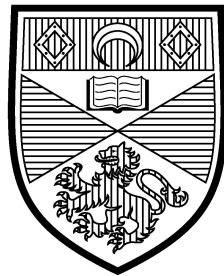


# Organizing Creativity – The Role of Aesthetic Knowledge in Advertising Creative Processes

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at the University of St Andrews.

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## Abstract

This thesis presents the results of research which investigated how creative processes in advertising agencies are organized and the role aesthetic understandings play therein. In-depth accounts describing how creative processes in advertising agencies are organized were not well characterized in the extant literature. This was surprising, given the confusion that existed about whether or not advertising practitioners share similar tastes. Whereas some research suggests highly homogenous taste patterns, other research, reporting about severe conflicts in advertising agencies, suggests that the contrary is true. Consequently, also research on taste-making processes and thus the ways through which tastes and collective action are negotiated was missing. This research aims to address these gaps in the literature by providing an in-depth account of the way specific practices creative processes are organized by analysing how practices and tastes interlink as well as by providing insights into the ways through which taste and collective action are sustained at advertising agencies. To do so, qualitative research at a leading London-based advertising agency was carried out over a period of five months. Two sets of practices by which the advertising creative processes were organized were identified. In addition, four types of tensions between both sets of practices and thus different tastes among advertising practitioners, depending on the practices in which they were immersed, were found. Moreover, ways in which tensions were resolved and thus how different tastes were negotiated were identified. By doing so, this research closes the above gaps in the literature and reveals that at advertising agencies' creative processes and taste-making go hand in hand. Finally, practical insights for managers in the advertising industries, aiming to foster collective engagement, collaboration and conversations, and creative expression in creative advertising processes as well as suggestions for future research are offered.

# Declaration

## Candidate's declarations

I, Christian René Grahle hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 79,400 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. I was admitted as a research student in September 2011 and as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Management Studies in September 2015; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 2011 and 2015. I received assistance in the proofreading of this thesis by Val Turner from Val Turner Virtual Assistance as English is my second language.

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Date	Signature of candidate
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## Supervisor's declaration

I hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Management Studies in the University of St Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### *What the thesis is about*

This thesis presents the results of research which investigated how creative processes in advertising agencies are organized and the role aesthetic understandings play therein. In particular this thesis presents the results of research which analysed the role of creativity understandings, not only influencing ways in which ideas should look but also ways in which things are done at advertising firms (Stuhlfaut, 2011). My initially rather vague interest in the organization of advertising creative processes and the role of creativity understandings as some type of shared aesthetic knowledge, stemmed from research conducted as part of my Master's programme but also my personal background as a designer and entrepreneur in advertising.

### *The research problem and how it was approached*

In the beginning my interest in advertising creative processes and creativity understandings required me to conduct preliminary literature reviews in the field of general creativity, advertising creativity, and organizational aesthetics. The aim of this preliminary literature review was to identify potential research directions in the overlap between all three disciplinary areas for more detailed investigation.

In the course of the literature review, I identified gaps of *three* kinds:

Creativity appeared to be highly context dependent. A limited number of creative process models existed, conceptualizing ways in which creative work comes into existence very differently. This called for highly context dependent accounts in domains, in which creativity is central, such as advertising, in order to find commonalities and regularities between those accounts. In advertising, however, despite highly generic models in educational

textbooks, in-depth accounts of advertising creative processes in which multiple disciplines interact were missing, which led to the *first* gap this research aimed to fill.

The non-existence of advertising creative process models was surprising since among advertising practitioners shared but also strongly divergent aesthetic understandings and thus tastes regarding how to do things and how things should look have been identified. However, clear evidence, which would have helped to either settle the debate, or show why both impressions might somehow paradoxically be true, was missing as well which led to the *second* gap this research aimed to fill.

As will be described later, practicing together is “a matter of taste” and through ‘taste-making’ processes collective action in organizations is sustained (Gherardi, 2009, p.535). Thus, particularly if tastes are different among advertising practitioners, strong confusions, tensions, and even conflict were expected. However, although various accounts exist that discuss tastes among advertising practitioners, the development of shared or different tastes in advertising agencies, and thus the nature of taste-making processes at these organizations, was unexplained which finally led to the *third* gap this research aimed to fill.

The aim of this research was thus to fill the above three gaps:

- First, by providing an in-depth account by which the specific practices advertising creative processes are organized;
- Second, by describing similarities and differences of aesthetic understandings based on the practices identified;
- Third, by identifying the underlying processes through which similarities and differences of aesthetic understandings are negotiated and thus collective action is sustained.

Going further, methodologies suitable to achieving the above research aims were chosen. Research, which identified taste differences among advertising practitioners, insinuates that aesthetic preferences of advertising practitioners might be related to their doings. For this reason, a practice lens to the study of aesthetic understandings in advertising creative processes was taken. As will be described in more detail, the essential idea of practice theory is that “the social” resides in “a mesh of practices and material arrangements” and that social life emerges from such “practice-arrangement bundles” (Schatzki, 2005, p.472-473). To bring forth practices, make them visible, and turn them into epistemic objects (Nicolini, 2009b) and to overcome “aesthetic muteness” (Taylor, 2002) ethnographic research was carried out over a period of five months at a large London-based advertising agency. In addition, members of the advertising agency were interviewed.

*The findings and contributions*

As indicated above, this research provides an in-depth account of ways in which creative processes at advertising agencies are organized. Besides ‘inflexible’ practices, rather ‘dynamic’ activities and thus practices through which advertising practitioners put their strong belief into practices have been found. In addition, four tensions accompanying the ‘dynamic’ practices that were identified through this research will be discussed, pointing out that shared but also distinct tastes co-exist at advertising agencies. Additionally, ways in which the above tensions are resolved at advertising agencies were found. It will be demonstrated that advertising practitioners resolve tensions through doings rather than sayings, and that most taste-making concerns their doings instead of the actual ideas they produce. In this context, it will be discussed that being a creative expert is not only a requirement to judge ideas but also an important criterion to have a say in taste-making processes. It will be explained that the negotiation of collective action in such a seemingly ‘aesthetically loaded’ situation was only possible because of the strong belief in creativity on the one hand and the ‘slavish

complaisance' to the expectations and requirements of alleged creative experts resulting thereof on the other. Most importantly, however, based on the above insights gained, this research will demonstrate that 'dynamic' practices and taste-making go hand in hand, leading to a very new perspective on creative processes. That is, it will be shown that overlapping creative processes are, at the same time, repeated performances of aesthetic negotiations in which ways of doings and how things should look and thus collective actions are reproduced.

Finally, a range of practical contributions will be made, which emerged from the insights revealed. As this research will describe in more detail later, advertising managers will be advised to foster collaboration and conversations to prevent separation and silence; to enable collective engagement to avoid gatekeeper engagement; as well as to foster expression to avoid suppression.

*The remaining thesis is structured as follows, in five chapters:*

In 'Chapter 2: Literature review' a literature review on general creativity, advertising creativity as well as organizational aesthetics will be presented. As shown above, the three areas of research provided the general framework of both the initial exploration but also the study *per se*. In 'Chapter 3: Methodology' the research approach used to achieve the aims of this study will be discussed. This provides further explanations of the general philosophical stance, as well as the specific research approach and procedures used for data analysis. In 'Chapter 4: Findings,' the insights gained through the interpretative research including interviews, will be presented. As has been intimated above, 'inflexible' but also rather 'dynamic' practices have been identified. Alongside these practices, two different kinds of voiced understandings of advertising practitioners have been found. In particular, voiced participant understandings about how such practices constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes as well as about how participation in such practices impacted on themselves and their working lives have been identified. The thesis concludes with 'Chapter

5: Discussion and conclusions.' In this final chapter the theoretical implications of the 'inflexible' and 'dynamic' practices will be discussed. In particular, specific tensions accompanying the 'dynamic' practices will be examined in more detail, pointing out that shared but also highly distinct aesthetic understandings co-existed. Most importantly, however, as will be discussed, the tensions accompanying the 'dynamic' practices demonstrate that overlapping creative processes and taste-making go hand in hand, and that collective action is negotiated regardless of the paradoxical co-existence of shared but also highly distinct aesthetics. Last but not least, practical implications will be discussed following the findings from this research, providing advertising managers with a new perspective on advertising creative processes, bearing in mind the various tensions that exist based on similar but also different aesthetic understandings. This final chapter ends with a summary of the overall contributions as well as some limitations.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

*This chapter is structured as follows, in three parts:*

The chapter begins with a literature review on general creativity. Subsequently, relevant research on advertising creativity will be discussed. Finally, the concept of organizational aesthetics will be explained. The chapter concludes with an integrative conceptualization of the three thematic areas, leading to the specific research questions investigated in this study.

### General creativity

#### **Introduction**

Creativity is generally defined as “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile et al., 1996, p.1115). However, creativity is often described as a complex phenomenon and can be discussed from a number of different perspectives (Runco, 2007). Creativity can, for example, be looked at from different disciplinary angles such as from a behavioural, biological, cognitive, or social point of view (Runco, 2007), and thus by concentrating on the activities of individuals in creative endeavours, their physical conditions and mental processing, as well as interactions with others in creative work (e.g. Jawecki et al., 2011, Vartanian, 2012, DeFelipe, 2011, Hutter et al., 2011). Moreover, it can be discussed in relation to different fields (Runco, 2007) such as business, teaching, academic research, and even urban development and thus in relation to areas in which fostering diverse outcomes is of particular importance (e.g. Atuahene-Gima and Wei, 2011, Burnard, 2012, Alvesson and Gabriel, 2013, Lysgård, 2012). Historically, the discussion of creativity shifted from a ‘genius stage,’ to a ‘creative person stage,’ to a ‘social’ stage, also referred to as the shift from the

‘He-paradigm,’ to the ‘I-paradigm’ and the ‘We-paradigm,’ which takes “more holistic and systemic ways” when describing creativity (Glăveanu, 2010, p.6).

Given the focus of the present study on the organization of creative processes, in which multiple individuals interact, it is appropriate to highlight the social nature of creative work. Explaining the social nature of creativity requires the description of the broader context from which creativity emerges. Thus, to explain creativity in general and (later) to describe creativity in advertising, Rhodes’ (1961) ‘four Ps’, dissecting the creativity construct into the realms of person, processes, product and press,<sup>1</sup> are used. The framework is the most frequently applied conceptual schema in creativity research (e.g. Richter et al., 2012, Bissola and Imperatori, 2011, O’Quin and Besemer, 2006, Burroughs et al., 2011), since it “helped researchers to ‘locate’ their efforts and make links between the different categories,” as well as “to structure literature reviews” and “pieces of empirical research” (Glăveanu, 2013, p.69). It should be noted, however, that the ‘four Ps’ are used as a loose guide only, since the boundaries of each of the ‘four Ps’ are blurred (Rhodes, 1961). Rhodes’ (1961) framework thus provides a useful and widely recognized method for organizing literature insights, without being overly constraining or exclusive.

The discussion of general creativity tries to explain creativity on the individual and group level. Where possible, connections to the relevant literature at an organizational level are drawn to contextualize the later literature review on creativity in advertising particularly. For organizations creativity is enormously important to innovate and remain competitive in the market (Anderson et al., 2014). As Gupta (2011, p.429) points out, “organisational creativity is an important element of organisational innovation” and “creativity is considered to be a function of the creativity of the individual, groups and contextual factors.”

