

Organizational Creativity as Idea Work: Intertextual Placing and Legitimizing Imaginings in Media Development and Oil Exploration

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 extend practice-based approaches to creativity; we do so by questioning whether creative processes can be captured in linear, singular and reified ideas. We draw on the work of Bakhtin and apply it to longitudinal research in two contrasting cases: scenarios for hydrocarbon prospecting and developing 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), legitimizing imaginings, where ideas of what to do are linked to ideas of what is worth doing and what it might become in the future perfect. We describe how this ongoing constitution and legitimizing takes place in practices of generating, communicating, connecting, evaluating and reshaping ideas, in essence a form of what we will refer to as idea work. Framing organizational creativity as idea work recognizes the processual nature of creativity and the deeply intertextual nature of ideas, including the multiplicity of idea content and the shifting part-whole relationships in creative processes. Idea work also serves to open up the neglected role of co-optative power for exploration.

Key words: organizational creativity, ideas, intertextuality, power, practice-based studies, 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)

Recent creativity research has explicitly focused on collective efforts and mundane work in creativity (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009; Sawyer, 2007; Obstfeld, 2012; Murphy, 2004; Sonenshein, 2014), shifting from traditional foci on individuals (Sternberg and Lubart, 1999), laboratory studies (Paulus et al., 2011) and breakthrough moments in group-settings. Mainstream creativity theory tends to deploy implicit assumptions of linearity and stage separation of creative efforts, an implication of which is that ideas can become seen as reified and singular. The quote from Bakhtin suggests a radically different starting point. From a Bakhtinian perspective, ideas are inherently intertextual, inhering not in persons' private minds but in the public sphere of texts, talk, dialogic encounters, making *all* work on ideas inescapably relational (Tsoukas, 2009). Moreover, ideas have no independent existence in themselves, no stable and inherent qualities that determine their fortune. They are nothing if not worked on because ideas, as Bakhtin articulates, are made with, for and because of others. Hence, organizations that are engaged in creative exploratory emergent projects have to be rich in “dialogic relationships”: it is in and through these that ideas are sustained, engaged and projected into future accomplishments (Pitsis et al 2003).

Practice-based approaches to creativity have increasingly questioned assumptions of mainstream creativity literature (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Hargadon, 2003; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009), including the linearity of creative processes and the detachment of idea generation from evaluation and implementation (Mørk et al., 2012; Garud et al., 2016; Lingo

and O'Mahony, 2010). Harvey and Kou (2013), for example, in a recent study have criticized the idealized model of evaluation as a distinct stage in a process, describing situated evaluations as different modes of group interaction characterized by feedback, joint problematization, and collective decision-making. Likewise, recent research on the creative process stresses feedback that interacts with processes of co-construction of problem spaces and the excavation of ideas that have been left behind (Harrison and Rouse, 2015).

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). Such prior research insufficiently investigates and theorizes how ideas are connected and constituted on an ongoing basis, albeit that some research has shown how idea creators engage in repeated bouts of dialogical extensions and re-synthesis, using contextually available resources (Garud et al., 2014). The notion of the singular breakthrough idea still prevails in creativity research despite more general contributions from practice theory (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011) and the sociology of science (Woolgar, 2004) that suggest otherwise. We will extend these practice-based approaches through a comparative analysis of two cases particularly well suited to understanding the development of composite ideas. Both are engaged in forms of future perfect strategy: using bricolage with what is at hand to create a project that will realize an imagined future. In one case it is a successful TCV series that is projected at *MediaTale* (a pseudonym), an organization that develops and sells ideas for film and media production. In the other case, at *Explorer* (also an alias), it is the imagining of exploration projects for a major oil company, developing prospects about where to drill for oil and gas. The extreme substantive difference between the cases – making television programs or 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 prevalent 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 allegorically to represent existence as dialogic (Holquist, 2002), in which 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). The simultaneity of different voices, dialects, epochs and cultural genres inherent in all of social life informs his worldview (Holland and Lave, 2001: 16). What is important are how elements of such “heteroglossia” (Bakhtin, 1981) become appropriated and orchestrated in specific instances of forming and communicating ideas. Central to Bakhtinian dialogism is not only dialogic interaction but also the connection to a variety of voices and messages entertained as resources over the life course of ideas-in-the-making.

From a Bakhtinian position we first highlight the inherent intertextuality and processual nature of creativity evident in practices of generating, communicating, connecting, evaluating and reshaping ideas: in essence, what we refer to as idea work (Carlsen et al, 2012). We further explain why considering organizational creativity as idea work has important implications for understanding creative processes as work, the multiplicity of idea content and much neglected role of power in creativity before discussing two cases in which, when people worked on focal ideas, they typically did so through ongoing efforts of connecting to ideas of others, some distant in time and context, others more proximal, in an imagining of the future project. 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, people in both organizations typically discussed *ideas* in their plural. It could be an

idea of a character for a TV-series addressing a contemporary social issue. It might be a new set of geological data held up against current and previous prospects for reinterpreting a geological basin. The ongoing intertextual placing and legitimation of imaginings evident in our cases was not confined to particular stages of creative efforts. We then draw some conclusions from the data that are designed to reorient the field of creativity research with a Bakhtinian direction. We begin by exploring theorizing with respect to creativity.

