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Organizational creativity as idea work: Intertextual placing and legitimating imaginings in media development and oil exploration

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Abstract

How do we understand the nature of organizational creativity when dealing with complex, composite ideas rather than singular ones? In response to this question, we problematize assumptions of the linearity of creative processes and the singularity of ideas in mainstream creativity theory. We draw on the work of Bakhtin and longitudinal research in two contrasting cases: developing hydrocarbon prospects and concepts for films and TV series. From these two cases, we highlight two forms of work on ideas: (1) intertextual placing, whereby focal ideas are constituted by being connected to other elements in a larger idea field, and (2) legitimating imaginings, where ideas of what to do are linked to ideas of what is worth doing and becoming. This ongoing constitution and legitimating is not confined to particular stages but takes place in practices of generating, connecting, communicating, evaluating and reshaping ideas, which we call idea work. The paper contributes to a better understanding of the processual character of creativity and the deeply intertextual nature of ideas, including the multiplicity of idea content and shifting parts–whole relationships. Idea work also serves to explore the neglected role of co-optative power in creativity.

Keywords

ideas, intertextuality, organizational creativity, power, process theory

The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*.

(Bakhtin, 1984: 87-88 italics in original)

Ideas, as Bakhtin articulates, are made with, for and because of others. This statement is particularly meaningful when trying to understand the creation of complex compositions, such as the creation of a new TV series, a prospect for where to find oil or the development of a research paper, rather than creating a simpler or more confined idea. Creating complex compositions involves not only a combination of inputs that may change through time but also shifting interpretations. A tweak in a character may connect with a powerful societal myth; a new piece of geological data may shift interpretation of geological processes from one model to another; the argument you are reading right now connects, convincingly or not, with traditions of research that you are familiar with. The making of such “dialogic relationships” between ideas, their makers and their users are decisive to their perceived quality and novelty. Yet, this ongoing revisioning and repositioning of composite ideas is underexplored in organizational creativity research. It also, as we will show, challenges key assumptions of prior research.

This paper contributes to a relatively recent stream of creativity research that focuses on how organizational creativity inheres in collective practice (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009; Obstfeld, 2012; Murphy, 2004; Sonenshein, 2014). Creativity research has traditionally focused on individuals (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999), relying on laboratory studies and surveys (Paulus et al., 2011) or studies of a fairly narrow range of

breakthrough moments in group settings. Mainstream creativity theory tends to deploy implicit assumptions of linearity and stage separation of creative efforts (e.g. Simonton, 2004; Baer, 2012). By implication, ideas can become seen as reified and singular—finished objects that are passed from one stage to another. The quote from Bakhtin suggests a radically different starting point. From a Bakhtinian perspective, ideas are inherently intertextual, understood as a weave of interconnections between related and similar ideas or between parts and wholes. These connections do not inhere in the private minds of individuals but in the public sphere of texts, shared artifacts and dialogic encounters. Moreover, composite ideas have no independent existence in themselves. They are nothing outside the weave and the weaving—nothing if not worked on.

Practice-based approaches to creativity have increasingly questioned the assumptions of mainstream creativity literature (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009), including the linearity of creative processes and their individual nature (Mørk et al., 2012; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Garud et al., 2016). We build on and extend such research by further problematizing assumptions of linearity and related assumptions of reification and singularity of ideas. Prior research does not go far enough in investigating and theorizing how ideas are connected and constituted on an ongoing basis (Martine and Cooren, 2016). This includes how idea creators actively use contextual resources in repeated bouts of dialogical extensions and re-synthesis (Garud et al., 2014). Implicit in phase based models are not only assumptions that ideas stay more or less the same once they are generated and presented for evaluation, but also that they are independent of each other as countable, separate entities (Gabora, 2015). While there are more general contributions from practice theory (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) and the sociology of science (Woolgar, 2004) that problematizes singularity, we find this to be an understated critique of creativity research.

To further such critique, we present a comparative analysis of rich data from interviews and observations in two longitudinal cases. These cases are particularly well suited to understanding the creation of composite ideas: MediaTale (all names are aliases) develops and sells ideas for film and media production. Explorer is the exploration unit of a major oil company and develops ideas about where to drill for oil and gas. The extreme substantive difference between the cases—making television programs versus searching for oil—makes the analysis particularly compelling: We isolate features of creative practice that are generic in these contrasting cases and show how they differ from dominant assumptions in the field.

We draw on the theoretical work of Bakhtin to orient our empirical analysis. Bakhtin used the literary genre of the novel as an allegory to represent existence as dialogic (Holquist, 2002). He emphasized how ideas are constituted as “live events” that are “played out at the point of a dialogic meeting between two or more consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984: 88). His philosophy attends to the simultaneity of different voices, dialects, epochs and cultural genres inherent in all of social life. Elements of such “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981: 293), or more simply multiplicity, are appropriated and combined in specific instances of forming and communicating ideas. In short, Bakhtinian dialogism helps us understand the connections between ideas in their making.

Emergent from our empirical inquiry and theoretical inspirations, we highlight the inherent intertextuality and processual nature of creativity. When people in the two cases worked on focal ideas, they typically did so through the ongoing efforts of connecting to ideas of others. A central part of this ongoing connecting was the legitimating of imaginings, where ideas of what to do were linked to ideas of what is worth doing and becoming, thereby enrolling people in narrative imagination. Discussions were seldom about *one* isolated idea,

whether for a TV series or a prospect for where to find oil. Rather, in any session we observed, people in both organizations typically discussed ideas in their plural: how ideas related to previous exemplars and genres or how parts were connected to wholes. The ongoing intertextual placement and legitimating of imaginings evident in our cases is not confined to particular stages of creative efforts. Instead, it is evident in practices of generating, communicating, connecting, evaluating and reshaping ideas, which we call idea work. The paper contributes with an analytical vocabulary for understanding and studying organizational creativity from a strong process view and acknowledging the multiplicity of idea content. In turn, this opens the path for considering a richer account of the much-neglected role of co-optative power in creativity.

Theorizing creativity: Extending practice-based approaches with dialogism

Comprehensive reviews of organizational creativity research have repeatedly called for more path-breaking and multi-level approaches that heed collective processes and their embeddedness in particular work contexts (George, 2007; Anderson et al., 2014; Hennessey and Amabile, 2010). In response, we use Bakhtinian dialogism to extend practice-based approaches to creativity. For Bakhtin, ideas, such as knowledge, identity or existence itself, cannot be understood apart from the “never-repeatable” and “once-occurrent eventness of [their] Being” (Bakhtin, 1993: 2). The use of dialogism is still rare within organizational creativity research (Martine and Cooren, 2016). The communicative constitution of organization (CCO) perspective (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren et al., 2011) is an exception. Scholars involved in this tradition of research typically invoke the Bakhtinian notion of seeing the world, and any experience, as being relationally constituted in interactive processes (Cooren and Sandler, 2014). Following this perspective, and the heritage from Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981: 293), all work on ideas is half someone else’s. People operate with

shared and borrowed language and are engaged in processes where they are both *passers* of the voices of others and *actors* that arrange input to serve one's intentions (Cooren and Sandler, 2014). Recognizing the constitutive role of acts of generating, elaborating or evaluating, suggests a research agenda for exploring organizational creativity from a strong process theory perspective (Langley et al., 2013). Doing so means giving primacy to process and viewing *all* work on ideas as potentially constitutive (Garud et al., 2016).