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<sup>1</sup> Rhodes (1961, p.306) uses the term press to describe the environmental factors, which either have a “constructive or destructive,” psychological impact on creativity.

However, as Joo et al. (2013, p.391) note, “research on creativity in management and psychology has exponentially increased for the last three decades.” Thus, as Simonton (1999, p.322) explains, “the number of rival theories of creativity is quite large, even overwhelming.” Consequently, given the focus of this study, four key perspectives on creativity that span these levels are described here. First, creativity from a person-perspective will be explained. Second, several process models leading to creativity will be discussed. Third, creativity from a product-perspective will be described. Finally, literature on contextual factors either fostering or inhibiting creative action will be presented.

### **Explaining creativity from a person-perspective**

Research dealing with individual differences represents the largest proportion of creativity research, and in the past researchers identified a range of personality traits creative individuals would share (e.g. Barron and Harrington, 1981).

One of the most prominent studies cited in the creative personality literature is the research of Gough (1979) who identifies several factors which impact positively and negatively on creativity. Creative individuals were identified as being capable, clever, confident, egoistical, humorous, individualistic, informal, insightful, intelligent, interests wide, inventive, original, reflective, resourceful, self-confident, sexy, snobbish, unconventional, whereas non-creative individuals were identified as being affected, cautious, commonplace, conservative, conventional, dissatisfied, honest, interests narrow, mannerly, sincere, submissive, and suspicious. Creative individuals thus seem to be more idiosyncratic, independent, and open minded than non-creative individuals. Comparable findings have been reported in organizational settings. Oldham and Cummings (1996), for example, used Gough’s (1979) creative personality scale and found similar relationships in business contexts. Equally prominent is the personality description system of Feist (1998). Feist (1998, p.290) found creative people to be “more open to new experiences, less conventional and less

conscientious, more self-confident, self-accepting, driven, ambitious, dominant, hostile, and impulsive.” Moreover, Feist (1998) suggests, that these features remain fairly consistent over time and affect the social, cognitive, motivational and affective characteristics of creative individuals.

On the lookout for further nuances in the personality traits of creative individuals, recent research generally supports these findings (e.g. Furnham et al., 2009, Furnham and Nederstrom, 2010, Nusbaum and Silvia, 2011, Fink and Woschnjak, 2011). In addition, concentrating on “‘dark-side’ measures of personality” (Furnham and Nederstrom, 2010, p.958), Silvia et al. (2011) found creatives to be more dishonest and arrogant than others. Gino and Ariely (2012) and Gino and Wiltermuth’s (2014) research on the ‘evil genius,’ as they term it, supports these findings. However, also somewhat deviating results are reported. Rios et al.’s (2014) research, for example, suggests that it is not self-confidence but self-uncertainty, which truly enhances creativity. Furthermore, Goncalo et al. (2010, p.484) note that “narcissists are not necessarily more creative than others but they think they are, and they are adept at persuading others to agree with them” and thus explain why these differences may exist. In addition to traits, links between creativity and various other factors, that is, values, self-concepts, identities, and psychological states have been found to be ‘typical’ for creative individuals – with equally ambivalent results (Anderson et al., 2014). Despite these differences all research on individual differences has in common that it regards creative individuals as somewhat different to their non-creative counterparts.

As revealed above, researchers are interested in individual differences since it is assumed that certain personal characteristics affect the social, cognitive, motivational, as well as affective conditions of individuals (Feist, 1998), and thus “the factors essential for the production of [creative work]” (Amabile, 1996, p.83). The most prominent model describing these factors is the componential model of creativity by Amabile (1996), which is based on

earlier work by Amabile (1983). To be creative, individuals have been found to require domain- and creativity-relevant skills as well as task motivation (Amabile, 1996). Domain-relevant skills describe “the individual’s complete set of response possibilities from which the new response is to be synthesized, and information against which the new response is to be judged” and includes factual knowledge and technical skills as well as domain relevant talents (Amabile, 1996, p.85). Creativity-relevant skills refer to the degree to which an individual’s “product or response will surpass previous products or responses in the domain,” and include a specific cognitive style and knowledge of heuristics for developing creative ideas as well as a particular work style (Amabile, 1996, pp.87-88). Task motivation, finally, describes “the individual’s baseline attitude towards the task [...], and the individual’s perceptions of his reasons for undertaking the task in a given instance” (Amabile, 1996, p.91). In Amabile’s (1996) model all three components and thus the creative behaviour of individuals are affected by the social environment in which the individual is immersed. Particularly, task motivation is influenced by the context in which an individual is operating, as will be explained later.

Similar to Amabile (1996), also Ford (1996) conceptualizes individual creativity as a function of motivation and certain sets of knowledge. However, different to Amabile (1996), Ford (1996) explains why individuals engage in creative performances *per se*. In particular, he explains why some individuals discover problems that would have remained hidden for others or try out new approaches to solve problems although already well established and seemingly appropriate solutions exist. As Ford (1996, p.1120) notes, “unusual interpretations facilitate creative action, in part because they elicit intentions that can mobilize a person’s motivation and ability toward creative action.” Therefore, Ford (1996) includes ‘sense making’ as an important component in his model. Moreover, he explains the construct of motivation in more detail. The motivation to undertake creative action (as opposed to habitual action) would depend on an individual’s goals, receptivity beliefs and capability beliefs as well as emotions (Ford, 1996). Moreover, he argues that an individual’s receptivity and capability beliefs

would be influenced by the social environment he or she is surrounded by. As Ford (1996, p.1121) points out, “behaviors with positive consequences establish favourable receptivity beliefs” whereas behaviors with “ill consequences, or imagine rejection or punishment” establish unfavourable receptivity beliefs, which persist for some time.

Similar results were identified in organizational contexts. Amabile et al. (2005), for example, propose a model of emotions in creativity, which concentrates on the role of affect in organizational creativity in particular. The authors note “creative activity appears to be an affectively charged event, one in which complex cognitive processes are shaped by, co-occur with, and shape emotional experiences” (Amabile et al., 2005, p.367). Favourable experiences (i.e. positive reactions to ideas) facilitate cognitive variation and nurture unconscious incubation processes. This effect lasts for some time. Adverse affect, however, provokes equally negative emotional reactions.

However, the picture is more complex, as more recent literature demonstrates. Although researchers generally agree on the importance of motivation and different types of knowledge for creative work the precise nature of the relationship between the above factors generally as well as the role of potential moderators and cross-level effects particularly is still under debate. Due to ambivalent results for the relationship between motivation and creativity, for example, the construct was investigated in more detail and the concept of prosocial motivation was introduced. Grant and Berry’s (2011) research, for example, suggests that the motivation to engage in creative activities is strongly influenced by the prosocial motivation of individuals as well as their willingness to take on different perspectives. These and other findings led Forgeard and Mecklenburg (2013) to differentiate between loci of motivation but also between intended beneficiaries of creative work, such as self-orientated versus other-orientated motivation in creative endeavours. Based on this distinction, the authors suggest a reciprocal model of creativity, including several modes in which prosocial motivation comes

into effect, creative outcomes are shaped, as well as the creator's motivation is being fuelled anew. Additionally, the precise nature of the relationship between different types of skills and creativity is still a matter of on-going discussion. Although it is agreed that to be creative individuals need to have at least some creativity- and domain-relevant knowledge, research suggests that high levels of expertise or knowledge specificity may actually hinder the exploration of original ideas. As Hirunyawipada and Paswan (2013, p.2333), for example, point out, "based on their past experiences, specialists may stick to their tried and tested mental models," and thus overlook potentially new ideas. Other research, however, questions the negative influence of tenure, as organizational researchers refer to it. Gino et al. (2010), for example, suggest positive relationships between task experience and creativity, particularly if task experience is 'acquired' directly. Also Ng and Feldman (2013, p.585) found that "age and tenure are not negatively related to innovation-related behaviours." Moreover, Chen et al.'s (2011) research even proposes that high levels of expertise can compensate for low levels of individual initiative. Thus, although researchers generally agree that motivation and certain types of understandings are important to develop creative work, the debate on their exact interplay continues.

As shown earlier in this section, however, in most situations individuals do not generate creative output in isolation but in interaction with each other. This is particularly true for organizations. As Bechtoldt et al. (2010, p.622) point out, "much creative work is done in groups." In these situations, "the locus of creative problem solving" continually shifts from the individual to the interactions of groups (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, p.484).

The most prominent model, describing characteristics important for the development of creative work in groups, is proposed by Woodman et al. (1993); different to characteristics on the individual level, in group contexts, antecedents required to collectively engage in the creative process become increasingly blurry. In particular, as Woodman et al. (1993, p.294)

point out, group creativity is a “complex person-situation interaction.” Woodman et al. (1993, p.296) define group creativity as “a function of individual creative behaviour ‘inputs,’ the interaction of the individuals involved (e.g., group composition), group characteristics (e.g., norms, size, degree of cohesiveness), group processes (e.g., approaches to problem solving)” as well as several social and contextual factors on an organizational and environmental level that impact on the creative behaviour of groups (the contextual influences will be described in the press section further below). In group contexts thus certain interpersonal dynamics, which either foster or hinder the development of creative work, play an important role. Based on this conceptualization, Woodman et al. (1993) suggest several propositions regarding group characteristics that are required to produce creative work. The authors, for example, assume that group diversity and cohesiveness increase creativity (although for the latter a curvilinear relationship is suggested). Moreover, they suggest that the availability of resources as well as structures and processes that facilitate knowledge exchange have positive links to creativity. However, Woodman et al. (1993) did not test these relationships between group characteristics and creativity.

West and Anderson (1996) argue for similar variables and actually tested their influence. The researchers suggest that creativity of teams is a function of group inputs, such as group composition (heterogeneity, size, group tenure, proportion of innovators, knowledge, skills, and abilities of team members, as well as task complexity), and group processes (clarity of and commitment to objectives, participation, task orientation, support for innovation). Similar to Woodman et al. (1993), West and Anderson (1996) include contextual factors into their model as well, which will be discussed later in the press-section in more detail. Out of these factors, West and Anderson (1996) analysed the impact of group size, team tenure, proportion of creative minds and the four group processes as well as the contextual factors. Group size was found to have no impact on the creative output of groups as such, but on the radicalness of the ideas produced. That is, larger teams produced ideas that were more

impactful than those ideas from smaller teams. Also team tenure was found to have no impact on group creativity. It was only positively linked to one ‘creativity dimension’ the researchers used which was ‘staff well-being.’ The proportion of creative minds on a team, on the other hand, was found to have a positive effect on group creativity. That means the more creative individuals who work on a team, the higher their creative output. And finally, for group processes, only support for innovation, participation, and task orientation were found to lead to more creative output.

