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Idea championing as a missing link between idea generation and team innovation implementation: A situated emergence approach

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ABSTRACT

We examine idea championing as a key intermediary process of the idea journey linking idea generation and idea implementation in teams. Building upon multilevel framework of emergence we theorize about how compositional and compilational emergence of idea generation along with idea championing behaviors translate team members' creative ideas into team-level innovative solutions. We adopt a two-study research design including a two-wave two-source field study (309 employees nested into 92 teams with direct supervisors) and an experimental study (423 students nested into 79 teams) to test our conceptual model. The results of field study show that team innovation process featuring strong compilational (selected actor-maximum) idea generating followed by compilational idea championing leads to best team-level innovative solutions. Using a sociometric approach as a part of an experimental study, we further show that individuals exhibiting the strongest idea generating activity are also significantly more likely the ones engaging in most intense idea championing behavior. While having team members exhibiting such exceptional behaviors is relatively more effective in an unstructured team innovation setup, structured idea journey setups result in better team-level innovative solutions, when idea championing behaviors are more equally distributed among team members. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

"*A new idea either finds a champion or dies*". (Donald Schon, 1963, p. 84)

Transforming ideas into viable solutions represents a critical challenge of the innovation process in contemporary organizations. Many creative and potentially transformative ideas never make it through the innovation process (Berg, 2016; Stevens& Burley, 1997) because they are not sufficiently promoted and supported. In contemporary organizations, the entity at the crux of this challenge is a team embedded in an organizational context. Teams represent the primary pool of creative potential and the immediate social setting, where the generated ideas get evaluated, elaborated, promoted, and implemented (Chen, Farh, Campbell-Bush, Wu, & Wu, 2013; Hollenbeck, Beersma, & Schouten, 2012).

Whereas existing research enables a good understanding of the separate components of the overall team innovation process, there is still a strong need to examine how the components are linked (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014; Černe, Kaše, & Škerlavaj, 2016a). Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017) introduced the *idea journey* consisting of four subprocesses including idea generation, elaboration, championing, and implementation. In their review of the literature addressing constituent parts of the idea journey, the authors expressed the need to address linkages between these subprocesses and emphasized that idea championing has received by far the least attention (ibid., p. 60). Idea championing is about a process, where "idea champion" promotes an idea and influences others to gain support for and engagement with the idea and for its implementation; first within the team and then beyond it (Baer & Oldham, 2006; Fleming, Mingo, & Chen, 2007). To address resistance and the riskiness of new ideas and their imperative of changing the "status quo," idea championing often represents a critical activity in the process, which makes a difference between an idea succeeding to the implementation phase *versus* being abandoned and forgotten. It is thus both unfortunate and an opportunity to see that this potential bottleneck of the team innovation process still remains underexplored.

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Moreover, organizations adopt different approaches to managing/governing the idea journey, which can either facilitate or inhibit the innovation process (Tidd & Bessant, 2011). There is some research evidence on how the context of the innovation process affects its effectiveness (Fay, Shipton, West, & Patterson, 2015; Schippers, West, & Dawson, 2015). However, this stream of inquiry has mostly examined how a setup affects a single subphase of the innovation process, most frequently idea generation (Harvey & Kou, 2013; Kim & Zhong, 2017). This leaves ample room for examining the effects of setup on other subphases and their linkages. Innovation research on idea management systems, on the other hand, has mostly focused on organizational-level phenomena as a context of the micro-innovation processes without delving into the behavioral specifics occurring in and between the idea journey stages (cf., Sandstrom & Bjork, 2010; Westerski, Iglesias, & Nagle, 2011). This invites research on how setting the context of the idea journey through different arrangements of idea management may influence idea championing behaviors, and how it could affect the linkages between multiple phases of the idea journey. Specifically, we consider two basic idea journey setups—in our case systemic approaches to idea management—a *structured* and an *unstructured* one. A structured idea journey setup represents a structured and predetermined approach in generating, absorbing, and evaluating ideas, whereas an unstructured approach does not provide a predetermined sequence and involvement of all team members equally, but rather leaves the idea journey to play out to chance and interpersonal dynamics.

Building on the convergence and emergence framework in multilevel research in organizations, we adopt *a situated emergence approach* to address the highlighted research opportunities (see Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016; Kozlowski, Chao, Grand, Braun, & Kuljanin, 2016; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000) and expose the role of idea championing in different idea journey setups. With such an approach, we recognize that individual-level phenomena emerge to the unit level conditioned upon context in which they are embedded (see Hulsheger, Anderson, & Salgado, 2009). We propose idea championing as a key intermediary process linking idea generation and idea implementation in teams, and we address the focal parts of the idea journey as emergent behaviors situated in teams and in diverse idea journey contexts. We do this by explicitly juxtaposing theoretically plausible compositional—resulting in isomorphic phenomena across levels—and compilational—resulting in functionally equivalent yet distinctively different phenomena—emergence mechanisms (cf., Kozlowski & Chao, 2012; Kozlowski, Chao, Grand, Braun, & Kuljanin, 2013) underlying idea generating and idea championing behaviors.

Our two studies (field Study 1 and experimental Study 2) complement each other in examining the relationships between emerged idea generation (creativity), idea championing, and idea implementation (innovation). Our field Study 1 allows for a robust general test of our model. The experimental Study 2 complements it by providing validation, by examining the role of the context, and by investigating specific individual actors in their dual role as idea creators and idea champions. Specifically, Hypotheses 1a and 1b—concerning the relationships between both team compositional and compilational idea generation and team-level idea implementation as mediated by computational team idea championing—are first examined in Study 1. In Study 2, we further investigate the position of the strongest contributors across idea generation and championing phases along with the role of the structured (vs. unstructured) idea management system setup (Hypotheses 3a and 3b, respectively). We demonstrate our conceptual model with hypotheses in Fig. 1.

In doing so, we identify four key contributions to the literature, most importantly by strengthening the integration between the creativity and innovation literatures as far as the idea journey is concerned. First, we conceptually refine idea championing as a relational team-level construct and show in both a field and an experimental study that it has an important role in linking individual idea generation and team-level idea implementation. Second, we test different types for emergence within specific bottom-up processes of micro-innovation. This is valuable because empirical evidence of situated emergent behaviors of idea journey remains scarce (Kozlowski et al., 2013; Mannucci & Perry-Smith, In press). Third, using a sociometric approach (a methodological novelty), we showcase the stability of central positions of the strongest contributors across constituent parts of the idea journey. The very individuals who acted as the strongest idea creators were also found to be the strongest idea champions within their teams. Fourth, we show that the idea journey context – having a structured or unstructured team innovation setup – affects the emergent processes leading to team idea implementation.