Theorizing creativity – extending practice-approaches with dialogism

Practice-based perspectives, typically concerned with what people do in their everyday work (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011; Rennstam and Ashcraft, 2013), have limited impact in creativity research (Kurtzberg and Amabile, 2001; Sawyer, 2007; Hargadon, 2008; Harvey, 2014). Some researchers have explored collective creativity in collaborative work in which group collaboration has been a major focus in (Gilson and Shalley, 2004), investigated, for example, by means of interaction analysis (Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009; Murphy, 2005). The work of Hargadon and colleagues (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Hargadon and Bechky, 2006; Hargadon and Douglas, 2001) provides a central set of practice-based contributions. Other important recent examples are available, several of which we shall discuss later (Sonenshein, 2014; Seidel and O'Mahony, 2014; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010; Harvey and Kou, 2013; Mork et al., 2012; Harrison and Rouse, 2015).

In the past there have been major reviews of the field. One particularly comprehensive review by George (2007) called for more breakthroughs and (ironically) more creative approaches to creativity that would consider the job-specific and “very complex nature of creativity in organizations” (George, 2007: 468). More recently, Anderson et al. (2014: 1318) pointed to “the relative lack of theoretical advances across the creativity and innovation literatures in the past decade.” Multi-level approaches and process research, they argue, are

needed to create more radical theory-building contributions. Building on these major reviews we extend practice-based approaches to creativity research in at least two ways – a turn to work on ideas as ongoing processes and to their dialogical multiplicity.

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). Along with such conceptions come inherent assumptions of linearity and phase separation, suggesting that creativity unfolds in one-way sequences of distinctly different practices for idea generation, prioritization and implementation. There are many antecedents to such stage models in creativity research (Zhou and Shalley, 2008), including approaches that rely on the differentiation between variation, selection and retention in evolutionary theory (Simonton, 2004). Baer's (2012) work is illustrative, suggesting 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, creative ideas, when compared with more mundane ideas, may be more difficult to accept. Baer is not alone in operating with such assumptions in current research (see for example Litchfield and Gilson, 2013; Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2013; Paulus et al., 2011). The conception is paralleled by the use of stage-gate models of innovation (Cooper, 2001) and is also evident in a recent theoretical article on organizational creativity by Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017). Here, the notion of an idea journey is conceived as being composed of four distinct phases, proceeding in a linear fashion from idea generation to elaboration, championing and implementation, while allowing for some recursive loops. The article argues, for example, that creativity in the field of academic publishing involves “idea championing” when

submitting papers to journals and responding to feedback, while “implementation” follows as the subsequent writing of the full paper (Perry-Smith and Mannucci, 2017: 57).

Several recent practice-based studies have indirectly or directly questioned more linear models of creativity. Discursive studies, for example, have contested the proposition that ideas become successful due to their inherent qualities, instead emphasizing 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 is the process of evaluation. Rather than evaluation being merely a point of prioritization or selection of something more or less finished, Harvey and Kou (2013), in their analysis of work in four U.S. healthcare policy groups, found that evaluations are core practices in collective creativity that both precede and follow idea generation. Similarly, the practice of prototyping is typically conceived as having dual functions of assessment and stimulation of ideation (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Ford, 2009). Study of feedback interactions in two creative projects of modern dance and product design by Harrison and Rouse (2015) strike a similar chord. Feedback involved intensive two-way interactions and co-creation.

These studies acknowledge the interplay between evaluation/assessment and idea generation/imagination as well as the recursive nature of the creative process. More radically, we suggest these studies lead one to question the very conception of ideas as reified objects that transition from one stage to another. When ideas travel, spatially and temporally, they are engaged in a constant process of translation (Czarniawska and Sevón, 2005). As Bakhtin acknowledges, ideas, like knowledge, identity or existence itself, can neither be understood apart from the “never-repeatable” and “once-occurrent eventness of [their] Being” (Bakhtin,

1993: 2). Nor can ideas be grasped as detached from the voices, positions and biographies of their creators (Bakhtin, 1984). There is no such thing as a separate idea. The dialogic relationships that give life to ideas need to be explored as constitutive events. A research agenda that explores organizational creativity from a strong process theory perspective (Langley et al., 2013), that gives primacy to process as prior, viewing *all* work on ideas as potentially constitutive (Garud et al., 2016), is required.