Similar to individual level factors, group level factors and their relationship to creativity are also being discussed at great length at the present time. Hülsheger et al. (2009) conducted a meta-analysis to analyse much of the research that has been done in the past years. They found that most research conceptualizes group creativity as a function of team composition, team structure, and team processes. The meta-analysis however, only revealed “substantial and generalizable relationships” between team processes and creativity, in particular for external and internal communication, vision, support for innovation, task orientation, and cohesion (Hülsheger et al., 2009, p.1137). Findings for team composition and team structure suggest only “small and variable relationships” with creativity (Hülsheger et al., 2009, p.1137). The variance in research on group characteristics becomes particularly evident in the discussion of the pros and cons of group diversity. Whereas some research replicates its positive effects on creativity (e.g. Suh et al., 2010, Somech and Drach-Zahavy, 2013, Franke et al., 2014), other research suggests negative effects as well (Bell et al., 2011, Chua, 2013, Öberg, 2013, Harvey, 2013). Some researchers thus investigate whether certain team processes, such as perspective taking (Hoever et al., 2012) and knowledge sharing (Gilson et al., 2013, Huang et al., 2014) or the ratio between knowledge variety and depth (Hirunyawipada and Paswan, 2013) are responsible for mediating the direction of its effects.

So far, besides certain personal traits that appear to differentiate creative individuals from non-creative individuals, the literature review stresses the importance of motivation and certain understandings (i.e. domain and creativity relevant knowledge) for creative activities. In addition, the literature review demonstrates that in group contexts specific processes are necessary to build upon and to integrate the creative inputs of all group members. Finally, thus far the literature review highlights the importance of contextual factors for creative performances, which either enhance or diminish the motivation of individuals and groups, for example, to engage in creative work generally and to share their ideas with others particularly. However, whereas motivation has consistently demonstrated positive relationships with creativity, the relationship between certain understandings and creativity is less clear-cut. In particular, confusion about the optimal depth and breadth of domain and creativity relevant knowledge on individual and group level exists.

Having discussed creativity from a person-perspective, in the following section a process-perspective on creativity is taken.

### **Describing creativity from a process-perspective**

Whereas the person-perspective described certain ‘demographic variables’ necessary to engage in creative work on an individual or group level, processes refer to the cognitive and behavioural activities underlying creative work (Glăveanu, 2013). Thus, in the following section both the “internal, psychological dimension” as well as the “external, behavioural” dimension of creative action will be explained (Glăveanu, 2013, p.73). It should be noted, however, that the state of affairs is more complex and debatable. Therefore, the separation of creative action into internal psychological activities as well as external behavioural action functions as an organizer of the literature only.

The most often used concept to structure creative processes is Wallas’ (1926) four-stage model. For Wallas (1926) the creative process consists of the four sequentially arranged

stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. In this conceptualization, Wallas (1926) differentiates between conscious and unconscious conditions, as will be shown below. In preparation individuals conduct a “systematic, and fruitless analysis of the problem,” as well as consciously set up and define its constituting parts (Wallas, 1926, p.81). Wallas (1926, p.10) also argues that in preparation individuals “consciously accumulate knowledge, divide up by logical rules the field of inquiry, and adopt a definite ‘problem attitude.’” In incubation individuals consciously decide either to work on other problems or to take a break from the problem to be solved. However, no conscious thinking is carried out on the initial problem at hand. Wallas (1926) argues that in incubation, individuals produce many associations or idea combinations unconsciously. However, most of the unconsciously produced associations or idea combinations are later rejected. By referring to the work of Poincaré (1914), Wallas (1926) emphasizes that an individual’s *aesthetic categories* are the basis on which they unconsciously accept or reject promising ideas. The aesthetic categories individuals have function as a ‘sieve,’ filtering associations into promising and non-promising ideas. Illumination occurs when a promising idea raises consciousness – the sudden and unexpected “appearance of the ‘happy idea’” (Wallas, 1926, p.80). Wallas (1926) describes this moment as a ‘fringe-conscious psychological event,’ which is preceded and accompanied by the ‘flash of illumination.’ Finally, in verification the validity of the promising idea is tested and the idea itself is “reduced to exact form” (Wallas, 1926, p.81). Thus, in verification individuals assess, judge, and refine the particular idea that stood out (Wallas, 1926).

In the past, Wallas’ (1926) four-stage model of the creative process served as a framework in multiple research studies (e.g. Horng and Hu, 2008, Hélie and Sun, 2010, Cropley and Cropley, 2012). However, Wallas’ (1926) model has also been criticized by various researchers. The criticism of Guilford (1950), who notes the absence of mental operations in Wallas (1926) model, is most cited here (e.g. Horng and Hu, 2009, Peng et al., 2013, Stierand et al., 2014). This led to the emergence of models concentrating on creative

‘sub-processes’ only (Lubart, 2001). Guilford (1957), for example, explains the generation of ideas as a sequence of convergent and divergent thinking processes. Although convergent and divergent thinking usually co-occur, in creative activities, and thus in situations where there is no right answer, divergent thinking activities would prevail (Guilford, 1957). Similarly, Mednick (1962) proposes an associative theory of creative thinking, explaining creativity as “the forming of associative elements into new combinations which either meet specified requirements or are in some way useful,” and “the more mutually remote the elements of the new combination, the more creative the process or solution” (Mednick, 1962, p.221) Interestingly, Mednick (1962) also refers to the work of Poincaré (1914), emphasizing the role of aesthetics in the selection of creative ideas. Finke (1996) explains creativity as a process of generation and exploration of ideas and points out that generational and explorative processes alternate until an appropriate solution has been found. Moreover, he argues that “at any point in the cycle, various constraints can be imposed on the final products” (Finke, 1996, p.386). Simonton (1999, p.309), finally, offers a Darwinian explanation of creative thinking by describing it as “blind variation and selective retention,” following similar mechanisms such as biological evolution. However, Simonton (1999) understands his concept not as rival but inclusive to most other models of creativity (e.g. the theories of Guilford, 1957, Mednick, 1962, Finke, 1996). All models would follow the same Darwinian mechanisms.

Other researchers used Wallas’ (1926) model but amended and/or expanded the stages it was comprised of. Perhaps the most prominent and often cited revision of Wallas’ (1926) scheme is Amabile’s (1996) sequence of response generation model (e.g. Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, Çokpekin and Knudsen, 2012, Gilson et al., 2013), which consists of the four stages problem or task identification, preparation, response generation, and response validation and communication. In problem or task identification the problem to be solved is either identified by individuals or presented to them by others. As revealed above, task motivation is crucial at this stage. In preparation individuals activate task- and domain-

relevant knowledge and skills to generate relevant ideas. This phase can be seen as ‘preparatory,’ since it is in response generation the actual generation of solutions takes place. To identify creative ideas, individuals search through different cognitive pathways available to explore the novelty and relevance of the responses generated. In response validation and communication then individuals articulate their ideas to others and the creative value of the responses is assessed. In the outcome stage, finally, decision-making takes place based on the response validation results. In contrast to Wallas (1926), Amabile (1996), however, ‘delinearized’ the creative process, arguing that individuals would often switch between different developmental modes. Most importantly, however, different to Wallas (1926) Amabile (1996) emphasizes the importance of problem finding in creative work and integrated an *interpersonal aspect* to her model – that is, the communication of one’s idea or product to others.

However, as already mentioned on several occasions, creativity is not solely an individual process. As Hargadon and Bechky (2006, p.484) note, “although some creative solutions can be seen as the products of individual insight, others should be regarded as the products of a momentary collective process.” Consequently, in these performances the individual creative process loses its significance and is transformed into a process where several individuals interact (Mazzola et al., 2011).

Hargadon and Bechky’s (2006) model of collective creativity is one of the most prominent works, which describes creative performances on the group level (e.g. Hennessey and Amabile, 2010, Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010, Mueller and Kamdar, 2011). The researchers suggest that collective creativity is made through four types of interrelating activities: help seeking, help giving, reflective reframing, and reinforcing. The activity of help seeking describes an individual who either identifies or is assigned to a problem and actively seeks the help of others. The activity of help giving on the other hand describes an individual who is

willing to devote time and attention to assist others to solve the problem. The activity of reflective reframing describes the ‘mindful behaviour’ of individuals and the ability to draw upon and reframe their past experience based on the comments and actions of others in order to solve a problem collectively. Thus, the creative process of groups working together is no longer a process of single- but multiple-authorship. Reinforcing, finally, describes activities, which support the activities of help seeking, help giving, and reflective reframing in a direct or indirect manner. Thus, similar to the above authors, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) acknowledge certain conducive or restrictive conditions in which collective creativity takes place.

Harvey and Kou (2013) take a slightly different approach to the creative work of groups by arguing that it is through evaluation that creativity emerges. In their eyes, evaluation thus functions as much more than only a means for decision-making. This becomes evident in the way evaluation is defined: Evaluation would be “a process that guides how groups combine members’ inputs into creative collective products” (Harvey and Kou, 2013, p.372). Going further, the researchers identify four modes of evaluation: brainstorming, sequential interactions and parallel interactions as well as iterative interactions. Whereas brainstorming refers to the generation of ideas “with little if any evaluation, relying on their own interpretation of the problem framework to do so,” sequential interactions describe practices in which “groups elaborated on ideas and built consensus about the problem framework by considering the advantages and disadvantages of each idea” (Harvey and Kou, 2013, pp.356-358). Finally, parallel interactions refer to the “discussion of multiple ideas at the same time” and iterative interaction to performances, in which “groups introduced and discussed one idea, then introduced a new idea without directly comparing it with the previous idea, then returned to the original idea” (Harvey and Kou, 2013, pp.360-361). However, the authors found that group members are engaged in different evaluative modes at different stages of the creative process and thus that different group creative processes exist: a

generation-centred sequence and an evaluation-centred sequence. Whereas the generation-centred sequence would lead to more ideas, the evaluation-centred sequence would generate solutions that are more creative.

Later, Harvey (2014, p.324) expanded her ideas by suggesting a model of “extraordinary group creativity,” and thus a model of creative performances typical for “outputs that depart significantly from what has been done in the past.” Harvey (2014) argues that continuous breakthrough outputs are only achievable when ideas are synthesized and thus ideas of group members merge. This “creative synthesis,” as Harvey (2014, p.335) terms it, is described as “a process through which a group’s cognitive, social, and environmental resources are combined into creative output.” That is, in creative synthesis cognitive resources (in order to come up with a range of highly creative ideas), social resources (in order to have a range of different stimuli to build upon) as well as environmental resources (in order to foster the autonomy and ambition of group members) are combined into ideas, which function as exemplars of the synthesis. These exemplars “prompt groups to change or refine the synthesis so that synthesis and exemplars co-evolve” (Harvey, 2014, p.325). The process of creative synthesis is facilitated by certain group dynamics, such as collective attention, the enactment of ideas (i.e. the production of physical representations of ideas) and, finally, by building on similarities. Although particularly at the beginning conflicting perspectives would be an inherent part of extraordinary creative processes, it would be through “repeating the process,” consensus would be developed and the “consistent production of breakthrough ideas” facilitated (Harvey, 2014, p.325).

