.

Findings – According to research results, there exists the inconsistency among the views of researchers, as well as practitioners. As the literature review reveals, there are various stances towards this issue: from silent assumption that the concept does not require to be defined till some analyses of the relations between routine and creative actions. Similar variety was disclosed when analyzing practitioners’ judgments.

Research implications/limitations – The divergence in opinions as to the necessity of distinguishing a particular taxon of creative projects as well as the broad variety of opinions as to their specific characteristics have given rise to the call for more precise framing scientific research on creative projects. The research has numerous limitations resulting from its scope, sampling method or sample size, however, it demonstrates the absence of coherent views and variety of arguments used.

Originality/value/contribution – Apart from urging the more rigorous frames of research on creative projects, the paper indicates new avenues of investigations oriented towards determining the ways of assessing the level of project creativity. Moreover, the paper opens the further discussion on the education and training of more creative project managers, as well as on the designing creativity-supporting project environment.

Keywords: project management, creativity, creative project.

JEL Classification: M10, M50.

1. Introduction

In the last years, creativity has appeared as the focal point of deliberations in various fields of science drawing interests of researchers in psychiatry, psychology, social sciences or economics. In numerous scientific papers or more popular articles such notions as ‘creativity explosion’ (Osborne, 2003), ‘celebrating creativity’ (Tuori & Vilen, 2011) or ‘the development of creativity-based economy’ (Florida, 2005) have been manifested and disputed widely. Prior research in management demonstrated creativity mostly as the foundation of the development and the origin of market success of enterprises (Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Rehn & De Cock, 2009). Creativity is regarded as the key to enhance work environment (Amabile, 1997; Amabile, Schatzel, Moneta, & Kramer, 2004), as the primal resource (Dawson & Andriopoulos, 2014), or as the groundwork of research and development (Napier & Nilson, 2006; Politis, 2005). Moreover, it is often underlined that in contemporary economies the role played by creative industries, such as fashion, advertising, media, video games etc., has been growing undoubtedly (Banks, Calvey, Owen, & Russell, 2002; Florida, 2005; Seidel, 2011). Thus, the breadth of the diversity in research is very extensive with the levels concerning creative individuals and organizations, likewise creative teams or projects, creative classes, cities, regions or even industries or countries.

Unavoidably, the development of research on creativity has not omitted this area of management that is exploring projects and project management. It seems to be obvious considering the fact that the most popular way of defining projects is to see it as a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service, that relates to the absence of routine and repetitions and focusing on new, original ideas. The subject matter of creative projects has been explored by researchers in variety of contexts, e.g. peculiarity of the realization and the role of experimentation (Lorenzen & Fredriksen, 2005) or impulses (Adler & Obstfeld, 2007), as well as typical attributes of project management (Banks et al., 2002; Simon, 2006), or establishing the environment supporting creativity of project teams (Bettioli & Sedita, 2011; Suh & Badrinarayanan, 2014).

Despite the increasing prevalence, there is a lack of deliberations on basic assumptions as to creative projects. One of the primary issues is the manner of defining and understanding of the notion ‘a creative project’. Is it a peculiar, distinctive type of projects or, maybe, every project can be denominated a creative project?

Unquestionably, in the existing literature on project management there are numerous examples of projects’ classifications (Trocki, 2013). The significance of classifying in science is evident – it is the basis for understanding and communicating complex ideas, it offers the clarification of complicated constructs, and, what is more important, it is the fabric in theory-building processes. The taxonomies are foundations of scientific discourse familiarizing certain concepts and constructs. What should be underlined, besides, classifications are important for the practice, as practitioners use their own mental models as the basis of their perception, and thus as condition of their decisions and actions (Daniel & Daniel, 2008). Mental models require definitions, understanding, and taxonomies.