1. Theory and hypotheses

A typical innovation process in organizations begins with individual creativity – the generation of novel and useful ideas (Axtell, Holman, & Wall, 2006; Axtell, Holman, & Wall, 2006; Paulus & Yang, 2000; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017) – and ends with idea fruition at a collective level, for example, as team idea implementation (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2001; Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013. This stimulates the reasoning that an idea journey unfolds across multiple stages of the innovation process and that team innovation emerges across levels. Conceptual development on the linkages between idea generation, idea championing, and idea implementation should thus follow the logic of mediation and adopt a multilevel perspective.

Therefore, we adopt what we call a *situated emergence approach* to better understand the focal linkages in the idea journey. We build on the convergence and emergence framework in multilevel research paradigm in organizations (Fulmer & Ostroff, 2016; Kozlowski et al., 2016; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). This framework asserts that the

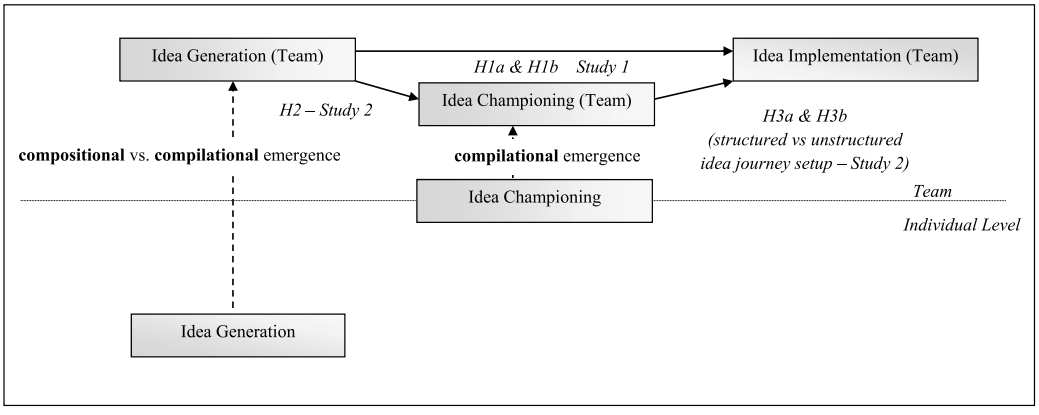

Fig. 1. Conceptual model with hypotheses.

understanding of emergent phenomena is linked to the understanding of how the emergence process is affected by the relevant context. Specifically, we address the team innovation process as a (mediation) process featuring emergent individual idea generation and idea championing behaviors that result in team-level innovation, while recognizing that this focal process is situated in the respective context, in which the emergence occurs. We highlight two key aspects of the context: 1) the social context in which team-level phenomena emerge and 2) the systemic context in the form of idea management approaches, which facilitate and constrain the emergence of the team-level phenomena.

Emergence generally occurs through two primary qualitatively distinct bottom-up aggregation logics: composition and compilation (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). *Compositional* type of emergence, based on the assumptions of isomorphism, addresses phenomena as qualitatively the same or very similar as they emerge across levels. Compositional processes occur when lower-level characteristics converge in a similar manner to yield a higher level property that is essentially the same as its constituent elements. *Compilational* type of emergence, based on the assumptions of discontinuity, on the other hand, sees phenomena as having a common domain but being qualitatively different as they emerge across levels. Compilational processes describe the combination of related but different lower-level properties that yields a higher-level property that is functionally equivalent to its constituent elements but is not merely a sum of its parts (Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000).

In what follows, we first address the role of the idea championing in the idea journey. We continue by contrasting two general emergence types to examine the emergence of team-level innovation in the idea journey that consists of idea generation, idea championing, and team idea implementation. Then, we theorize the overlap between idea generation and idea championing roles for specific individuals as a linchpin of the two respective processes, and we conclude by addressing the role of the organizational idea management approach as a situational constraint for idea championing.

1.1. Idea championing as a critical element of the idea journey

Idea implementation is inherently embedded within a social contexts and involves interpersonal processes, which means that individuals have to exchange, elaborate, integrate, disseminate, promote, and win support for their ideas to move to later stages of the innovation process and eventually see them materialize (Mainemelis, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Schon (1963) was the first to point out the importance of product champions – advocates of an implementation of particular product, for the success of technological innovation. Consistently, idea championing has been defined as acting as a strong advocate for a project and generating support for an innovation during its development or work on behalf of the project in the face of neutrality or opposition (Markham, Green, & Basu, 1991). It essentially represents a position in an organization where someone creates, defines, and facilitates ultimate adoption of an idea (Maidique, 1980).

While we use Markham et al. (1991)'s definition of idea championing and treat it as an integral part of the micro-innovation process (McCann & Sparks, 2019), we emphasize the need for idea championing to be embedded in a particular social context (i.e., teams in our case). This means that idea championing is *per se* a relational construct, as it is inseparably connected to a specific social context, which at the same time represents the focal actor's target audience. A team is the most common and immediate social context within which idea championing takes place. Since ideas are novel and uncertain, they usually cause disagreements caused by differences in viewpoints and idea evaluations. They are also likely met with skepticism, hesitation (Janssen, Van de Vliert, & West, 2004), and even resistance as they may change thinking modes and ways of doing things along with challenging existing power structures (Janssen et al., 2004). These social dynamics first emerge within a team where the idea was generated (Shin, Kim, Lee, & Bian, 2012). Idea championing is a process through which they can be resolved effectively with a buy-in from team members. This not only unlocks potential for idea implementation but also creates a solid support basis for further championing beyond the team level.

Sharing information and successful problem representation, reaction to idea evaluation, and negotiation about planning for implementation are all part of idea championing behaviors occurring within the team (Howell & Boies, 2004; Howell & Shea, 2006) that are essential for the innovation implementation processes. Interactions between members shape their viewpoints and idea evaluations, paving the way for acceptance of new ideas. Intensive team idea generation, geared by either an exceptional contributor or more equally distributed among team members, leads to a situation of abundance of competing ideas, where effective idea championing is particularly valuable for directing team efforts toward idea implementation.

The idea journey, and most notably the subprocesses of idea generation and idea championing, are notably affected by the role distribution among the team members (Drach-Zahavy & Somech, 2001). The latter determines the emergence type and has important consequences for ultimate team-level innovation (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999). We build on the compositional and compilational emergence logic to theorize about how different distributions of team member behaviors affect emergent team-level idea generation and championing, and how they ultimately determine team-level innovation.

Using compositional logic team-level creativity (or idea generation) emerges as an aggregate of creative behaviors, where team members contribute more or less evenly (Pirola-Merlo & Mann, 2004). Individual team members exhibit creative behaviors, which in turn create expectations of creative performance for other members and influence them to adopt similar behaviors (Gong, Kim, Zhu, & Lee, 2013). Through a recursive social influence process, role modeling, and the fostering of shared norms and expectations, individuals are encouraged to exhibit further creative behavior and thus elevate team-level creativity (Gong et al., 2013). This composition-based emergence of idea team creativity is consistent with the classic approach underlying existing work by Taggar (2002), and Pirola-Merlo and Mann (2004). They have shown that each member's contribution to team creativity, averaged in a team creativity score, is important in generating creative ideas regarding open-ended problems.