This section thus demonstrates why motivation and certain understandings (i.e. domain and creativity relevant knowledge) are important to engage in creative work. Motivation functions as the fuel of creativity across all stages of creative processes. Domain-relevant knowledge is important to explore and generate associations between elements of a

domain's content. Moreover, creativity-relevant knowledge is important to explore as many associations as possible as well as to predict the creative value. In this context, the literature review highlighted that ideas do not possess an objective creative value. Instead, it is always 'others' who determine their creative quality. In collective creative process models, the social nature of creativity becomes particularly evident. In these contexts, evaluation is central since it is through continuous assessment that creative ideas evolve. However, the literature demonstrates that different modes of collective creative action exist, which result in different creative outcomes. Unsurprisingly, the social nature of creativity also becomes evident in the way creative products are defined, as will be explained in the next section.

Thus, having discussed creativity from a process-perspective, in the following section a product-perspective on creativity is taken.

### **Discussing creativity from a product-perspective**

The above creative process models (except the model of Wallas, 1926) exemplify that creative ideas have to be communicated in order to come into existence. Whereas in Amabile's (1996) model, communication takes place at the end of the creative process, in the other models, communicating ideas to colleagues or group members is an inherent part of the creative process itself. Communicating ideas to others is crucial in creative processes, since it is the judgment of others, which determines an idea's creative quality (Runco, 2007). Since creative ideas are defined as those ideas that are both novel and meaningful (e.g. Amabile et al., 1996, see above) more people have to be involved in defining the novelty and meaningfulness of ideas than the person who invented the idea him- or herself. This is also pointed out by Sternberg (1999, p.84), who notes, "given the importance of purpose, creative contributions must always be defined in some context."

In her consensual definition of creativity, Amabile (1982, p.1001) emphasizes this social aspect of creative accomplishments: "a product or response is creative to the extent that

appropriate observers independently agree it is creative. Appropriate observers are those familiar with the domain in which the product was created or the response articulated. Thus, creativity can be regarded as the quality of products or responses judged to be creative by appropriate observers, and it can also be regarded as the process by which something so judged is produced.” Moreover, Amabile (1982) argues that subjective criteria underlie all social judgments. That is, although there are certainly “particular characteristics of attitude statements of persons or products that observers systematically look to,” ultimately “the choice of those characteristics is a subjective one” (Amabile, 1982, p.1001). The consensual definition of creativity is based on four assumptions (Amabile, 1996): First, observable responses to creative products are the hallmark of creativity. It is impossible to define *a priori* which objective features of a product will be considered creative. Second, although hard to verbalize, people are able to recognize and agree upon creative aspects of a product. Third, there is “one basic quality of products that observers are responding to when they call something ‘creative,’” no matter in which domain they are situated (Amabile, 1996, p.34). Finally, observers are able to recognize and agree upon different levels of creativity.

The inherently social aspect of creativity is particularly evident in the systems view of creativity of Csikszentmihalyi (1999), which is based on earlier work developed by Csikszentmihalyi (1988). Although other systems theories of creativity exist (see Saunders, 2012), Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) scheme is the most cited framework in the creativity literature and has been applied to various fields, such as film-making, haute cuisine, advertising, and others (e.g. Vanden Bergh and Stuhlfaut, 2006, Redvall, 2012, Stierand et al., 2014). Similar to Amabile (1996), Csikszentmihalyi (1999) argues that “creativity is not the product of single individuals, but of social systems making judgments about individuals’ products” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p.314). In particular, he points out that the appropriateness as a constitutive element of creativity requires people to assess whether the response generated is meaningful or not. As Csikszentmihalyi (1999, p.314) states, “if

creativity is to retain a useful meaning, it must refer to a process that results in an idea or product that is recognized and adopted by others. Originality, freshness or perceptions, divergent-thinking ability are all well and good in their own right, as desirable personal traits. But without some form of public recognition they do not constitute creativity. In fact, one might argue that such traits are not even necessary for creative accomplishment.” Csikszentmihalyi’s (1999) systems model consists of three elements: the domain, the individual, and the field. The domain is necessary for the development of creative ideas as it is impossible to introduce new variations without reference to existing patterns or objects. The individual is generating the creative outcome, based on his domain-specific knowledge. For creativity to produce ‘novel variations of the domain’s content,’ the individual needs to recognise the patterns and objects of the domain in question. The field finally determines the inclusion of a potentially creative contribution into the domain in question, that is, it decides over the acceptance or rejection of a potentially creative contribution as well as its long-term importance. Fields vary in terms of composition and (hierarchical) structure, but also in terms of their openness and the rules they apply (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999).

Nevertheless, as the differentiation between group creativity and extraordinary group creativity above intimates (Harvey, 2014, Harvey and Kou, 2013), different classifications of creative outputs do exist. Generally, creative contributions can come in many different shapes: They can either exist as products or processes as well as “material” or “ideal/conceptual outcomes,” as Glăveanu (2010, p.157) explains.

Mumford and Gustafson (1988), for example, distinguish between major and minor contributions. Whereas major contributions describe outputs “used in solving a variety of problems,” the use of minor contributions would be “still significant” but more limited (Mumford and Gustafson, 1988, p.28). Similarly, Gilson and Madjar (2011) and Madjar et al. (2011) differentiate between radical and incremental creative ideas. Whereas radical creativity

refers to contributions that “differ substantially from existing practices and alternatives,” incremental creativity describes contributions “that imply changes in frameworks and approaches and modifications to the existing practices and products” (Nord and Trucker, 1987, as cited in Gilson and Madjar, 2011, p.22). Kaufman and Beghetto (2009), finally, argue that two types of creativity are not sufficient enough. Thus, besides ‘little-c’ and ‘Big-C,’ their conceptualization also includes ‘mini-c’ (“creativity inherent in the learning process”) as well as ‘Pro-C’ (“the developmental and effortful progression beyond little-c that represent professional level expertise in any creative area”) (Kaufman and Beghetto, 2009, p.1).

However, several taxonomies drawing a more differentiated picture exist as well. Sternberg (1999, p.88), for example, distinguishes between “contributions that accept current paradigms and attempt to extend them” as well as “contributions that reject current paradigms and attempt to replace them.” Moreover, Unsworth (2001) takes aspects of the creative process itself into account and integrates types of problems (open or closed) as well as drivers (external or internal) that underlie creative work. This leads to four different types of creativity: expected creativity (open problem type, external driver for engagement), proactive creativity (open problem type, internal driver for engagement), contributory creativity (closed problem type and internal driver for engagement) as well as responsive creativity (closed problem type, external driver for engagement). Finally, Suh et al. (2010) differentiate between process- and outcome-based creativity. Whereas outcome-based creativity refers to “the degree of development of new knowledge as an outcome of a project” process-based creativity is described as “the degree of [...] development of new knowledge” in a project (Suh et al., 2010, p.212-213).

However, the ‘requirement of recognition’ (Runco, 2007) and the impact of social judgments on the creativity of an idea or product (“a product or response is creative to the extent that appropriate observers independently agree it is creative,” Amabile, 1982, p.1001)

is linked to several problems (Runco, 2007). It is unclear what ‘appropriate observers’ exactly means and thus what the ‘field’ is comprised of. Most researchers argue that experts are the most appropriate observers of creative work (Kaufman and Baer, 2012), such as creative directors, account manager, and clients in advertising production (Vanden Bergh and Stuhlfaut, 2006), “film teachers, critics, journal editors and commissioners” in film-making (Redvall, 2012, p.62), as well as “testers from the leading restaurant guides” in haute cuisine (Stierand et al., 2014, p.15). Non-experts would lack the expertise required to assess creative ideas and only judge an idea’s ‘appeal’ and studies, which found differences in creativity ratings of non-experts, quasi-experts, and experts are quoted to demonstrate the inappropriateness of lay judges (Kaufman and Baer, 2012).

The criteria experts apply in order to assess the creativity of an idea or product, however, are as subjective as the criteria of any other judge (Runco, 2007). Chong’s (2013) research, for example, has shown that although book critics state that they use strategies to ‘objectivize’ their judgments, in practice the application of objective criteria can be questioned. Thus, particularly when the field is relatively small or applies highly formal decision-making processes, the criteria they apply have to be challenged (Runco, 2007). In addition, experts often disagree in the evaluation of creativity, and given the subjectivity of their assessment, it is problematic to favour one judgment over another (Runco, 2007). Most importantly, however, it has been found that experts often have a unique perspective on the creative quality of an idea or product and tend to be quite inflexible in thinking (Runco, 2007). In other words, their judgment can simply be wrong. As De Sousa (2008, pp.61-62) points out, “even if we manage to define a set of field experts and a perfect scale, for the assessment of creativity of a certain product, we know that the experts may be, themselves, a barrier to the acknowledgement of true creativity, either because they are not able to understand the importance of the creation, or just because of their holding on to power.”

Thus, the above literature review demonstrates that also in the various definitions of creative ideas the social nature of creativity is evident. Without ‘others’ making judgments about ideas, creativity would not exist. ‘Others,’ namely, appropriate judges such as expert panels define whether an idea is a minor or major contribution, incremental or radical, and so on; that is, they define the degree to which ideas are creative. The judgments of ‘others’, however, are as subjective as the judgments of the creators, which can pose certain problems, for example, when the group of judges is relatively small or evaluations are biased, and in the past there have been various cases where social judgments were simply wrong (Runco, 2007). Given the social nature of creativity and the importance of ‘others’ to bring creativity to existence it is thus not surprising that creativity is highly dependent upon contextual factors, which can either be supportive or unsupportive for emergence of creativity, as the following section will describe.

Specifically, having discussed creativity from a product-perspective, in the final section a press-perspective to creativity will be applied.

### **Examining creativity from a press-perspective**

As has been shown during the introduction of the ‘four Ps’ (Rhodes, 1961), all creative work is developed in a context. As Joo et al. (2013, p.400) point out “although it is undeniable that creativity stems from individual ability, whether or not individual creativity is activated, exercised, and channelled into the final products or services is a function of [...] contextual characteristics.” Shalley et al. (2004, p.935) define contextual factors as “dimensions of the work environment that potentially influence an employee’s creativity but that are not part of the individual.” As described above, Rhodes (1961) understood these environmental factors as a form of psychological ‘press,’ which is “either constructive or destructive to creativity.” And in the past several researchers investigated which contextual factors foster but also hinder creative performances (Shalley et al., 2004).

On an individual level, as indicated above, Woodman et al. (1993, p.312), for example, propose that “creative performance will be increased by group norms that support open sharing of information” as well as “organizational cultures that support risk-taking behaviors” but “decreased by group norms that create high conformity expectations” as well as “reward systems that rigorously evaluate creative accomplishment and link these outcomes tightly to extrinsic rewards.” On the group level, Woodman et al. (1993, p.313) further theorize that “group creative performance will be increased by group diversity,” as well as “highly participative structures and cultures,” but “decreased by the use of autocratic styles of leadership.” Moreover, they suggest that “group creative performance” has “a curvilinear relationship to group cohesiveness” (Woodman et al., 1993, p.313). Finally, on an organizational level, the research proposes that “organizational creative performance will be increased by the availability of slack resources,” as well as the employment of organic organizational designs, but “decreased by restrictions on information flows and communications channels within the system” as well as “restrictions on information exchanges with the environment” (Woodman et al., 1993, p.314).