From singularity to dialogical multiplicity

Pursuing practice approaches to creativity means being able to describe creative processes in context in terms of the “dynamic interactions among individuals and their work setting that effect the development and utilization of creative solutions” (Ford, 2009: 318). Creativity rarely occurs as isolated practices by individuals or small groups but is more often part of complex creative projects involving several units and shifting subgroups though time (Obstfeld, 2012; Drazin et al., 1999). Peoples’ work on ideas are *entwined* (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) in relational totalities – larger creative endeavors that cannot be known through surveys or experimental studies.

One early example of research on creativity that heeds entwinement is the historical analysis of Gruber (Gruber and Wallace, 2001) on the work of Darwin, showing how the various subtasks and projects of Darwin fit into a larger systemic and evolving whole; the “network of enterprises” that he was engaged in as a project to both retrospectively and prospectively legitimate evolutionary ideas. Similarly, 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 also heeding the historical roles of actors in their larger pursuits.

The dual attention to context and activity is central in approaches to collaborative creativity that emphasize socio-cultural aspects (Sawyer, 2006; Sawyer and DeZutter, 2009; Murphy, 2005) particularly in educational creativity research (e.g. Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008). Here, heeding Bakhtin's heritage nuances understanding of both ideas and context. A Bakhtinian approach, with its key idea of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 1991), means abandoning ideas as singular ; rather, one should consider the appropriation and constitution of a variety of contextual resources, voices and inputs forming part of what he refers to as the "eventness" of being. Such a performative view of context as contextualizing is still underdeveloped in research on organizational creativity (Garud et al., 2014).

Several of the practice-based studies referred to tend to stress some duality of parts-whole relationships, where ideas co-evolve with "problem space" (Harrison and Rouse, 2015), "problem framework" (Harvey and Khou, 2013) or "project boundaries" (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010). Harvey explicitly distinguishes creative synthesis as "a new way of understanding what an idea is" (Harvey 2014: 330), one that evolves in tandem with exemplars that exemplify it. We seek to build on and extend these conceptions of parts-whole dialectics by heeding the dialogical multiplicity of ideas-in-the-making. Doing so, we attend to dialogue not just as micro-processes of interacting in co-creation but also to wider dialogic relationships constituted with previous and contemporary efforts.

Summarizing our position thus far, we extend practice-based research on organizational creativity by more fully recognizing the ongoing and constitutive nature of creative work, questioning language that represents ideas as entities, in order to explore the dialogic constitution of ideas from a multiplicity of contextual resources. We present and analyse two cases that are particularly well suited for such an endeavour.

Research context and method

We undertake comparative analysis of projects in two organizations to illustrate and substantiate how a practice-based approach to organizational creativity may challenge assumptions of linearity and singularity. The data is assembled from larger studies conducted by the first and second author. The data collection was modelled on Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) and Staudenmayer et al. (2002) and was based on stratified purposive sampling (Patton, 2002: 240). We emphasized information richness (two organizations whose value creation is fully centred on work on complex ideas) and provided maximal variation (in terms of type of work, project life cycle and temporality of imagination, see below) to enhance the basis for constant comparison (Glaser and Strauss, 2009: 28-52). The choice of two focal projects represents within-case purposive sampling (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 29), in which the interplay with larger wholes – whether film genres or regional geology – was evident. Additionally, we had repeated opportunity field for access and observationsⁱ.

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 the *Explorer* unit take part only in prospect development up to and after drilling, including post mortems of dry wells or business development (clarification of production concept and commercial resource assessments) for discoveries.

The two cases contrast on 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 to become scripted drama series,

documentaries, reality shows, sitcoms or game shows, developing stories that might come into material being in the future. *Explorer*, in contrast, practices a form of systematic science-based work whose creativity may, at first glance, appear surprising. The geoscientists develop ideas about where to drill for oil and gas and seek to convince stakeholders through retrospective imagination of stories about what was – the past formation, migration and trapping of hydrocarbon resources – in order to frame future materialities.

Data collection and analysis

The research at *MediaTale* took place as an ethnographic study with about one year of immersion in the field, including 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*, which provides the focus for the project sampled from that site. The research at *Explorer* took place as part of an ongoing action research effort over eight years, focused here on one project, called *Snow crest*, a project that ended in a major oil discovery. The second author made 15 site visits, including co-facilitation of six post-discovery workshops on concept clarification. Table 1 below details the data that we draw from. In both of the case organizations, the research was longitudinal, combining ethnographic observations with interviewing.