Considering the sense of classifying, when introducing ‘creative projects’ as taxonomy units, it should be understood that the mental models evolve, influencing the construction and interpretation of reality. Seemingly simple question: is ‘a creative project’ a new taxon, or should projects be divided into separated clusters of creative and uncreative, is an important research problem for these who explore project classifications and those who are eager to understand the mental models, perception or learning processes of project managers. This research problem leads to a further range of questions concerning the divergence in the view of theorist and practitioners, as well as the potential sources of such divergence. Consequently, it results in further questions of the assessment of project creativity. Should it be a simple binary scheme or rather a multi-dimensional evaluation system? Taxonomies and mental models shape both theoretical discourse and practical solutions.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze the taxon of ‘a creative project’ in two dimensions, i.e., the perception of researcher of this subject matter and the observations and apprehension by practitioners involved in everyday project management and realization. As the literature review reveals, there are various stances towards this issue: from silent assumption that the concept does not require to be defined (e.g., Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010) till some detailed analyses of the relations between routine and creative actions seen as points of one bi-polar scale (Obstfeld, 2012).

In this paper, the results of research of prior works are confronted with the results of empirical research conducted among Polish practitioners of project management. Are they opinions consistent or contrary to researchers’ views? Are practitioners more willing to distinguish creative project as peculiar type, or prefer to see each project as creative and their own work as originative?

In the structure of the paper there are two main parts corresponding to research objectives: first, the results of literature research is demonstrated briefly, and next the results of empirical research conducted with mixed methods (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009) and supported by Poll Everywhere platform and MAXQDA software are discussed concisely.

2. Literature review

It is to be underlined hereby that although creativity has been the subject of intense research since years, the problem of defining this term still remains (Piórkowska, 2016). It could be explained by a very large extent of studies, from individual personality traits, through team creativity, till organizational aspects. Creativity is considered as a process connected with particular unexpected emotions and the shock of recognition, e.g. as ‘an act that produces effective surprise’ (Bruner, 1962). Creativity is also defined through mental abilities of putting old things into new combinations (Weick, 1979; Whitfield, 1975). More contemporary definitions underline the influence of the environment and human interactions. In general, in the most frequently quoted definitions creativity is understood as the process leading to novel, useful and understandable result (Kao, 1989), or – in other words – as the process through which new and useful ideas are generated (Amabile, 1997). When summarizing the discussions on creativity such features as originality of ideas, their usefulness and effectiveness, as well as such terms as lateral thinking, novelty, experimenting, imagination, intuition, self-expression or self-manifestation are indicated most frequently (Kozarkiewicz, 2015).

Creativity as a subject matter and topic of research has drawn interests of numerous scientist working on projects and project management. Although the issue of creative projects has been investigated widely comprising various matters from creative teams till projects in creative industries (Kozarkiewicz & Kabalska, 2017), the defining and understanding of what a creative project is remains unequivocal and imprecise, even when the notion ‘creative project’ appears in the title of the publication.

The approach towards defining a creative project that seems to be used most often in existing works appears in the manner of combining two terms: project and creativity, and indicating peculiar conditions or attributes meeting the expectations related to creative projects. This approach was used for instance in the works of Simon (2006) or Harrison & Rouse (2015). Some authors prefer to define a creative project indirectly – defining a creative team as combining

individual and collective processes of creation (Suh & Badrinarayanan, 2014). Alternatively, the authors use synonymic expressions describing creative projects. The terms: project-based systems (Banks et al., 2002) or market-based projects (Lorenzen & Frederiksen, 2005) can be demonstrated hereby as examples.

The clue of the next approach is the assumption that the understanding of what a creative project is can be delivered indirectly by the context, most of all industry. In numerous papers presenting selected issues of creative industries (Bettioli & Sedita, 2011; Harrison & Rouse, 2015; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Simon, 2006) the authors presume that they could call the projects creative. For example, in the papers investigating the role played by music producers in Nashville (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010) or modern dance company (Harrison & Rouse, 2015), although creative projects appear in the titles, there are no introductory definitions or discussions on the matter.

And the final and distinct approach towards defining creative project is based on detailed and meticulous analysis relating creative and routine actions and indicating that, in general, they manifest points of the same scale but located on opposed directions (Adler & Obstfeld, 2007; Obstfeld, 2012). Consequently, it could be assumed that every activity is creative, however, it has a different level of creativity: from very low, routine and repeated, till very high, unique and original. Therefore, every project is creative, but creative projects differ by their requirements as to the originality and novelty.