Yet, the emergence of team-level creativity can also be considered using the *compilational* logic, where team-level creativity emerges through a fuzzy process, with some members having a much more dominant role in the ideation process than others (Paulus & Brown, 2007), and their idea generation behaviors can be far more consequential for team-level creativity.[3] Strong contributors to team creativity provide a high number and/or novelty of ideas, which spur additional ideation/association process in other team members and results in high team-level idea generation (Putman & Paulus, 2009; Seeber, De Vreede, Maier, & Weber, 2017). This compilation-based emergence of idea team creativity is consistent with a recent operationalization by Gong et al. (2013). Excellent creative performance of strongest members spills over to other team members and engages them to wish to share the cause and consequences (namely, rewards; cf. Allen & Griffeth, 2001) that accrue to teams around strong contributors in the creative process.

In contrast to idea generation, where both compositional and compilational logics are conceptually plausible, we posit idea championing as predominately compilational. This notion already stems from our operationalization of idea championing as a relational construct, where a specific actor—idea champion—in the absence of the idea management approach (i.e., idea journey setup) design constraints has a dominant role in influencing other members within a social setting. The role of an idea champion in teams demands relational competencies, such as political skills or issue selling, capability to form social relationships, influence and facilitate interactions through which necessary support is obtained (Baer, 2012; Fleming et al., 2007). These

competences are frequently not possessed by all team members equally. Rather, they are prone to the Matthew effect and concentrated in particular (selected) individuals (cf., Aguinis & O'Boyle, 2014). In addition, the effects of social influencing and relational dynamics following championing behavior are nonlinear, socially complex, and feature different sequences before the adoption of an idea in a team is final. For example, too novel and too frequent idea generation is perceived as risky and reduces idea implementation (Škerlavaj, Černe, & Dysvik, 2014). Too vocal voicing of ideas is regarded as voicing subjective interests and is often times assigned with hidden agendas, and it has an inverted U-shaped relationship with team innovation (Liu, 2019). New ideas are diffused to the market in a nonlinear manner (Rodriguez-Sanchez, Williams, & Brotons, 2019).

Considering the compositional and configurational logics of our focal concepts, we propose two plausible paths of the idea journey. In the first hypothesized path, we take the classic approach to the emergence of creativity in organizations and posit that idea championing (by the strongest team contributor) will mediate the relationship between idea generation (consisting of relatively homogenous creative contributions of team members) and team-level innovation. In this case, the creative input of individual team contributors will add up synergistically and serve as a basis that an idea champion will take up and through an interactive process push through toward implementation. Accordingly, we stipulate Hypothesis 1a:

Hypothesis 1a. The level of strongest individual idea championing in a team mediates the relationship between the average level of individual idea generation in a team and team innovation.

In the second hypothesized path, we take a more recent approach to the emergence of creativity in teams and argue that the roles of strongest idea generator and strongest idea champion will be paramount to an effective idea journey.

Unequally distributed individual team member creativity provides the raw material of novel and useful ideas, which are processed through nonlinear process and fuzzy team member interactions into team-level creativity (Pirola-Merlo & Mann, 2004). Follow-up negotiations, power, and status of being a creative idea generator in teams determine whether an individual member will voice her creative ideas and potentially be able to influence team members in acceptance of creative ideas to be developed further in the idea journey. Strong idea championing role steps in at this point by enthusiastically supporting these ideas, building support, and overcoming resistance to idea implementation (Humphrey, Morgeson, & Mannor, 2009; Černe, Kaše, & Škerlavaj, 2016b). Strong idea champions carry team boundary activities needed for team innovation (Somech & Khalaili, 2014) and represent idea championing of a collective entity – a team. They are also more likely than team members in peripheral roles to be successful in winning support and pushing the innovation process forward, facilitating implementation in teams (Johnsson, 2018). Accordingly, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 1b. The level of strongest individual idea championing in a team mediates the relationship between the strongest level of individual idea generation in a team and team innovation.

1.2. The overlapping roles of strongest contributors across the idea journey

Reflecting on our discussion so far one could easily infer that due to contrasting demands of particular subphases of the innovation process, most prominent idea generators and champions in a team might not be the same individuals. Actually, our hypotheses development above remained at the notion of concepts and roles, uninformed about whether the strongest individual idea generator is also the person that plays a role of the strongest idea champion.

To be successful in respective subprocesses, a part of extant literature reported the need for needs diverse individual characteristics (Vila, Perez, & Coll-Serrano, 2014) and access to varied social resources (Björk & Magnusson, 2009). In particular, an individual excelling in idea generation is likely thought of as being open to experience, divergent thinker, who is not constrained by dense, conformity-inducing social ties (Baer & Oldham, 2006; Fleming et al., 2007), while strong idea championing is usually associated with politically savvy individuals, who are capable of influencing others and are well connected, especially to important gatekeepers (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Rodan & Galunic, 2004).

However, another stream of previous research on idea or innovation champions emphasized the inevitable connection between generating and championing ideas (e.g., Maidique, 1980). Idea generators are usually the most motivated to carry their ideas out because of a feeling of intrinsic inertia and (psychological) ownership over their ideas (Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Howell & Boies, 2004; Van Dyne & Pierce, 2004). They act as internal entrepreneurs of their ideas who bring them to light of others and guide their execution. When strong idea generators produce ideas in teams, they usually claim or at least believe in their ownership of these ideas (Hannah, 2004). Having ownership both on the idea as well on the following process of championing allows individuals in teams to explore divergent research directions that fall outside the remit of formal projects (Jin, Chua, & Bledow, 2018; O'Connor & McDermott, 2004). It also provides them with more freedom to explore uncharted territory and to attain explorative advantage over colleagues who do not excel in idea generation and do not claim ownership over their ideas, resulting in higher likelihood for the implementation of ideas. Equally likely, when someone generates a creative idea, the same person frequently gets formally appointed to champion and execute it.

Similarly, different social network resource demands for being a successful idea generator or champion do not necessarily imply that two different individuals are needed for (separately) excelling in idea generation and implementation. On the contrary, recent research on ego-network dynamics suggests that individuals' time-based reconfiguration of their network (Burt & Merluzzi, 2016), timely activation of appropriate network configurations (Smith, Menon, & Thompson, 2012), and activation of the right networks based on the collaborative context (Obstfeld, Borgatti, & Davis, 2014; Soda, Stea, & Pedersen, 2019) can be the reasons for their superior performance. As point of departure for their conceptual model, Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017, p. 55) even assumed that the idea creators remain the primary drivers throughout the idea journey, though the demands in each phase change significantly.