The strength of our data derives from long-time immersion by the first and second author in each site, with repeated access to key persons involved across the entire project cycle as well as in decisions concerning competing prospects. Also, we have been engaged in a variety of facilitated sensemaking effortsⁱⁱ in which we earned the trust of practitioners by contributing to reflections on practice, in itself an important sign of understanding “how things work” in the field (Watson, 2011; Collins, 2001). We had limited opportunity to tape all conversations in the field, or videotape interactions, thus we have limited amounts of

transcripts with raw data from micro-interactions. What we do have are “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of the processes involved in each case.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Following Alvesson and Sandberg (2013: 145-146), we have pursued an overall analytical strategy of grounding our theorizing through using two contrasting cases – see Table 1 for details – as devices for critical dialogue and inspiration. We emphasize features counter to established views and provide interpretations that challenge assumptions common to mainstream creativity theory. The analysis of data is based mainly on between-case constant comparison (Suddaby, 2006; Charmaz, 2006), with frequent iterations between theory and data. Early discussions involved sharing interpretations and data from the two sites, both in terms of excerpts from interviews and observations (through field notes) as well as a process of constant rounds of revision by synthesizing data into descriptions of dialogues, practices and project trajectories. Joint analysis took place through a series of phone conversations, face-to-face meetings and sharing of new syntheses where we started building emerging theoretical lines of sight (Locke et al., 2008) as we compared practice across the two empirical settings.

Comparison across these sites was initiated as informal sharing of ongoing and independent studies by the first two authors who were struck by the multi-layered 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 other authors became a sounding board for initial ideas before becoming fully fledged co-authors engaged in making sense of these two cases using the ideas emergent from our collaboration. The term “idea work” was conceived in this first session and since then picked up and

subsequently used as an umbrella term for all creative practice with practitioners in several action research projects. In this paper, we turn to Bakhtin as a key theoretical resource to makes sense of our data, interrogating assumptions of linearity and singularity (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013). What we observed in the field, as we shall show later, was an ongoing weaving of interrelated ideas whose relationships are never finalized, where evaluative efforts may mean entering into a joint imagining reconnecting elements in a larger field, rather than externally assessing something as singular and settled.

In the final write up, we used two sets of analytical strategies common to process research (Langley, 1999): first, *narratives of projects and episodes*: We aimed to maintain processual sensitivity to longer-run project evolution and produce coherent accounts synthesized from interviews and other data to show a sequence of events across time. The composite story of the *Snow crest* project also played an important role in data collection since it was used as an iterative mediating device for the dialogue with two key interviewees to produce a jointly told tale (Rhodes, 2000), of particular importance in a type of work saturated with specialized language. Second, we used *visual mapping* of the intertextual placing of 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).

Empirical findings and analysis

We first present two narratives that capture the development trajectory of our two project cases – the documentary 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, each lasting 40 minutes, the audience encounters the community through 12 of its inhabitants, portraying their work, practices and aspirations: What kind of place is *Island* today? What is it like to live there?

As a contemporary media tale, *Islanders* was developed as a follow-up idea to a series called *Old People*, an award winning and record-setting production that combined elements of reality and documentary genres. *Old People* followed a group of charming younger elderly people engaged in a major common undertaking, behaving in ways that had many viewers re-think 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 instance, turned down an offer to produce *Big Brother* for the domestic market. When the first 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 and was surprised to experience the community as very different from prevailing clichés: Could this be the location and thematic for another myth-busting contemporary story?

The idea was first pitched in an email 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. The aim was to entertain while also “extending people’s horizon about the world we live in”, as expressed by Roald. 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 email).

Along with an industry-wide discussion of genre renewals, Henry and Roald worked out a synopsis for a twelve-part series of 15 minutes each and presented it to the national broadcaster. The full production of *Old People* was now underway, having all the signs of success. In its wake, the pre-project for *Islanders* was financed and an intense two and a half-month period of project development undertaken. 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 supplemented with a written summary of why this person was chosen. A full project proposal was handed to executive directors of the national broadcaster after a decisive pitch session, with an emphasis on the richness of stories and characters. Many references were made to *Old People*, both in terms of the overall genre and the characters. The serial was green-lighted by the broadcaster in mid-November 2002, with production starting 14 months later. Like *Old People*, it 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*, through its regional office of 300 staff in a small and remote town of 30,000 persons, had taken part in over 95% of the wells drilled in the basin. Less than a handful of exploitable discoveries had been made, none of them 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, when 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 temporary licenses to explore areas). The prospect did not survive internal ranking. Two other prospects were chosen for development, prospects that at the time were considered far more attractive. These prospects turned out to be massive disappointments, yielding only non-commercial amounts of low-saturation gas when drilled, adding to a long string of dry wells. Furthermore, based on seismic surveys (all 2D), the *Snow crest* prospect 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 3D survey covering the area, the team approached 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 3D seismic data were bought and interpretation commenced, with several companies in parallel trying to make sense from them.

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 3D data with previous analysis made in the area. A decision to reprioritize the prospect as number one was made and the acreage was 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. A discovery of equal size was made 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.