Based on Woodman et al.’s (1993) early work, a range of studies investigate the relationship between contextual factors and creativity on the individual, group and organizational level in more detail. As described above, West and Anderson (1996), for example, carried out similar research. Despite group inputs and group processes, the authors suggest several contextual factors that would impact on the groups’ creative outputs, such as climate for innovation, support for teamwork, resources and the organization’s size. For their study, however, they only tested the impact on organizational resources and size. Both factors were found to be negative but insignificant predictors of creative outcomes.

As part of her componential theory of creativity introduced previously, Amabile (1996) conducted an in-depth literature review to organize the various studies investigating

the various impacts of social and environmental influence, such as the relationship between creativity and evaluation, reward and task constraints, social facilitations, modelling, and motivational orientation as well as competition. Overall, the studies reviewed by Amabile (1996) reported rather ambivalent instead of consistent results for the different factors. For evaluation, for example, Amabile (1996, p.152) concludes that the influence somewhat depends on “certain individual-difference traits, on initial interest in the activity, and on initial skill level.” “Work-focused and constructive” feedback was, for example, found to have positive impacts on creativity (Amabile, 1996, p.152). For rewards most studies reported negative effects. However, positive influences were reported for situations in which intrinsic motivation was “kept salient” and extrinsic motivation “less salient” and in which “rewards signify competence or enable performance of interesting new activities” instead of “signifying external control of behaviour” (Amabile, 1996, p.177). Similarly, for motivational orientation Amabile (1996) concludes that focussing on intrinsic motives may impact positively on creativity whereas concentrating on extrinsic motives prior to conducting creative work may have mixed effects. For competition, Amabile (1996, p.240) found that “win-lose competition between peers has a negative effect on creativity. However, this effect may depend on some individual-difference variables such as gender or gender roles. Moreover, competition with outside groups may have a positive effect on the creativity of work teams.” Other influences were reported to be more consistent: For task constraints, consistently negatively effects on creativity were found. Similar effects have been reported on creative endeavours in group settings. For social facilitations, Amabile (1996) concludes that being identifiable as an ‘author’ of creative ideas leads to more creative ideas whereas creating ideas anonymously leads to ideas of higher creative quality. Further, for modelling, positive influences on the creative behaviour were reported. Based on these findings, Amabile (1996) suggests a range of contextual factors supporting autonomy, competence, and task involvement, either directly or indirectly supporting the intrinsic motivation of creative individuals.

Based on these insights tools have been developed to measure creative environments of organizations, such as Amabile et al.'s (1996) tool for assessing the climate for creativity, KEYS, consisting of the five conceptual categories encouragement of creativity, autonomy or freedom, resources and pressures as well as organizational impediments to creativity, which either relate positively to creativity (stimulant scales) or negatively (obstacle scales) or West and Anderson's (1998) Team Climate Inventory, TCI, consisting of the four conceptual categories vision, participative safety, task orientation and support for innovation. In addition researchers suggest specific ways to lead creative people. Mumford et al. (2002), for example, suggest that leaders need to have expertise and creative abilities themselves, to help and shape creative problems, exercise influence, and evaluate ideas; specific leadership styles, to enhance creativity through, for example, transformational and charismatic management approach as well as planning, sense-making, and social skills to set up common goals and, particularly at later, more complex stages of idea development, to help achieve them. In addition, leaders need to possess influence tactics to overcome what the researchers term the "apparently contradictory demands" of creative organizations to reduce "stress and ambiguity" on the one hand and to maximize "challenge and risk taking" on the other (Mumford et al., 2002, p.719, also see Mueller et al., 2012). This includes tactics to lead people but also to lead the work. Leading people involves stimulating and involving individuals, supporting them and advocating for their ideas, providing sufficient resources and autonomy, as well as rewarding them to endorse their self-esteem (Mumford et al., 2002). Leading work involves selecting challenging projects, directing work, providing appropriate recognition, and protecting creative individuals from rather mundane tasks and non-creative colleagues, whilst ensuring diversity by exposing individuals "to a range of projects, people, and ideas" through accessible and flexible structures, which extends beyond material shared by peers or the wider professional network (Mumford et al., 2002, p.728).

Ten years after Amabile's (1996) analysis, Shalley et al. (2004) conducted an in-depth literature review again to see where researchers agree and where they disagree. Overall, the researchers found seven factors that constitute creative environments in organizations: job complexity; relationship with supervisors; relationship with and co-workers; time deadlines and production goals; rewards; evaluation as well as the spatial configuration of work places. The literature reviewed by the authors suggests that researchers seem to agree on the direction of some effects, whereas other effects are still under debate. Research generally agrees on a positive relationship between job complexity and creativity, due to its positive influence on the motivation of individuals. Moreover, research agrees on the influence of supervisors on creativity. Supporting leadership was consistently found to enhance creativity, whereas controlling leadership was found to stifle creativity. Additionally, for evaluation and spatial settings consensus exists. Anticipated judgmental evaluation is generally agreed to diminish creativity, whereas developmental evaluation is agreed to increase creativity. Further, research agrees that individuals perform higher in physical settings with physical boundaries and some distance between individuals. Other research areas are less clear-cut. Nurturing and supportive co-workers were mainly found to foster and unsupportive, competitive co-workers to stifle creativity. However, deviating effects are also reported. Additionally, time deadlines and production goals were mainly found to hinder creativity, fostering the pressure amongst individuals and thus harming their motivation. However, also in this case contradictory findings exist. Profound disagreements seem to persist on the role of rewards, supporting the findings of Amabile (1996) discussed above. Although it is undisputed that rewards play a role, the direction and magnitude of their influence is still under debate.

Recent research generally supports the importance of the above factors; however, confusion about their interplay with creativity somehow seems to persist. This does not affect those relationships that have been found to be relatively stable, such as the link between job complexity and creativity (e.g. Coelho and Augusto, 2010) but, rather, those for which mixed

effects have been found. Byron and Khazanchi's (2012) meta-analysis, for example, suggests that the different effects for rewards resulted from different contexts in which the link between rewards and creativity has been tested. Controlling for context, the researchers found that "creativity-contingent rewards tend to increase creative performance – and are more positively related to creative performance when individuals are given more positive, contingent, and task-focused performance feedback and are provided more choice (and are less controlled). In contrast, performance-contingent or completion-contingent rewards tend to have a slight negative effect on creative performance" (Byron and Khazanchi, 2012, p.809). For time pressure, a curvilinear relationship with creativity is suggested, which is moderated by openness to experience and support for creativity (Baer and Oldham, 2006). Similar to Byron and Khazanchi (2012), Dolmans et al. (2014) argue that early, deviating research would not pay attention to the dynamic nature of resource positions. For goal constraints, Hirunyawipada and Paswan (2013) found a positive effect on the usefulness of ideas but only little effect on their originality. In particular, they found that goal constraints supports bringing together "the diverse expertise of the team toward a more useful idea" (Hirunyawipada and Paswan, 2013, p.2332). For competition, Baer et al. (2010) found different effects, depending on membership change of groups and the level of competition. Whereas competition amongst open groups only impacts positively on creativity with low or high levels of competition, posing risks for later project development stages, intergroup competition for closed groups demonstrates clear benefits with intermediate levels of competition. However, for closed groups controlling for competition would be important. As Baer et al. (2010, p.841) note, "creating a fiercely competitive environment offers few added benefits (and perhaps even costs)," such as a significant decrease in collaboration, as the results demonstrated. And more recent research suggests that this relationship is somehow mediated by the team members' genders (Baer et al., 2014). Finally, for supportive co-workers, Hüsleger et al. (2009) only found limited support. In their meta-analysis,

introduced above, they only found a “weak, non-generalizable positive correlation” between participatory safety and creativity (Hülsheger et al., 2009, p.1137).

The above literature review on environmental factors thus demonstrates that certain environmental contexts can either foster or hinder creativity. Most of the above factors influence creativity by impacting on the motivation of individuals. Others, and particularly those impacting on creative groups, influence creative action by affecting specific interpersonal dynamics required to generate ideas collectively. In addition, the literature review highlights that contextual environmental influences vary in their magnitude. Besides the most obvious environmental factors, such as the wider organizational and environmental context, leadership styles and co-worker behaviours have considerable influence on the creative work of individuals and groups. Nevertheless, other factors, such as feedback, rewards, and competition, as well as certain group norms, task constraints, the availability of resources, and even spatial settings have been found to impact on creativity. However, as has been emphasized, due to the complex nature of creativity, many relationships remain unexplained.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, the above sub-chapter reviewing the general creativity literature highlights the complex nature of creativity. Although researchers generally agree about certain ‘ingredients’ necessary to generate creative ideas, such as specific types of understanding, motivation, certain cognitive and behavioural processes, as well as environmental conditions, the exact character of their relationship with creativity is still largely unexplained.

As pointed out earlier, for example, motivation is important to carry out creative work (e.g. Ford, 1996). However, in team contexts different types of motivation exist, which lead to different creative outcomes (e.g. Forgeard and Mecklenburg, 2013). Whereas other-oriented motivation had a positive relationship with creativity, self-orientated motivations

demonstrated opposite effects. Going further, it has been highlighted that certain types of knowledge are important to generate creative ideas (e.g. Amabile, 1996). At the same time, however, research suggests that their usefulness is limited. That is, ‘too much’ knowledge would hinder the development of highly creative output (e.g. Hirunyawipada and Paswan, 2013).

Moreover, creative individuals are generally described as highly idiosyncratic and almost conceited individuals (e.g. Silvia et al., 2011). Yet, collective creative process models suggest a highly romanticized picture of ways creative ideas are generated in groups. Group dynamics, such as perspective taking (e.g. Hoever et al., 2012), run contrary to many of the characteristics described by researchers interested in personality differences.

Creative process models also demonstrate the importance of aesthetic categories in idea development (e.g. Wallas, 1926). Particularly, ultimately, aesthetics matter, since it is not the creator but others who evaluate the creative quality of ideas (e.g. Amabile, 1982). Nevertheless, problems have been raised with the ‘requirement of recognition’ (Runco, 2007) such as political games critics play, further questioning the romanticized picture of creative processes (e.g. De Sousa, 2008).

It appears that creative development takes place in a highly complex context and this wider context in which individuals are operating decides the specific direction and magnitude of certain effects. That is, certain ingredients in one context lead to different effects than in others. This is evident in the increasing amount of research which tries to capture and analyze the almost infinite interplays of variables that exist on the individual, group, and organizational level. Most importantly, however, the context-dependence of creativity is evident in the various creative process models that have been described above.

Research not only suggests different creative process models on the individual and group level but also for different types of creative outcomes, which challenges the notion of a universally valid way of creative development (e.g. Wallas, 1926, Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, Harvey, 2014). Instead, it calls for highly context specific research on creative processes, which accounts for the very different conditions in which creative endeavours take place. It seems that only through comparing these in-depth accounts commonalities and regularities that are valid across multiple creative occupations can be identified. In particular, it begs the question how creativity is organized in an occupation where it constitutes its reason to be – that is, in organizations where creative ideas are the main offering.

In advertising, creativity *is* key to the success of advertisements. As Verbeke et al. (2008, p.127) explain, “creativity is at the core of an agency’s capability; in fact, [it is] the main reason why clients source creative services from ad agencies.” However, as the following literature review will demonstrate, in-depth accounts describing ways in which creativity is organized at advertising agencies do not yet exist.