From linearity and reification to ideas as ongoing processes

Creativity and innovation are typically conceived of as belonging to each end of a spectrum that ranges from fuzzy front-end idea generation to more streamlined idea implementation (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010; Anderson et al., 2014). Inherent assumptions of linearity and phase separation come with such conceptions, suggesting that creativity unfolds in one-way sequences of distinctly different practices for generating, prioritizing and implementing ideas. There are many antecedents to such stage models in creativity research (Zhou and Shalley, 2008), including approaches relying on the differentiation between variation, selection and retention in evolutionary theory (Simonton, 2004). An article on the implementation of creative ideas in organizations by Baer (2012) illustrates this. Baer (2012) suggested that idea generation and implementation are two clearly distinguishable practices of the innovation process. Accordingly, some creative ideas may be considered both novel and useful but not be implemented because they evoke uncertainty and are met with resistance. Consequently, still following Baer (2012), creative ideas may be disadvantaged relative to mundane ideas. The inherent qualities of ideas determine their subsequent fate.

Baer is not alone in operating with such assumptions in current research (see for example Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2013; Paulus et al., 2011; Cooper, 2001). Linearity is

also evident in a recent conceptual article on organizational “idea journeys” by Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017). The authors conceive of idea journey as composed of four distinct phases, describing how people generate, elaborate, champion and implement ideas in a linear fashion. Some recursive loops are acknowledged. By this model, creativity in the field of academic publishing involves “idea championing” when submitting papers to journals and responding to feedback, while “implementation” means subsequently composing a full paper (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017: 57). Such a view implicitly assumes that the ideas in research papers stay more or less unaltered during the review process. Co-creation is ignored.

Several recent practice-based studies have indirectly or directly begun to question linear models of creativity. Researchers have contested the proposition that ideas become successful due to their inherent qualities and instead emphasized processes of enrolment (Whittle and Mueller, 2008) or translation (Mueller and Whittle, 2011). An ethnographic study of “nexus work” by Nashville music producers showed that ambiguity in quality, expertise and production triggered repeated bouts of problem definition, integration and synthesis (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). Of particular interest in such critiques is the role of evaluation. Harvey and Kou (2013) found in their process analysis of work in four U.S. health care policy groups that evaluations are core practices in collective creativity. Rather than being merely a point where people champion, prioritize or select something more or less finished, evaluations may both precede and follow from idea generation. Similarly, researchers have described how the practice of prototyping has the dual functions of assessing and creating ideas (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Ford, 2009). Harrison and Rouse (2015) struck a similar chord in their study of feedback interactions in two creative projects of modern dance and product design. Feedback was not solely one-way commentary but involved intensive two-way interactions and co-creation, with interaction patterns co-evolving with ideas.

These studies modify stage-based models. Researchers acknowledge a need to know more about the recursive interactions through which people in organizations evaluate and develop ideas. More radically, we see a need to challenge the very concept of ideas as (more or less reified) objects that transition from one stage to another. There is still a tendency in current research to talk of evaluation processes being done to pre-formed ideas rather than recognizing the potentially constitutive nature of any evaluative act. Furthermore, ideas cannot be understood as detached from the voices, positions and biographies of their creators (Bakhtin, 1984). There is no such thing as an isolated idea.

From singularity to ideas as complex relational compositions

Assumptions of linearity are closely tied to notions of singularity—typically manifest in talk of ideas as discrete, countable and independent entities (Gabora, 2015) that are developed and evaluated divorced from context. Examples are rife in mainstream creativity theory (e.g. Simonton, 2004; Baer, 2012) but can also be found in practice-based research (e.g. Harvey and Kou, 2013). Practice-based approaches to creativity try to meet the critique of singularity to some degree. Grasping context is particularly important when trying to understand the creation of complex compositions, for example creative projects involving several units and shifting subgroups through time (Obstfeld, 2012). Much of Hargadon's work (Hargadon, 2003)—whether on Edison and his team of “muckers” (Hargadon and Douglas, 2001) or on the design firm IDEO (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997)—demonstrates a combination of attention to the micro-contexts of practices while heeding the historical roles of actors in their larger pursuits. The dual attention to context and activity is also central in approaches to collaborative creativity that emphasize socio-cultural aspects (Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009; Sawyer, 2007), particularly in educational creativity research (e.g. Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008).

The heritage from Bakhtin nuances our understanding of the interplay between ideas and context. A Bakhtinian approach goes beyond relating to context as something necessarily distinct from and outside of ideas. We are alerted to how a variety of contextual resources, voices and input are appropriated to create ideas. Such a view of context as *contextualizing* is still underdeveloped in research on organizational creativity (Garud et al., 2014). Several practice-based studies referred to so far have stressed contextualizing when referring to dualities of parts–whole relationships. Examples include how ideas co-evolve with a “problem framework” (Harvey and Kou, 2013), “project boundaries” (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010) or a “problem space” described as “a set of possible problems and solutions that inform each prototype” (Harrison and Rouse, 2015: 393). Harvey explicitly distinguished creative synthesis as “a new way of understanding what an idea is” (Harvey, 2014: 330) that evolves in tandem with exemplars. Overall, though, there is a still limited vocabulary for understanding how connections between ideas, including between their parts and wholes, may develop over time.

We seek to build on and extend these studies by developing a conception of how the multiplicity of inputs that make up complex creative compositions are connected. A Bakhtinian lens allows us to attend to dialogue not just as micro-processes of co-creation but also to the wider dialogic relationships with previous and contemporary efforts. We now present and analyze two cases that are particularly well suited for that endeavor.

Research context and method

We conducted a comparative analysis of two projects in two organizations to explore and substantiate how a practice-based approach to organizational creativity may challenge the assumptions of linearity and singularity. We assembled the cases from larger studies

conducted by the first and second author (modelled after Howard-Grenville et al., 2011). To enhance the basis for constant comparison (Charmaz, 2006), we used stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 2002: 240) to emphasize information richness (two organizations whose value of creation is fully centered on working on complex composite ideas) and provide maximal variation (in terms of type of work, project life cycle and temporality of imagination). The choice of using two focal projects represents within-case purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 29), where the interplay with larger wholes—whether film genres or regional geology—was evident *and* where we had been particularly well situated in the field.█

MediaTale is a small independent concept developer for the TV and film industry, employing 16 persons and drawing on a vast network of freelancers and other subcontractors. The company was formed by a diverse group of successful media personalities from advertising, fiction writing and TV and film production. The firm focuses on story content with an emphasis on originality and stories that can make a societal difference. Explorer is the exploration unit of a major integrated oil company. It comprises around 800 persons and has exploration activities in all parts of the world. Typically, personnel from Explorer will not take part in production but work only in prospect development up to and after drilling.

The two cases are similar in that both firms engage in a type of creative work that is imagination intensive and narrative in nature. Both organizations also depend on developing new high-quality prospects to survive and thrive. The two cases also contrast across several dimensions. MediaTale is a classical creative industries firm and operates in the intersection between the arts, media business and new production technology. The firm develops ideas for scripted drama series, documentaries, reality shows, sitcoms or game shows—stories of what

could be. Explorer, in contrast, practices a form of systematic science-based work, the creativity of which may, at first glance, appear surprising. The geoscientists develop ideas about where to drill for oil and gas and seek to convince stakeholders through the retrospective imagination of stories about what once was. Much as in qualitative inquiry (Locke et al., 2008), exploration involves a form of creativity that relies on abductive reasoning to generate leaps of imagination from messy input: Geoscientists use traces of events to make causal inferences about the past formation, migration and trapping of hydrocarbon resources (Raab and Frodeman, 2002).