Organizational creativity as idea work – two forms

Using the two cases, we now substantiate an understanding of organizational creativity as an ongoing stream of practices whereby ideas are generated, pitched, connected, contested, reshaped, re-synthesized and tested again: *idea work*. Ideas are not singular, discrete entities that are implemented and modified in processes subsequent to and separated from their generation. Rather, in idea work, ideas are constituted on an ongoing basis as part of a moving field of ideas in which they emerge as inter-subjective realities. Two sets of dynamics of creativity as idea work are evidenced, both foreshadowed in the project stories.

First, both prospect ideas are evolving heteroglossic compositions in which the 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 seismic data and character casting profiles), references to previous prospects (such as *Old People* and prior discoveries or dry wells) as well as ideas of wholes (media genres and geological models) and the stories of its makers. The dynamics of *intertextual placing* are evident, explicitly or implicitly constituting the focal idea by reference to other elements in a larger idea field. The resulting imaginings are intertextually linked or re-synthesized from new parts-whole relationships.

Second, a process of ongoing *legitimizing imaginings* was involved, where ideas of what to do are connected to ideas of what is worth doing and becoming, seen in terms of both internal aspirations to do something meaningful as well as external expectations of value. Legitimizing 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.

The two cases also provide contrasts. While *Islanders* was made by analogical extension of a previously successful TV-series, helped to success by the identity of its well-reputed creators, *Snow crest* was born in strife, threatened by association with past failures and diminishing trust in the office developing the project. Table 2 provides an overview of how the two dynamics relate to the assumptions of creativity research that we critique.

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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 thus for forming social power (Briggs and Bauman, 1992: 148).

Five types of placing: Figure 1 provides a model of the constitution of ideas in the larger idea fields through five types of intertextual placing. This is exemplified and compared in Table 2. Both a location through 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 models) are evident. For example (all quotes from field notes), when presenting 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” (model placing) that “followed real people through time in non-staged interactions, just like *Old People*” (model placing through an extension of a new genre and proximal placing through analogue).

Also depicted in Figure 1 is the placing against a set of intersecting wholes of evolving identities (identity placing), traditions of production (production placing) and larger (societal or geological) stories being (re) told (frame placing), all elements of 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. These were the organizer of a local Tango club and a hunter who worked as a day trader when not checking his traps. The characters became important resources for shared imagining, much as was interpretation of new data at *Snow crest*. The potential to connect with a larger story (frame placing) pushes imagining beyond established clichés. Likewise, 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.

Using the same production crew would be important in ensuring the quality of live recordings in real time and non-controllable settings (production placing).

INSERT FIGURE 1 AND TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Constituting ideas through re-placing: Each change in the field of ideas portrayed in Figure 1 may invoke changes elsewhere, something particularly evident in the *Snow crest* prospect. When the prospect first emerged for consideration, it was associated with small pockets of gas, marked by single “flat spots”, an indicator of a hydrocarbon reservoir. As voiced by a senior explorer:

“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 Wolf-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 [geologists inside and outside Explorer] equated that [the single flat spots] with small pockets of gas.”

The quote suggests a stable schematic coupling between the data of *Snow crest* and what was likely to be non-commercial amounts of hydrocarbons and thus 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 promising associations:

“In the *exact* same round we discover Avir and then we discover Vera [two competing prospects]. Dome structures, a lot of salt, we see pretty clear DHIs. It is flat, we see a flat spot that runs all the way through. We pull up the data for Packman [a massive proven gas field in a nearby basin], and it looks just like Avir ... giant anomalies ... I was dead sure that Avir would be a discovery.”

When Avir and Vera turned out to be massive disappointments, containing only low saturation gas – “I was shocked, we simply could not believe it” – at first this reflected badly upon the *Snow crest* prospect, which again was turned down. Two events then changed the interpretation of the prospect. First, the introduction of new data from 3D seismic analysis

(that *Explorer* 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 in 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 reconstructed: 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. Reconstruction was also brought to bear on the broader geology (frame placing). As emerged in a flurry of media articles following the *Snow crest* discovery, the event 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 in the domestic media market and elsewhere through a simultaneous process of renewal of a larger whole.

Intertextual immanence and parts-whole relationships: In our two chosen cases, intertextuality is immanent in idea expression, reflecting a variety of borrowings from a multiplicity of genres and voices that can be invoked in a particular utterance, ideas evolving as heteroglossic compositions (Bakhtin, 1981: 293). For example, the *Snow crest* project, is defined by the double flat spots and the repeated labelling “rotated mid to early Jura fault blocks” (in interviews and media entries), referring 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) as well as a history of how such reservoirs may have evolved in the Wolff-basin.

