



## The wave-particle duality, kind of | The Xpragmatic View



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 by [Marc Buyens \(@mbuyens\)](#), Xpragma  
[marc.buyens@xpragma.com](mailto:marc.buyens@xpragma.com)  
 url: <http://www.xpragma.com/view107.php>

In quantum mechanics, there is a well-known concept, called the wave-particle duality, which essentially means that all matter exhibits both wave-like and particle-like properties. In modern business, we have a similar duality with management and creativity. Well, almost.

### Dizziness

As Seth Lloyd writes in the introduction of his book, "Programming the Universe", *"Quantum mechanics is famously weird"* and to illustrate this, he refers to Niels Bohr, the father of quantum mechanics, who once said, *"Anyone who thinks he can contemplate quantum mechanics without getting dizzy hasn't properly understood it"*.

In today's business, we seem to experience a similar dizziness while thinking about management and creativity.

### Management and creativity

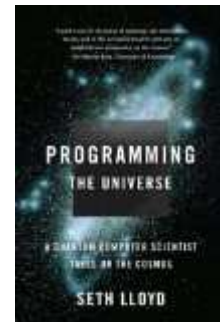
A couple of days ago, two postings on management and creativity dropped into our FeedDemon inbox.

The first one was a posting in the Conversation Starter blog of Harvard Business Publishing by Teresa Amabile, ["Is Management the Enemy of Creativity?"](#). The second one was a reaction to this article posted in the Thinking Space blog of Yihong Ding, titled ["Modern management and creativity"](#).

In her posting, Amabile makes the observation that, *"...while the basis of competition has shifted decisively to innovation ... [large organisations seem] unable to cultivate it within their own walls, end up buying it instead"*. Therefore, she argues, there is a need to *"reinvent management"*.

In his reaction, Yihong Ding argues that management and creativity are to some extent mutually exclusive since management, especially in large organisations, is essentially a matter of control and risk-avoidance, which are "natural" inhibitors for creativity and innovation.

Neither of the two posting makes a really in-depth analysis of the issue. Still, they are both a good basis for some reflections.



Programming the Universe  
 A Quantum Computer  
 Scientist Takes on the  
 Cosmos  
 Seth Lloyd

### Large organisations and innovation

In general, we think that Ding's statement is correct. Large organisations do need more control and more strict risk avoidance, which unfortunately have a tendency of introducing more formality and bureaucracy, which again, are well-known roadblocks on the road towards more innovation.

On the other hand, we do like Amabile's point of view that acknowledges today's innovation problem in many large organisations, but still allows us to hope that we might find new organisational structures or new management approaches that will allow combining both worlds. Can we really hope for this?

Unfortunately, we fear we cannot.

Today's management practice still is largely based upon some kind of one-size-fits-all thinking. Organisational structures and management approaches are assumed to be largely identical in both small and corporate organisations. We all do brainstorming. Even the smallest start-up already runs SAP or Oracle, although perhaps in service mode.

However, size matters. As in nature, you cannot grow things beyond certain limits without sacrificing certain abilities. Therefore, shouldn't we start acknowledging that organisations of different sizes have indeed different capabilities and needs? And shouldn't we start accepting that the organisational requirements of a large corporation by necessity introduce certain problems for innovation and creativity? We might hope that we will be able to find that unique organisational approach that Amabile is talking about, but is this realistic?

Probably not.

Perhaps we should abandon our quest of looking for new management paradigms that will allow large organisations to become innovative. Perhaps we simply need less large organisations.

## About the author



Marc Buyens is analyst, management consultant and owner of Xpragma. Marc started Xpragma in 1999 after a 20+ years career in the IT sector. Today, he provides advice, training and mentoring services focusing on the intersection of technological evolution, organisational change and business strategy: a messy world of unfulfilled promises.



<http://www.facebook.com/marcb254>



<http://www.linkedin.com/in/marcbuyens>



<http://www.twitter.com/mbuyens>

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Xpragma bvba - Mechelsesteenweg 254 - 2820 Bonheiden - Belgium  
Tel. +32-(0)15-340 845 - [info@xpragma.com](mailto:info@xpragma.com) - [www.xpragma.com](http://www.xpragma.com)



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