Data collection and analysis

The research at MediaTale took place as an ethnographic study with about one year of immersion in the field. This included focused observations of bi-weekly idea sessions and two months of full-time participation by the first author as a research and casting assistant for a serial documentary, *Islanders*. This is the focal project that we sampled from that site. The research at Explorer took place as part of an ongoing action research effort spanning eight years. Here we focused on a project called *Snow Crest* which resulted in a major oil discovery. It took place at a site where the second author made 15 site visits, including the co-facilitation of six post-discovery workshops on concept clarification. Table 1 below details the data that we draw from.

The strength of our data derives from long-time immersion by the first and second author in each site. We had repeated access to key persons involved across the entire project cycles and in decisions concerning competing prospects. We also engaged in a variety of facilitated sensemaking efforts in which we earned the trust of practitioners by contributing

to reflections on practice, an important sign of understanding “how things work” in the field (Watson, 2011).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Following Alvesson and Sandberg (2011; 2013), we have pursued an overall analytical strategy of problematizing by using two contrasting cases as devices for critical dialog and inspiration. Our comparison across these sites started with the first two authors informally sharing what was, at the time, two ongoing and separate studies. We were struck by the multilayered and textured nature of prospective ideas at both sites, the dominance of analytical work in the creative projects and the constant zooming in and out between parts and wholes. The term idea work was conceived in this first session and was subsequently picked up and used as an umbrella term for all creative practices with practitioners in several action research projects (see Carlsen et al., 2012).

In this paper, we return to the first inspirational cradle through a comparative and longitudinal study, where we more systematically compare the features of work practice that contrast with mainstream creativity literature (Baer, 2012; Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017). The use of Bakhtin and dialogism grew along with revisions of the paper as we developed our engagement with data.

The analysis of data is based mainly on between-case constant comparison (Suddaby, 2006; Charmaz, 2006) with frequent iterations between theory and the data described in Table 1. We dwell on features from the cases that represent empirical breakdowns (Alvesson

and Sandberg, 2013: 145-146) with established views. Early discussions involved sharing interpretations and data from the two sites, both in terms of excerpts from interviews and observations (through field notes, see Table 1) and through rounds of synthesizing data into descriptions of dialogs, practices and project trajectories. These efforts were guided by questions such as: “How do the features of work observed (in this event/project) contrast with the assumptions we problematize? What are the similarities and differences between the two cases in terms of successfully creating composite ideas?” Joint analysis took place through a series of phone conversations and face-to-face meetings where we shared data and interpretations to build emerging theoretical lines of sight (Locke et al., 2008).

In the final write up, we used two sets of analytical strategies common to process research (Langley, 1999). The first was *narratives of projects and episodes*: We produced coherent accounts synthesized from interviews and other data to show a sequence of events across time. The composite story of the *Snow Crest* project became an iterative dialogic device to produce a jointly told tale (Rhodes, 2000) with two key interviewees. This was important to describe a type of work saturated with specialized language. Second, we used *visual mapping* of the intertextual placing in the two sets of prospects as a means to compare two highly contrasting cases, showing a similarity in divergence that increases the robustness of findings (Bechky and O’Mahony, 2016: 171). See Figure 1.

Empirical findings and analysis

We present our findings in two layers. We first present two narratives that capture the development trajectory of our two project cases—the TV series *Islanders* at MediaTale and the exploration project *Snow Crest* at Explorer. Both these narratives are compiled from interviews, observations and archival data and form an important part of our analysis. The

stories place the two focal projects in their larger context and point to connections with other evolving prospects. We then go on to deepen the analysis by delving into two sets of dynamics of organizational creativity in the two projects, namely intertextual placing and legitimating imagining.

The Islanders project: Making a difference with another genre-renewing tale

Contemporary everyday life in a northern Arctic island community is the subject of *Islanders*, a documentary TV series. Through 13 episodes of about 40-minutes each, the audience learns about the community through 12 of its inhabitants, portraying their work, lives and aspirations. As a contemporary story, MediaTale developed *Islanders* as a follow-up idea to a series called *Old People*, an award-winning production that combined elements of reality and documentary genres. *Old People* followed a group of younger elderly people engaged in a major common undertaking, behaving in ways that had many viewers rethink what it means to grow old. It was the first major success of MediaTale and represented the kind of work the partners really wanted to do by “showing real people” and “telling a story that made a difference.” The management of the firm had, for example, turned down an offer to produce *Big Brother* for the domestic market. When the idea of *Islanders* was born, *Old People* was well into the pre-project stage. One of the partners of MediaTale, Henry, visited the place in June 2002. He was surprised to experience the community as remarkably different from prevailing clichés: Could this be the location and thematic for another myth-busting contemporary story?

The idea was first pitched in an e-mail sketch to the manager of MediaTale, Roald, who became intrigued. As with *Old People*, *Islanders* sought to renew the documentary genre through a seasonal format. According to Roald, the aim was to entertain while also

“extending people’s horizons about the world we live in.” The partners of the firm wanted to demonstrate that a “contemporary portrait of a small community” —a show without competitions, manipulating tasks or voting—could “outperform brainless game shows or reality TV, with an interesting piece of the real world” (data from e-mail).

Along with an industry-wide discussion of genre renewals, Henry and Roald worked out a synopsis for a series of twelve 15-minute episodes and presented it to the national broadcaster. The full production of *Old People* was now underway, with promising test ratings. In its wake, the pre-project for *Islanders* was financed and an intense two-and-a-half-month period of project development started. Casting was a main activity, involving over 60 meetings with potential characters. The team tried to cover the more intriguing communal practices at *Island*, following leads provided by the *Islanders* themselves. A digital video recording was made of each potential participant, later edited into a one-minute profile and with a written summary. After a decisive pitch session, Henry handed the full project proposal to executive directors of the national broadcaster. The proposal emphasized richness of stories and characters, with many references to *Old People*, both in terms of the overall genre and the characters. The broadcaster green-lighted the serial in mid-November 2002. Production started 14 months later. Like *Old People*, *Islanders* was aired in prime time and set records for viewer ratings. Both projects produced concepts that were later sold internationally and paved the way for new genre experiments.

The Snow Crest project: Re-establishing a frontier exploration region

The *Snow Crest* project occurred in a frontier Arctic basin, called Wolff basin. Explorer had taken part in over 95% of the wells drilled in the basin through its regional office of 300 staff in a small and remote town of 30,000 persons. Less than a handful of

exploitable discoveries had been made. None of them were grand. Many geologists and industry insiders were doubtful about the resource potential of the region due to so-called geological uplift with erosion of trap structures.

In 1989, a rival oil company made the first interpretation of potential discoveries in the location in question. Others joined the search. The common perception was that hydrocarbons were there, but not in sufficient quantities to pursue. Attention to the area resurfaced with the *Snow Crest* prospect during 2004-2005. A regional project in Explorer identified it as promising and developed it for internal evaluation in time for the 19th concession round (a round whereby oil companies compete in nominating and acquiring licenses to explore areas). The prospect did not survive the internal ranking. Two other prospects were chosen for development, at the time considered far more attractive. These prospects turned out to be massive disappointments, yielding only non-commercial amounts of low-saturation gas when drilled. They added to a long string of dry wells. Based on seismic surveys (all 2-D), the *Snow Crest* prospect also looked to contain only small pockets of gas. When the 20th concession round started, the *Snow Crest* prospect again lost out in the internal competition.

