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Dynamics of Professional Simulation and Organizational Creativity in Private Sector Institutions: A Theoretical Approach in Light of Gabriel Tarde's Sociology

ديناميكية المحاكاة المهنية و الإبداع التنظيمي في مؤسسات القطاع الخاص : مقاربة نظرية في ضوء سوسيولوجيا غابرييل تارد

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- **Abstract:**

This paper offers a theoretical approach to the relationship between professional simulation dynamics and organizational creativity within private sector institutions, drawing on the sociological framework established by the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde through his theory of imitation. The study assumes that professional behavior within organizations does not emerge in a vacuum but is shaped through mechanisms of social imitation that spread from more experienced or influential individuals to other members of the organization, creating a dialectical tension between the need for compliance and the need for innovation. The paper concludes that understanding Tarde's three laws of imitation provides a fertile explanatory framework for understanding how creative practices spread or are hindered within contemporary organizational structures.

Keywords:

Professional Simulation, Organizational Creativity, Gabriel Tarde, Laws of Imitation, Private Sector Institution

الملخص:

تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية إلى مقاربة نظرية للعلاقة بين ديناميكية المحاكاة المهنية والإبداع التنظيمي داخل مؤسسات القطاع الخاص، انطلاقاً من الإطار السوسيولوجي الذي أرساه عالم الاجتماع الفرنسي غابريال تارد من خلال نظريته في التقليد والمحاكاة .وتفترض الدراسة أن السلوك المهني داخل المؤسسة لا ينشأ من فراغ، بل يتشكل عبر آليات التقليد الاجتماعي التي تنتقل من الأفراد الأكثر خبرة أو نفوذاً إلى بقية أعضاء التنظيم، وهو ما يخلق توتراً جدلياً بين الحاجة إلى الامتثال والحاجة إلى الابتكار .وتخلص الورقة إلى أن فهم قوانين المحاكاة الثلاثة عند تارد يوفر إطاراً تفسيرياً خصباً لفهم كيفية انتشار الممارسات الإبداعية أو إعاقتها داخل البنى التنظيمية المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية : المحاكاة المهنية، الإبداع التنظيمي، غابريال تارد، قوانين التقليد، القطاع الخاص

- **Introduction .**

Private sector institutions constitute a complex social space in which professional relationships intersect with the psychological and social dynamics that govern individual behavior within the organization. Among the concepts that recent sociological studies have renewed interest in is the concept of professional simulation, regarded as a fundamental mechanism for transferring knowledge, skills, and practices within the work environment, which raises the problem of its relationship to another concept of equal importance: organizational creativity.[1]

If the prevailing view assumes that organizational creativity represents the opposite of simulation and imitation, the theoretical framework established by the French sociologist Gabriel Tarde in the late nineteenth century offers a different perspective, as he considers that every social innovation is, in essence, an individual invention that spreads through the mechanism of imitation to become a collective practice.[2]

Based on this conception, this paper seeks to answer the following research problem: How can the dynamics of professional simulation explain the phenomenon of organizational creativity within private sector institutions in light of Gabriel Tarde's sociology? This problem branches into secondary questions related to the nature of the three laws of imitation and the extent to which they apply to the contemporary organizational environment.

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[1]Ahmed Yaslam Al-Aoush, Determinants of Organizational Creativity, Lectures in the Sociology of Organizations, University of Algiers, 2023.

[2] Gabriel Tarde, The Laws of Imitation, trans. Elsie Clews Parsons, New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1903, p. 14.

1.The Concept of Professional Simulation (Expanded): Its Mechanisms, Causes, and Relationship to Organizational Structure

1.1 The Concept of Professional Simulation :Expanded

Professional simulation, as defined in the study, describes a **psychosocial process** in which employees reproduce the behaviors, skills, and values of higher-status or more experienced colleagues to integrate into workplace culture and build the competencies

their role demands. This concept sits squarely within a well-established body of organizational psychology research, most directly traceable to Albert Bandura's social learning theory and its later refinement into social cognitive

1.2The Psychological Mechanics Behind It

Bandura's foundational insight was that most human behavior is learned not through trial and error but through **observation and modeling** watching a competent "model" perform an action, forming a mental representation of it, and later reproducing it when the situation calls for it. He specified four sequential subprocesses that make this reproduction

- Attention — the observer must notice and focus on the model's behavior.
- Retention — the observed behavior must be encoded and stored mentally, often as a symbolic or verbal representation.
- Reproduction — the observer must be physically and cognitively capable of translating what was learned into actual performance.
- Motivation — the observer needs a reason to enact the behavior, typically driven by anticipated reward, social approval, or avoidance of negative

Crucially, this is not blind copying. Bandura insisted that observers actively evaluate a model's behavior and its outcomes before deciding whether to replicate it, which is what separates social learning from mere imitation and gives professional simulation its **selective, purposive** character.

