DISRUPTING THE ROUTINES:
Spontaneous and routinized spheres of creative interaction

(Previous title: “Disrupting the routines: Spontaneity and serendipity in creative interaction”)

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Abstract

The paper focuses on developing theory and understanding about organizational creativity as a communicative phenomenon, especially from the viewpoint of creative interaction within teams. With empirical analysis on a media organization, utilizing the diary method, grounded theory and grounded practical theory, the paper concentrates on creativity as communication practices in organizational context. The significance of interaction in creative processes is central, although research considering the subject has been scarce. Building on the research on organizational creativity and communication practices, the paper contributes to the theory on creativity in organizations by modelling creative interaction on the level of teams in spontaneous and routinized spheres of interaction as well as presenting a typology of six communication practices related.

Introduction

The aim of our paper is to develop theory and understanding about organizational creativity as a communicative phenomenon, especially from the viewpoint of creative interaction within teams. The paper contributes to the theory of creativity in organizations, especially on creative interaction on the team level. We present a new theoretical model about creative interaction, based on an empirical analysis on the practices of creative interaction within the work of an editorial team in a media organization. Based on qualitative analysis, we present a new practice-based framework for theorizing and conceptualizing creative interaction within organizations and groups. We also discuss and contextualize the empirical findings such as the dynamics of spontaneity in creative interaction practices, concluding with practical and

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managerial implications related to our findings.

To contribute to theory of organizational creativity, we analyse practices of creative interaction within a team in a media organization. The empirical study focuses on the incidents concerning creative interaction, especially on how creativity is generated and supported by interaction within the team. Following from this, we focus on exploring the following research questions: What is the role and significance of interaction in team creativity? What modes and practices of interaction are critical for team creativity, i.e. the creation of new and useful ideas and solutions in organizations?

We consider these questions fundamental from several points of view. In terms of interaction related to creativity in organizations, there is a notable research gap in both organization studies and creativity studies literature. The existing theories regarding the phenomenon are scarce and insufficient, and have only limited empirical substantiation. This leads to a necessity for new theories and empirically based models about creative interaction in organizations. Findings of our study will also inform managerial practices of organizations and teams and thus have significant implications for managing and developing the practices of creative organizations. A more comprehensive understanding of creative interaction carries potential of having general implications for development of organizations as well as innovativeness and growth of companies, benefitting society at large. For these reasons, there is a current demand for research that explores and understands the nature of creative interaction and how it relates to organizational and team creativity.

The organization studied is part of an international media company specialized in magazine publishing, which is an interesting sector of the media industry to explore from the perspective of creativity. This is particularly due to the rapid transformation related to digitalization and media convergence as well as expansion of the business operations towards developing multichannel media brand portfolios. In the wake of these changes, magazine publishers have faced the need to depart from the deep-rooted traditions and previously prosperous business models of the industry. Many of the industry’s long-standing practices have been losing significance, and as a result, media organizations have to place an ever-greater premium on renewal and innovation. The industry of ‘legacy media’ is striving to create new ways of operation, new business models as well as content and service innovations. At the same time, the businesses of numerous magazine companies are declining, and the management is working on streamlining, reorganizing and optimizing the operations, seeking to cut down expenses and to increase revenues.

Thus, the media industry is a prime example of a business, in which the organizations are under an ambidextrous pressure of both innovation and productivity. This ambidexterity (e.g. Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008) in the magazine industry, incorporating simultaneous goals of innovating new things and rationalizing the existing operations, emphasizes the development of new practices for operating in organizations. Accordingly, the progression of all-
round organizational creativity is of vital importance for the companies in the media industry.

This article contributes to the theory of creativity in organizations from the perspectives of organizational interaction in multiple ways. We argue that several constraints of organizational creativity are rooted in the traditional practices and routines of organizational interaction, and are in need of renewal. We illustrate this with an empirical analysis on an organization in the media industry, where the increasing work intensification as well as the managerial focus on work productivity are leaving less and less time and space for both creative thinking and creative projects. Thus, we also argue that spontaneous creative interaction within the practices and routines of an organization is the decisive factor regarding the creative capability of the team.

The paper is structured as follows: First, we delineate the theoretical background of the study, drawing on organizational creativity literature and research on communication practices. Second, we describe the empirical research context, the features of the empirical material and the methodology used. Third, we present the findings and a new model of creative interaction. Finally, we discuss our findings in relation to the existing theories and literature and elaborate on the future directions of organizational creativity research.

**Theoretical context**

The theoretical background of the study draws on two research streams: organizational creativity and communication practices. The phenomenon studied, creative interaction in teams, relates to these branches of research in multiple ways. In the following, we describe our theoretical position and discuss the relevance of our study to these scholarly fields.