The above exposed psychological, network resources, and contextual demands arguments lead to reasoning that individuals who are highly successful as idea generators will likely also be idea champions of those same ideas. They will stand against the opposition of others and confidently push their own ideas, acting as icons of change embodying the risk-taking and perseverance necessary to gain acceptance for ideas that disrupt the status quo. This might be even more relevant for idea championing in teams as the demands might be more dissimilar in comparison to when support is needed to be won organization wide (Ellis & Pearsall, 2011; Westman, Bakker, Roziner, & Sonnentag, 2011). Thus, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2. The exact individual team member contributor exhibiting the strongest idea championing behavior is likely also exhibiting the strongest idea generation behavior.

1.3. Idea championing in different idea journey setups

An important part of any emergent process and more specifically of the process of transforming creative ideas into implemented innovations is its systemic setup, which can be favorable or detrimental toward encouraging individuals' contributions to team-level idea generation and championing. To further elaborate on our situated emergence approach, we develop theory about how idea championing, as a focal

stage of our interest in the idea journey, contributes to team innovation in different idea management systems. In particular, we address two basic idea journey setups—a *structured* and an *unstructured* one.

A structured idea journey setup incurs a context in which teams work with ideas following a set of rules and procedures. It represents a structured approach in generating, absorbing, and evaluating ideas, usually of incremental nature (Sandstrom & Bjork, 2010) and influences the process of team-level emergent behaviors. In such a setting, individuals would be encouraged to share any ideas that come to mind and build upon ideas of others, similar to the logic of developing creativity in groups expressed as early as in 1957 by Osborn. The process is organized in a series of sequences and repeated time intervals, when all team members focus on thinking, generating, and enacting ideas in a particular way (specified in-advance). This structured approach usually consists of covering different types of thinking one after another (Halpern, 1998; McFadzean, 1998). Alternatively, an unstructured approach would not provide a predetermined sequence and involvement of all team members equally but rather leave the idea journey to play out to chance and interpersonal dynamics.

Our conceptualization of what happens with idea championing in a structured versus an unstructured idea journey setup develops a distinction between two different situations related to two distinct compilational emergence types of idea championing in teams: *maximum selected actor* versus *dispersion-composition*[2] models (cf. Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). In the absence of any particular systematic idea journey setup, we had already argued strongest idea championing (i.e., maximum selected actor model) as predominant, yet in the context of a structured idea management system, a more equally distributed idea championing comes to the forefront. Indeed, the need for highly creative individuals and idea champions (in line with the maximum selected actor role) in teams is not paramount in structured settings. Individuals with dominant roles flourish in an unstructured setting that leaves the innovation journey more open to serendipity and interpersonal dynamics. When the process is not predetermined, exceptional individuals are able to voice their viewpoints, champion them more eagerly (also at the expense of other team members; Faure, 2004), and bring them to implementation.

In a structured idea management context, the idea championing role needs to be enacted differently. The emphasis in not only on the strongest member's idea championing capacity but on the general dispersion among all team members. This is captured by another variant of the compilational emergence model, the so-called dispersion-composition model, which captures variability among team members' behaviors (Cole, Bedeian, Hirschfeld, & Vogel, 2011), in our case, idea championing. According to our definition of idea championing, this is a less probable, yet still theoretically plausible emergence type for idea championing. We propose that in a structured creative-idea generation setting, where individuals are prompted to promote their ideas and attention is distributed more equally by design, dispersion in team member idea championing behavior will more likely be related to team innovation. Such an approach enables each participant to capitalize on their own creative ideas (Garfield, Taylor, Dennis, & Satzinger, 2001; Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009). This principle makes the idea journey more decentralized and increases participation throughout the process (Sandstrom & Bjork, 2010; Westerski et al., 2011). Moreover, it enables the group to build on others' ideas in the generation phase and then equally contribute to the evaluation phase (Flynn, Dooley, O'Sullivan, & Cormican, 2003). This familiarizes everyone with others' ideas and viewpoints, potentially decreasing ownership beliefs over ideas (Harvey, 2014; Taylor & Greve, 2006), which puts team members in a more equal position with regard to championing ideas.

Employees who usually would not dare to raise their opinions and try to gather support for ideas (perhaps because of introvert personality types, cf., BarrickStewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998, or because of fear of rejection and critique, cf., Bowen & Blackmon, 2003) would in a structured idea generation setting have to speak up and try to find and voice positive aspects of (their) ideas. This type of a structured setup would neutralize the effects of an informal pecking order among members of a team (Nunamaker Jr, Applegate, & Konsynski, 1987). Moreover, other employees would be able to develop and build on their ideas (Paulus, 2000), benefiting other phases of the idea journey.

In such a setting, each individual, not only the most creative ones, would be more likely to not only brainstorm but also express his or her creative thoughts and champion theirs and others' ideas. A structured process facilitates everyone, not only the 'usual idea championing suspects' to voice and champion their ideas, and having variability of diverse ideas and championing initiatives to choose from and guide in a structured manner is more likely to result in team innovation. Therefore, a dispersed idea-championing process should be able to yield better results in a structured idea journey setting. Taken together, we propose the following:

Hypothesis 3a. In an unstructured idea journey setup, a high maximum idea championing behavior is more beneficial for team innovation.

Hypothesis 3b. In a structured idea journey setup, dispersed idea championing (relative to concentrated one) leads to higher levels of team innovation than in an unstructured setup.

2. Study 1: Methods

2.1. Sample

Data were collected in two waves and two levels (from a final sample of 309 employees and their 92 direct supervisors) in a European insurance company (holding about 30 percent of the market, operating in Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and North Macedonia) in the Fall of 2013. The company has a sales network of 12 regional units, 42 representative offices with numerous outlets, and more than 660 insurance agents. Employees in possession of an e-mail address participated in our study. This resulted in a total sample of 2405 employees who hold a variety of jobs, including knowledge-intensive jobs, clerical jobs, sales, etc. and who are organized in units with clearly labeled supervisors. They do not have a formally defined structured process of dealing with ideas.

In order to prevent problems with common method bias, data were collected by two separate online questionnaires sent to participants by their department representative: one for the employees, who self-reported on their idea generation and idea championing and the other for their supervisors, who assessed team-level idea implementation. One supervisor only evaluated one team, so there is no nesting in observations. In addition, a post-hoc marker variable test was done post hoc (reported below). Data were collected in two collection waves, the second (when we measured self-rated idea championing and supervisors' ratings about team idea implementation) about three weeks after the first one. We obtained complete (more than 90% of survey items) questionnaires in both waves (including their supervisors) from 309 employees, and this accounted for 12.84% response rate. Remaining (<10%) missing data were handled as missing, resulting in some case/item combinations being left out of some analyses as appropriate. About 53% of the participants were female, and about 25% were between the ages of 35 and 44 (mean = 42.13, SD = 9.19). A total of 36.2% of respondents reported under seven years of work experience (mean = 9.49,

[2] Please mind that although the word composition is in the name of the model, it is part of the compilational emergence type.

[3] The multilevel emergence literature (Chen et al., 2004; Snijders, 2016) refers to such collective constructs that are importantly or exclusively determined by a particular (e.g., because they exhibit the most intensive behaviors) individual as a compilational (selected-actor maximum), thus denoting the strongest (role) contributor in a team.