Why It Happens: Organizational Socialization

Professional simulation is the behavioral engine of what organizational researchers call **socialization** the process through which a newcomer acquires the "social knowledge and skills necessary to assume an organizational role". Research on this

process shows a clear mechanism: new members imitate colleagues performing their roles specifically to fit into the work unit, while simultaneously being implicitly taught skills, behaviors, and values needed for career advancement by imitating hierarchically superior mentors. This dual function belonging and competence-building explains why the definition emphasizes both integration into "work culture" and acquisition of "competencies required to perform tasks" as parallel

1.3 The Role of Status and Hierarchy

The requirement that the source be someone of "higher status or greater experience" is not incidental it reflects a consistent finding that hierarchical position amplifies imitative pull. Studies on managers as role models show that observing superiors' positive and negative consequences leads directly to imitation of their behaviors, with the manager-observer relationship structured as a distinct role-model/imitator pair. Mentoring relationships formalize this dynamic deliberately, pairing seasoned professionals with newcomers so the transfer of tacit, hard-to-codify skills happens through sustained modeling rather than formal instruction

1.4 From Individual Cognition to Organizational Culture

At a broader level, this individual-level modeling aggregates into what institutional theorists describe as mimetic forces shaping the organization as a whole new members don't just learn tasks, they absorb symbolic norms that let the organization present itself as legitimate and coherent to internal and external audiences. This is why professional simulation matters beyond the individual: it is simultaneously a personal learning strategy and a structural mechanism institutions rely on to reproduce their culture, standards, and professional identity across successive generations of employees.[1]

Professional simulation differs from mere mechanical imitation, as it includes a selective dimension that leads the individual to reformulate what they imitate according to their own context, which opens the door to the possibility of transforming imitative action into creative action.

This definition of organizational creativity draws directly on the landmark formulation by Woodman, Sawyer, and Griffin, who defined it as "the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system". That original wording is worth

[1] Moujtama Fikr, Imitation and Social Behavior: How the Mechanism of Simulation Builds the Social System, online article, 2024.

dwelling on because each clause carries analytical weight. The emphasis on "valuable" and "useful" distinguishes organizational creativity from mere novelty for its own sake an idea that is simply different but generates no benefit to the institution does not qualify, since the concept demands both originality and functional relevance to the organization's goals, whether expressed through a product, a service, an internal procedure, or a broader strategic policy. This dual requirement of novelty plus usefulness echoes Teresa Amabile's componential theory, which frames creativity as the production of ideas or outcomes that are simultaneously novel and appropriate to some goal, reinforcing that creativity in an institutional context is never evaluated in the abstract but always against the practical demands the organization faces.

The second defining feature is the insistence that creativity emerges from "individuals working together" rather than from isolated genius. Woodman and colleagues built their framework on an interactionist model of creative behavior, arguing that creative outcomes result from an ongoing interaction between the characteristics of the person and features of the surrounding situation, replicated at the individual, group, and organizational levels simultaneously. This means organizational creativity is inherently multilevel: it is not simply the sum of individually creative employees, but a phenomenon shaped concurrently by personality traits and domain expertise at the individual level, by cohesion and healthy conflict at the group level, and by culture, leadership support, and resource allocation at the organizational level. Amabile's parallel model captures this same layered logic, showing that both individual and organizational creativity depend on the same three underlying components motivation, raw resources or expertise, and a repertoire of skills for recombining them in novel ways but that the source and strength of each component shift as the unit of analysis moves from person to team to institution.