3. Research methods

The dispersion of approaches towards defining and understanding creative projects has been the main motivation to conduct empirical research oriented to explore and categorize the opinions and convictions of practitioners as to separateness and peculiarity of creative projects. The first phase of the research was a pilot exploration based on the application of a survey (CAWI) conducted by Poll Everywhere platform. Among 40 respondents willing to participate in this part of research 43% have chosen the option that every project is a creative project. Moreover, according to 45% of respondents the restoring of one of the university building is an example of a creative project as well. Thus, one of the first remarks based on this phase of research was that the practitioners want to relate their work with creativity (over 40% in both questions), possibly willing to see their own work as creative. However, it must be underlined that quite high percentage, i.e., 57% manifested the view of the existence of creative and uncreative projects.

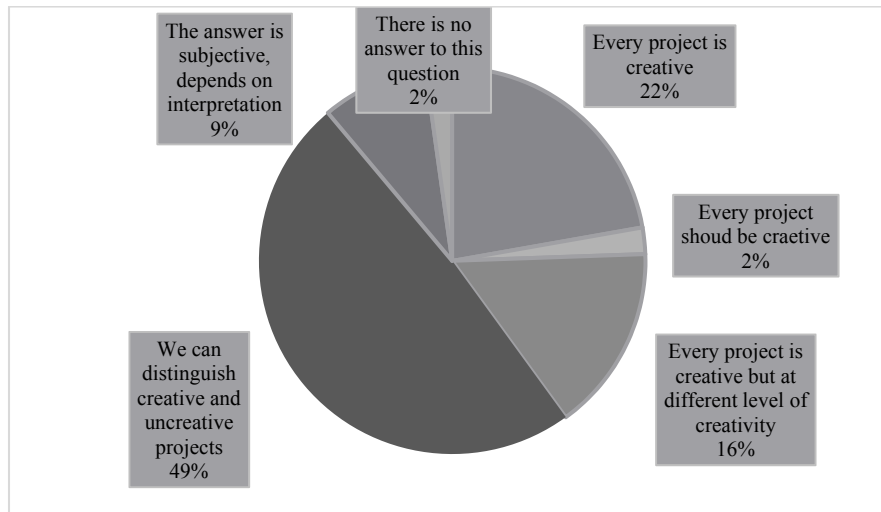
As it was confirmed within pilot studies not only the researchers, but also the practitioners represent varied views as to the substance of creative projects. This assumption laid the foundation for the next step in the research, at this stage qualitative, oriented towards identification of the crucial arguments used by practitioners when delineating their idea of creative project. The question that was the basis of qualitative research was as follows: ‘A project could be defined as an endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service. Does it mean that each project is a creative project? Can we distinguish uncreative projects? What is the difference?’ This question was published on an Internet platform, and the participation in the research was voluntary. The sample was collected within snowball sampling and quota sampling rules, with the awareness and acceptance of their pros (e.g., cost) and cons (lack of representativeness). In result 37 statements were gathered. As it was disclosed, the respondents of the survey represented variety of industries (e.g., construction, automotive, IT and advertising). The qualitative analysis was conducted with MAXQDA software and with two steps of coding: first, 25 inductive open codes were introduced, next they were grouped and synthesized into five categories of sub-codes relating to general perception, defining creative project, type of arguments used, examples used and industry influence.

4. Research findings

The declaration of practitioners as to their view of the existence or peculiarity of creative projects can be synthesized into three major groups of opinions:

1. Every project is a creative project:
 - a) every project is a creative project by definition,
 - b) every project is a creative project as uncreative projects should be abandoned (a normative view),
 - c) every project is a creative project, but has different level of creativity.
2. There are two separate types of projects: creative and uncreative.
3. There is no answer to such question:
 - a) the absence of answer relates to the subjective interpretation of terms,
 - b) there is no clear answer to such complex question.

Figure 1 demonstrates the results of research. What should be underlined hereby is that some statements of respondents were not clear or contained more than one, and sometimes contrary declarations, making the classification of texts more ambiguous. Among 37 texts there were six responses that, in fact, demonstrated mixed opinion of the respondent.