Despite these setbacks, a small team at the regional Explorer office never gave up on the potential of the area, believing that the opportunities surpassed the time given to investigate them. When approached by a seismic company in 2007 for access to a large 3-D survey covering the area, the team asked management for funding. The team was turned down twice. Management felt enough time and resources had been invested in the prospect. The team leader, Kjetil, hesitated about asking again. A close colleague, Jan Ove, gave him the final push: “We simply cannot risk not being in on this; we do not have the evidence for turning

the area down. You've got to ask them." So Kjetil tried once more, this time with success.

The 3-D seismic data were bought. Interpretation commenced, with several companies trying to make sense of them in parallel.

The short version of what followed—we shall provide more details later—was that geoscientists at Explorer, in record time, were able to develop the prospect by connecting information from the new 3-D data with previous analysis made in the area. A decision to reprioritize the prospect as number one was made and the acreage acquired. When Explorer drilled it in early 2011, around 260 million barrels of oil was found. The discovery made *Snow Crest* the “high-impact well” for which all had hoped. People at the regional office celebrated in euphoria for two full weeks. The office made a discovery of equal size in a twin prospect a year later. Together, the two discoveries dramatically renewed the optimism for the entire basin. Oil companies that had previously abandoned the area began returning.

Two dynamics of organizational creativity as idea work

Two dynamics of organizational creativity are evident in the cases, both foreshadowed in the project stories. First, the ideas in both our cases are evolving complex compositions. Decisive imaginings (a future media product or a reinterpretation of past geological development leading to a future discovery) are synthesized based on a broad variety of inputs (such as character casting profiles and seismic data), references to previous prospects (such as *Old People* and prior discoveries or dry wells) and ideas of wholes (media genres and geological models) and the stories of their makers. The dynamics of *intertextual placing* constitute the focal idea by connecting it to other elements in a larger idea field.

Second, the work on ideas in our case also involves the dynamics of ongoing *legitimizing imagining* where ideas of what to do are connected to ideas of what is worth

doing and becoming. Legitimizing imagining is seen in terms of both internal aspirations to do something meaningful and external expectations of value. This is an interwoven element of almost any session of work on ideas, not something that is done detached from (prior to or after) idea generation. Legitimizing imaginings serve to enroll people in idea development through making the conjured stories matter and believed in.

Table 2 below provides a description of the core elements of each of the two dynamics, while Figure 1 explains the connections between them. Together, the two dynamics depict organizational creativity as idea work—a recurrent and cumulative constitution and legitimating of ideas in organizations. Acts of connecting to the ideas of others are at the heart of both dynamics – an ongoing intertextuality of composite ideas in the making. Legitimizing imaginings partly overlaps with intertextual placing in the sense of connecting prospect ideas to related meaningful wholes that are affectively charged. The two dynamics sometimes co-occur in the same strip of dialogue. As we will show, this is particularly well illustrated in a practice called *Midwifery* (by the practitioners) at MediaTale.

Insert Table 2 and Figure 1 about here

Dynamics of intertextual placing

Intertextual placing means constituting focal ideas through connecting them to ideas of others, placing them in larger wholes or making analogical inferences that constitute new part-whole relationships. In this sense, as Bakhtin (1981; 1984) noted, every idea is intertextually linked to other ideas leading to it, underpinning it, or following from it. Intertextual placing traverses levels from the micro to the macro and can involve shifts in

genres that are decisive for imagination and the formation of social power (Briggs and Bauman, 1992: 148).

Variations of placing Intertextual placing takes many forms. Six variations emerge from the two cases. This is exemplified and compared in Table 2 and further illustrated in Figure 1. These complementary constitutive acts are surprisingly similar across the two contrasting cases.

We start with the intertextual placing depicted in the upper level of Figure 1. Central here are *model placing* (whether a media genre or a type of geological model) and *proximal placing* (extending from or resembling successful exemplars of media ideas and geological prospects). For example (all quotes from field notes), when Roald, Henry and his team members presented the *Islanders* prospect prior to financing, it was described as “not a reality show” (a negative placing against another genre model) but a “documentary serial” (new model placing) that “followed real people through time in non-staged interactions, just like *Old People*” (proximal placing through analogue). Likewise, Kjetil, Jan Ove and their team described the *Snow Crest* prospect by an interpretation of the double flat spots and the repeated labeling “rotated mid to early Jura fault blocks” (a model placing). The new 3-D survey thus triggered a placing to a new model that refers both to a specific geological time (Jurassic) and to a type of geological structure in which oil could be contained and trapped (the rotated fault blocks).

Also depicted in Table 2 and Figure 1 is the placement against a set of intersecting wholes, such as identity trajectory, *identity placing*, traditions of production, *production placing*, and larger (societal or geological) stories being told; *frame placing*. These placings all serve to build a field of understanding that provide crucial contextual resources for focal

ideas. For example, during casting at MediaTale, two characters came to exemplify the value of the idea in terms of its myth busting potential: the organizer of a local tango club and a hunter who worked as a day trader when not checking his traps. These characters became decisive input (*parts placing*) for the shared imagining, similar to the interpretation of new data at *Snow Crest*. The potential to connect with a larger story (frame placing) pushes the story beyond established clichés. Furthermore, when doing the final pitch of *Islanders* to the national broadcasters, the project leaders were careful in drawing parallels to the production of its successful predecessor (production placing). Using the same production crew would be important in ensuring quality of doing live recordings in a real time setting.

The intertextual placings we have shown here are not mere references or something done to pre-formed ideas from the outside. Rather, we see a form of weaving where ideas are relationally constituted (Martine and Cooren, 2016) on an ongoing basis. The intertextual placing works to fashion particular arrangements of inputs into meaningful composite wholes and simultaneously position this whole versus alternative and competing ideas.

Placing versus re-placing in the two projects The two cases provide useful contrasts with regard to organizational processes of placing and re-placing. Both projects were controversial, but the sources of controversy differed. For *Islanders*, the MediaTale partners were faced with the persistent challenge of establishing the new genre of docu-reality and with convincing the national broadcasters that such developmental work could be done from an outside supplier. The prospect itself represented an analogical extension of previous work (proximal placing) helped to success by the identity of its well-reputed creators. By contrast, the development story of *Snow Crest* tells of a radical break with prior understanding. The

prospect, when successful, emerged through a highly contested intertextual *re-placing*. Let us unpack that.

When the *Snow Crest* prospect first emerged for consideration, it was associated with small pockets of gas, marked by single “flat spots,” an indicator of a hydrocarbon reservoir. A senior explorer, Jan Ove, voiced this:

There was never any doubt that there were flat spots on those structures. You saw a lot of such structures. The dilemma with those flat spots at the time [2004-2005] was that Cinderella [a gas discovery in Wolff basin] (...) and Hercules [an oil discovery] did *not* have any clear DHIs [direct hydrocarbon indicators] – you just did not see any clear seismic indicators there. ... I have to claim that all of us [geoscientists inside and outside Explorer] equated that [the single flat spots] with small pockets of gas.

