

CREATIVE IMITATION-RISK OR OPPORTUNITY?

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Abstract: *It is known that one starting from the first day to the present day succeeded in his work, thanks to continuous innovation and introduction of new technologies, organizational solutions and new approaches in general and philosophy. This is one of the most influential forces that have had a major impact on the overall social development and progress. Had man not innovated, he would remain at the level of the animals up to the present day.*

While innovation and new inventions rise to the level of the determining factors of success, yet imitation, as a creative process is neglected or underestimated, and in some cases considered to be immoral, illegal and harmful phenomenon. Copycats are often considered plagiarists who live at the expense of innovators, which resulted in the introduction of a number of protections, even at the global level.

A deeper analysis show and prove that creative imitation is by its importance, if not more important, then certainly at the level of innovation. Given that there are centuries of misunderstandings and controversies regarding these issues, this article aims to shed light on the broader context of this issue and point out that creative imitation is not meaningless copying and plagiarism, or the repetition of something bigger there, but it is a smart quest for improved functional and other characteristics of products or services, as the final results of any organization.

The aim of the paper is not to provide definite answers to this problem, since there are no final answers, nor there can be, but to encourage a different way of thinking.

Keywords: *creative imitation copycats.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern world works on classical grounds, often on fallacies that last for decades, and some for several centuries. The numerous solutions are the result of a certain way of thinking, namely certain ideas and answered to a particular social moment, or technical, organizational and other characteristics. These solutions have made an important contribution to human civilization in the past. However, it is shown that contemporary problems cannot be solved by obsolete and outdated concepts since problems often arise because they had not applied the concepts and approaches that suit the business environment in general both in closer and wider environment. It turns out that the innovations in the industrial world are treated as the most important factor that has the greatest im-

pact on business performance up to this day, whole innovators in the developed countries enjoy a special status, but also they provided benefit through legislation in the long run. Along with the above process and the tendency an imitation or creative imitation is produced, which is illogical as a term, because if something is creative it cannot be an imitation while if it is an imitation it has nothing to do with creativity. Practice shows that imitation, creative imitation in particular, can be more important than innovation, which is a new approach in innovation management. This approach breaks down the century old stereotypes and misconceptions that exist in the legal, ethical, technical and economic fields, at the macro, mezo and micro levels. It turns out that imitation or creative imitation is not pointless duplication or repetition of something that already exists, but the intelligent pursuit of a better, more perfect, than the existing one. Any suggestion that commitment for making creative imitation an important role in the business sphere does not mean advocating „intellectual theft” because it is legally sanctioned and morally condemned. The opening of the question is quality by itself, because all the scientific researches show that many misconceptions have persisted for a long time, but they eventually had to be broken, and their places were occupied by new ways of thinking, often being the exact opposite of the first ones.

2. CREATIVE IMITATION AS THE MOST COMPLEX TYPE OF INNOVATION

Imitation or creative imitation occurred almost with the creation of innovation, or the moment when a man tried to set resources for work and improve the tools and weapons and make them more functional than the existing ones. The creative imitation by its complexity is placed into the sixth group of innovation. This ranking is in the top of complexity, because the highest level of complexity of innovation is considered to be the one where innovations bring revolutionary changes, such as the discovery of internal combustion engine, or the invention of electricity, and so on. Under the creative imitation are understood the scientific researches that build on already applied theories and innovation with which they create or enhance new products or services.¹ Therefore creative imitation is a complex innovation, which is different from Schumpeter who in his famous works „The Theory of Economic Development”, observed the innovation as a force, namely the force that is capable to transform the economy and society from a state of simple circular motion into the developmental trends and trends through new combinations of business factors. In this view, only the first application of a new idea is considered an innovation, and every other application has not got the character of innovation nor of entrepreneurship. Of course, this understanding of economic theory, especially in the contemporary conditions has become unsustainable.² It turns out that it is largely influenced the built of a classic infrastructure, even at the global level, in order to protect innovation and reportedly rewarded the author or inventor. Thus, a law on the protection of copyrights was created, as well as a code of ethics which condemned the so called intellectual theft and imitators are prosecuted or placed on the pillory.

¹ Z. Radosavljevic, *The creative imitation, manuscript*, 2013

² These tasks can be seen in more detail: V. Vucenovic, *Champion Management*, NIP Educational informatory, Belgrade, 2004, pg. 93.