The weaving and reweaving of the dialogic relationship through which focal ideas are constituted involves a never-ending dialogue between parts and their wholes. At *Explorer*, the wholes are play models or broader geological interpretations, ranging from regional development patterns to theories of tectonic shifts. At *Media-Tale*, this feature of intertextuality is played out when discussions of pitches are compared 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?” In a session discussing a well-known square in the middle of a Scandinavian capital where the horrors of drug trafficking and its fatal human consequences are lived in the open, the discussion progressed by bringing up alternative story frames 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.

The dynamics of intertextual placing 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 termed “Midwifery”. The meeting is set up by the partners of the firm who take turns in preparing a written memo of 1-2 pages that accompanies a presentation of a particular idea for a media tale. The idea then becomes the focal point for several rounds of enrichment through comments, extensions and suggestions where the other partners connect their prior experiences and insights to the idea in question. In this way, Midwifery is an arena for support, creative elaboration and critical assessment as 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, in the sense that there are repeated sessions where ideas of hydrocarbon prospects are given focal attention by a diverse group of specialists who provide criticism and support. The idea work at *Explorer* differs from *MediaTale* in the sense that it stretches out more in time and space (as with the repeated rounds of considering the *Snow crest* prospect) and often crosses organizational and geographical borders (three groups in different locations were involved in the last stage of 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, revivifying and re-synthesizing old data (such as the double flat-spots analysis) through combinations with more recent data (such as the new 3D data) as well as new geological understandings.

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 a narrative and relational and that may also involve a co-optative and positive use of power (Follett, 1925/2013). People at *MediaTale* sought to enrol stakeholders into conjuring future media tales, trying to have them imagine both key plotlines and the societal stories that media tales resonate with, engaging in “future perfect strategy” (Pitsis et al. 2003). People at *Explorer* enrolled stakeholders into imagining past sequences of processes that led to formation and trapping of hydrocarbons, including development of regional geology, in order to try and model analogous conditions for explorations that would be “future perfect”. 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, as explaining value. Legitimizing

imaginings is an interwoven element of almost any session of work on ideas, a constitutive communicative process (Ashcraft et al., 2009) where ideas are talked into being.

Imagining ideas in multidirectional conversations: MediaTale was founded to fulfil the personal ambitions of successful media savvy actors who wanted to make a an ethically positive difference. Imaginings need to be seen as having moral legitimacy. In the words of one partner: “We are genuinely preoccupied with the making of stories that reach a wide audience and at the same time may change the world a little bit”. The ambition that is kept vivid and alive in all major projects is expressed particularly clearly in a project ambition that followed *Islanders*:

“This will be our best idea ever. We will go into a local community that is in an obvious process of dying in a few years time and make a documentary over three years (...) There are quite a few people who have accidentally ended up in a situation where their house is worth nothing and they have to move and their entire social network and all that which we take for granted will soon disappear – and they haven’t done *shit* to deserve that and nobody cares other than a few reportages that are quite superficial.”

Voicing such ambitions functions not merely as antecedent to action. Legitimizing imaginings 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?); in effort deployed 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 people were involved in developing and maintaining belief in shared imaginings of what could be, building positive power by creating “temporarily stabilized outcomes” of a projective nature (Callon and Law, 1982: 622) through a network of interests.

The multidirectional nature of the conversation, which Bakhtin (1981: 276-280) discusses as the multiple addressivity of utterances, is also clear at 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* (from field notes): note that all turns in the conversation reported verbatim below 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.

Legitimizing imaginings of focal ideas forms an important part of their development and, again, takes place by connecting these ideas to a larger field, including the desired identity of its creators, as also seen in the *Snow crest* project. In that case not only was the prospect at stake but also the future of the regional exploration office. In a small town, alternative employment as an explorer is very scarce. Not acquiring the 3D 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!'"

"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."

Other senior executives at *Explorer* corroborated this impression, both before and after the discovery. It was a close call for a regional office in a frontier basin regarded by many as an attractive place to work because of its virginal territory and geo-science novelty, despite risk of failure. The unusually low turnover of highly competent personnel co-existed with a history of repeated dry wells, a context that weighed on the evaluation of the *Snow crest* project's repeated peer review sessions since 1989. 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 felt they needed to overcompensate for the past erosion of trust: "If you can answer

at once, you remove that insecurity, you are not outmanoeuvred, you don't appear to have left something out."