The quote suggests a stable intertextual coupling between the data of *Snow Crest* and probable non-commercial amounts of gas. This was a proximal placing with negative associations. The data for the two competing prospects that were developed for drilling in the 19th concession round had more promise. These prospects turned out to be massive disappointments, containing only low-saturation gas. Several geoscientists at the regional office expressed shock: “We simply could not believe it.” Initially, this reflected badly upon the *Snow Crest* prospect, which again was turned down for exploration. Two events then changed the interpretation of the prospect. First, the introduction of new data from 3-D seismic analysis (that Explorer managers reluctantly agreed to purchase) made it possible to identify a so-called double flat spot. The new data radically strengthened the indications of exploitable resources: “the likely volumes more than doubled.” Second, when interpreting

and discussing the new data, the team was able to draw on prior analysis, started three years earlier, of the flat spots of all wells in the area. Said Kjetil:

So, when we got those *Snow Crest* data in 2008, all the thorough work that Jan Ove had already done on flat spots made it possible to understand and interpret the data in a much better way than we would have otherwise. (...) He was able to show hard data from those [previous] wells and say that ‘this is precisely what you expect to see when you have a gas cap above oil’ Right, so then we got data that matched the theory and the groundwork he had done with those wells.

With the new data and the analysis, *Snow Crest* was intertextually re-placed. It was disconnected from association with small pockets of low-saturation gas and reconnected to proximal exemplars of double flat spots (in the Wolff basin) that indicated gas over oil: in sum, a renewed and strengthened proximal placing. This reconstruction was also brought to bear on the broader geology. As emerged in a flurry of media articles, the discovery was immediately used to reframe the story of the larger Wolff basin as an exploration province with proven “play models” (a type of hydrocarbon accumulation, with a specific type of source rock, a trap and a migration pattern). The parallel to MediaTale is clear: *Old People* and *Islanders* became proven concepts through a simultaneous process of renewal of a larger whole.

Practices for placing and re-placing The weaving and reweaving of the dialogic relationship through which focal ideas are constituted involves a never-ending dialog between parts and their wholes. At Explorer, the wholes are play models or broader geological development patterns. At MediaTale, this feature of intertextuality is played out during discussions of prospects with different media formats, asking, “Is this story going to

work best as a film, a TV series or something else? What is the genre? What are comparable media tales that have worked well?” A case in point was a discussion of a well-known square in the middle of a Scandinavian capital where the horrors of drug trafficking and its fatal human consequences were lived in the open. The discussion progressed by bringing up alternative model placings, with genres that ranged from “critical documentary,” “burlesque sitcoms,” “an art program” and “a multi-theme location serial” to “hard-hitting fist in the stomach,” each with a specific set of examples and references (proximal placing).

At both case organizations, the imagination of a potential story of a successful idea is aided by negotiation of alternative intertextual placings. This involves bringing prior experiences to attention and making them available for combination in new ways. The example from MediaTale that we just described was played out in bi-weekly meetings for preparatory efforts and idea enrichment, a process termed Midwifery by the practitioners. The meeting is set up by the partners of the firm, who take turns preparing a written memo of 1-2 pages that accompanies a presentation of a particular idea. Other partners then connect their prior experiences and insights to the idea in question through questions, assessments, and creative elaborations. Ideas become “soaked in a mix of factual and fictional comments,” as one partner remarked.

At Explorer, making extant knowledge and experience available for new combinations displays similar dynamics. There are repeated sessions where ideas of hydrocarbon prospects are given focal attention by a diverse group of specialists who provide criticism and support. Compared to MediaTale, the work stretches further in time and space (as with the *Snow Crest* prospect) and often crosses organizational and geographical borders (three groups in different locations were involved in prospect development). Many major discoveries are done in

mature exploration areas, sometimes in the wake of a series of dry wells. Much as in the *Snow Crest* project, breakthrough ideas typically result from tedious analytical efforts prior to and alongside a decisive leap of imagination.

Dynamics of legitimating imaginings

By the dynamics of *legitimizing imaginings*, we mean the processes whereby ideas about what to do are connected to ideas of what is worth doing and becoming. It is a form of imagining that is narrative and relational and that may also involve a co-optative and positive use of power (Follett, 1925/2013). People at MediaTale sought to enroll stakeholders into conjuring future media tales, trying to have them imagine both key plotlines and the societal stories that media tales resonate with. People at Explorer enrolled stakeholders into imagining past sequences of processes that led to formation and trapping of hydrocarbons, including development of regional geology. The processes of legitimating imaginings are both internally and externally addressed: internally, as aspirations for doing something meaningful and worthwhile and as a quest for identity; externally by explaining value. What is involved is both making imaginings matter and making them believed-in.

Making imaginings matter MediaTale was founded to fulfill the personal ambitions of successful media persons who wanted to make a difference. Imaginings need to be seen as having moral legitimacy. Live, a senior producer, emphasized the social responsibility of speaking on behalf of weak groups. Others expressed the importance of making of stories that reach a wide audience and at the same time “may change the world a little bit.” Such ambitions are kept vivid and alive in all major projects.

Voicing ambitions functions not merely as antecedent to action. Legitimizing imaginings through questions of how they matter was evident in every step of the *Islanders* process, from the very conception of the series (“Is it another myth-busting story worth telling and working on for us?”); in recruitment of potential participants (“Will sharing our lives through the series be respectful and beneficial to us and to others?”); in the casting sessions (“Are these persons able to convey something authentic, surprising and interesting about life at *Island* today?”); and in meetings with the national broadcaster (“How will the series and these particular ways of telling stories fulfill the ambitions of MediaTale and the national broadcaster?”). At each step, Henry and his colleagues were involved in developing and maintaining belief in shared imaginings of what could be. The team built positive power by creating “temporarily stabilized outcomes” of a projective nature (Callon and Law, 1982: 622) through a network of interests.

Making imaginings matter is entwined with the constitution of ideas. This is evidenced in the multidirectional nature of the conversation, which Bakhtin (1981: 276-280) conceived as the multiple addressivity of utterances. To see what is involved, we return to the Midwifery sessions where there is a striking use of relational and affective expressions in the articulation of ideas. An example is the opening string of a discussion following a pitch for a new series on people’s personal relationship to computers—*My Computer* (reported from field notes, all turns of the conversation took place within 10 minutes):

The discussion starts by (i) presenting, clarifying, deconstructing and re-building the initial focal idea, then moves to (ii) a comparison with a similar concept internationally (*Ken’s Computer*), continues by (iii) questioning the role of MediaTale in such production, asking whether (iv) the story told would differ enough from a clever

advertising pitch, (v) enquiring what the larger untold story could be, before moving to (vi) a series of new utterances about the content of the series and potential voices heard, followed by (vii) yet other questions of whether this is a fit for MediaTale and (viii) thinking aloud about the genre it seeks to develop.

The utterances in this string of discussion address not only the constitution of ideas but why they should matter in the first place, to the partners of the firm and to the audience. Why could it be worth doing? In this way, legitimating imaginings takes part in constituting focal ideas by connecting them to a larger field, including the desired identity of their creators.

The ongoing and active questioning of why imaginings matter is seen also in the *Snow Crest* project. In that case, the resources were committed not only to the prospect at stake but also potentially to the future of the entire basin and the regional exploration office. In this small town, alternative employment as an explorer is very scarce. Not acquiring the 3-D seismic and risking losing out on the decisive discovery in the basin could have meant a closedown. As voiced by two geoscientists at the office:

I don't think people realize how important a crossroad this was (...) There was this anti-bonus, meaning: 'Move! Sell the house!' (Jan Ove)

Imagine sitting here today and reading in the newspaper that OilCorp [alias for a competitor] made these large discoveries. I mean, the difference is extreme. (Silje)

Other senior geoscientists at Explorer corroborated this impression. It was a close call for a regional office in a frontier basin operation with a history of dry wells.