Creativity has been a subject of growing multidisciplinary research for over 60 years (e.g. Amabile 1996; Sawyer 2006). However, the understanding about the phenomenon remains incomplete. In order to develop the concept of creativity as a scientific construct and to advance the field of creativity research, the theoretical, conceptual and epistemological assumptions behind the understanding about creativity need to be critically scrutinized (e.g. Simonton, 2012; Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Klausen, 2010; Kampylis & Valtanen, 2010; Unsworth, 2001; Styhre & Sundgren, 2005; Parkhurst, 1999). Particularly, creativity research has largely emphasized entity-based studies, creative outcomes and individual talent over collective processes and organizational contexts (e.g. Amabile, 1996; Styhre & Sundgren, 2005; Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Although work within organizations is increasingly based on collective efforts and collaboration, creativity research focusing on action and interaction at the collective level is scarce (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of the paper is to develop the theory and understanding about creativity in organizations from the viewpoint of creative interaction within teams. To this end, the paper contributes to extending the theory on
creative interaction, particularly in relation to theories of creativity in organizations (e.g. Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993; Amabile, 1996; Amabile, 1998; Mumford & Simonton, 1997; Drazin, Glynn & Kazanjian, 1999). Although the knowledge concerning organizational creativity has been growing, the theories of creativity in organizations are still multifaceted and miscellaneous (e.g. Styhre & Sundgren, 2005; George, 2007; James & Drown, 2012; Rosso, 2014).

In the organizational context, creativity is designated to lead to novel and useful solutions that have practical value for the company (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Following the classic definition of creativity stating that creativity produces original, novel or unique ideas that are considered useful and appropriate (see Runco & Jaeger, 2012), creativity is commonly discussed as an issue of high importance regarding the renewal and innovation capability of any organization. Nevertheless, creativity, and the notion of creativity, has not reached substantial or particularly notable role in management research or management thinking (Styhre & Sundgren, 2005). As Rickards (1999: p. 36) has stated, creativity has stood “outside the orthodoxy of management studies, and is not taken seriously enough to make much contribution to the ongoing debate about the nature of management studies.” This lack of a solid theoretical base concerns also current research on creativity in groups. It is evident that research is needed to deepen the understanding about creative team processes and their organizational contexts (e.g. Rosso, 2014; George, 2007).

In this study, we contribute to these research areas by focusing on a topical but under-studied area of creative interaction in teams and organizations. Although interaction as such has not been on the agenda of organizational creativity research, it has been observed that it is crucial to increase understanding about how communication (Sonnenburg, 2004), interaction (Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009), relations (Zhou & Shalley, 2003; Shalley, Zhou & Oldham, 2004) and social networks (Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2014) affect creative work in organizations. Notably, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) have studied creativity from the viewpoints of social interaction. Based on their empirical research, they introduced a model of creativity that highlights the significance of the interpersonal interactions in creative work. The study advanced especially the understanding about collective creativity, a concept which Hargadon & Bechky (2006) based on social interaction between individuals where interpretations and discoveries are generated.

Organizations and collectives should not be seen only as groups of people, but as sets of work practices and opportunities for interaction that allow for creativity and innovation (Getz & Lubart, 2009). By approaching creativity as practice, we concentrate on theorizing creativity as something people do (e.g. Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks & Yanow, 2009; Corradi, Gherardi & Verzelloni, 2010). With this approach on studying creativity in organizations, we explore team creativity focusing on the creative actions of people (e.g. Joas, 1996; Weik, 2012) and the dynamics of creative processes (e.g. Styhre & Sundgren, 2005; Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Especially, with focus on communication
practices, we aim at deepening the research on interaction within and inside the creative processes (see also Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Thus, following Drazin, Glynn and Kazanjian (1999) and Woodman, Sawyer and Griffin (1993, we comprehend creativity as a process of individuals working together and engaging in creative action that aims for new and useful ideas, products or processes.

In this paper, we analyse creative interaction as practice of communication. Communication is a specific constellation of interaction that stresses intentionality of the action and “serves to produce genuine intersubjective understanding as the basis of coordinated action in the common interest” (Jensen 2010, 151). Communication practices are essentially about human interaction (Craig & Tracy, 2014) and can be described as “a coherent set of activities that are commonly engaged in and meaningful to us in particular ways” (Craig, 2006: p. 38). Following the core features of this definition of the concept of practice, i.e. coherence, regularity and significance, we aim to develop and enrich the theorization on creativity from the perspective of creative interaction as a communicative practice. In addition, we emphasize the significance of sharing in relation to practices. For example, Vaara and Whittington (2012: p. 287) have summarized that practices are “shared between actors and routinized over time”.

In the conventional conception of communication as transmission, the process of communication is comprehend as sending messages and information from a communicator to a receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1964; see also Craig, 1999). This linear model has long been evaluated as too limited, and it has been complemented and often replaced with conceptualizations of communication as interpreting and sharing of meanings (e.g. Craig, 1999). Also the etymology of communication links to sharing of meanings and the sense of communality, in addition to transmission (Peters, 2000; Jensen, 2010). In this conception, communication is seen as “a constitutive process that produces and reproduces shared meaning” (Craig, 1999: p. 125). This definition relates also to the views that organizations are constituted in communication (e.g. Putnam, Nicotera & McPhee, 2009), where communication is a crucial part of the process and practices of forming and describing the organization.

In the context of organizations and teams, communication can be comprehend as a process where individuals interact with each other and influence other individuals (Craig, 1999: p. 143). This view of communication relates to both of the conventional conceptions about communication. Following Johan Fornäs (1995, 140), communication is then understood as human interaction that involves both transmission of something and connecting and sharing something with others. Communication practices comprise, then, transmitting messages, interpreting and understanding the meanings as well as making them common in communities, i.e. organizations, groups and teams.