Figure 1. Research results – the perception of distinctiveness of creative projects

The first interesting group of opinions was manifested by these authors who advocates clearly their view that each project is creative. The opinions, in fact, were based on three major arguments – first, it results from the definition of a project: “[...] a firm could work continually on one group of products, but the combination of the elements of project triangle will be always different and specific to a project. The reason could be for instance specific requirements of the customer as to product, time of delivery or means allocated to the project [...] Uncreative project wouldn’t be a project” (Respondent 11). “Single and separate product, i.e. the lack of links to normal, routine activity of the firm, doubtlessly indicates that each project is creative” (Respondent 27). Secondly, it is affected by the definition of creativity: Translating this definition into project management we can accept that creativity is the ability to original and effective problem-solving and risk taking [...] creativity in project is demonstrated not only by thinking up but also by associating effective solutions fitting to the current requirements” (Respondent 35). “According to the definition, each project is a creative project... working on a project requires use of the imagination or original ideas [...] never being certain as to the final result” (Respondent 4). “And thirdly, it results from the demands towards people involved in projects: the role of a project manager is to link the elements of project triangle and this requires creative and individual approach to each project” (Respondent 11); “[...] every project has something unknown, demanding from the team, and the managers foremost, the best fitting of the project to its external conditions” (Respondent 35).

The next approach towards creative and uncreative projects relates to the statements that every project can be regarded as creative, however, each demonstrates different level of creativity due to specific internal and external contingencies. The level of creativity depends, according to respondents, on uniqueness of the product (“[...] the more unique the task the more creative project”, Respondent 12), on repetitiveness and possibilities to use the experience (“[...] as less creative we will regard the projects with low level of novelty, e.g., projects oriented to systematize the process”, Respondent 32), on the risk and uncertainty (“[...] the level of project creativity I will connect with unpredictability of final results”, Respondent 4) as well as on behavior and creative attitudes of project team (“[...] the level of project creativity relates to the potential of the team [...], organizational conditions and processes”, Respondent 7).

A different approach was presented by these respondents who presented the conviction as to the possibility to distinguish two separate types of projects: creative and uncreative. When analyzing and delineating the arguments used in their opinion it has to be underlined that hereby three major plots of arguments could be revealed. Two of them seem to be similar to those presented in above points: product qualities (“[...] the effort taken to produce original product [...] so it can be shown easily that not all projects are creative, thus I can admit that there are also uncreative projects”, Respondent 17), and the characteristics of project team (“[...] if we consider this assumption as true, all projects require creativity from people involved in them, and with such assumption I cannot agree”, Respondent 3). However, there is one new plot in the discussion – and this new topic are the attributes of the processes of project realization and management (“[...] there are project that we can call creative and uncreative and what is distinguished relates mostly to the manner of the leading”, Respondent 1; “[...] although there is a lack of objective or plan [...] everyday adaptation to changing project environment”, Respondent 21). Quite a large representation of respondents (nine people) does not identify project creativity with its product, but rather with management processes, called by respondents: approach towards leading, manner of product realization, management method or project methodology. It can be argued that the respondents more frequently see the management processes as discontinuous (discrete) from the point of their creativity.

As it was underlined, a part of respondents decided to give noncommittal, evasive answers, and these respondents demonstrated the lack of possibility to answer such question (“[...] there is no single, unequivocal answer to the problem if every project is creative, as it is the issue of definition we accept when defining creativity”, Respondent 30), or the subjectivity in the perception of creativity, own particular interpretation of both definition and examples deliv-

ered by experience (“[...] in my opinion project creativity mostly depends on the perspective and subjective point of the recipient. The assessment [...] depends upon the evaluator and his or her view. The assessment can be influenced by the difficulty of the task”, Respondent 15).

When exploring the result of the research, the analysis can be also focused on the ways of dealing with the reasoning supporting the respondents’ opinions. The variety of arguments used can be categorized into four major groups: first, they were based on the quoted, however relatively loosely, definitions of project and creativity, and consequently on underlying peculiar attributes of projects or the absence of such attributes (14 opinions); secondly, quite a numerous group of respondents decided to use maneuver emphasizing the distinctiveness of creative projects by the comparison of examples based on practice, media or literature (16 statements), next, there were references to experts, literature or – as it was called – theories (7 opinions), and finally, there were references to own professional practice, with specific attention paid to the experience as the source of arguments (4 views).

Similar conclusions as to the ways of argumentation could be drew when applying the method of lexical search. Such words as product, unique, objective, process, result, management, risk, as well as definition or example, were among the expressions most frequently used by respondents. What can be underlined is the high position of such words as management and risk. It seems to confirm that the respondents tend to link ‘creative projects’ with the way of management (‘creative project management’). Moreover, the word ‘methodology’ appeared also frequently as the argument in identification of creative projects. The respondents more often than uncertainty or unpredictability used the word ‘risk’ that is typical when discussing project management.