SD = 8.47) and 53.5% reported under three years of working with a particular supervisor – their unit leader (dyad tenure; mean = 4.55, SD = 4.38).

2.2. Measures, aggregation procedures, and the operationalization of emergence types

Seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree") were used in this study. We used a translation-back translation procedure (Brislin, 1986) to translate the items from English into local language and back into English.

Creative-Idea Generation was self-reported and measured with eight items taken from Zhou and George (2001) concerning the generation of novel and useful ideas—not implementation (in line with advice in Montag, Maertz, & Baer, 2012)—and adapted them for employee self-reporting. A sample item includes: "How often do you suggest new ways to achieve goals or objectives?" Reliability coefficient α = 0.95. Similar to the approach taken by Gong et al. (2013), we aggregated the idea generation scores to the team level with various emergence approaches (Cole et al., 2011; Klein & Kozlowski, 2000; Rousseau, 2011). We primarily focused on the compositional model (i.e., average score of idea generation in teams) and compilational (selected-actor maximum) model (i.e., maximum score of individual idea generation among members of a team). To address the emergence of individual-level creativity processes to the team level, these approaches were deemed to add additional information about how individual-level creative behavior translates into team-level creativity (cf., Pirola-Merlo & Mann, 2004; Sawyer, 1999), different from a referent-shift type of investigation, where the primary referent of the items would relate to the level of the team. Aggregation indices are as follows (slight skewed shape): ICC (1) = 0.17; ICC(2) = 0.37, rwg(8) = 0.85.

Idea Championing was also self-reported and assessed with a three-item measure taken from the scale of Zhou and George (2001) following a study of De Spiegelaere, Van Gyes, De Witte, Niesen, and Van Hootegem (2014). The opening of the scale asked participants to describe their behavior in the context of their team, and sample item includes "I promote and champion ideas to others." (α = 0.76). The same approaches for team-level aggregation as in the case with creative-idea generation were used in the case of idea championing as well, with the following aggregation indices (slight skewed shape): ICC(1) = 0.20; ICC (2) = 0.41, rwg(3) = 0.51.

Team-Level Idea Implementation was evaluated by team supervisors with two items taken from De Jong & Den Hartog (2010) that only concerned the implementation part of the innovation process, rather than idea generation, idea selection, or idea championing. In addition, the opening of the scale was adapted to concern team-level idea implementation, i.e., "How often do employees in your work unit as a group" … "systematically introduce innovative ideas into work practices" (α = 0.92). Each supervisor assessed their team.

We controlled for *team size* in models that include idea championing as the internal processes of championing one's own or others' ideas might be influenced by the number of team members in a team, and because team size has been shown to be important in the team innovation processes (Eisenbeiss, van Knippenberg, & Boerner, 2008).

3. Study 1: Results

Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics for all variables analyzed in Study 1. We first observed the factor structure of the focal variables using confirmatory factor analysis procedures in AMOS software version 21. The expected three-factor solution (idea generation, idea championing, idea implementation) displayed a good fit with the data [chi-square (62) = 288.29, CFI = 0.955, SRMR = 0.059, RMSEA = 0.082].

To additionally alleviate concerns related to common method bias, we applied Lindell and Whitney's (2001) marker variable test, using a theoretically unrelated variable (i.e., marker variable) to adjust the correlations among the principal constructs in the model. Any high correlation of the marker variable with any of the study's other principal constructs would indicate potential common method bias. For robustness, we separately repeated the marker variable test with two variables that were not included in the model (employee gender and dyad tenure), for which we had little or no theoretical basis to expect a relationship with the study's principal constructs. The average correlation between the study's principal constructs for employee gender (r = 0.065) and dyad tenure (r = 0.09) was low and nonsignificant, providing no evidence of common method bias.

Using hierarchical regression analysis, we first examined idea generation as a predictor of team innovation (controlling for team size). The results indicated that compositional team idea generation (average) was positively related to team innovation (β = 0.333, s.e. = 0.252, p = .032, R^2 = 0.162, F = 4.778, df[2, 50]). Compilational (selected-actor maximum) idea generation was also positively related to team

Table 1
Study 1: Descriptive statistics (Team-level).

Variable		*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Idea generation (composition-average)	5.54	.67	–											
2.	Idea generation (compilational-selected-actor-maximum)	6.44	.52	.64**	–										
3.	Idea generation (dispersion-average deviation)	.94	.59	−.69*	−.02	–									
4.	Idea generation (dispersion-rwg)	.73	.28	.64**	−.01	.02	–								
5.	Idea generation (dispersion-coefficient of variation)	.18	.14	−.76	−.17	−.05	−.93**	–							
6.	Idea championing (composition-average)	5.75	.92	.36**	.09	−.05	.29**	−.27**	–						
7.	Idea championing (compilational-selected-actor-maximum)	6.44	.88	.31	.25*	.02	.15	−.18	.76**	–					
8.	Idea championing (dispersion-average deviation)	.82	.72	−.08	.15	.08	−.20	.14	−.42**	.23*	–				
9.	Idea championing (dispersion-rwg)	.77	.30	.00	−.18	−.04	.05	−.03	.30**	−.09	−.57**	–			
10.	Idea championing (dispersion-coefficient of variation)	.16	.17	−.09	.15	.11	−.22*	.16	−.61**	−.02	.94**	−.57**	–		
11.	Team idea implementation (supervisor-rated)	5.06	1.26	.35*	.37**	.88**	−.03	−.02	.00	.05	.10	−.04	.12	(.92)	
12.	Team size	4.07	2.52	−.09	.26*	−.05	−.06	.03	−.15	.11	.21*	−.18	.17	−.24	–

Note. n = 92.
* p < .05.
** p < .01.

innovation (β = 0.446, s.e. = 0.304, p = .003, R^2 = 0.25, F = 8.308 [2, 50]).

We then turned to hypotheses testing and examined the mediation of compilational (selected actor-maximum) idea championing in the relationship between compositional (average) idea generation and team-level idea implementation. We followed standard procedures for examining mediation with a bootstrap approach (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Drawing 5000 random samples using replacement from the full sample, we constructed 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the hypothesized indirect effects. We present these results in Table 2. The indirect effect from the full sample was .213, and the confidence interval from the bootstrap analysis excluded zero (0.0781, 0.3843), supporting Hypothesis 1a. Interestingly, team size was constantly negatively and significantly related to idea implementation, indicating that smaller teams are more likely to implement ideas.

Further, we focused on the mediation of compilational (selected-actor maximum) idea championing in the relationship between compilational (selected-actor maximum) idea generation and team-level idea implementation. The indirect effect from the full sample was .234, and the confidence interval from the bootstrap analysis excluded zero (0.0012, 0.4873), supporting Hypothesis 1b.