To grasp on communicative practices of creative interaction, we are drawing on the framework by Craig and Tracy (1995; 2014) that focuses on discovering a
theory by reflecting and reconstructing communication practices. The grounded practical theory offers a methodology to analyse communication practices in three levels: the technical, the problem and the philosophical level. According to Craig and Tracy (1995; 2014), the technical level focuses on specific communicative techniques and strategies that are routinely used within the practices. The problem level highlights the problems and dilemmas the practitioners experience and the logic behind these problems. The philosophical level concentrates on normative ideals and principles that comprise the rationale for resolving the problems. The problem level is central to the theoretical reconstruction of communication practices, because it determines and guides the reflection that follows on the technical and philosophical levels of practices, which are responses to the problems and dilemmas encountered by the practitioners.

Thus, in this study, we utilize empirical approach to practice, and focus on the activity and interactivity of people working in an organization, and emphasize the meaning of practices in the everyday operations within the organization (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011: p. 1240). Attempts to examine and conceptualize creativity explicitly from the practice viewpoint in organizational contexts are sparse (see Lampel, Honig & Drori, 2014; Lombardo & Kvålshaugen, 2014; see also Burnard, 2012). While much of creativity research has been carried out in laboratory settings, empirical research on actual practices of team or group creativity enables to explore the dynamics of ongoing creative work in organizations more thoroughly (Rosso, 2014; George, 2007). Next, we will move to present the specifics of our empirical study.

**Empirical research context, method and data**

The empirical study is concerned with creative interaction and team creativity in one of the leading European multi-channel media corporations, employing some 7,500 professionals in Europe. The study concentrates on an editorial team of 40 media professionals working on a continuous creation media product (e.g. Picard, 2005), i.e. a weekly magazine. It is a traditional magazine that has been published for more than half a century. The magazine is among the leading publications in its market category. In addition, the editorial team is responsible for the production of other services, products and platforms related to the media brand, such as websites, social media contents (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter), mobile and tablet editions, and several occasional theme issues and events.

The group of participants included the editorial team, in total 40 professionals of magazine journalism. Of the 24 team members that responded, 46% were journalists, 33% graphic design professionals, 17% managing editors and copy editors and 4% assistants. The average age of the participants was 36 years (between 25 and 45 years). They had been working in the media industry on average for 10 years (between 3 and 20 years) and in the media company studied on average for 6 years (between 0.5 and 13 years). Some two-thirds of the responded team members had studied in higher education institutions and
The majority of the others had studied in occupational programs and taken courses focusing on the skills needed in the magazine industry.

The empirical material was collected using the diary method. The diary method allows collecting large amounts of real-time empirical material from the same group of individuals frequently for a certain period of time. The method is especially convenient for capturing personal perceptions and reflections about suddenly occurring events (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003). The diary method is especially useful in studying personal experiences, for example to increase understanding about the action and interaction in organizational context (Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003; Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen & Zapf 2010). That kind of self-evaluation is a useful method for purposes of exploring not only actual events and practices, but also people’s thoughts, feelings and interpretations. For example, Amabile and Kramer (2011) have used the diary method in examining creativity in organizational contexts. They have shown that the diary method is particularly applicable to research on creativity in organizations, because it allows analysing creative work in its natural environment and as an integral part of the work community and the organization.

In addition to using the diary method, we applied the critical incident technique as a guiding approach to the construction of the diary writings. The critical incident technique is a qualitative research method that suites particularly well for analysing human activity and organizational practices (e.g. Flanagan, 1954; Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson & Malio, 2005; see also McGourty, Tarshis & Dominick, 1996). The role of the critical incident technique was to guide the participants to focus their attentiveness and thinking on the most crucial incidents of the working day. That way, they could produce profound and detailed descriptions of the experiences about the emerging incidents.

Utilizing the combination of the diary method and the critical incident technique, two standard questions were sent to the team members by email every morning during the research periods. The purpose of these questions was to guide the diary writings towards describing meaningful incidents of the day. The participants were asked to describe two events in writing (positive and negative) about creative interaction with other team members daily: (1) “Tell about an incident of today, where the interaction between the members of the team contributed positively to the creative work and the content production”; (2) “Tell about an incident of today, where the interaction between the members of the team contributed negatively to the creative work and the content production.” The expression ‘content production’ was included in the questions to clarify the often ambiguous and versatile concept of ‘creative work’, and in the spirit of the critical incident technique, to focus the attention in diary writings on the core processes of the team operations, i.e. content production.

The study lasted for two separate production periods i.e. ten working days during two separate working weeks (from Monday to Friday) in January-February 2014. The research week was repeated after a break of one week.
During both research weeks, participants received an e-mail from the director of the research team every morning at around 7 a.m., inquiring them to write a diary log and respond with e-mail during that day. The e-mails presented the guiding questions and the instructions for answering. The daily work of a journalist is often hectic and unstable, and because of the out of office duties and work trips some team members were unable to participate. Some respondents were also unable to contribute because they were absent from work due to holiday or illness. The empirical material collected included 210 diary entries and 24 answers regarding the background information about the respondents.