What has to be underlined is that, according to research results, there are no differences in views connected with the industry (sector) represented by respondents. Even respondents who declared employment in creative industry firms (e.g., advertising) support the opinion of the existence of creative and uncreative projects: “[...] graphics prepared to a leaflet of a shops network. It is a unique product, each leaflet is different, but it is not a creative project, there are only specific and predetermined places to put photos and text” (Respondent 34).

The final part of research conclusions is based on exploring the understanding of ‘a creative project’, i.e., on categorizing the ways of constructing the definitions. As it was revealed, numerous respondents took some effort to define what – in their opinion – ‘a creative project’ is. It could be stressed, however, that some of these views, although apparently referring to the literature, in fact demonstrated rather the conviction as what the literature should contain. Table 1 demonstrates the results of the analysis conducted.

Table 1. Definitions of creative projects in respondents' views

No.	Ways of defining	Examples (quotations)
1.	Description based on product attributes (subject)	
	Unique, original, novel, innovative result	<i>The difference [...] is that creative project is characterized by innovativeness, like introducing new idea or new product into the market (Respondent 23)</i>
	Artistic products	<i>When we look at artistic projects we immediately categorize them as creative projects (Respondent 20)</i>
2.	Description based on project attributes	
	Unrepeatable	<i>[...] in a completely different way and in result it gives something novel, then doubtlessly we can talk about creative project (Respondent 30)</i>
	Unpredictable	<i>[...] they have much higher risk, uncertainty and unpredictability. Activities [...] and results are unique, and also uncertain as to their final shape, the important role plays here risk as well (Respondent 32)</i>
	Flexible	<i>A creative project requires flexibility in actions taken and in resources allocated due to the lack of predictability (Respondent 6)</i>
3.	Description based on peculiarity of processes	
	Decision-making	<i>[...] the ability to decide what solution is better in a particular situation (Respondent 32); we talk about creative projects when we use innovative solutions enhancing the effectiveness of actions (Respondent 8)</i>
	Project methodology	<i>Active engagement of customer [...] requires continuous creativity from developers and adaptation to the expectations that are impossible to be predicted at the stage of project planning (Respondent 21)</i>
4.	Description based on people performance	
	Team	<i>[...] when e.g., customer does not have precise expected attributes [...] the project team has to offer more creative attitude that allows for understanding needs and meet customer expectations (Respondent 22)</i>
	Manager	<i>It requires particular creativity from manger who's role is to adapt every day to changing project environment (Respondent 21)</i>
5.	Description based on specific industries	
	Art	<i>[...] particularly being realized in artistic sectors (Respondent 22)</i>
	Creative industries	<i>We can comprise such industries as advertising, architecture, design, fashion, computer games and software, as well as movie or music industries (Respondent 10)</i>

According to the definitions of creative projects proposed by respondents, there are five main dimensions that allow for comprehension or distinction of this term: attributes of product, features of project (as such), qualities of management processes, characteristics of team (or managers) and peculiarity of industry. Moreover, to elaborate their definitions more precisely the respondents introduced examples of creative projects – from the most often used example of creative and uncreative projects from the same industry (construction industry was here used most frequently), till interesting, peculiar examples “[...] like Zalando or Amazon that in fact did not introduced a new service, but proposed a new way of its conduct” (Respondent 3) or “[...] Pet Rock project... invented in 1975 by Gary Dahl. Although the idea seems to be absurd (sending a box with a stone) it allowed Gary to become a millionaire” (Respondent 15).

5. Discussion

The results of research uncover and delineate the variety of opinions as to defining and understanding the notion of creative projects. Moreover, apart from the absence of unanimity as to the definitions, there is also the lack of compatibility in considering the necessity of determining the substance of the subject matter. The study of the existing literature demonstrated that in the scientific papers on creative projects the most frequently used ways of constructing the definition are the combinations of two basic terms: project and creativity, or the descriptions of the context, i.e., creative industry. When analyzing prior research we can only assume that the origins of the difference in research frameworks are grounded in research objective – for some researchers the concept of a creative project is central for the explorations and understanding, however, some others concentrate rather on explaining linked phenomena.