4. Study 2: Methods

To address potential limitations of the field study (i.e., heterogeneous jobs and tasks of participants, imperfect supervisory ratings of idea implementation in teams) and to test the effect of different journey setup types, we conducted an experimental study in which participants worked in teams to generate ideas and implement innovative team solutions. We manipulated the idea journey setup by applying a structured setup in one group and unstructured in the other (control group). Additionally, the intention of our second study was to control for the task, examine the roles of idea generating and idea championing in teams along with how they correspond to each other (tracking the exact same individual and their behaviors through the idea journey), and use multiple experts rating the innovation outcome.

4.1. Sample, design, and procedures

We conducted an experiment with 423 s-year undergraduates (79 teams). The extent of missing data in collected questionnaires was marginal; remaining instances of missing data on particular case/item combinations were left out of analyses where appropriate. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 36 years, and the mean age was 20.63 years (SD = 1.54). Approximately 59% were female, and roughly 87% had some work experience such as student or summer jobs. Their average GPA was 7.34 (on a scale from 6 to 10 as grades that let you pass), ranging from 6.0 to 9.6. They were given extra points for participation. The experiment used a between-subjects single-factor (structured/unstructured idea journey setup) design put in the idea generation/championing setting. The participants were randomly assigned to the classrooms prior to the experiment and randomly assigned to the teams.

Table 2
Study 1: Results of the mediating analyses.

Dependent variable: Team innovation implementation	Model 1a	Model 1b
Team size	−.081 (.02), p = .002	−.103 (.027), p = .000
Idea generation (composition-average)	.388 (.098), p = .000	
Idea generation (compilational-selected-actor-maximum)		.186 (.135), p = .174
Idea championing (compilational-selected-actor-maximum)	.507 (.074), p = .000	.576 (.078), p = .000
Indirect effect (idea generation – compilational idea championing – team innovation implementation)	.213 *c.i.:* .0781, .3843	.234 *c.i.:* .0012, .4873
R	.725	.672
F (df)	32.440 (3, 88), p = .000	24.145 (3, 88), p = .000
R^2	.525	.451

Notes. N = 92. Standard errors are in parentheses next to standardized coefficients (betas).

We introduced the study by explaining that we were interested in studying how people solve business problems and that creative ideas are requested. The experiment began by presenting the task where the participants were assigned the role of company HR managers for a large car retailer. In the scenario, one of the company's branch managers has just resigned, and the company's HR department must come up with a printed newspaper job advertisement to find his or her replacement. The participants received a case in which the previous manager's tasks were written in detail. Teams consisted of four or five students and work on the task of designing a newspaper job advertisement for the company's new branch manager (e.g., write and draw it on paper as it would appear in an appropriate outlet). They had 60 min to complete the task altogether, that is to generate ideas for the job ad, champion ideas, and implement the solution as a team.

Structured Idea Journey Setup Manipulation. Prior to the beginning the task, we introduced our manipulations of a structured vs. unstructured idea journey setup for teams. In the control group (unstructured setup), we did not provide any other detailed instructions about the idea journey. In the structured setup, we applied one of the widely recognized techniques for structuring team interaction and innovation processes, the De Bono's six thinking hats system (De Bono, 1995). The interaction method revolves around six metaphorical thinking hats that the participants all put on at the same time, indicating the type of thinking (factual, emotional, cautionary, positive, creative, and overarching) that is used in the whole team at a particular point in time during the task. The work was structured in a way so that for repeating time intervals, all team members focused on thinking, generating, elaborating, and championing ideas in one particular specified way. This structured approach consisted of covering all six types of thinking one by one in a predetermined order and enabled a more equally participative idea generation and championing process in comparison to the control setup, where the process was completely open (offering more chances for participation to more dominant and expressive team members).

After the participants completed the task, the participants answered questions regarding their *creative-idea generation* behaviors during the task (same measure as in the field study was used [α = .67]). *Idea championing* was also self-rated with the same measure as in the field study (α = 0.80), again with an explicit reference to the target of championing behavior (team). In order to address team members' perceptions on strongest idea generators and idea champions in each team, *sociometric measures of idea generation and idea championing* were used. Namely, we asked each of the participants to evaluate their team members' idea generation (with two items from the idea generation scale, namely 'During the task, he/she suggested new ways of achieving objectives' and 'He/she was a good source of creative ideas') and idea championing (with one item from the scale, namely 'During the task, he/she promoted and actively championed ideas to others'), and then calculated the normalized weighted in-degree centrality (de Nooy, Mrvar, & Batagelj, 2011) of both variables for each specific participant.

Each team's *idea implementation* was assessed on innovativeness (novelty and usefulness) of the solution developed by the team. Three independent raters, experts in the field, blind to the manipulation and the purpose of the study rated these solutions on a scale from "1 = not at all novel/useful" to "7 = very novel/useful." The three raters' reliability (ICC2 = 0.73) and agreement (average deviation = 1.15 on a scale from 1 to 7) were within conventional guidelines (LeBreton & Senter, 2008). We thus averaged their ratings into a measure of the overall innovative idea implementation of the teams' solutions.

5. Study 2: Results

Means and standard deviations of the focal variables are shown in Table 3 for each condition.

We used two variables to serve as a manipulation check to examine whether the idea journey setup was indeed more structured; the dispersion of other-rated (normalized weighted in-degree) measures of idea generation and the dispersion of idea championing; both generation ($F[1,77] = 9.241$, $p = .003$) and championing ($F[1,77] = 6.490$, $p = .013$) of creative ideas were significantly more dispersed in a structured idea journey setup. Examining innovative idea implementation output as the dependent variable, it was also significantly higher in the structured condition ($F[1,77] = 7.658$, $p = .007$).

Turning to the link between idea generation and idea championing, in 72.2% of teams' individuals who were rated as exhibiting the strongest idea generating behaviors in their team were also the most intensely championing ideas. Table 4 presents a contingency table with the role of idea generation (normalized weighted in-degree evaluations by teammates) on one axis and the role of idea championing (obtained through normalized weighted in-degree evaluations by teammates) on the other. The results of a chi-square test support Hypothesis 2 (Table 4; Pearson chi-square value: 135.63, $p < .000$).

We then examined the compilational emergence type of idea championing; the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect of the structured/unstructured idea journey setup condition manipulation and the maximum idea championing in teams ($F[3,78] = 4.405$, $p = .039$; Fig. 2). Supporting Hypothesis 3a, in an unstructured setup, it was more beneficial to have strong selected-actor (maximum) team idea championing. On the other hand, in a structured setup, the innovation output levels were higher for teams with a weaker selected-actor (maximum) team idea championing.

Finally, we focused on dispersion models of idea championing that we hypothesized would matter more in a structured idea journey setup. The ANOVA did not reveal a significant interaction effect of the structured/unstructured condition and the dispersion of idea championing (average deviation) in teams. However, in the condition of a structured idea journey setup, higher levels of dispersion in terms of idea championing mattered more for the team-level innovation (*t*-test difference between teams with low vs. high dispersion of idea championing = 1.8961, s.e. = 0.282, p = .066, providing marginal support for Hypothesis 3b; Fig. 3). In an unstructured setup, these differences were not statistically significant.