In analysing the empirical material, we utilized the approach of the grounded theory method as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967/2009) and the grounded practical theory formulated by Craig and Tracy (1995; 2014). With a systematic empirical analysis guided by the general principles of grounded theory we conducted a data-driven analysis intending to create new theoretical understanding about the phenomenon under study. The grounded theory was applied as a general approach to focus the analysis on generating theoretical ideas that emerge from the empirical material, instead of being guided by particular prefixed existing theories. This approach was found applicable, because the theories about the phenomenon of creative interaction on team-level are scarce and disconnected.

The process of analysing the empirical material proceeded as follows. First, we (two researchers) separately read the empirical material repeatedly and wrote notes and memos about the main features of the material. At this phase, the empirical material was divided into four different data sets, based on the diary entries on a question (first or second) during a research week (first or second). The data sets were evaluated separately one by one to ensure that the empirical material in its entirety is solid and that it did not include notable biases or differences between different data sets. After the separate evaluations, we discussed our initial observations and notions, trying to create a shared understanding about the empirical material and its general features. In the evaluation, we used the research questions as a general frame of reference. As a conclusion, the contents of the separate evaluations proved to be reasonably equivalent: we had identified relatively similar initial categories, and even though there were several divergent notions, after discussing the evaluations they constituted a consistent whole. The separate data sets were partially overlapping but also included some distinct features, particularly between the data sets regarding the diary entries about the positive contributions and the ones about the negative contributions.

At the second stage, we continued evaluating the empirical material separately and started to itemize initial conceptual categories and their conceptual properties indicated by the empirical material. We aimed for diversity in the emerging categories and tried to discover as many relevant conceptual categories as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2009). At this point, we concluded with altogether 135 potential conceptual categories of the empirical
material. After discussing these findings we delineated the amount of conceptual categories and formed the initial draft of the first coding system, including 20 emerging conceptual categories of creative interaction. These conceptual categories served as a preliminary classification that was to be reformulated, delimited and established during the process of coding and analysis.

At the third stage of the analysis, we started to separately code the incidents in the empirical material into various conceptual categories. During the coding of the incidents, we continuously compared the incident with previous incidents in the categories. This process allowed us to constantly reconsider and reformulate the categories in relation to other categories and make analytical notes about the features of the material. In addition to helping us to build the categories, the continuous process of comparison also helped to generate the theoretical and conceptual properties of these categories. As Glaser and Strauss (1967/2009, 106) have noted, comparing the incidents generates theoretical properties related to the category as well as helps to clarify its relations to other categories. After the both two rounds of coding, we made intercoder agreement checks (Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman & Beauchamp, 2001), in which we discussed the justifications for the decisions made during the process. Following, we rechecked and finalized the coding and classified the empirical data accordingly for the conclusive analysis.

At the fourth stage, we focused on analysing the empirical material on the basis of the emerged coding structure. We focused on delimiting the theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967/2009), clarifying the relations of categories and reducing the number of conceptual categories. Integrating the categories and focusing on the most important ones helped us to find cohesive relations between the incidents within the categories, to deepen our interpretations and to develop the emerging theoretical framework. In that way, the development and reporting of a grounded theory was based on a constant and recursive comparison of the empirical material, the conceptual categories and the emerging theoretical framework (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). At this stage, the role of the grounded practical theory (Craig & Tracy 1995; 2014) in the methodology was to shed light on communicative practices and to provide a three-level framework (as described in the section about theoretical background) for exploring and organizing the findings of the empirical material. The grounded practical theory is a methodological framework focusing on systematic analysis of communication practices and their reconstruction. According to Craig and Tracy (1995), this framework makes it possible to discover, criticize, and theoretically reconstruct a grounded theory that focuses on the characteristics of communicative practices.

The grounded theory approach embraces a technique of constant comparison and allows an agile but systematic way for joint coding and analysis. We considered coding and analysing as intertwined processes: developing a coding system is an integral part of qualitative data analysis and the process of category development (Weston, Gandell, Beauchamp, McAlpine, Wiseman &
Beauchamp, 2001). Using multiple investigators in coding and analysing the empirical material offered significant advantages. Having different systematic evaluations of the empirical material enables diverse perspectives and complementary interpretations (Eisenhardt, 1989). It also strengthened the reliability and soundness of the findings and ensured that the findings were developed with a firm grounding in the empirical material. Multiple investigators also provided a more rigorous approach to verification. To strengthen the consistency and reliability of the analysis, we wrote memos and made notes of the progression of the coding processes. Documentation of the separate processes of coding enabled us transparent comparison between the codings as well as the assumptions and hypotheses in relation to the interpretations. Thus, intercoder agreement and shared perception among the researchers strengthened the reliability of the interpretations. Constant dialogue between the researchers in the process of coding and analysing the empirical material strengthens the consistency of the study and credibility of the interpretations. With two parallel analytic processes, the validity of the analysis is less dependent on researcher’s existing preunderstanding, subjective framework and interpretative repertoires (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007).

Next, we move on to present the findings of the research that are based on the categories and concepts that emerged from the empirical material, and which are further analysed utilizing the three-level framework provided by the grounded practical theory. Afterwards, in the Discussion section, and following Glaser and Strauss (1967/2009), the findings are brought together with previous theories and concepts within the research tradition that are useful for reflecting the results and further theorization.

