



## Foreword

# “Inspiration Economy”: A New Journal

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### Introduction

It is always good to present something that has only just come into being, which is why it is such a pleasure to be inaugurating the first edition of the Journal of Inspiration Economy. In this foreword, our objective is to outline the general reasons underlying the creation of this review, as well as the objectives assigned to it. The founding hypothesis is that contemporary economies have reached a new stage in evolution such that we are in need for more inspiration in our socioeconomic practices.

### Inspiration: from art and religion to business

Inspiration is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define. It describes a particular psychological dynamic, a fortuitous creative whisper, which is said to give rise, in blossoming, to satisfaction, joy and a feeling of being comforted. It is an ancient notion originally associated with the sacred and religious, as well as with artistic or literary creation. Etymologically speaking, the term ‘inspiration’ is rooted in the Latin ‘in spiritum’ - which literally means ‘having the Spirit (that is, God) within you’. We should also bear in mind that, in Ancient Greece, artists were meant to be inspired by the Muses, daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne.

The sacred, non-rational dimension of inspiration would not, a priori, be conducive to this notion of conquering the business and management field. Although it clearly does not fall into the scope of substantial calculatory rationality, neither does it fit with procedural rationality, unlike intuition - which - in the managerial field in particular, is sometimes (though wrongly) considered a synonym. Yet inspiration, as a creative force, is propagated through economic activity. This propagation is not surprising for those economic activities closest to artistic activity (the whole creative activities field) or those which share with the religious activities - if not a moral aspiration, at the very least an ethical and civic one - alongside a preoccupation or empathy for one’s neighbour (public services, care services, etc.). However, this propagation goes well beyond: indeed it is universal (pervasive). Increasingly, all economic activity is affected. As the notion of inspiration shifts away from the artistic and religious sphere, and toward the economic sphere, we note that its transcendental nature is coupled with a relational one. In this way, the external environment is also commonly designated as a source of inspiration.

A working general definition of inspiration might be: “the process that lets humans (re-) discover their potentials, in interaction with others, so as to trigger their learning, creativity, innovation, competitiveness and welfare, for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of their community, organisation/firm, or the world “ (Buheji, 2014).

### **Towards an inspiration economy**

Economic and managerial literature has multiplied the labels we use to designate contemporary economies. Examples we might mention include: information economy, knowledge economy, intangible economy, permanent innovation economy, quality economy, experience economy, access economy, new economy, net-economy, services economy, transformative economy, etc.

These labels, each of which refers back to a more or less solid and/or influential theoretical corpus, describe the facets of a single reality, namely: the third industrial revolution, founded on information technologies. Inspiration is a further facet, now fully emerging out of this reality, a facet that some have no hesitation in considering the premise for a fourth industrial revolution. Thus, contemporary economies are economies in which inspiration is playing an increasingly important role. These are inspiration economies. Such an observation fully justifies the creation of a journal devoted to the analysis of their dynamics.

However, inspiration is not just another facet of contemporary economies. Its effects come earlier (upstream). It constitutes an essential springboard which contributes to triggering other facets - whether in terms of innovation, knowledge, experience, service, insights, mindset and paradigm shift or other aspects. In an inspiration economy, inspiration is not an end in itself, but rather the helm which allows a course to be set towards an end (for example, the production of an innovative service, the consumption of goods whose production is not harmful to the environment, or the development of inclusive technologies).

The inspiration economy is an economy of relations (or interactions) and meaning. The rising importance of an “everything is service” logic supports this interactive or relational dimension of the inspiration economy. As for the search for meaning, this is implicitly present in the paradigm of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore, 1999), which considers consumers to be no longer in search of consuming goods or services but rather of having an enriching experience (one which is meaningful, involving engagement, an experience which transforms the consumer). Therefore one can consider inspiration economy as “a collective effort of how we rediscover inspiration and how we manage it towards better economy” (Buheji, 2014).

The inspiration economy can be seen as an economy of relations at various analytical levels: individual, company, city-wide, regional, or national (cf. the following point). It is an economy that would enhance our societies contribution by re-discovering our potentials, thus helping even the less fortunate individuals or communities overcoming their limitations.

These various agents are linked by reciprocal inspiration relations. Thus, even as they are competitors, producers inspire one another, consumers inspire producers and vice-versa, and consumers are invited to co-produce and co-create. Regions and nations inspire one another in the same way. Even disciplines would be aligned to exchange practices more openly.



The relational dimension of the inspiration economy may manifest itself horizontally, or vertically. In this second case, inspiration can work top-down, or bottom-up. For example, in terms of innovation, the bottom of the pyramid can inspire the tip. This is the approach known as 'Bottom of the Pyramid' (BoP): it is brilliantly illustrated by the works and experiences of Nobel Peace Prize winning Muhammad Yunus (micro-credit), as well as those of C.K. Prahalad (2006). This BoP approach underlies frugal innovations (Jugaad innovation), that is, simple innovation (technological or not), produced at low cost, yet having considerable social repercussions and impacts. It is noteworthy that BoP and frugal innovations (as well as green / social innovations more generally) born in developing countries can be sources of inspiration for developed countries. This is particularly true of micro-finance, which has spread through developing countries in the wake of the economic crisis.