Table 4
Contingency Table (Cross-Tabulation) for the roles of idea generation and idea championing [a].

			Normalized weighted in-degree idea championing (1 = the best person in team, 0 = all other ranks		Total
			0	1	
Normalized weighted in-degree idea generation (1 = the best person in team, 0 = all other ranks	0	Count	301	29	330
		% within Weighted in-degree idea generation best	91.2%	8.8%	100.0%
		% within Weighted in-degree idea championing	90.1%	32.6%	78.0%
		% of Total	71.2%	6.9%	78.0%
	1	Count	33	60	93
		% within Weighted in-degree idea generation best	35.5%	64.5%	100.0%
		% within Weighted in-degree idea championing	9.9%	67.4%	22.0%
		% of Total	7.8%	14.2%	22.0%
Total		Count	334	89	423
		% within Weighted in-degree idea generation best	79.0%	21.0%	100.0%
		% within Weighted in-degree idea championing	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	79.0%	21.0%	100.0%

Note. Pearson Chi-Square value = 135.629 (p < .001).

6. General discussion

The results of our two studies offer important insights into the role of idea championing within the overall idea journey in teams. Our field study provided support that idea championing (selected-actor, i.e., team maximum) mediates the relationship between idea generation (both in the case of average and selected actor - maximum) and team innovation. In addition, sociometric approaches in the experimental study indicated that individuals, who exhibit strongest idea generating behaviors, also assumed the strongest idea championing. Structuring the idea journey results in superior idea implementation outcomes when there is no clear exceptional idea champion in a team, and when idea championing behaviors are more equally distributed among team members.

6.1. Theoretical implications

Our research directly addresses the call for more research examining the individual-team interface at the intersection between generation and implementation of ideas (Anderson et al., 2014) and explicitly focuses on idea championing as an important yet overlooked phase – a mediating relational mechanism spanning across individual and team levels – of the innovation journey (Mannucci & Perry-Smith, In press; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Several important theoretical contributions follow from our research.

First, we provided an adapted, relational conceptualization of idea championing that is applicable for the team setting. Idea championing in teams, although being put to life by individual members, is not meaningful in isolation. It differs from other constructs, which have their level

Table 3
Study 2: Means and standard deviations by condition.

Condition	Idea generation self-rated team average	Idea generation self-rated team maximum	Idea championing self-rated team average	Idea championing self-rated team maximum	Team-level idea implementation
Unstructured process ($n = 39$)	4.9676 (.42575)	6.1141 (.47450)	4.9821 (.62974)	6.3590 (.58432)	3.8462 (.63221)
Structured process ($n = 40$)	5.0923 (.49211)	6.1802 (.54814)	5.0543 (.69415)	6.2500 (.83972)	4.3375 (.91637)

Notes. Standard deviations are in parentheses. N denotes sample size at the team level.

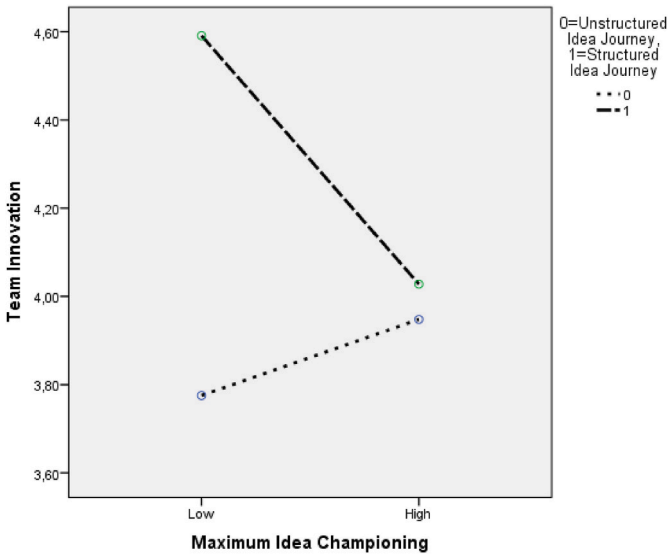

Fig. 2. Team innovation by the level of a structured/unstructured innovation process setup and compilational (Maximum) idea championing.

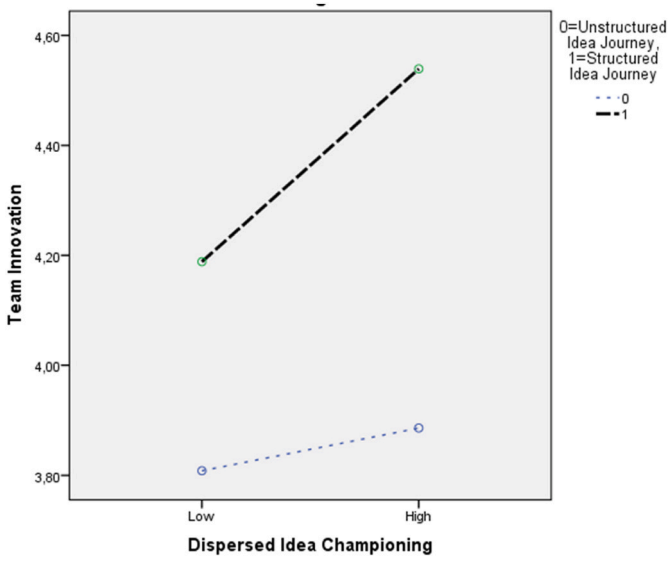

Fig. 3. Team innovation by the level of a structured/unstructured innovation process setup and idea championing dispersion (Average Deviation).

of theoretical origin at the individual level (such as creative behavior) in that it can only be operationalized for individuals in a social context. That is, an individual can exert creative behaviors in isolation (Ford, 1996), whereas idea championing on 'a desert island' is not meaningful. A straightforward implication for further research is that research designs investigating idea championing in the team context should always include observations of both individuals and their immediate social settings. Because it spans levels of construct (cf., Klein & Kozlowski, 2000), caution should be exercised while theorizing about idea championing and its operationalization. Conceptualizing it as a purely individual-level construct is in our view fundamentally inappropriate. Moreover, while the extant research on the idea journey only touched upon idea championing in an implicit manner (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), our research explicitly tackled the role of this phase and exposed it as a key activity for linking the two core stages most frequently examined in the idea journey (idea generation and idea implementation) of teams. This has the potential to further integrate the micro-innovation theory (cf., Axtell, Holman, & Wall, 2006; West, 2002) and provide additional understanding in less frequently examined stages of this process.