Making imaginings believed-in as co-optative power: Not only is the power to persuade important but also the potential power to co-create in the future. Imaginings need to be shared and believed-in for the project to move forward. One of the long-timers at the regional office consistently alluded to claims of having "seen" the reservoir that was discovered, many years ago, as a "post discovery" claim. For him, it was nothing new. Commenting upon this claim, one of the other protagonists refers to the new 3D data and the visual image of the double flat spot as not just the icing on the cake but the constitutive core, dryly stating that:

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 endeavour, 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 intertwine 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, picked up again, gaining momentum, getting lost and so on, 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, inviting them into interpretation, not just “showing 100 glossy power points”. Such invitation 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 communicated better about the whole area where the prospect resided as “one out of 14-15 prospects there, (...) it’s simply so rare that you have such richness, we should have voiced that stronger.” Likewise, when asked what was the best presentation of a drilling prospect that he could recall having witnessed, a former top manager at *Explorer* underlines the importance of putting “the whole play into context before you talk about the prospect”, exemplifying:

[he provided] what data he needed to define the play further and what the major risk elements were going to be; what the reward could be from a size standpoint; and then even further on the business side, who is the competition and what blocks could be open (...) he was able to start from the broadest of pictures and bring it down to individual prospects, and at each step along the way explain how that fit relative to our exploration portfolio.

Evident in these quotes is the importance of demonstrating an overview of the larger field of ideas, visiting many of its parts and inviting participants more fully into the constitutive process. The power to engage in imagination is in no small way derived from an ability to master the intertextuality of ideas.

Discussion and implications

Extending a practice-based approach through the notion of dialogism (Bakhtin 1991; 1984) we have problematized assumptions of linearity, reification and singularity in mainstream creativity research and used empirical material from two contrasting cases to qualify two sets of dynamics of creativity as idea work. We have argued and shown 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, building potential future perfect strategies. *Legitimizing imaginings* of creativity 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 there is to organizational creativity, but they do 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. Analytically, we invite recognition and comparative investigation of a broader set of activities and organizational settings as objects for creativity research (Kazanjian and Drazin, 2012; Hargadon, 2008). Three sets of deepening of this overall contribution follow, each with distinct implications.

Recognizing the inherent intertextuality of creativity

A first set of major implication of this study is a push towards more explicit attention to intertextuality in creativity. We have provided a more nuanced vocabulary for the multiplicity of idea content and extend previous research on parts-whole dialectics of creativity. Intertextuality is implicitly recognized in theories of knowledge brokerage (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997; Hargadon, 2003; Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010) and has also been used to explain entrepreneurial competence (O'Connor, 2002; Cunliffe and Coupland, 2012), as well as to legitimate research contributions (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997). The latter approach parallels our findings in the sense that 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, genres and contextual resources. In this sense, and returning once more to

the topic of evaluation, our research suggests that ideas are not evaluated as singular and stand-alone objects or platonic ideals but gain their meaning and value through their socially constructed relationships to other elements in a larger field. Evaluations can be points at which ideas get richly intertextual. What is evaluated, are both the very act of contextualizing and the resulting polyphonic composition.

Intertextuality opens up exploration of the parts-whole dialectics in creativity. Ideas of new music may, for example, be constituted through intertextual references to exemplars of songs and genres, emerging from a shared sense of a desired sound, an aesthetic whole (Lingo and O'Mahony, 2010: 66). 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., 2016). Future research should aim to better grasp the collaborative co-emergence of focal ideas and the various wholes they are connected to. In doing so, there is a need to abandon the idea of the singular idea. Ideas of oil discoveries emerged against a contested regional geology and in a struggling local office; ideas of a TV-series emerged 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.

Our analysis supports the theoretical work of Harvey (2014) in terms of explicit attention to exemplars *and* creative synthesis. Both our prospects interplay between exemplars, including proximal analogues, and *genres*, a parallel conception to creative synthesis. The 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, to the identity of their creators and to the larger story frames to which they contribute and from which they take

shape. While not exhaustive, the five types of intertextual placing identified in this study suggest a broadening of how we understand wholes in parts-whole dialectics in creativity.

In general terms, we need to understand better how ideas gain meaning in a field (Taylor, 1985: 22), 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 (Cornelissen, 2006; Tsoukas, 2009), in building bridges across contexts. Doing this goes beyond studying dialogical exchanges in immediate joint activity (e.g. Tsoukas, 2009) and how it is resourced at the micro level (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008: 189). Aligned with a Bakhtinian (1981) perspective, our research here suggests a push to see how ideas may escape “the dungeons of a single context” (Bakhtin, 1981: 274) and are constituted through the “intercontextuality” connecting ideas in more distant contexts (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2008: 181).

Studying creativity as ongoing processes of idea work

The second major contribution of the study is to add to the analytical vocabulary for understanding and studying organizational creativity from a strong process view. The processual is wedded to the intertextual. The dialogic relationships that make up composite ideas undergo constant revision and re-constitution throughout the duration of the creative projects. To see what this implies, let us return to the activity of evaluation as particularly salient for understanding collective creativity. Like recent practice-based studies, we find that ideas are not merely evaluated (Harvey and Kou, 2013) or given one-way feedback in a passage point after idea elaboration (Harrison and Rouse, 2015). Occasions for evaluations and feedback on ideas, whether informal settings like 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 where the collective nature of creativity is visible and recognized and where cues of collaborative potentials (Elsbach and Kramer, 2003: 298) may be as important as assessment of the value of ideas as a singular finished entity.