Making imaginings believed in Legitimizing imaginings may involve a power to persuade but more so the power to invite, connect and co-create. In the final instance, imaginings need to be shared and believed in for the project to move forward. One of the long-timers at the Explorer regional office consistently alluded to post-discovery claims of having “seen” the reservoir of the *Snow Crest* project many years ago. For him, it was nothing new.

Commenting upon this claim, one of the other protagonists refers to the new 3-D data and the visual image of the double flat spot as not just the icing on the cake but the constitutive core, dryly stating:

In retrospect, one can always say that one time or another we have had ideas that correspond to all the prospects that are now proven. But these ideas are always subject to change – imaginings that weaken or grow depending on new information and that must survive tough competitions against other prospects. (...) In the end, you need to convince decision makers that the one you are championing is the best. They also need to be able to imagine there being oil and believe in it. It is not enough that only we see it.

The quote underlines how imagining is a joint endeavor, one that may or may not engage the competence of the people involved. A subtext here is also the dual function of assessments and co-construction in peer review sessions. Legitimizing imaginings in this sense always intertwines with evaluations. At MediaTale the structuring of work through pre-determined deadlines and formal gates for evaluation is modest. Ideas may enter and exit Midwifery sessions several times, being enriched, put on hold and picked up again, in informal cycles of simultaneous development and evaluation. Formal evaluation at set deadlines with semi-specified formats does not take place before ideas are pitched to outside partners, such as broadcasters.

By contrast, at Explorer any prospect that ends up being drilled will need to have passed five to seven formal review sessions with people from other units, including a corporate review function and external partner scrutiny. One of the standing debates in the corporation at large has been to what degree formal reviews should be a hierarchical go/no go evaluation based on distanced analysis (a display of coercive power) or allow for more interaction (involving co-active power). Several evaluators expressed preference for the latter—to be exposed to raw data, rough sketches and doubt that invite them into interpretation, not just selling by “showing 100 glossy power points.”

Invitation, or enrollment, caters to more than merely attending to the domain-specific details of a geological prospect. With hindsight, the protagonists at *Snow Crest* regret not having better communicated about the whole area where the prospect resided: “[It was] one out of 14-15 prospects there, (...) it’s simply so rare that you have such richness, we should have voiced that stronger.” In the decisive meeting for the decision to drill, the added analysis from all the double flat spots in the area made all the difference, as the team members felt they needed to overcompensate for the past erosion of trust. Evident in these passages is the importance of demonstrating an overview of the larger field of ideas. Making imaginings believed in derives power from mastering the intertextuality of ideas and inviting participants more fully into the constitutive process.

Discussion and implications

By extending practice-based approaches to creativity through dialogism (Bakhtin 1981; 1984), we have problematized assumptions of linearity and singularity in mainstream creativity research. We have used empirical material from two contrasting cases to qualify

two sets of dynamics of creativity as idea work. We have demonstrated that ideas are not singular and discrete entities developed in sharply distinctive phases of work. Rather, they are constituted on an ongoing basis by *intertextual placing* in a moving *field* of ideas through analogical inferences and new parts–whole relationship. *Legitimizing imaginings* are not done in the service of transmission or at stage gates only but are interwoven and constitutive elements of almost any session of work on ideas.

We make no claims that these two sets of processes are all that there is to organizational creativity. The processes form the basis for recognizing the eventness and intertextuality of ideas, the ongoing and constitutive processes that shape ideas and the way these acts become tangled up with organizational work not normally labelled creative. The two dynamics also form the basis for articulating an alternative set of assumptions about organizational creativity in contrast to those previously identified and problematized, see Table 3. This new set of assumptions emerged from both empirical puzzlement and the use of Bakhtinian dialogism. We have answered the question of how to understand the nature of organizational creativity when dealing with complex, composite ideas rather than singular ones. Overall our study also represents a rare use of dialogism on organizational creativity. Three sets of deepening of this overall contribution follow. Each has distinct implications.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Studying creativity as ongoing processes of idea work

The first major contribution of the study is to add to the analytical vocabulary for understanding and studying organizational creativity from a strong process view. People build the dialogic relationships that make up composite ideas through intertextual placing and

re-placing throughout the duration of creative projects. Here our finding is well aligned with the claim from dialogism that no being or phenomenon “inherently possesses its properties”, but is relationally constituted on an ongoing basis (Martine and Cooren, 2016: 146).

To see the implication of this contribution, the context of evaluation is enlightening. Like recent practice-based studies, we find that ideas are not merely evaluated (Harvey and Kou, 2013) or given one-way feedback after idea elaboration (Harrison and Rouse, 2015). Occasions for evaluations and feedback on ideas, whether informal settings such as Midwifery at MediaTale or more formal peer review sessions at Explorer, are regarded by practitioners in those organizations as being highly important for engaging in co-creation. These are indeed events in which the collective nature of creativity is visible and recognized and in which cues of collaborative potentials (Elsbach and Kramer, 2003: 298) may be as important as assessment of the value of ideas as a finished entity. Our cases support the notion of situated evaluations being embedded in several modes of interactions (Harvey and Kou 2013). The continued work on idea elaboration in the two focal prospects lead up to and away from iterative processing of a small number of ideas in settings such as Midwifery and exploration workshops. The work of influencing and legitimizing ideas is not constrained to phases of championing or implementation, as suggested by Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017). On the contrary, getting to the point of organized evaluation may presuppose a prior legitimizing of why it might be worthwhile to engage in idea elaboration at all, a finding that is supported by Lingo and O'Mahony (2010). Use of the terms “championing” or “implementing” in this context is problematic. It emphasizes monologue and unidirectionality and neglects the relational and potentially constitutive nature of any act of evaluation.

Prior contributions that have renewed the understanding of feedback (Harrison and Rouse, 2015) or evaluation (Harvey and Kou, 2013) in organizational creativity focused on

events *framed a priori* as such occasions. Beyond this, evident in our longitudinal cases were repeated evaluation-salient and feedback-intensive *moments* throughout the duration of the projects, outside of any planned sessions. Such moments occur not as sharply demarcated activities or even distinct modes of interaction but appear as a transitory quality of a discussion that is multidirectional. Evaluative moments may thus take place within a stream of work whose dynamics is not captured by models with a priori process categories. Further research should attend in more detail to the temporality of the constitutive acts (Garud et al., 2016). In particular, our cases suggest attending to the interplay between retrospective assessment (is the conjured story strong enough to warrant more resources?) and projective enrichment (how can we further strengthen the believed-in imagining of this prospect?).

More generally, the notion of idea work denies the existence of the unchanging character of ideas (Woolgar, 2004: 452). It helps us move from a transmission model (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevón, 2005) in which ideas are reified, to acknowledging the constitutive and translational nature of the practices producing the social reality of ideas (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). With idea work, we move beyond translation to a stream of constitutive acts: just as identities exist in and through identity work (Carlsen, 2006), ideas exist in and through idea work.