It is this relational dimension of inspiration that we find in well-known economic phenomena such as, for example, spillovers, open innovation, networks and innovation systems. Spillovers are the spin-offs of what others inspire in us. These come to light, for example, in job rotation, or open innovation situations, that is, where there is co-operation, reciprocal inspiration between multiple actors to produce innovation. Innovation alliances, partnerships, systems and networks are just specific modalities for setting up an open innovation model.

As an economy of meaning, the inspiration economy goes one step beyond the experience economy, which, as we have already stressed, postulates that a consumer consumes an experience, rather than a given item or service. The postulate of the inspiration economy is that consumers only consume (and producers only produce) what inspires them - in other words, what is meaningful to them. So it is no longer just a matter of product quantity (goods or services or a goods-services systems) or product quality which counts, but the end result (aesthetic, ethical, social) of production and consumption. The inspiration economy calls both consumerism and productivism into question. We are seeking to maximise neither consumption or production; rather, we are asking questions about the meaning of our consumption (production) and the consequences of our consumptions (productions) on ourselves, on others and on our environment. It is a different mindset approach. We are also asking questions about our work, and its meaning, with a desire to raise our aspirations. In an inspired economy, this quest for meaning is at the heart of sustainable development issues in their various facets: economic, environmental, and social. As a facet of the inspiration economy, the environment economy is concerned with the preservation of our physical environment, whereas the care economy, in contrast to the traditional economic rationality (individualistic and optimizing) is one that is focused on others rather than on the self, an economy that's concerned with the well-being of others, through a rediscovery of the virtues of altruism, trust and empathy with the problems of others.

**This twin dimension of the inspiration economy raises several issues:**

- First and foremost, we note that the quest for meaning can lead to a quest for connection. A product consumed by a given actor may be meaningful only because it creates connections (social relationships). This is what can lead a consumer to choose the local market, rather than the supermarket.
- This quest for meaning and connection comes together in the emergence and development of what we have termed Public Private Innovation Networks in Services (ServPPINs) (Gal-

louj, Rubalcaba and Windrum, 2013). Indeed, ServPPINs describe collaborations between public and private service organisations within the innovation field. These differ from traditional innovation networks in several ways. Firstly, relations between the public actors, the third sector (non-profit associations and NGOs) and private actors are positioned at the centre of the analysis. Next, service providers (often from the third sector) are the principal actors in this. Finally, non-technological innovation (service innovation and social innovation), often neglected in the literature, are taken into account here.

- From these two perspectives, the inspiration economy calls for new tools with which to measure wealth. This can no longer be evaluated simply in terms of quantities produced and monetary values, but must now also include alternative wealth indicators which take into account intangible values, which reflect an economy's degree of inspiration: not just its Gross Domestic Product, but in a way, its Gross National Happiness (Gadrey, 2002 ; Stiglitz et al. 2009).

All in all, we could say that contemporary economies are (or will increasingly be) governed by a truly universal law of inspiration, which is somewhat reminiscent of the universal law of imitation put forward by a precursor of Joseph Schumpeter, French thinker Gabriel Tarde (1890).

#### **A generalist, multidisciplinary journal**

Bearing in mind the above remarks, it would be a mistake to believe that the JIE is aimed at a thematic niche. On the contrary, it is a generalist journal covering a broad thematic spectrum: innovation, creativity, knowledge, services, leadership, sustainable development, etc; whom are presented in table (1) below for a more detailed (though not exhaustive) list. However, we cannot help but recognise that certain themes give rise to relations more quickly than others, with the inspiration issue or in relevance to reviving economies. This is true, for example, of innovation and sustainability problems.