Second, we provide further evidence for the emergence of the idea journey constructs by testing different emergence types in both field and large experimental designs. Consistently with our focus on the manner in which individual creative behaviors translate into team-level innovation, our research offers insights into the bottom-up mechanisms of the innovation process. Taking a situated (contextual) emergence perspective, we compared selected composition-compilation models (Mathieu, Tannenbaum, Donsbach, & Alliger, 2014; Rousseau, 2011) to examine the translation of idea generation to implementation in teams via idea championing. Our findings share some similarities with results obtained by Gong et al. (2013). Specifically, our research also showed that idea implementation is significantly positively related to both the maximum and average of idea generation behaviors in teams. This means that both the general level of idea generation activity and the level of idea generation activity by the most active individual relate to team innovation. However, we go beyond these authors' findings and show that these causal paths are mediated through idea championing, and we obtain a more holistic portrayal of the idea journey within innovative teams (cf., Chen et al., 2013) along with both bottom-up and team-level processes that occur within them.

Third, we contribute to the existing research on idea journey and micro-innovation by explicitly tracking specific individuals across the idea journey stages. One of the key questions in the debate regarding the emergence of innovation subprocesses from the individual level to result in team innovation, and a potential to integrate creativity and team innovation literatures, is whether the same individuals can play the roles of "idea creators" and "idea champions". Our experimental study featured a methodological novelty based on sociometric design that enabled us to do so, and explicitly test whether individuals, who are the strongest idea generators in teams, are also the most frequently ones who are the strongest in championing them. Researchers interested in emergence processes in teams may find it useful to not only track the minimum, maximum, etc. values of focal constructs across teams but to also examine who exactly this minima and maxima adhere to. This could be useful in exploring other compilational emergence processes in organizations (cf. Chen, Mathieu, & Bliese, 2004; Kozlowski et al., 2013), and in particular those that unfold over multiple phases, where it is important to track individuals' behaviors across those stages.

Finally, we have shown that the setup of the idea journey (i.e., the idea management approach an organization adopts) matters for emergence and its outcomes, contributing to the literature on context and settings favorable for fostering innovation (cf. Fay et al., 2015; Schippers et al., 2015). In fact, structuring idea journey process seems to lead to better innovation outcomes, and this was shown to be particularly useful in the absence of highly creative individuals and those who would be particularly powerful in championing ideas in teams. Adding to studies that show the importance of structuring the creative and innovative processes (e.g., Frankenberger, Weiblen, Csik, & Gassmann, 2013; Leach, Stride, & Wood, 2006), we established a causal link between using a standardized idea generation, selection, and promotion setup and obtaining the best innovation results. Complementing previous research on the impact of a structured idea-evaluation setting on group creativity (Harvey & Kou, 2013; Kim & Zhong, 2017), our studies indicated that structuring the idea journey process in teams enables teams that initially do not exhibit high levels of average idea generation nor include strong idea generators to ultimately achieve similar innovative output. This strengthens the implication of our previous point that we do not only need to better understand the composition-compilation models, but also, or even more so, the moderators of the emergent processes leading to team innovation (cf. Bowen & Ostroff, 2004).

6.2. Practical implications

Our findings hold important implications for the practice of creativity and innovation management in organizations, and they speak to the need for better structuring of the innovation process to achieve optimal results of innovation in teams. Since many innovation management initiatives in organizations fail (Baer & Frese, 2003), it is of crucial importance to understand what mechanisms managers can adopt to enhance the likelihood of success. It is important to note that creative ideas are useless unless they provide a tangible value for organizations in the form of implemented innovations (Baer, 2012). The process of translating creative ideas into team innovations works best when teams include individuals who are very strong in idea generation and idea championing. Therefore, managers should first be informed about the importance of idea championing. When composing teams they should think of including individuals who are not only good in idea generation but can also promote their and others' ideas, 'sell' them to others, and obtain supporting coalitions for their implementation. In addition to selecting such individuals, organizations could train individuals to be better at idea generation and championing by instructing them in creativity enhancement techniques, creative thinking, and social (influencing) skills needed to promote ideas better.

Managers can also formally assign idea champions in teams, based on their characteristics (i.e., creativity, salesmanship, and influencing). In fact, the implications stemming from our results support the common notion of providing creative individuals high levels of autonomy or taking a laissez-faire approach to the innovation process. Our experimental study suggested that most frequently, the strongest idea generating activity in teams comes from members who also most eagerly champion (their) ideas. In case such individuals are present as team members, as our findings suggest, the empowering laissez-faire approach works, and managers should refrain from trying to setup the idea journey too rigidly.

However, teams may lack individuals who would be exceptional in idea generation and idea championing. Fortunately, subsequent championing and implementation efforts are easier to manage than the initial idea generation phase, and our findings highlighted a complementary approach for handling the idea journey when faced with a lack of idea generation and championing activity among the team members. Organizations can focus more on structuring the innovation process in this case, providing each team member with a possibility to participate in the idea generation, selection, and promotion activities. It needs to be noted that managers should be careful when structuring the innovation process, since evidence shows that hierarchical structures generally hinder creativity (Kim & Zhong, 2017). Hence, a structured idea journey based on a thinking modes enhancement seems to result in superior levels of team innovation output, even when the initial levels of idea generation and championing in teams are lower or more dispersed.

6.3. Limitations and future research directions

Our findings are subject to limitations that can be addressed in future research. One general limitation of this research, but also more generally the research stream on micro-innovation, is that a very complex, recursive process of the idea journey (cf., Alexander & van Knippenberg, 2014; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017) has been considerably simplified to allow empirical elaboration. The threat is that such streamlining approaches lead to oversimplification to the extent where validity is jeopardized. A remedy for future research is to corroborate quantitative approaches with qualitative methods, simulations (agent-based modeling), and intensive longitudinal research designs (e.g., diary studies).

How team members influence each other in generation, elaboration, championing, and especially developing ideas toward implementation under different idea journey setups also remains to be further examined. In our experimental study, we focused on examining the role of idea journey setup (structured vs. unstructured) for idea championing. However, research opportunities exist in examining the role of structured versus unstructured setups for other subprocesses of the idea journey.

In addition, future research should delve into the delineation between internal (within-team) and external (to members of other teams) idea championing. Even though idea championing usually starts at the most proximal higher-level social entity (e.g., a team), promoting idea to other members of an organization might be even more important for radical innovation spanning and its implementation beyond the scope of a single team. Adopting a social network perspective, as we have done here, could inform us about the roles, dynamics, and structural elements of these processes.

Second, there are also some limitations related to the methodology. The measurement of key concepts, including employee championing, is still under development. A limitation of this study is thus related to using a measure for idea championing that is formally part of the creativity scale (George & Zhou, 2001), though it in fact relates to championing not generative behavior (Montag et al., 2012). Therefore, future research should continue refining measurement instruments for concepts along the idea journey.

Third, limitations also stem from the context in which the studies were executed. While providing an interesting juxtaposition to existing research, our studies are regionally focused on a specific part of EU. Cultural differences at the individual level stemming from national culture could play a role in influencing the interpersonal processes underlying innovation and ideation behaviors and interpersonal team dynamics (Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, Cerne, & Kadic-Maglajlic, 2019; Bouncken & Winkler, 2010) and warrant additional research.

Data statement

Data of both studies available by contacting any of the authors.

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