Recognizing the inherent intertextuality of creativity

The second major implication of this study is more explicit attention to intertextuality in creativity. Ideas achieve their properties only when being related to other beings (Martine and Cooren, 2016). We have provided a more nuanced vocabulary for this multiplicity of ideas as complex compositions and extended previous research on the parts–whole dialectics of creativity. Intertextuality is implicitly recognized in theories of knowledge brokerage

(Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010) and has also been used to explain entrepreneurial competence (Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012) as well as legitimating research contributions (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997). The latter approach parallels our findings. Much as the set of ideas in a research contribution is always constituted in relation to a field of previous contributions and traditions of research, ideas at MediaTale and Explorer achieve their weight in an ongoing placing and justifying against other ideas and genres. In this sense, and returning once more to the topic of evaluation, our research suggests that ideas are not evaluated as singular and standalone objects or platonic ideals but gain their meanings and value through their socially constructed relationships to other elements in a larger field. Evaluations are points at which ideas get richly intertextual.

Intertextuality opens up exploration of the parts–whole dialectics in creativity. Lingo and O'Mahony (2010: 66) showed how ideas of new music were constituted through intertextual references to exemplars of songs and genres and emerged from a shared sense of a desired sound; an aesthetic whole. Such an aesthetic whole differs in kind from our cases but shares the feature of not being given or outside of ideas in their making; rather, they form part of an active endogenizing of context (Garud et al., 2014). Future research should aim to better grasp the collaborative co-emergence of focal ideas and the various wholes to which they are connected. In doing so, the notion of the singular idea needs to be abandoned. Ideas of oil discoveries emerge against a contested regional geology and a struggling local office; ideas of a TV series emerge against myths about an island and the desire to make a difference; ideas of songs emerge against a search for a sound and identity. Take away these wholes, and creativity research may miss what really matters in animating focal ideas.

In extension of previous research, our cases suggest that the relationship between exemplars and genres, or creative synthesis (Harvey, 2014), is but *one* of the parts–whole relationships that bring life to ideas. Exemplars also become legitimized when linked to their potential production, their decisive parts, the identity of their creators and the larger story frames to which they contribute and from which they take shape. While not exhaustive, the variations of intertextual placings identified in this study point the way to a richer vocabulary for how we understand composite ideas and parts–whole dialectics in creativity.

In general terms, we need to understand better how ideas achieve meaning in a field (Taylor, 1985: 22) and how ideas gain weight or are dismissed when they come into contact with other ideas (Bakhtin, 1984: 201). Idea work implies looking more closely at dialogic processes that are both hermeneutic (Taylor, 1985), in zooming in and out between parts and wholes, and analogical (Tsoukas, 2009), in building bridges across contexts. Doing this goes beyond studying dialogical exchanges in immediate joint activity and how it is resourced at the micro level (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008: 189). Ideas may also be constituted “intercontextually” by connecting to ideas in more distant contexts (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008: 181), such as a geological model from another basin.

Unpacking the constitutive character of power

A third implication from this study is that the ongoing constitution and legitimating of ideas invites recognition and exploration of co-optative power in organizational creativity. Power seems missing from overviews of the field (Kaufman and Sternberg, 2010; Anderson et al., 2014; Zhou and Hoever, 2014). Its neglect in creativity research may be seen as stemming precisely from an ontology of reification and phase separation, leading to a stress on static notions of *power over* (as in stage gate models) rather than the constitutive nature of *power to*

(Clegg and Haugaard, 2009) or *power with*, which Follett (1925/2013) referred to as co-optative power. To see the relevance here, we return one last time to the topic of evaluation. Previous research (Harrison and Rouse, 2015; Harvey and Kou, 2013) tells of settings where participants enter with particular expectations of interaction and reciprocity. Much less is said about how such settings are constructed and the tensions between different forms of power. Our cases suggest the need for more research into how evaluations take on dual functions of coercive and co-optative power, both in how they are framed and how they are conducted.

More generally, co-optative power in creativity needs more investigation as a dialogically situated form of building connections across the idea field. We have shown how Henry and colleagues repeatedly connected *Islanders* with *Old People*, and how Kjetil, Jan Ove and others connected new 3-D data with prior analytical work on double flat spots. The protagonists are both passers and actors (Cooren and Sandler, 2014) when channeling and intertextually placing the ideas of others (such as prior exemplars and models) in the service of their own composite ideas. They are also actors who quite intentionally enter a struggle over meaning (Kuhn, 2014) where they disconnect their ideas from selected prior work, whether a worn-out genre of reality shows or unsuccessful geological prospects. Overall, our protagonists marshal networks of supporting ideas to produce a constellation of ideas that can persist through challenges (Kuhn, 2014). The agentic power in play here is not the championing of premade ideas ready for implementation but the ongoing constitutive work of connecting, disconnecting and assembling constellations of ideas in a larger field.

What seems to be at stake here is not merely enrolling people into one's interests but facilitating ways of aligning agencies and imagining together. To Follett (1925/2013: 105), a precondition for co-optative power was circular behavior in the sense of facilitating

interactive influence between levels and boundaries in the organization. Extending this, our research suggests attention to the facilitation of relational agency (Cooren, 2018) where people work as connectors and integrators across a diversity of input. That implies a sharing of both particulars and alternative wholes that allow organization members to zoom in and out together. Building such joint power in idea work may thus be investigated as sharing a rich repertoire of representations of idea input and conceptions (Seidel and O'Mahony, 2014) or simultaneous attention to fragments and scaffolds (Majchrzak et al., 2012). Our cases have provided useful contrast in showing that such sharing may be particularly challenging for work that is temporary and spatially distributed, such as oil exploration. Ultimately then, and still following Follett (1925/2013: 106, 116), joint power in creativity may be explored as an active and unifying collective process of a set of progressively improved integrations.

Conclusion

We have extended practice-based approaches to creativity and explored processes that give life to ideas in organizations by comparison of two longitudinal cases from highly contrasting domains. The cases show striking similarities that break radically with core assumptions of mainstream creativity research. New media ideas and prospects for hydrocarbon discovery are complex polyphonic compositions that achieve their status when they enlist people in narrative imagination. The work done to these ideas is ongoing, may take place as moments in multidirectional conversations and involve legitimating focal ideas by connecting them to a variety of resources in a larger field of ideas. Moments and processes of evaluations are amongst the points at which the collective nature of this stream of intertextual work is most evident. They are also the points at which power shows its constitutive and co-optative role in creativity.

Seen from cases of complex composite ideas, organizational creativity is best understood as the ongoing constituting and legitimating of ideas as people learn in and from practice and connect their understandings to the ideas of others in new ways. Idea work is not the same as ideation and is not something exclusive to front-end stages of innovation. Without idea work, creativity cannot occur and ideas would not exist. So it must be with the “idea of idea work.” It will live only insofar as it comes into contact with the ideas of others. Thus, ending where we started, with Bakhtin (1981), we invite a living conversation that “cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads” (Bakhtin, 1981: 276).

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Notes

There is an element of emergent sampling (Patton, 2001: 240), since we capitalized on opportunities for participating in casting during the *Islanders* project and of doing repeat data collection in the *Snow Crest* project. Exploration projects in particular may be notoriously difficult to research due to the long time frames and lack of access that allow multiple

vantage points for processes that may be shrouded in secrecy and conflict. When the *Snow Crest* project resulted in a discovery, we were able to couple prior data collection at that site with more targeted follow-up data. As a case, *Snow Crest* also carries particular significance due to its impact.

² At MediaTale, the first author was involved in bi-weekly sparring sessions with the manager of the company, sharing observations and questions emanating from the field work. At Explorer, the second author participated in the co-facilitation of post-discovery workshops for *Snow Crest* and for a series of workshops on creativity, as well as elsewhere in the company. The latter also included 1- to 2-hour sessions of discussing and comparing patterns of work practices from observations and interviews across several sites.