3. CREATIVE IMITATION BEING MORE IMPORTANT THAN INNOVATION

Research and analysis of contemporary business show that creativity is a key factor for the survival and success of individuals or organizations. This is confirmed by research conducted by IBM in the middle of the last decade which gathered over 1500 CEOs from 60 countries around the globe. The results of this study clearly indicate that CEOs believe that the success of the company for the time we live in is more than responsibility, discipline and integrity of individuals, and even more important than the vision and necessary creativity.³

Recent research, especially studies carried out by Oded Shenkar showed that imitation is, if not more important, then surely of the same importance for business and personal success, as well as innovation. Naturally, this finding is analogous to the statement where said that performing exercises on complex high education institutions of lectures and exercises that are more complex than teaching, and that they should be modeled by professors, not teaching assistants, as it is done today. This is natural, since the one who is performing the practical part of lectures has to know the theoretical and practical aspects of the issue, or issues, whereas in lectures theory is mainly being used in teaching. Oded Shenkar investigated the place and role of innovation in eight scientific and academic disciplines from history to medical science. In all cases, he came to the conclusion that imitation is the primary source of achieving business and personal success and progress.⁴ Professor Shenkar points out that of the 48 innovations he had investigated, 75% were plagiarized, as well as that percentage is growing, copying a growing trend. Examples in the automotive, textile, leather, fashion and cosmetics industry, construction machinery, as well as in the service industry such as banking systems, tourist destinations, shops (hypermarkets, supermarkets, electronic stores) and so on, confirm this. Usually some time passed before other manufacturers, or service providers copied the practice of those who first applied innovation. According to the data, GM introduced a new model army Spark, and only a year since the launch it was followed by a Chinese imitation QQ, which has exceeded six times the original sale. So, in this case 98% of the profits of the new phone went copycat, not an innovator. In other words, the innovator is awarded for the originality of their ideas and the efforts or costs which he did, and the main benefit is of the one who had waited and followed.

A more detailed analysis shows that imitation is the search for new ideas and a permanent copy that enriches innovation and makes it acceptable, as in the wider context allows expansion or its diffusion. It turns out that imitators work is based on the market reaction to the initial innovation and that the process of copying is often accompanied by functional improvement of original ideas. For example, Visa, MasterCard and American Express are the idea of plastic credit cards taken of the Diners Club, which invested heavily in a study of this technology. The situation is similar to the system of department stores which first emerged in Paris, and their model of organizational structure was adopted around the globe; electronic commerce and a host of other managerial, organizational, and techno-

³ The research was conducted by an experienced consulting firm from IBM department of Global Business Services, through interviews conducted face-to-face. In detail, the „Manager of the dolphin“, Belgrade, no. 191st November 2011, pg. 1

⁴ Oded Shenkar, *Interviewed at Harvard Business review*, 2010, April, pg. 14-17

logical innovation. Wal-Mart has admitted taking over from his predecessor. The secret is in taking original ideas or innovations from its predecessors, but also any changes in order to get a winning combination. It turns out that many of today's giants from various industries emerged on the basis of imitation and adaptation. Accordingly, the management science developed a special technique called benchmarking, developing concepts to explore best practices in a particular field and attempt to apply the same corporate systems.⁵

4. THE NECESSITY OF DIFFERENT THOUGHTS ON IMITATION

It has already been stated that creative imitation or emulation is one of the most complex types of innovation. Thus, imitation is the life law of nature. This characteristic is inherited from animals by humans and it is being carried for lifetime. Thanks to creative imitation, a man has survived, since he mimicked or imitated animals through education, improved living and working. It is sufficient to note that the man mimicked leaders in the pack of animals and sought to establish leadership, both leadership in life and work. Even today, after the experiments and observations of animals and people in a variety of conditions, scientists regard imitation as a complex and demanding process that requires high intelligence and cognitive ability. According to researchers who have been working with animals, great apes have the ability to mimic what it takes to survive in a hostile environment despite physical disabilities. The same goes for the jungle that objectively exists today in the business world and beyond.⁶

If in living and working, the same rule is applied- that we should take into consideration the reality, then there is a need to review the relationship of imitation and its treatment in the economic and social life. This is because it is now considered that imitation is unacceptable, that it being used only by incompetent followers and unethical people and organizations. Accordingly, a set of regulations and standards stipulate prohibitions or sanctions for imitators and imitators. Even companies that accept imitation as a way of doing business, avoid operations that declare themselves as such, because of the characteristics and perceptions that imitators wear, but also because of numerous laws concerning the protection of intellectual property. It is argued that people learn from their earliest youth that copying other people's ideas and modes of behavior is unworthy and inappropriate and that they must move towards originality as a way of life and work, even though no one knows what originality is and to what extent an individual can be the creator of the original and comprehensive ideas. In other words, in the modern hardly anyone can have exclusivity on an innovation, i.e. that it was his invention. It turns out that many, who have explored and have failed, are also responsible for an innovation or innovator, because they suggest that researchers and followers need to go in a different direction. If this were not the case, many would always begin from the start and would not achieve certain innovations.