**Findings**

Drawing on our empirical research, we propose a model of creative interaction in organizations in this section. The model illustrates the two-fold catalytic influence of interaction in team creativity. Our model of creative interaction makes a distinction between different spheres, i.e. areas of social action and influence. Creative interaction is divided between a routinized sphere that maintains and keeps the team’s performance and production on track; and a spontaneous sphere where the team creates something new and unexpected. In the first sphere, interaction is informative and regulatory; in the second, it is informal and open.

*Figure 1: The model of creative interaction in organizations*
The following describes in more detail these two spheres of our model as well as the related analyses.

**Sphere 1: Routinized creative interaction**

The first sphere of routinized creative interaction is related to routine production work, and it is geared to furthering and supporting systematic implementation of the production process. Much of the team members’ actual input consists of independent production work that is based on a close familiarity with the organization’s established routines, practices and principles. Furthermore, it is informed by knowledge of the team’s set objectives and schedules. The first sphere is thus characterised by a commitment to efficient and systematic production in line with commonly agreed principles and processes. Routinized interaction that aims to support creativity in production is sustaining by nature. It seeks to ensure that the production process runs smoothly without disruption.

In the first sphere, the purpose of the team interaction is to enhance and support a systematic production process. A distinction can be made between three different types of routinized creative interaction. *Informing interaction* is crucial in providing the communication required to maintain a successful production process and to ensure that its targets are achieved. *Resolving interaction*, then, is aimed at resolving problems and unexpected situations occurring in the production process, and at ensuring the continuity of the process. Finally, *verifying interaction* among team members is aimed at confirming that the production process is moving in the right direction and at supporting team members in the production process. The various forms of routinized creative interaction as communicative practices are described in Table 1.

*Table 1: Routinized creative interaction as communication practices*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sphere 1: ROUTINIZED CREATIVE INTERACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication practices</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical level:</strong> Repertoire of communicative strategies and techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem level:</strong> Communicative tensions, problems and dilemmas in practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophical level:</strong> Normative principles and rationale for resolutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Informing interaction**

Informing interaction is about providing information and guidelines to team members about the production process. It is expected that informing interaction concerning production shall be clear, accurate, detailed and easily comprehensible. It is intended to provide a basis for informed and systematic decision-making about production and for reaching agreement about related details and production schedules. The provision of information is often straightforward communication intended to keep team members informed of what is expected of them at different stages of the production process. It is prescriptive by nature and focused on defining priorities. Practices of informing interaction are routine-like and goal-oriented, and involve scheduled meetings, face-to-face discussions to check on details, or information exchanges within a small group. This interaction strives for efficiency in terms of time and content.

Inaccurate information and communication will slow and delay the production process and cause frustration to team members. It disrupts the production process and leads to inappropriate choices with respect to job contents. If informing interaction fails and the information required in the production process is not adequately distributed, that is bound to cause uncertainty and complicate the team members’ ability for creative input.
Informing interaction is first and foremost about efficiency and effectiveness. Interaction becomes thinner towards the end of the production process, concentrating on checking and revising final content versions. The focus of informing interaction is on bringing the production process to completion as effectively as possible, without undue disruption. In this situation informal creative discussions or communication about matters other than production efficiency may hamper informing interaction. At the same time, routine informing interaction may also prevent creative action outside the actual production process, activity that might be beneficial to teamwork as a whole.

*Example of typical excerpt:* “It became clear from our discussions with the managing editor that briefing for the story had been too vague and insufficient. The content is bound to suffer when you don’t know exactly what you’re supposed to be doing and what is expected of the story. I tend to get bogged down with my own writing when I have to clean up other people’s work.”

**Resolving interaction**

Resolving interaction is geared to resolving as quickly and effectively as possible any problems, uncertainties and exceptional situations in the production process. It is needed above all at the most critical junctions of the production process where time pressures are most acute. In these situations, resolving interaction is highly focused and aimed at reaching prompt conclusions and solutions that will provide a clear foundation for continuing with the production process. Time pressure in resolving interaction may itself be conducive to creativity and the creative solutions, provided that interaction can produce quick and effective solutions to the challenges arising from the production process.

Communication style is of paramount significance to resolving interaction. As it is focused on dealing with problem situations, resolving interaction typically involves disagreement and critical attitudes. As the decisions made are often geared to maintaining the efficiency of the production process, it is often felt that those decisions tend to obstruct creativity. Managers and supervisors have a pronounced role in resolving interaction. In particular, irritated or uncompromising managerial communication or communication that restricts creative solutions may be frustrating and demotivating for staff members. Open and respectful resolving interaction, on the other hand, may help to resolve problems quickly and smoothly and strengthen the team’s sense of togetherness. A solution-minded orientation that strengthens collaboration creates within the team a sound basis for the collective resolution of future problems.

*Example of typical excerpt:* “We quickly made the decisions together with the managing editor on what to do and I then added the necessary missing bits to the story. In a sense the time pressure also fed into creativity. There just wasn’t the time to sit around and...”
think too much, you just had to find the creativity in yourself straightaway.”