This leads to the *first* research direction of this study:

To provide an in-depth account of the specific practices advertising by which creative processes are organized.

For this reason, in the subsequent sub-chapter, literature on creativity in advertising will be described in detail.

## Advertising creativity

### **Introduction**

As markets are full of interchangeable products and brands, distribution is not an important competitive factor, and price changes are quickly matched by competitors (Frazer, 1983). For these reasons, for most marketers advertising remains as the most easily manipulated marketing element (Frazer, 1983). Advertising campaigns are set up in order to gain different objectives, for example, inform, persuade, or remind consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). Particularly in a highly competitive marketplace, persuasive advertising becomes important to change or reinforce the consumers' mind-set about a product, comprising brand awareness, brand associations, brand attitude, attachment (or loyalty), and activity (Keller and Lehmann, 2003). This includes thoughts feelings, experiences, images, perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards a brand (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010).

Overall, "the main aim of every advertising campaign is differentiation" (Moeran, 2009, p.965), and this is where creativity comes into play: In order to gain the desired effects, advertising needs to be arresting for consumers and hold their attention in appealing ways (Pieters et al., 2010). Marketers can either break through the advertising clutter by outspending their competitors (e.g. running more and larger advertisements than their competitors) or "outsmarting" their competitors by running highly creative advertisements (Pieters et al., 2002) and "generating greater impact 'for the same buck'" (Modig et al., 2014, p.138). Both academics and advertising practitioners regard creativity as the key element of advertising success, as it increases the "stopping power of advertising" and thus marketplace sales (Pieters et al., 2010, p.48). As Yang and Smith (2009, p.935) argue, "creative advertisements stand out in ad clutter and therefore receive more intentional resources from potential consumers."

Moreover, despite increasing the amount of attention devoted to it the positive impact of advertising creativity (on information storage) was found to further impact consumer processing (Pieters et al., 2002). In academic research advertising creativity has constantly been proven to enhance recall, liking and comprehension and thus impact on the key cognitive, affective and behavioural stages of the consumer response (e.g. Ang and Low, 2000, Stone et al., 2000, Till and Baack, 2005, Baack et al., 2008, Dahlén et al., 2008, Sheinin et al., 2011). Possible reasons for the effectiveness of advertising creativity were offered by Yang and Smith (2009), who found that creativity in advertisements triggers increased open-mindedness, lowers the scepticism of consumers to process advertisements, and facilitates the transfer of emotions to more favourable intentions. Smith et al. (2008) investigated the impact of advertising creativity on the multiple levels of the hierarchy-of-effects model (see Lavidge and Steiner, 1961) and reported similar results. Their research suggests that consumer-perceived creativity positively impacts on all levels, such as brand awareness, message learning and acceptance, and brand liking, leading to positive brand intentions.

In addition, these effects persist over time. Lehnert et al. (2013, p.211) analysed the “wearin” and “wearout” of advertising creativity effects, and found that the effects of creative advertisements are not only stronger than the effects of non-creative advertisements, but also arise quicker and last longer. By looking at the unintentional effects of advertising creativity, Modig et al. (2014, p.137) even found that consumers associate creative advertisements with “higher-than-average” expenses and efforts which impacts positively on brand attitudes, brand interest and word-of-mouth, whereas non-creative advertisements with “lower-than-average perceived expense” displayed opposite effects. And Rosengren et al.’s (2013) research suggests, creative advertisements enhance the contexts in which they appear, for example, specific media channels and foster the consumers’ own creativity, suggesting that advertising creativity not only benefits advertisers but media owners and consumers as well.

Advertising creativity researchers generally agree what constitutes creativity in advertising, which is the development of advertising ideas that are both original but also appropriate to the target audience at hand (Kilgour and Koslow, 2009, Sheinin et al., 2011). By focusing on the creative process, Burnett (1968) as cited in El-Murad and West (2004, p.190), for example, describes advertising creativity as “the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable, and in good taste, but which somehow presents the product in a fresh new light.” Thus there are dual purposes in advertising creativity, in the need to ensure that “imagination must operate within a goal-directed and problem-solving context” (Reid et al., 1998, p.3). Kim et al. (2010) term this as involving an ‘outside-the-box’ and an ‘inside-the-box’ thinking process. Definitions of creativity in advertising are thus not very different to definition of creativity in general. However, whereas in advertising, the originality component is undisputed, the type of appropriateness component to be included (if any) is still under debate. Consequently, in the sections below a more differentiated view on creativity is presented.

Similar to the above discussion of creativity in general, the following section of advertising creativity will stick to the ‘four Ps’ (Rhodes, 1961) as well. Also, in advertising creativity, Rhodes’ (1961) ‘four Ps’ is commonly used (as, for example, explained in El-Murad and West, 2004) to “locate” their efforts” and “to structure literature reviews” (Glăveanu, 2013, p.69). However, it should be emphasized, again, that in the following sub-chapter the categories comprising Rhodes’ (1961) ‘four Ps’ (i.e. person, process, product, and press) are blurred and thus function as loose organizers of the literature only.

### **Exploring advertising creativity from a person-perspective**

Despite some exceptions, “most attempts by large corporate marketers to produce their own in-house campaigns have been notable creative failures” (Sasser and Koslow, 2008, p.13). As Sasser and Koslow (2008, p.13) point out, “a barrier between marketing

organizations and advertising agencies is that client marketer organizational environments intentionally inhibit the kinds of creative processes necessary to produce successful advertising. Organizationally embedded expertise stifles creativity since such patterns involve set routines.” And thus, “advertising campaigns are usually conceptualized and realized by advertising agencies working on behalf of corporate clients” (Moeran, 2009, p.965). In contrast to marketing clients, advertising practitioners would try to deliberately interrupt “habit patterns” and instead to improvise and experiment. As Grabher (2002, p.252) notes, “resistance to [the temptation to become locked in to routines of past success] is critical in an industry, in which reputation of the creative personnel is rather built on a degree of unpredictability than on idiosyncratic trademarks, or even less, particular (aesthetic) house styles.”

Advertising agencies can be differentiated in terms of their size (e.g. large- vs. small-sized agencies), their degree of specialization (e.g. full-service vs. specialist agencies), their corporate structure (e.g. network vs. independent agencies), as well as their understanding of how advertising works (e.g. service vs. creative agencies) (e.g. Michell, 1984, Morrison and Haley, 2006, Horsky, 2006, McLeod et al., 2011, Sasser et al., 2013). Whereas categories such as agency size, degree of specialization and corporate structure are self-explanatory, the category ‘understanding of how advertising works’ requires further explanation: Based on their different understanding of how advertising works, agencies share different understandings “about how to produce the creative product, including how the product should look” (Stuhlfaut, 2011, p.284). As McLeod et al. (2011, p.118) explain, “service-led agencies are associated with ‘low risk’ creative work, since they prioritize processes that deliver effective, efficient client service. In contrast, creatively led agencies seek to produce strong creative work with award-winning potential. ‘Creatives’ in these agencies tend to have more room to experiment and produce ‘riskier’ work than their service-led counterparts.” In addition, most advertising agencies follow different theories “about how ads affect viewers”

and thus “philosophies that, in turn, offer guidance for creating ads” (Verbeke et al., 2008, p.122). This, for example, includes emotional or rational approaches to advertising as well as blends of the two (West and Ford, 2001). Whereas rational philosophies include advertising based on “‘argument,’ ‘problem-solution,’ ‘pre-emptive,’ the ‘USP,’ and ‘positioning,’” emotional philosophies include advertising based on “more impulsive, irrational and sensual models of buyer behaviour” (West and Ford, 2001). Thus, although rather obstructive to creativity “particular (aesthetic) house styles” (Grabher, 2002, p.252) in advertising agencies (see above) do exist, too (Stuhlfaut, 2011). These will be explained at the end of sub-chapter in more detail.

Whatever the niche occupied by particular advertising agencies, creative processes are organized through teams consisting of creative and non-creative advertising practitioners who develop advertising campaigns collaboratively (Ewing et al., 2000). ‘Creatives’ are generally comprised of teams of copywriters and art directors (c.f. McLeod et al., 2011), whereas non-creative disciplines refer to TV, radio, and print producers (‘creative services’), account managers, account planners/researchers, as well as media planners/buyers (Lange, 2001, Nixon, 2003). Together, they build the ‘account team,’ which is responsible to conceptualize the actual campaigns (Moeran, 2009). Depending on the specific type of advertising agency, however, the types of disciplines comprising the account team differ: Whereas ‘full-service’ advertising agencies, for example, usually accommodate all four disciplines, ‘specialized’ advertising agencies tend to outsource research or media planning and buying. As Hackley (2010, p.103) notes, “media buying has largely become a separate activity divorced from creative services.” In addition, there are usually finance and admin functions in advertising agencies, which are responsible for administrating personnel, accounts and the office management *per se*” (Nixon, 2003). Finally, there is also a general management which controls the “overall agency strategy” (Pratt, 2006, p.1885). However, finance and admin

employees, and “heads of major functions” (Pratt, 2006, p.1885) are usually not part of the account team. Instead, they ensure the agency’s overall performance.

- *Creatives* are responsible for generating the creative ideas. They usually operate as a team of two: A copywriter, responsible for the textual contents of advertisements, and an art director, responsible for the visual contents of an advertisement. However, the lines between both functions become increasingly blurred (Moeran, 2009). Creative directors oversee the generation of creative executions and approve their work before it is presented to clients (Lange, 2001).
- *Producers* are responsible for bringing the creative teams’ executions to life. As noted by Foster (2005, p.151) in pre-production, production, and post-production “the [...] production department [...] controls the creative content, timetable and budgeting from approval of a script through to supplying finished client approved copy to the TV/radio station or cinema distributor.”
- *Account managers* are responsible for managing the relationship between the advertising agency and the client, presenting the creative team’s ideas to the client and delivering feedback on the client’s point of view to the creative team and organizing the overall development process (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010).
- According to Crosier et al. (2003, p.8) *account planners* (also referred to as ‘strategists’) function as “...‘voice of the consumer,’ ‘strategic pivot,’ ‘creative catalyst’ and ‘client confidant’...” in the development of advertising campaigns. In particular, account planners are responsible for “moulding consumer perceptions, emotional insights, and lifestyle observations into

message strategy or creative briefs” and thus lay out the basis for advertising creation (Morrison and Haley, 2006, p.131).

- *Media planning and buying* is responsible for monitoring the media landscape, evaluating the benefits of different forms of media for the clients’ needs, allocating the clients’ budgets to different forms of media, as well as negotiating, arranging, and verifying the specific placing of the clients’ communication measures within these channels (Bogart, 2000).

In addition, a range of other individuals and groups are involved in advertising development: Account teams, for example, are working closely together with their *corporate clients*. Therefore, Hackley (2010, p.111) points out that “the client is effectively the invisible member of the account team.” As Grabher (2002, p.250) explains, “once accounts are placed with an agency, the relation with the client increasingly evolves into performing projects *with* clients rather than of realizing projects *for* clients.” Besides providing an initial brief, which sets out the strategic direction and defines “what is considered appropriate or inappropriate,” clients influence the advertising development process through evaluating the ideas that the account teams came up with (Koslow et al., 2006, p.83). Furthermore, clients influence the creative process through the resources they provide as well as the way they hold advertising agencies accountable (Koslow et al., 2006), as will be discussed in the press-section of this sub-chapter in more detail.