The reference to a "complex social system representing the institution" situates creativity firmly within organizational context rather than treating it as a purely cognitive or artistic act. Amabile's social environment component of her theory makes this explicit: the surrounding environment supervisor support, managerial practices, the degree of autonomy granted, and the broader organizational climate actively shapes whether an individual's domain-relevant skills and intrinsically motivated effort translate into genuinely creative output or are suppressed before they can surface. This is precisely the theoretical bridge that connects the concept back to professional simulation and diffusion discussed earlier: because creativity

in this framework is inseparable from social structure, the same variables that govern how imitation propagates through an organization contact density, hierarchical position, competing practices are also the variables that determine whether a creative idea, once generated by an individual or small group, finds fertile ground to become a valuable, adopted organizational practice rather than remaining an isolated, unrealized insight.[1]

Organizational creativity is linked to the institution's ability to build an organizational framework that encourages the generation of new ideas and integrates them into its strategic processes, making it one of the most valuable fixed assets in achieving competitive advantage.[2]

2. Second: Gabriel Tarde's Sociology and the Laws of Imitation

2.1 Imitation as the Fundamental Social Bond

Gabriel Tarde, in opposition to his contemporary Émile Durkheim who believed that society imposes itself on the individual through a mechanism of social coercion, established a different vision holding that society is essentially formed through the process of imitation. According to Tarde, everything social is, in origin, an individual invention that is generalized and spread through the mechanism of imitation.[3]

Tarde considers that sociology, at its core, is the study of the laws of imitation that govern the transmission of ideas, beliefs, and desires from one mind to another, in a semi-conscious manner that leads individuals to imitate one another in ways of speaking, patterns of behavior, and even ways of thinking.[4]

2.2 Gabriel Tarde's Three Laws of Imitation An Organizational Lens

Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), the French sociologist and criminologist, built his entire social theory around a single idea: society itself *is* imitation. As he put it in his foundational work, *The Laws of Imitation* (1890), repetition is the universal engine of change physical vibration in nature, biological heredity in organisms, and imitation in the social world. When he examined how new behaviors and ideas

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[1] Ahmed Yaslam Al-Aoush, Determinants of Organizational Creativity, Lecture No. 12, University of Algiers, 2023.

[2] Article on Developing Organizational Creativity within the Strategic Human Resource Planning Model, Algerian Scientific Journal Platform (ASJP), 2019.

[3] Imitation and Social Behavior: How the Mechanism of Simulation Builds the Social System, Moujtama Fikr website, July 16, 2025.

[4] Gabriel Tarde: The Secret Behind Humans Imitating One Another, documentary video, June 2026.

actually spread among people, he distilled the pattern into three interlocking laws close contact, imitation of superiors by inferiors, and insertion which map cleanly onto how norms, habits, and innovations travel inside modern institutions.

2.2.1 The Law of Close Contact

Tarde argued that imitation intensifies with proximity and interaction density the more frequently individuals encounter one another, the more their beliefs, gestures, and habits converge. In an organizational setting, this explains why tightly-knit project teams, open-plan offices, or departments with constant cross-communication develop shared jargon, unwritten norms, and even similar working styles far faster than loosely connected units. Close contact acts as a conduction medium: the tighter the network, the higher the "transmission rate" of behavior, much like heat spreading faster through a denser material. This is why organizations trying to spread a new culture or practice often prioritize embedding change agents directly within high-interaction teams rather than issuing memos to disconnected departments

2.2.2 The Law of Imitation from Higher to Lower Status

Tarde's second law holds that imitation is fundamentally hierarchical: it flows from those with prestige, authority, or perceived expertise down toward those with less status — from "elites toward the people," as he framed it, rather than the reverse. This is rooted in his broader idea that imitation rests on **prestige**, with the classic father–son dynamic serving as his primal example of authority driving replication. Organizationally, this is precisely why leadership behavior is disproportionately consequential: when a senior manager adopts a new tool, communication style, or ethical standard, subordinates tend to mirror it — not necessarily because it's objectively superior, but because status itself lends credibility. This law is the theoretical backbone of "tone from the top" in corporate culture, and it also explains why grassroots practices from junior staff struggle to gain traction unless a senior figure visibly adopts and legitimizes them first

2.2.3 The Law of Insertion (Substitution)

The third law addresses what happens when two competing practices coexist: newer habits do not simply add themselves onto old ones, but actively contest and gradually replace them. Tarde treated conflict as an inevitable byproduct of two imitation "waves" interfering with one another, with resolution typically favoring the more useful or "truer" innovation a dynamic he called his **law of logical imitation**. In institutions, this shows up whenever a new software system, management technique, or communication protocol overlaps with an entrenched legacy method. There's rarely a clean, instant switch — for a period both coexist,

often generating friction, until the newer, more functional practice displaces the older one. This is the mechanism behind why organizational change initiatives often report a "transition phase" of parallel systems before full adoption.