Verifying interaction

Verifying interaction has a critical role to play in production and in controlling the quality of the end products. Verifying interaction consists of steering communication related to production process routines and contents produced: it verifies and establishes common conceptions about the objectives and direction of production. It focuses on exact and targeted feedback on the functions and other details about production. Verifying interaction has not only the role of reinforcing production, but it also supports individual agents in the first sphere.

Routine creative activity carried out in the context of the production process needs verifying interaction and feedback in order to ensure that individuals are successfully performing according to plan. Both superiors and colleagues have an important role in verifying interaction. Verifying and encouraging feedback provided by superiors furthers and advances the creative work process and its effectiveness. Furthermore, verifying interaction with colleagues makes possible the development of common practices and routines in the team.

Verifying interaction has great importance to team members in that it reinforces team members’ views about the choices they have made as well as their confidence that their creative input will be effective. The role of verifying interaction is to create shared meanings about ways of working in the team. Its role is not to aim for particularly creative outcomes, for instance to produce new ideas, to question earlier choices or to suggest new solutions or practices that differ from existing ones. Verifying interaction improves the conditions for team collaboration, team confidence and sense of cohesion. Therefore, it also creates a solid foundation for future work and encounters.

Example of typical excerpt: “We were revising the first version of my story with the subeditor and managing editor. They confirmed things that I had doubts about in the story, and based on our meeting I hope was able to improve on the story.”

Sphere 2: Spontaneous creative interaction

The second sphere consists of spontaneous creative interaction that has its inception in coincidental encounters and unexpected connections among team members and the informal interaction that follows. In this sphere face-to-face open interaction among team members is particularly important as it makes possible emergent creative processes and unexpected creative outcomes. In contrast to the first sphere where the aim is to foster planned, systematic and limited action, spontaneous creative interaction is based on team members’ open, informal and encouraging exchange and communication.
Spontaneous creative interaction is divided into three types of communication practice: (1) coincidental interaction, (2) informal interaction and (3) enabling interaction. Coincidental interaction is based on random and unexpected encounters, whereas informal interaction is characterised by openness and the absence of set plans, which facilitates spontaneous creativity. The purpose of enabling interaction is to support and encourage team members in spontaneous interaction. The forms of spontaneous creative interaction as communication practices are described in Table 2.

Table 2: Spontaneous creative interaction as communication practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication practices</th>
<th>Coincidental interaction</th>
<th>Informal interaction</th>
<th>Enabling interaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Technical level:</strong> Repertoire of communicative strategies and techniques</td>
<td>Random encounters and unexpected situations of interaction that initiate creative action</td>
<td>Casual meetings and get-togethers (i.e. breakfasts and lunches), relaxed and unofficial discussions between team members</td>
<td>Face-to-face communication that supports other team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem level:</strong> Communicative problems and dilemmas in practices</td>
<td>Initiatory communication generates new creative interaction</td>
<td>Informality and unplanned interaction situations liberate creativity</td>
<td>Encouraging, supporting and helping team members and their interaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophical level:</strong> Normative principles and rationale for resolutions</td>
<td>New encounters shall be actively searched as they open up new perspectives and ideas</td>
<td>Open interaction has significant potential to promote imagination and innovativeness</td>
<td>Supporting new encounters and open interaction can pave the way to new ideas and perspectives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coincidental interaction**

The second sphere consists of spontaneous creative interaction that is prompted by random and unexpected encounters. These encounters may lead to unexpected creative interaction, which in turn may have concrete consequences in the shape of surprising ideas or outcomes. As face-to-face interaction creates new, shared interpretations and understandings among team members, these meanings can open new perspectives. In other words, the second sphere facilitates spontaneous creative interaction that can have surprising and unexpected results.

If the conditions are favourable for an accidentally started interaction to progress, spontaneous interaction provides an incentive for the creation of something new. In the context of spontaneous creative interaction, discussions can meander freely as there are no requirements of efficiency or achieving
given targets within a given time frame. This is essential for the creation of something new: creative interaction requires time, a relaxed atmosphere and the opportunity to develop emerging new ideas patiently.

The potential for creating new ideas increases when a team member spontaneously seeks to connect and enter interaction situations and to get other team members to join in the discussions. This kind of proactive attitude leads to spontaneous interaction processes that are not based on planned organizational routines characteristic to the first sphere. New ideas may be created, for instance, in connection with small talks and other everyday interaction. Spontaneous creative interaction may fuel random associative transitions and new kinds of associations and conceptions. When random meandering and thematic departures emerge in a discussion on some issue, they may lead to new and useful ideas.

Example of typical excerpt: “I’ve got a black eye from an accident and I come to work wearing no makeup. Colleagues are horrified of how I look, but our beauty editor grabs me by the arm and leads me into her office. She wants to hide the black eye with makeup, which leads to an idea for a story – let’s make a before and after story, complete with pictures, and post in on our website. Our bosses are excited about the idea. I get some great tips from the beauty editor for the story, and our online editors are encouraging and say this is a good piece. Other colleagues also say they’re impressed by how I’ve thrown myself into this. A great teamwork effort.”