Table (1) List of thematic fields for JIE

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy Inspiration</li> <li>• Inspiration Economy</li> <li>• Society Inspiration</li> <li>• Organizational Learning</li> <li>• Organizational Innovation</li> <li>• Organizational Competitiveness</li> <li>• Organizational Excellence</li> <li>• Organizational Knowledge Management</li> <li>• Knowledge Economy</li> <li>• Learning Economy</li> <li>• Innovation Economy</li> <li>• Social Engineering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Society Co-existence</li> <li>• Social Integration</li> <li>• Disruptive innovation</li> <li>• Accelerated learning</li> <li>• Business of Inspiration</li> <li>• Service economy</li> <li>• Experience economy</li> <li>• Social innovation</li> <li>• Alternative welfare indicators</li> <li>• Sustainable development</li> <li>• Healthcare Inspiration</li> <li>• Healthcare Innovation</li> <li>• Healthcare Quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Healthcare Improvement</li> <li>• Healthcare Leadership</li> <li>• Healthcare Management</li> <li>• Technology inspiration</li> <li>• Technological excellence</li> <li>• Electronic entrepreneurship</li> <li>• Technological innovative diffusion</li> <li>• Inclusive technology</li> <li>• Technology Competitiveness</li> <li>• Government Inspiration</li> <li>• Society Development</li> <li>• Entrepreneurship Spirit</li> <li>• Organizational Psychology</li> </ul>
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Similarly, given the origin of the concept (art, the sacred, religion), and its psychological nature, the notion of inspiration, applied to the various thematic fields mentioned above, calls for a multidisciplinary approach. This is why the JIE seeks to become a resolutely multidisciplinary journal. Inspiration is also at the heart of inter- Humanities and Social Sciences relations. In this way, the economic paradigm (founded on homo oeconomicus) has successfully inspired many fields such as politics (cf. public choice) and history (new economic history) - to the extent that we have been able to talk about a veritable imperialism of economics. However, to limit ourselves to a single example, economics was itself inspired by psychology, in order, for example, to develop what we refer to as «behavioural economics».

#### **Different levels of analysis of the inspiration economy**

As we have emphasised above, the notion of inspiration originally applied to the individual (transcendental dimension). Yet inspiration is not a closed, inward-looking attitude – it is about being open to others and to one's environment. We are inspired, and we inspire others.

The management sciences have made these individual and micro-economic levels their own in many interesting fields: for example, inspirational leadership, coaching, benchmarking, etc. Unlike transactional leadership (founded on hierarchy and constraint, the reward-punishment regime), inspirational or transformational leadership inspires, motivates, is more about making people want to achieve than imposing targets upon them, offering a model to be followed. Generally, we consider such leadership to have a more positive effect on the performance of followers than does transactional leadership. Coaching is a methodology whose objective is to unbridle people's capacity for inspiration, in such a way as to allow them to reach deep inside themselves, the better to ground their relation to others. Benchmarking is a method which allows people to draw inspiration from best practice. Management clearly stands to gain from the laws of inspiration- however we could also ask whether inspiration might not also generate certain undesired effects: the risks of cognitive lock-in, autocratic drift, or mystical illusion, for example. If the inspiration economy is, as we have stated, an economy of relations, then we might well ask: what is the optimal degree of openness favourable to inspiration, and does inspiration increase with the degree of openness to others? Does it fall off once it has reached a certain threshold? In other words, should we be multiplying openings to others in order to be inspired (extensive conception of inspiration) or reducing the amount of openings in order to make them deeper (intensive conception)?

As we have already stressed, inspiration is not just an individual phenomenon. It can exist at other analytical levels: collective, city, regional, national, and so on.

Thus, of the five cities or worlds of Boltanski and Thévenot (1991) (who describe the forms of agreement, different social objects and different modes of conflict/controversy resolution), one city is described as inspired. The 'inspired city' is defined by the following characteristics: Its key values are inspiration, creation, imagination, and interiority. The characteristics it values are: the unexpected, passion, the marvellous, spontaneity, and emotion. Those it shuns are: habit, external signs and realism. The subjects it values most highly are the artist, the child, the fairy, the fool, the genius, and the visionary. Its model tests are creation from scratch, the interior adventure, and spiritual wanderlust.

Certain nations are more inspired than others. This is truer of certain historical eras than

others (for example, the France of revolutionary times). Certain nations are sources of inspiration for others. This is often true of developing countries, which seek to take inspiration from developed economies.

Regarding the analytical levels of the law of inspiration, an important question which arises is the question of the shift from individual to the next level, from micro to macro, in other words: how do individual inspirations come together to result in a meso/macro-economic, or macro-social, state of inspiration? This question is addressed in the same terms as the familiar one about the shift from individual to collective or organisational learning. Indeed, organisational learning exists only in so far as it cannot be reduced to the sum of individual learnings. Similarly collective inspiration (i.e. inspiration of a group, a community, a company, a town, a region, or a nation) is different from the sum of the inspirations of the individuals or entities that make it up. In this way, it is probable that established institutions play an essential role in the logics of inspiration at national, regional and/or international levels.

Finally, this very first issue of JIE is composed of a wide variety of contributions, reflecting the importance and diversity of inspiration practices and methodologies in various fields and in different regions and countries of the world (Ireland, Bahrain, New Zealand, Finland, UK and France). The issue starts with a paper entitled “why inspiration matters?”, which, in a certain way, outlines the main missions of the journal. The next papers reflect different moves towards inspiration economy within different service areas such as education, healthcare, communication, leadership, e-government, project management and benchmarking. Together with the JIE editorial board, I hope this issue would encourage more authors and readers to be part of the inspiration driven community and I look forward to their scientific contribution to JIE.

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