Why These Laws Still Matter for Institutions

Table 1 Laws of lmitation and their organizational Applications

Law	Core Mechanism	Organizational Implication
Close Contact	Frequency/density of interaction drives imitation	Cohesive teams adopt shared norms faster; useful for culture-change strategies
Higher-to-Lower Status	Prestige and authority direct the flow of imitation	Leadership modeling is the fastest lever for spreading new practices
Insertion	Competing practices clash until the more useful one prevails	Change management should expect a coexistence period before full replacement

Source: (Theory of Imitation, Sociology Students Publications, academic Facebook page)

Comment: Tarde saw these laws as universal applicable not just to fashion, language, or crime, but to economics, politics, and the spread of "administrative and professional practices" as your original text notes. Later scholars like Barbara Czarniawska extended this Tardean framework specifically to organizations, showing how city administrators and corporate managers imitate their counterparts elsewhere as a branding and legitimation strategy. The enduring relevance of Tarde's framework is that it treats organizational change not as a top-down directive event, but as an emergent, network-driven propagation process — one where

proximity, status, and competitive displacement jointly determine which practices survive[1]

[1] Theory of Imitation, Sociology Students Publications, academic Facebook page.

- ## Conclusion

This paper concludes that the dynamics of professional simulation, far from standing in opposition to organizational creativity, constitute the fundamental social mechanism through which individual innovation is transformed into a generalized organizational practice within private sector institutions. This synthesis aligns with the broader literature on diffusion of innovations, which similarly treats novelty not as a phenomenon that spreads on its own merits alone, but as one communicated through channels, over time, among the members of a defined social system. Everett Rogers' classical model reinforces this point precisely: organizational adoption is never purely a technical decision but unfolds through initiation and implementation subprocesses in which agenda-setting and matching depend heavily on how decision-makers within the hierarchy perceive and legitimize a given idea. Empirical work on managerial decision-making corroborates this interdependence directly, finding that innovation, invention, and imitation together not innovation alone shape managers' strategic choices, with imitation retaining a statistically significant, independent effect on decision quality even after accounting for genuinely novel practices. This confirms that simulation is not a residual or secondary process trailing behind creativity, but an active structural conduit that carries invention from isolated individual acts into institutionalized, organization-wide routines.

A reading of Gabriel Tarde's three laws of imitation strengthens this conclusion by clarifying exactly which structural features condition the pathways of new idea diffusion within the organization. The law of close contact indicates that dense, cohesive networks of interaction accelerate the rate at which a novel practice moves from its point of origin to the wider workforce, meaning that organizational design choices around team structure and communication density are not neutral but directly shape innovation velocity. The law of imitation from higher to lower status shows that authority and perceived expertise function as gatekeepers of legitimacy: an idea's survival often depends less on its intrinsic merit than on whether it is first adopted, or is seen to be adopted, by individuals occupying positions of institutional prestige. This resonates with DiMaggio and Powell's well-known observation that firms searching for effective practices tend to mimic those that other legitimate or successful actors have already validated, rather than evaluating every option from first principles. The law of insertion, finally, captures the transitional friction organizations experience when an emergent practice competes with an entrenched one, implying that the diffusion of innovation is rarely a clean substitution but a contested coexistence resolved gradually in favor of the practice perceived as more useful or adaptive.

Taken together, these theoretical strands justify treating the structure of social relations, and the distribution of authority and expertise across it, as a necessary analytical lens for any organization seeking to understand why some innovations diffuse rapidly while others stagnate despite comparable objective merit. This is consistent with diffusion research more broadly, which identifies the characteristics of adopters particularly their perceptions of opinion leaders' reactions

and the surrounding social influence as one of the three central variables explaining why diffusion succeeds or fails, alongside the attributes of the innovation itself and the wider social and political context in which it is introduced. This theoretical approach accordingly opens clear prospects for future field studies testing the extent to which Tarde's laws of imitation apply to specific Algerian organizational contexts, a setting where hierarchical structures, professional norms, and public–private institutional overlaps in the private sector create a distinctive social fabric worth empirically probing. Such studies could productively examine whether the same status-driven and contact-driven diffusion patterns observed in Western organizational literature hold with equal force, or whether local cultural and institutional variables reshape the speed and direction in which professional simulation converts individual innovation into standardized organizational practice.

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