Informal interaction

In the second sphere, interaction is based on informal and open exchange. Spontaneous encounters and connections are often short, informal and light, and the interaction they prompt opens up space for different kinds of topics and new angles. Informal interaction paves the way to diverse debate and discussion, as well as to departures from the norms and principles governing team members’ thinking about production. Open interaction also makes it possible to develop creative ideas further than is possible under the objectives defined by the production process. Open and flexible interaction thus also facilitates the development of team practices, for instance.

Spontaneous creative interaction is characterised by disintegration and the absence of set plans. The purpose of informal interaction is not to aim straightforwardly and efficiently towards planned outcomes. As informal interaction is not goal-oriented, it is not based, as in the first sphere, on certain roles governing activities or on the organization’s hierarchic structure, but on an embedded commitment to informality and equality. For instance, an open-minded and permissive climate at a staff meeting encourages people to come forward with different ideas and facilitates broader uncontrolled discussion. In an informal and relaxed discussion it is easier to set one’s own mind-set to observe things from new and surprising angles.
Example of typical excerpt: “We had a good brainstorming session, where we laughed a lot and came up with new ideas and the discussion meandered without someone all the time telling us to move on. Too much yapping is obviously no good, but you must have some latitude so that you can sometimes come up with fresh and interesting ideas at meetings.”

**Enabling interaction**

Interaction in the second sphere requires of team members mutual encouragement and supportive interaction, which then paves the way to spontaneous creative activity. Since interaction in the second sphere is based on spontaneity and openness, the organization has no formal principles, frameworks or rules that would govern or restrict it. That is why spontaneous creative interaction requires special facilitation and sustenance by the team members and workplace community. The encouraging and inspiring feedback provided by team members to one another serves to reinforce the team and individuals, creating an open and dialogical climate among team members. Active positive feedback creates a sense among team members that it is possible to boldly explore and bring forward unconventional ideas and opinions. This has a significant enabling impact on the team’s ability to think and act creatively.

Spontaneous creative interaction is mostly based on voluntary support. Enabling interaction is not based on process descriptions, organizational structures, areas of responsibility or people’s official roles, but on team members’ perceptions that they can and want spontaneously to help other team members develop something new. Interaction is based on the team member’s observation that some team members need help, and that the people providing help, by making their own contribution to interaction, can facilitate the team’s creative input. This will encourage them to offer help in resolving a problem or in improving the quality of work.

Enabling interaction creates a sense of collaboration in the organization, and a conviction that team members will help one another also in those cases, in which help is not available through the organization’s formal routinized processes. Enabling interaction is particularly important in urgent situations or in cases where some part of the team’s performance is at risk of sliding into crisis. Sometimes tight production schedules may prevent potential enabling interaction even when there is a specific need for such interaction. Time pressures in production may also hinder spontaneous creative interaction that would help to develop something new.

Example of typical excerpt: “We’d want to have more encouragement from the bosses and why not from colleagues as well. We decided to make a greater effort to encourage one another and to say out loud if we felt a published story had been good. And
the feedback should be given precisely in the form of praise, without
the proviso ‘but if this had been done better then’, which we often
hear. No buts, just the praise.”

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper, we have examined the spheres and practices of creative
interaction in organizational environment. The study has aimed to develop the
theory of creative interaction within teams, to complement the existing body of
knowledge on organizational creativity and to contribute to the research on
communication practices. In the discussion to follow, we conclude and reflect
our findings in light of the extant theories of creativity in organizations,
particularly the studies attached to theorizing creative interaction. We also shed
light on the implications for future research the paper has to offer.

In this paper, we have presented a new model of creative interaction and a new
typology of communication practices related. With theorization grounded in an
empirical study on a media organization, we introduced a model comprising of
two different spheres, i.e. the sphere of routinized creative interaction and the
sphere of spontaneous creative interaction, as well as six communication
practices related to the spheres.

In the first sphere of routinized creative interaction, the communication
practices are divided into informing, resolving and verifying interaction.
Interaction in the first sphere is usually linear, prescriptive and goal-oriented: it
is aimed at resolving problems, optimizing the creative production processes
and attaining the objectives set for action. Much of the interaction in the first
sphere is routine and ritual by nature and it is primarily aimed at maintaining
and strengthening the connections between the parties involved. The first
sphere consists of systematic, process-like and routine organizational activity
that has to do with production functions as well as related interaction.
Production work is steered by shared understanding about the product concept
as well as the organization’s practices and production routines that are familiar
to the team members and which they know how to apply.

The second sphere of spontaneous creative interaction consists of coincidental,
informal and enabling communication practices. In this sphere, the creation of
new ideas and resolutions is based on coincidental and unpredicted creative
encounters and interactivities. This kind of interaction leads to unexpected and
surprising results although it is important to the team’s performance and
informed by the needs and goals of the organization. Spontaneous creative
interaction is not based on the organization’s systematic operation and
management. It is characterised by random, unexpected encounters and
interactions between individuals. Spontaneous interaction does not take place in
any predetermined space, on a particular platform or under specific
organizational circumstances. It is triggered by coincidental encounters where
one or more team members take the initiative and open a discussion that is not
on the agenda defined by the first sphere. Spontaneous creative interaction is by
nature disintegrative and disruptive to the organization’s systematic routines. Its
processes coincide with routinized creative interaction, starting from the points of disruption in production processes.