In addition, as disclosed above, at later stages of the campaign development process, a range of *external professionals* join the advertising development process which are “hired to realize the account team’s creative concept” (Moeran, 2009). Account teams are thus “contracted to dream up and prepare the campaign,” whereas external professionals are “hired to assist in the creative work required to put it into effect” (Moeran, 2009, pp.963-963). Grabher (2002, pp.251-252) differentiates these external professionals into “a broad range of

professionals and specialized services,” including “outside project partners” such as certain photographers or directors “each of which ‘has its distinct flair’” deliberately chosen by creative teams, as well as “more technical inputs such as printing at less demanding quality levels, lithography, sound or photo editing, [...] characterized by a comparatively small scope for genuine creative inputs.”

Finally, *consumers* are also involved in advertising creation. As Thompson and Malaviya (2013, p.33) note, “increasingly, companies seek to involve consumers in the creation of advertising messages.” Involving consumers provides marketers with “deeper consumer insights,” “authentic content,” and consumers themselves with “a sense of collaboration and engagement” (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013, p.33). It became particularly popular due to recent technological changes, including consumers’ “access to multimedia software, the Internet, and social media platforms” (Lawrence et al., 2013, p.292). Most of the time, however, more ‘passive’ forms of consumer involvement are applied. That is, consumers engage in advertising development through research, such as focus groups and consumer panels as well as in-theatre tests in which they provide marketers and advertisers with insights, evaluate prototypes of ideas and, thus, through their judgments influence the marketers’ and advertisers’ decisions about the continuance as well as specific shape of ideas (Koslow et al., 2006).

The literature review highlights the positive effects of creative advertising ideas on consumers generally and the key cognitive, affective and behavioural stages of their response particularly. However, it has been shown that marketers do not usually produce advertisements themselves but commission advertising agencies to develop campaigns for them. In particular, advertising agencies are consulted because of their creative offering. The literature review emphasizes that advertising agencies differ in size, specialization and corporate structure as well as understanding how advertising works, which impacts on the

way advertisements are produced, as the following section will demonstrate. Generally, an advertising agency's personnel are organized in account teams in which creatives as well as non-creatives interact. But also clients, consumers and, at later stages, external professionals are regarded as part of the team, pointing out the complex nature of advertising development.

Having discussed advertising creativity from a person-perspective, in the following section a process-perspective to advertising creativity will be applied.

### **Reviewing advertising creativity from a process-perspective**

Whereas much has been written about specific roles in advertising creation, relevant literature investigating the ways advertising creative processes are organized is highly limited. As Griffin (2008, p.95) emphasizes “a retrospective analysis of the research dealing with the creative process as it operates within the domain of advertising makes one thing very clear: Much remains to be done.” And it seems as if not much has changed since 2008.

The limited amount of extant research analysing processes by which creative advertising ideas come into existence, concentrates on the individual – and in particular on the individual creative, such as the work of Griffin (2008) himself. In advertising agencies, individual creatives are regarded as the suppliers of creative work. The “celebration of the individual” (Koslow et al., 2006, p.82) might have multiple causes, located in advertising practice. The way industry magazines report job changes of creatives (“the acquiring agency is gaining creative expertise and the other agency is losing it”), the attribution of creative work through awards (“creativity awards usually are given to individuals or teams, not just the agencies themselves”), how training is provided (“creativity training is also frequently provided to individuals who work for agencies”) (Koslow et al., 2006, p.82), as well as the spatial separation of creatives from other advertising practitioners (“creatives are assigned dedicated space in separate floors or parts of the building”) (Grabher, 2002, p.248) might explain why creativity research in advertising remains trapped between the ‘He-’ and ‘We-

paradigm,’ as discussed above. Research beyond the individual level is even more limited and, with the exception of De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010), tends to concentrate on specific parts of the collective advertising process only (Moeran, 2009, Moeran, 2005, Morais, 2007).

As revealed above, Griffin (2008) investigated creative processes in advertising on the individual level. In particular, he was interested if inexperienced art directors and copywriters of an advertising school come up with ideas differently than more advanced students. In his research, Griffin (2008, pp.103-104) identified four dimensions in the creative process of both groups which interplay and from which ideas emerge: orientation for the work, and thus specific beliefs of what it means to be engaged in creative endeavours, approach to the problem, and thus specific understandings of approaching a project that requires creative solutions, mind-scribing, and thus specific ways to capture and build on various thoughts during ideation, as well as certain heuristics, and thus particular strategies to foster the ideation process *per se*. Interestingly however, Griffin (2008) found the degree to which students are immersed in these spheres varies; thus he proposes two different creative process models for each group: a performance model explaining the creative process of early students as well as a mastery model explaining the creative process of more advanced students. Beginners would be concentrated on “doing things ad people should do” instead of “sharpening their own abilities,” concentrating on solving a problem instead of finding it, making only little use of mind-scribing and heuristics, and starting to filter ideas early on (Griffin, 2008, pp.103-104). Consequently, the ideas they produce were found to be quite mediocre. Conversely, more experienced students would have an idea orientation for the work, display freer and more advanced use of mind-scribing and, rather, questioned problems instead of finding solutions to them. Consequently, more experienced students drew on richer resources, and developed more interesting possibilities which increased the duration of the creative process but led to more creative solutions. Although Griffin’s model appears to be

quite similar to the componential models of Amabile (1996) he argues that it would be ‘unique’ due to its “applicability within a single domain” (Griffin, 2008, p.106).

Other researchers focussed on aspects of the individual creative process, for example, on the use of heuristics in general and creative thinking techniques in particular. Kover (1995, p.601), for example, investigated how creatives ensure that ideas are accepted by their target audiences, and found that they use an “internalized target person.” This would either be the actual creative or an imaginary person, depending on the relative distance to the product or service he or she was trying to advertise (Kover, 1995). In both cases, however, the author stresses that it is an “internal dialogue” with an “ideal viewer” (Kover, 1995, p.601). In a similar vein, Goldenberg et al. (1999, p.335) investigated “common patterns” and thus “creativity templates” that guide creative behaviour and are identifiable in the outcome of creative advertising individuals. In their research, creativity templates, such as the Resonance or Janusian approach were identified in most highly creative advertisements, supporting their argument. In addition, teaching the use of creativity templates was found to lead to more creative outcomes. The authors argue that creativity templates and creativity are not contradictory concepts. Instead, audiences would need some sort of regularity to guide their efforts and thus to processualize and make sense out of the ideas presented. Goldenberg and Mazursky’s (2008) study later confirmed these results. Johar et al. (2001, p.8), finally, were interested in the use of “mythic formulae in the creation of advertisements” and the outcome itself. The researchers found that creatives would generally make use of the mythic themes such as comedy, tragedy, romance, and irony/satire. Most creatives, however, used only one “ad theme” in the process of idea generation, which led to relatively mediocre work (Johar et al., 2001, p.8). Creatives drawing “inspiration from more than one of the mythic types,” produced more creative work (Johar et al., 2001, p.17). Interestingly, they found that within these dyad teams, team members started with similar mythic orientations as their partners. The authors describe this phenomenon as a “meeting of minds” (Johar et al., 2001, p.22).

Creatives that have been working together for a longer period of time would be “more inward focussed,” drawing on inspirations from “patterns that have succeeded in the past rather than scanning the entire solution space for ideas” (Johar et al., 2001, p.22). They thus suggest to regularly break up teams or to engage in collaboration and conversation between teams to allow for more diverse approaches in advertising creation (Johar et al., 2001).

When looking at advertising creative processes at the group level, most models follow simple step-by-step structures, describing the overall doings of advertising practitioners from a product development instead of creative development perspective. Whilst the existence of certain steps is unquestioned, however, these models miss the highly uncertain, disorganized, and emotionally charged nature of advertising creative development. They do so by ignoring the ingredient, which makes advertising development different to assembly line production. In particular, they ignore the desire of (at least some) advertising practitioners to be creative, which pervades an advertising agency’s organizational life. Pratt (2006), for example, distinguishes between the pitch, sign off, working up the idea, decision on content and campaign, budgets, as well as making the advert stage. However, how creativity is collectively generated somehow remains a ‘black box.’

As intimated above, the research of De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010) is the only exception. They suggest that it is through “ritual processes [...] creativity in advertising agencies is managed, controlled, and channelled to produce the ads that circulate in society” (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.333) In particular the authors argue that “ritual processes” would be required to resolve the tensions that exist at advertising agencies due to the “special properties of the brand” as being “an ordinary everyday entity in consumers’ lives” on the one hand and “a highly charged ideological symbol, beyond the ordinary” on the other (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.334-335). Going further, the authors argue that “the tension in the brand paradox is a metaphor for the tension among the actors in the social

drama of advertising creation” (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.344). Unsurprisingly, these tensions would be particularly evident in the interactions between creatives interested in creating “change” on the one hand, and account managers interested to ensure “stability” on the other (as described above) (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.344). Referring to the work of Van Gennep (1960), rituals (which seem to follow a similar stage-by-stage structure as suggested by Pratt (2006)), would mediate between account managers and creatives by helping them to transform work in separation and placing them “in a liminal (often sequestered) location” but also by bringing them back together as soon as the work is “at a changed, often higher status” (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.337).

The remaining accounts concentrate on specific parts of collective advertising processes only. Moeran (2005), for example, describes how an advertising agency prepared for a competitive pitch. Moeran (2005, p.901) portrays this process as a “performance of authenticity,” taking place in a “complex situation where the objective realities of the market tended to be confused with the subjective tastes and preferences of individual personalities.” In this context, Moeran (2005, p.901) distinguishes between the advertising agency’s market analysis and creative interpretations, but also “back-stage interpretations of key personnel’s tastes [...] as a means towards making their final selection of campaign ideas for the presentation.” Advertising practitioners would have to first address the client’s taste before addressing the tastes of consumers. This could sometimes lead to an “authenticity-cynicism continuum” in idea development, in which market insights are ignored but “inside knowledge of individual tastes” of clients is “ruthlessly exploited” (Moeran, 2005, p.918). Moeran (2005, p.911) also introduced the concept of “post-rationalization and creative justification.” He points out that “advertising often advances by means of post-rationalization,” meaning that ideas often exist before they are theoretically justified (Moeran, 2005, p.911).

Morais (2007) offers a similar account by concentrating on advertising meetings as well. Morais' (2007) account, however, offers insights in general agency-client meetings, and thus meetings in which work is presented after an account has been won by an advertising agency. Morais (2007), for example, identified divergent goals advertising agencies as well as clients wishing to achieve when entering a creative meeting. In his research, Morais (2007, p.153) also mentions “agency anxiety” and thus the concerns of advertising professionals that arise “not only from the looming assessment of their work but also to the client’s impending judgment of the people who created it.” Finally, advertising practitioners would read the room when creative ideas are presented, to act on the reactions of clients appropriately and to “control creative meetings” (Morais, 2007, p.156).