When analyzing the results of empirical investigations and studying the answers given by practitioners, it could be recognized that their definitions are mostly based on popular, commonly known examples, sometimes supported by their prior experience. Interestingly, the majority of respondents support the idea of distinguishing creative and uncreative projects, or, quite similarly, the conception of the existence of varied levels of creativity in projects. The respondents connect the inherence or the level of creativity with uniqueness of the products, repetitiveness of actions, possibilities of the usage of prior experience, risk and uncertainty in project realization, as well as with the behavior and creative attitudes of project team. What is more typical for practitioners discussing the matter of creative projects is their focus on risk management as well as on project methodologies.

In general, the research cannot offer a simple answer to the question of the development of project taxonomies. It seems that although the introduction of a taxon based on creativity (i.e., creative and uncreative projects) will be accepted by the majority of theorists and practitioners, it will affect the rise of new challenges. From the point of further research, for example, when distinguishing creative and uncreative projects, the new and important subject matter is the assessment of creativity. Consequently, when constructing research framework, the decision as to creativity evaluation should be taken. For instance, creative projects could be depicted by a particular level of creativity: from extremely uncreative till very creative. Thus, the assessment and construction of scales seem to open new area for further explorations, possibly based on demonstrated above attributes of products, processes, team attitudes, industry contexts, risk level and methodology. It might be a new demanding field of next studies and discussions.

Finally, what should be underlined, the assumption that every project is creative, even if differing in the level of creativity, affects the considerations on some enhancements in the processes of teaching or training project managers. The changes could concern both, the knowledge required – with stronger focus on agility and agile methodologies, as well as the practical skills – with focus on methods and techniques stimulating creative behaviors of project teams or designing creativity-supporting environment.

6. Conclusions

Creativity as a phenomenon focusing interests of numerous scientists and regarded as a key factor conditioning the development of organizations, has fostered the emergence of new paths in project management research. The agility and flexibility required in project processes, the uniqueness and originality seen as essential features of expected projects outcomes, have affected the inquisitiveness in so called creative projects, making this area an interesting field of explorations. In this paper the question of a new project taxonomy based on criterion of creativity was explored, and the answer to seemingly simple question concerning the existence of creative and uncreative projects was investigated. As it appeared, such investigation is rather a complex and multi-faced endeavor.

When summing up the results of the exploration presented in this paper, the following issues could be underlined.

1. Both, academic researchers as well as practitioners differ in their opinions as to the understanding of the essence of a creative project and as to distinctiveness of this type. There are the supporters of the idea that there is no place for uncreative projects and every project should be creative, as well as these who advocate the peculiarity of a specific category called creative projects.
2. The arguments used by adherents of these views seems to be quite similar, although, as research revealed, the researchers are more moderate in their opinions and less normative in their views.
3. Researchers tend to take for granted that creative industries perform creative projects, what – as it was proved – can be rejected by practitioners.
4. What practitioners tend to underline is the peculiarity of management processes, methods (methodologies) or risk management.

There is no simple and clear answer to the question on the extension on project taxonomy by introducing new and specific taxonomic units called creative projects. However, the absence of coherent views as to the understanding of the term creative projects has further scientific implications, as seems to be a call for

the enhancements in framing the research on creative projects. It is expected that when doing research or presenting own opinions on creative projects, to avoid misunderstandings, the author should rather present own attitude towards understanding this denomination.

Next, what has to be underlined, the research has some indirect practical implication. The high percentage of supporters of the idea of creativity needed to perform and manage projects could be regarded as the orientation towards the new avenues of project managers' training and development oriented towards improving the creative potential of individuals, more focus on enhancing team composition and creativity, as well as offering more creativity-supporting environment for project-based organizations.

The research presented hereby has numerous limitations resulting from its scope, sampling method or sample size, however, it demonstrates the absence of coherent views and variety of arguments used. It shows the divergence in sense making and in creating the picture of creativity within the area of project management.

The research on creative projects, doubtlessly, will offer interesting area of exploration for the next years. The dispersion in the views as to the conception should not dishearten but rather motivate to the continuation. The results of this research indicate the necessity of the studies on the assessment of the level of project management creativity, i.e., the continuation of studies on the binomial (creative versus uncreative) or rather bipolar, i.e., two-dimensional evaluation of creative projects.

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