The results of our study described above contribute to the emergent research on interaction in organizational creativity by identifying and exploring the dimensions and significance of interpersonal interaction for team creativity. Generally, the study makes contribution to the domain of research by shedding light on this previously overlooked gap in theoretical understanding and building theoretical ground for future research on this emerging area. Particularly, it offers three main theoretical implications for the research on creativity in organizations and teams.

First, the paper presents a new model on creative interaction that has implications for future research as well as managerial practices. To provide tools for widening the understanding about creative interaction, we have created a framework for approaching the dimensions of creative interaction within organizations. This kind of theorization has been considered important in developing the growing domain of organizational creativity. In the analysis on future needs for creativity research, Zhou & Shalley (2003) have urged that new models about processes of team creativity should be formulated, thus contributing to expanding the research to new theoretical grounds.

Second, the paper develops the theory of creative interaction by introducing the typology of six communication practices for understanding the collective work in creative organizations. Also this contribution is predominantly based on the incompleteness of current body of knowledge about the topic, since there are only a few studies concentrating on interaction in creative processes. In their pioneering study, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) found four types of interactions related to collective creativity. Their conclusions relate strongly to some of our findings, and thus also construct a verifying context. Particularly, they specified the activities of help seeking, help giving and reinforcing, i.e. individuals actively looking for and providing assistance for team members as well as supporting them in problematic situations, which attach directly to our findings about the features of routinized creative interaction. The findings of our study also follow and complement the observations of studies noting that open and consistent communication is an important factor in enabling and encouraging creativity in teams (e.g. Rosso, 2014). Our findings show that informal and enabling interaction is essential especially in striving towards radically new ideas as well as unexpected and serendipitous processes (e.g. Merton & Barber, 2006), opposed to the case of everyday incremental creativity (see Madjar, Greenberg & Chen, 2011).

Third, with the analysis on the dual nature of creative work and interaction in organizational context, the paper has implications for understanding the paradoxical and bidirectional positions of organizations and their management. Organizations are commonly challenged by the contradictory goals of executing routine work efficiently as well as harnessing the ability of operating creatively and innovatively (Lampel, Honig & Drori, 2014). Thus, this paper contributes to deepening the understanding about the tensions (Rosso, 2014) and paradoxes
(George, 2008) of creative work in organizations. These juxtapositions related to creativity in organizations include, among others, static vs. dynamic (Lampel, Honig & Drori, 2014), exploration vs. exploitation (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009) and freedom vs. constraints (Rosso, 2014). As this study shows, research on organizational creativity should also focus on enriching the understanding about the organizational tensions related to creative work. Instead of considering paradoxical situations as contradictory, they can be seen as two co-existing streams of synergic action (Clegg, Cunha, & Cunha, 2002). This is a research area of organizational creativity, where new frameworks and conceptualizations that aim for synthesis are needed.

Although the nature and characteristics of interaction in the routinized and the spontaneous spheres are different, the purpose of interaction in both spheres is to enhance creativity, i.e. the creation of new and useful things (e.g. Amabile, 1996; Drazin, Glynn & Kazanjian, 1999; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). In the media industry, content production is by definition a creative activity that usually involves the creation of new and unique contents that are useful to both clients and the business itself. However, creative interaction among team members has a different role at the stage of implementing the production plans than it does in interaction geared to idea conception and planning.

In organizational context, the efficiency of the production process requires standardized practices as well as sharing of instructive and precise information. Previous studies have shown that various routine constraints, such as time schedules and rigorous processes, help to enhance team creativity in cases, where plans and goal of action are acknowledged (e.g. Rosso, 2014). Also, as our study shows, in routinized repetitive production practices, spontaneous creative interaction can in some instances be detrimental to efficient action. If addressing areas and issues that are not topical and relevant to the production process, spontaneous creative efforts can be a sheer waste of resources, such as time and energy of team members. In particular, constant sharing of new ideas and perspectives can hamper effective individual performance and the achievement of the targets set for production. Similarly, routinized organizational practices obstruct spontaneous action and emerging new ideas.

The model and typology produced by this study expand the scholarly conversation about organizational creativity and implicate new theoretical directions. We argue that the areas of routinized and spontaneous creative interaction provide prominent future paths for organizational creativity research. First, in order to develop the organizational creativity research it would be useful to build on organizational routines in considering the sphere of routinized creative interaction (e.g. Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Parmigiani & Howard-Grenville, 2011; Pentland, Feldman, Becker & Liu, 2012; Jarzabkowski, Lé & Feldman, 2012; Obstfeld, 2012). This approach has established a rich and evolving tradition in analysing phenomena related to human actors and action in organizations. Particularly, new studies focusing on the role of routines of interaction (e.g. Dionysiou & Tsoukas, 2013) in creative work practices could expand the theoretical understanding about collective team creativity. Second, in future explorations on the sphere of spontaneous...
creative interaction, organizational creativity could be analysed in relation to the literature on serendipity in organizational context, i.e. the process of making unexpected and valuable discoveries (e.g. Merton & Barber, 2006; Cunha, Clegg, & Mendonça, 2010; Dew, 2009). The emerging field of serendipity research is a particularly promising area for exploring creative action in organizational contexts.

References


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