Our cases support the notion of situated evaluations being embedded in several modes of interactions (Harvey and Kou 2013), such as the continued sequential work on idea elaboration in the two focus prospects, leading up to and away from parallel and iterative processing of a small number of ideas in settings such as midwifery and exploration workshops. Furthermore, 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 supported by the study of Lingo and O'Mahony (2010).

The contributions from Harrison and Rouse (2015) and Harvey and Khou (2013) both focus on events framed a priori as occasions for feedback or evaluation. In our longitudinal cases there were repeated evaluation-salient and feedback-intensive *moments* throughout the duration of the projects, outside of any planned sessions. Such moments occur not as a sharply demarcated activity or even a distinct mode of interaction but appear as a transitory quality of a discussion that is multidirectional and carries elements of idea elaboration, generation and intertextual placing. Evaluative moments may thus take place within a stream of work that needs consideration in its totality and whose dynamics of co-creation is not captured by models with a priori process categories. Part of the agenda for further exploration is to 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 incorporates a strong process view on creativity (Garud et al., 2016) and 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 and Sevón, 2005), in which ideas are reified, to acknowledge the constitutive and translational nature of the practices producing the social reality of ideas (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011). With “idea work” we also move *beyond* translation to a stream of constitutive acts, outside of which ideas have no life of their own. Just as identities exist in and through identity work (Carlsen, 2006), ideas exist in and through idea work.

Unpacking the constitutive character of power relations in creativity

A third major implication is that the ongoing constitution and legitimizing of ideas in idea work invites recognition and exploration of the constitutive character of power in organizational creativity, something missing from current overviews of the field (Zhou and Shalley, 2011; George, 2007; Anderson et al., 2014; Kaufman and Sternberg, 2010; Zhou and Shalley, 2008; Sternberg and Lubart, 1999). The field operates with an apolitical model of the dialectics of ideas, even in the most recent design thinking literature (Dorst, 2015; Kimbell, 2011; Kimbell, 2012). The neglect of power 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* (Follett, 1925/2013). All these forms of power are evident in our cases, and there is need to incorporate better understanding of how different forms of power may interact in organizational creativity. We have seen that being able to assert power in legitimating imaginings may involve mastering the larger field of ideas, including the intertextual replacing evident in the *Snow crest* case. Co-optative power

in creativity thus needs more investigation as a dialogically situated form of building connections across the idea field.

What seems to be at stake here is not merely enrolling people into one's interests but facilitating ways of imagining together. To Follett (1925/2013: 105), a precondition for co-optative power is circular behaviour, in the sense of facilitating interactive influence between levels and boundaries in the organization. Our research underlines that developing joint power, rather than dividing power, implicates a sharing of both particulars and alternative wholes that allow a variety of organization members to zoom in and out together. Building joint power in idea work entails 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). 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.

Finally, returning one final time to the issue of evaluation: Along with the dual function of brokerage identified by Lingo and O'Mahony (2010), our cases also suggest more research into how evaluations take on dual functions of coercive and co-optative power, both in how they are framed and conducted. The examples from Harrison and Rouse (2015) and Harvey and Kou (2013), as well as the famous Pixar brain trusts (Catmull, 2008) speak to events where participants who evaluate efforts enter settings with particular expectations of interaction and reciprocity, less about how these settings came be produced and the tensions between different forms of power in them.

Conclusion

We have extended practice-based approach 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 enlisting people in narrative imagination. The work done to these ideas is ongoing, may take place as moments in a multidirectional conversation, and involve legitimizing singular ideas by connecting them to a variety of resources in a larger field of ideas. Moments and processes of evaluations are amongst the points where the collective nature of this stream of intertextual work is most evident. They are also the points where power shows its constitutive and co-optative role in creativity.

Organizational creativity is best understood as the ongoing constitution of ideas as people learn in and from practice and connect their understandings to the ideas of others in new ways, imaging future perfect strategies involving new materialities, whether of TV shows or drilling expeditions. Creativity entails ongoing collaborative work on ideas, which we refer to as idea work. Idea work is not the same as ideation and 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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ⁱ There is an element of emergent sampling (Patton, 2001: 240) at the project level since we capitalized on unforeseen opportunities for participating in casting at the *Islanders* project and the possibility of doing repeat data collection in *Snow crest*. Exploration projects in particular may be notoriously difficult to research longitudinally because of the very long-time frames and lack of access to interviewees and conversations that allow multiple vantage points to conflicted processes. 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, allowing richness in data beyond any other single project at *Explorer* that resulted in a discovery. As a case, *Snow crest* also carries particular significance because of its conflicted nature and impact. It is widely considered the turning point for an entire province of exploration activity.

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