It is shown that imitators improve or adapt an innovation functionally to specific needs. To increase the chances for the implementation and promotion of innovation, it is necessary to step back from original ideas and original products, to develop options that enable

⁵ Радосавлевич М., Анджелкович М., Радосавлевич Ж., *Необходимость изменения отношений к имитации*, Международная научно-практическая конференция „Стратегические императивы совместного менеджмента“

⁶ Oded Shenker, Interviewed at Harvard Business review, 2010, April, pg. 14-17

them to be more effectively used, which places an emphasis on creating a strategy imitation.

The necessity of changing attitude towards imitation, especially the „creative imitation” or emulating is a radical and fundamental change, such as US-based production concept was changed by the middle of the last century or transformed into the marketing concept. It must be borne in mind that innovation and imitation have a common thread, and that they are the result of a thought process that is taking place at the same scenario. In other words, both of them are the result of conscious thinking and conscious activities of business men and are an intellectual activity. Many believe imitation is more complex, as the practice shows that many innovations follow the beaten track and go by familiar scientific paths, while imitation goes out of the box. It also appears that many innovations were created randomly, which is shown by an example of chewing gum, the one's desire to have a bath created Buoyancy. Fleming, after long study of bacteria, left the dirty dishes from the experiment and went on vacation. Upon returning the bacteria multiplied, which resulted in the discovery of the origin of bacteria, and thus the discovery of penicillin,⁷ which is considered to be the strategic innovation in this period.

The coincidence with creative imitation is disabled. Innovation and imitation are going through the same phases: the preparation phase, the phase of incubation, illumination and verification. The only difference can be seen in the preparation stage, as „Innovation comes from creative chaos, a creative imitation from the imperfection.” The phases of incubation and illumination are unconscious and automatic processes in both.

Each innovation and imitation has three dimensions, namely: technical, economic and legal. Recently, the highlight is on the ethical dimension. By not underestimating others, the primary dimension is economic one, because every innovation or imitation that does not increase the economic impact of its author, or client who comes may not be accepted and doomed to failure. In the practice of innovation, dominated the legal dimension, and with it the number of disputes in which authorships were being proved or disputed, or setting a time period in which an innovation cannot be used, and so on. In contemporary practice, it is necessary to put emphasis on the economic dimension of innovation, since it ultimately determines the other two dimensions. Having this in mind in relation to the abandonment of classical imitation and innovation is necessary to change the consciousness of people, and then legislation that slows the diffusion of innovation. Accordingly legislative, even at the global level is not aimed at increasing commercial success, but quite the contrary it slows the progress of mankind. This is a logical observation, if we imagine where mankind would be, if the whole of human knowledge was made available to all, without the protection and preservation of the known and unknown quarters. Out of this, benefit the individuals, so-called innovators, but the question is how and how much of a modern economy one can have on the authorship of an idea or innovation. It comes more to plagiarism or imitation of an idea which is not transparent enough, so we can ask the question of moral when individuals or teams claim the results of many, often unknown to researchers.

⁷ <http://metro-portal.hr/random-discoveries-that-have-changed-the-world/37790>

5. SUMMARY

Practice shows that imitation in modern conditions has become a respectable factor of economic development, and relationship i.e. attitude towards this phenomenon has to be changed. One must keep in mind that imitation, imitation or copying is a natural phenomenon and that it is difficult to eliminate it, and was it possible and it would seem to be counterproductive. It turns out that a man copies the behavior of the animals, that children imitate their parents, workers their leaders, or their national leaders. Imitation is present in the sphere of business, as the companies look up at each other and copy their behavior and way of doing business. In other words, the world works on the basis of imitation, and we cannot deny it and oppose the at the same time legal standards which are backed by the most penalties, but we can take care of, or use it to improve personal and business success.

Of course, everyday experience shows that some global companies see the plagiarism with approval, and often also support by the phrase „good players copy, the best steal.” The practice shows that the greatest effort and financial risk is owned by the innovator, and the greatest benefit by plagiarism, or imitators. Accordingly, it is shown that it is far better to be a plagiarist, instead an honest innovator. However, the above reason does not justify treating imitations in comparison to the old way, because it is a reality, and it is a necessity to manage the imitations.

In other words, the problem of imitation and imitating certainly cannot solve only by the legislation and moral convictions. The solution is not to protect intellectual property rights through legislation and insisting on standards that have existed in the past (e.g. the product is different from the patented by 30% in order not to be plagiarism) are absurd. It turns out that innovators should be rewarded in a completely different way than it is done today, or through special innovation funds that would „fill” the effects of which were made imitators. In this context it is necessary to find the specific mechanisms, in order to abandon the existing stereotypes and accept new concepts and approaches to the spread of primarily creative imitation „, as the newspapers in the business world. Therefore, it can reasonably be concluded that the creative imitation is not a threat but an opportunity, both for individuals and business organizations, states and the world in general. In this context it is useful to recall the statement of Michael Eisner: There is not an idea that cannot be improved.”

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