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Table I. Overview of data

<i>Islanders at MediaTale</i>	<i>Snow Crest at Explorer</i>
<p><u>Interviews and conversations:</u> Six long (90–120 minutes) semi-structured interviews: about 20 weekly semi-structured conversations of 5–30 min each, including one weekly conversation with manager.</p>	<p><u>Interviews and conversations:</u> Four transcribed interviews with two main protagonists (132 minutes); additional 10 informal and briefer conversations. Secondary material includes over 100 interviews elsewhere in the company.</p>
<p><u>Observation:</u> 1–3 days a week for 4 months, including observation at bi-weekly idea pitch sessions; two months immersion in the field as a full-time paid casting assistant for <i>Islanders</i>. Field notes were converted to 60 transcribed pages and enriched with reflective memos.</p>	<p><u>Observation:</u> 15 site visits since 2005, including three 2-day idea generation workshops (with feedback sessions on work practices) and co-facilitation of six 1–2-hour post-discovery team meetings (about 10 pages of field notes) with three 30 minutes debriefing interviews, not taped.</p>
<p><u>Archives:</u> Media articles, business plans, meeting minutes, project records including from pitches on work in progress.</p>	<p><u>Archives:</u> Media articles on the discovery, some project records (limited disclosure), meeting minutes and post-discovery project plans.</p>

Notes: ¹ The partners at MediaTale are all public figures in domestic media and were more than normally cautious about the perils of out-of-context quotes or otherwise sensitive information leaking to the press. Digital recording was prohibited, except for the last summary interview with the managing partner. Most of these interviews followed a protocol of 1) asking about developments of ongoing projects and 2) discussing aspects of practice and related issues of pressing concern. The interviews about *Snow Crest* followed a protocol of ethnographic interviewing (Spradley, 1979). We asked for a grand tour of the entire history of the work on the prospect followed by more specific tours of key events and the recent developments.

Table 2. Two dynamics of organizational creativity as idea work

Dynamics	Exemplified in MediaTale	Exemplified in Explorer
<i>Intertextual placing</i>	<i>The projects at large</i>	
	<i>Islanders' project</i> : The prospect is constituted as an analogical extension from <i>Old People</i> , with referrals to similar casting profiles and production technologies as well as the care taken to place the focal story in a myth-busting narrative. <i>Islanders</i> contributes to renewal of the docu-reality genre	<i>Snow Crest project</i> : The prospect is born in strife and constituted through intertextual replacing by disconnecting from its association with small pockets of gas and reconnecting to an exemplar of a double flat spot indicating gas over oil. The resulting discovery contributes to reframing the regional geology
	<i>Types of placing</i>	
<i>Parts placing</i>	Particulars of casting profiles emphasized as key for constitution of prospect and its myth-busting potential	Particulars of new 3D data and analysis of flats spots instrumental in shifting interpretation of prospect
<i>Proximal placing</i>	Emphasized repeatedly as an extension from <i>Old People</i> , as a proven, successful concept by the same team	First placed as an exemplar of single flats spots then replaced as exemplar of double flats spots (with higher potential)
<i>Model placing</i>	The prospect is presented as a docu-reality; at the time this was a debated new hybrid genre for television series.	In its final form, the prospect is suggested as an instance of a geological model of early to mid Jura rotated fault blocks.
<i>Frame placing</i>	The prospect is framed as a myth-busting series that challenges widespread layperson stereotypes.	The prospect challenges industry beliefs of Wolff basin as haunted by geological uplift and trap erosion.
<i>Identity placing</i>	The prospect is highlighted as coming from a team of proven individuals with recent success seeking to make a difference.	The prospect is variously placed as a desperate attempt from a struggling frontier office and as carrying rare expert knowledge from regional tradition.
<i>Production placing</i>	Production concepts are included as a documentary TV series, prime time, live field shooting & log recording.	The proven prospect is tied (after drilling) to technology of volume-dependent top side and tie-in concepts.
	<i>Practices of placing and re-placing</i>	
	“Midwifery” as a bi-weekly arrangement for pitching, enriching and evaluating ideas. Ideas are introduced by brief memos, pitched and then given focal attention in several rounds of roundtable discussions. New parts–whole relationships are playfully voiced and tested on the spot in a series of conversations within and outside Midwifery.	More analytic and isolated work that is subsequently integrated. Several breakthrough discoveries done in mature areas are based on re-synthesizing of old data. Growing recognition of importance of cross-disciplinary workshops. New parts–whole relationships are voiced during project pitches and in workshops but will often require sustained analytical work across many prospects and regions.

***Legitimizing
imaginings***

The projects at large

Islanders: Ongoing legitimating forms part of constituting the prospect ideas: from the start, during casting and at every pitch session. Main emphasis on linking casting profiles and production modes to stories with myth-busting potential. Legitimating strengthened by identity of well-reputed partners.

Snow Crest: Questions of internal and external legitimating formed part of the work for several project cycles since 1989. Dual emphasis on the value of individual prospects and development of the basin. Legitimating threatened by modest to low industry belief in the exploration basin and regional office with a history of dry wells.

Making imaginings matter

Alternative imaginings are charged with questions of how they matter, internally as desire of identity for partners and externally as worth for the audience and society. Legitimating is particularly evident as multidirectional conversations in Midwifery with a mix of utterances about details of idea content, comparable concepts and moral ambitions.

Alternative imaginings of where to find hydrocarbon resources are charged with question of value of prospects, the future of the exploration province *and* sometimes the fate of the regional office. Legitimating is particularly evident during pitches in formal and informal peer review sessions but would also be brought up during larger portfolio evaluations.

Making imaginings believed-in

Habits of seeing pitching of ideas as arena for enrichment and assessment, with open sharing of doubt and alternatives; modest structuring of formal evaluations. Ideas may enter and exit Midwifery several times. Co-optative forms of power dominate.

Heavy structuring of evaluative regime with succession of internal and external formal peer reviews, whose functions are contested. Gradual recognition that imaginations need to be shared for ideas to be given weight and actors to be enrolled in further work; mix of coercive and co-optative forms of power.

Table 3. Problematized and alternative assumptions

Assumptions problematized	Alternative assumptions
<p><u>Core assumptions – linearity and singularity:</u> Ideas are discrete and singular entities that are evaluated, selected and implemented in processes subsequent to and separated from their generation.</p>	<p>Ideas are constituted on an ongoing basis as part of a moving <i>field of ideas</i>, in which they emerge as inter-subjective realities and are intertextually linked in processes of combination, extension and re-synthesis of new parts–whole relationships.</p> <p>Changes in the larger idea field may inflict change in some focal idea, and every act of doing idea work takes place in such a larger field.</p>
<p><u>Corollary – detached legitimating:</u> Legitimating is done detached from (prior to or after) idea generation. It affects idea content to a limited degree and concerns singular and unrelated ideas.</p>	<p>Legitimating is an interwoven element of any session of work on ideas, through 1) shaping ideas by (re)placing them in the larger idea field, including the identity of key actors, and 2) mobilizing others in varying degrees of co-creation</p>
<p>Power is ignored or mainly inscribed as being coercive.</p>	<p>Power is both coercive and co-optative, the latter as a unifying process of aligning agencies to achieve collectively improved imaginings</p>

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Figure I Intertextual placing and legitimating imaginings