Moeran (2009), finally, provides an in-depth account into the production of print advertisements. In particular Moeran (2009) describes different spheres of creative influence in the production process. Although the advertising agency hires a photographer and production team to put ideas into effect at any time, it is the art director who is in charge of the creative product (Moeran, 2009). The rest of the production team only “dons the mantle of creativity” (Moeran, 2009, p.976). This is also reflected in spatial arrangements of studios (Moeran, 2009). Deviations thereof can lead to “sharp, but potentially explosive, exchange between” the members of the production team, as Moeran (2009, p.975) observes. Moeran (2009) argues that these spheres of creative influence are due to the interchangeability of production team members and the requirement to please both the art director as well as client, but also by the unilateral dependence on advertising jobs. Moeran (2009), however, notes that this somehow changes when production team members transform from ‘outsiders’ to ‘insiders’ and gain strong reputations.

The above literature thus highlights that theory describing how the development of creativity at advertising agencies is organized is highly limited. What is available concentrates

on the individual level and suggests that advertising practitioners use specific thinking techniques, which lead to mixed outcomes. At a group level the literature review has demonstrated that relevant research is even more limited. The research of Moeran (2005), Morais (2007), Moeran (2009) as well as De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010) indicates that there is much more to add to our understanding about advertising creative processes than can be described with simple step-by-step structures. Indications for tensions inherent in brand properties, struggles to remain authentic whilst delivering against the clients' needs, as well as rivalry in the collective development of ideas exist, all of which are interlinked to creativity and the paradoxes resulted thereof in commercial contexts. Generating advertisements in advertising agencies thus goes beyond step-by-step structures and appears to be increasingly complex the more one changes the focus from advertising development to creative processes practices, as will be emphasized in the integrative conceptualization in the last sub-chapter.

Having discussed advertising creativity from a process-perspective, in the following section a product-perspective to advertising creativity will be applied.

### **Clarifying advertising creativity from a product-perspective**

Creativity in advertising manifests itself “in novel strategic ideas, original research, and imaginative advertising campaigns” (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.336) which build the fundament of the above advertising types. This is also reflected in the many definitions of advertising creativity suggested in the advertising creativity literature.

As shown at the beginning of this section, advertising practitioners have to develop advertisements which deliver the core message in an unexpected, unusual manner, yet this unexpected manner must also be relevant to the core message so that such novelty is also meaningful. Without being meaningful and thus connected to the audience, ideas that are original only have less positive effects (Ang et al., 2014). Similarly, Wells et al. (2003, p.303) note that, “to be creative, an idea must be both original (different, novel, unexpected) and

strategic (right for the product and target).” Ang et al. (2007, p.222) also concur, stating that “a creative ad is perceived by its audience to be novel and different, and whose central message is interpreted meaningfully by, and connects with, its audience.” Smith and Yang (2004) term these two aspects ‘divergence’ and ‘relevance.’ By noting that “creative ads are those that are perceived to be divergent and relevant” (Smith and Yang, 2004, p.34) the authors strengthen the intercorrelation between the two components. The advertisement not only has to contain elements that are novel, different, or unusual in some way, it must also be meaningful, appropriate or valuable to the target audience (Smith and Yang, 2004). Moreover, there are further nuances. Smith and Yang (2004) distinguish between ‘ad-to-consumer relevance’ and ‘brand-to-consumer relevance.’ Ad-to-consumer relevance refers to situations where the advertisement contains execution elements that are meaningful to consumers, whereas brand-to-consumer relevance refers to situations where the advertised brand (or product category) is relevant to potential buyers.

Very recently, however, a few researchers started questioning the importance of appropriateness as an essential component of advertising creativity. Wang et al. (2013, pp.50-51), for example, argue that “originality alone contributes positively to the campaign’s market performance.” Since appropriateness would just be another term for effectiveness, it would be “tautological” to include it into advertising creativity definitions (Wang et al., 2013, pp.50-51). In a similar vein, also Lehnert et al. (2014) argue, that creativity should only include originality as an essential component. As Lehnert et al. (2014, p.283) point out, “creativity is primarily a function of divergence, and that meaningfulness, while important, seems to be if not separate then a distinct and less influential construct.” Thus the debate on what exactly constitutes advertising creativity re-emerges.

Nevertheless, advertising creativity from a product-perspective not only refers to “the quality of an advertisement as perceived by the target audience” but also to “the creative

quality of an agency team that develops the advertising strategy and produces the actual advertisements” (Hairong et al., 2008, p.110). Showcasing the creative quality of an agency team is highly important for advertising agencies’ business as it influences the agency selection process of marketers as well as potential employees (Beverland et al., 2007). Referring to pro-bono work, Waller (2010) notes that advertising creativity helps agencies to gain exposure, increase agency profile, and attract paying clients as well as talented advertising practitioners. Several studies found that clients choose advertising agencies based on their creative capability and that creative reputation plays a crucial role in advertising selection (Cagley and Roberts, 1984, Michell, 1987, Henke, 1995, Fam and Waller, 2008). By contrast, studies indicate that low standards of creative work lead to agency switching and relationship conflicts (Verbeke, 1988). Not surprisingly, amongst a range of different advertising agencies investigated by Wilson (2010) no organization positioned itself based on pricing. Instead most used “their reputation, skills, and creativity as the primary differentiator” (Wilson, 2010, p.157). An advertising agency’s creative reputation is also important for potential employees. There is a perception that for the career progression of creatives “the emphasis is not necessarily on moving to a bigger agency, but to one with a stronger creative reputation,” as McLeod et al. (2011, p.116) point out.

It should be noted, however, that “ad agencies do not generally advertise themselves” (Hackley, 2010, p.105). Instead, the industry understands itself as “a business-to-business environment where work is gained through word-of-mouth, relationships and reputation among a small community of communication specialists” (Hackley, 2010, p.105), and attempts to demonstrate their creative excellence with creativity awards (Stuhlfaut, 2011). “Advertising is a small community and awards shows and other events create a sense of specialness and exclusivity that is important to the industry in order to offset the lack of wider recognition for advertising expertise and accomplishment” (Hackley, 2010, p.106). In a similar vein, West et al. (2013, p.325) note “awards [...] have become the primary

marketwide – and relatively objective – method of assessing advertising creative output.” However, the actual importance of awards as indicators of an agency’s creative potential in the agency selection process of marketers has been a matter of debate for some time (Henke, 1995). As Hackley (2010, p.118), for example, notes “clients are more interested in their marketing objectives than creative awards.”

The above literature review thus demonstrates that to be creative an idea has to be original and meaningful to the target audience at hand. Being meaningful, however, seems to be a particularly complex construct, since meaningfulness includes various points of reference which have to be considered in the advertising creation, such as the product, brand, and consumer. Confusion also exists regarding the difference between meaningfulness and effectiveness, as recent research suggests. However, advertising creativity looked at as a product not only describes the ideas advertising agencies produce but also their creativity capacity *per se*. Since creativity is the advertising agencies’ reason to be (Wang, Dou, Li, & Zhou, 2013), demonstrating creative capabilities is assumed to be important for advertising agency selection and most advertising agencies use awards to prove their creative competencies. However, as described, the actual influence of awards to demonstrate creative capabilities relevant to marketers can be questioned (Hackley, 2010). Instead, for creativity, clients would be looking for effectiveness at advertising agencies (Hackley, 2010). Given the effects of creativity on consumers, however, it is surprising why both concepts are dealt with in separation.

Having discussed advertising creativity from a product-perspective, in the following section a press-perspective to advertising creativity will be applied.

### **Portraying advertising creativity from a press-perspective**

Overall, advertising creativity research identified similar factors enhancing or hindering creativity to those influencing creativity in general. Moreover, similar to research

on general creativity, opinions differ for some of those conditions. Interestingly, however, for some conditions, advertising creativity research has demonstrated fundamentally different results, as the following section will describe.

Verbeke et al. (2008), for example, investigated how the contextual factors, as defined in Amabile et al.'s (1996) KEYS measure introduced above, influence the creativity of advertising agencies. The study used the number of awards of advertising agencies as a measure of creativity. First, the researchers only found organizational encouragement, workload pressure and work group support, as well as the availability of resources, to be significant contextual factors for advertising creativity. Moreover, the researchers found that advertising agencies, which offer organizational encouragement and have a high workload pressure but offer little work group support and resources to have the strongest creative outputs. An additional test, which used a slightly different set up, replicated these findings. Thus, not only the factors but also their direction is somehow at odds to what Amabile et al. (1996) suggest. In addition, the researcher tested the influence of clients on advertising creativity and found positive relationships between creativity and client composition as well as client experience. They found that advertising agencies which work with a relatively homogenous client base of market leaders have the strongest creative outputs, implying that it is knowledge specificity and not breadth, which fosters creativity.

Going further, Sasser and Koslow's (2012) study somehow builds on the work of Verbeke et al. (2008) work. The researchers investigated how passion, organizational support and expertise, as well as politics, influence the creativity of individuals in advertising agencies. Similar to research in general creativity, the researchers found the strongest positive effects for passion. This effect, the researchers discovered, can even be fostered through management support. Moreover, organization support was found to influence creativity, although to a lesser degree. Interestingly, however, different to several studies in general

creativity that emphasize the importance of expertise for creative action, expertise was found to have no significant impact. Indications exist that the contrary might even be true (i.e. high levels of expertise in highly political situations). As Sasser and Koslow (2012, p.13) point out, “although expertise has been identified in the innovation literature as having the strongest effect among the many factors studied, this does not hold true in the advertising creativity field.” Finally, for politics alone, no significant effect on creativity was identified.

Other researchers concentrated on the influence of clients as ‘contextual factors’ in particular, given their role as “invisible member of the account team.” Grabher (2002, p.250, see above): Wang et al. (2013), for example, analysed, how the risk preference of clients influences the creative quality as well as performance of advertising campaigns. The researchers found that advertisers who are risk-seeking employ creativity demanding qualification processes which, in turn, lead to more creative work and higher campaign outcomes, Moreover, these clients have greater trust in advertising agencies. Both circumstances would enhance the creative work and lead to higher campaign outcomes. According to the researchers, these findings would point out “the importance of advertiser risk taking in shaping the creativity of advertising and suggests devices that advertisers can employ to reap the benefit of creative risk taking” (Wang et al., 2013, p.50). The researchers suggest that “advertisers should employ a creative qualification process to select agencies with desired creative capabilities” and “nurture a trusting environment and allow the agency to work autonomously” to obtain the desired creative outcomes (Wang et al., 2013, p.51).

Koslow et al. (2006, p.81) took a slightly closer look at the influence of clients. In particular, the researchers tested how client activities, such as direction setting, resource allocation and evaluation influence creativity. Koslow et al. (2006) found that the influence of setting direction depends on the way it is enacted: Setting directions in briefs was found to have only minor impact on creativity, whereas a willingness to explore creative ideas in

strategy was found to impact significantly on creative outcomes. In fact, it was found to be the most crucial factor of all variables measured. Moreover, contrary to the findings of Verbeke et al. (2008) the allocation of sufficient resources, such as time and money, but also providing access to the client's top management was found to have a positive effect on creativity. This, however, would depend on the client's status and willingness to explore ideas. Furthermore, if clients are of particular importance, "they have more power to enforce their evaluative judgements" leading to a "chilling effect on creativity, due to the potential threat of losing the account" (Koslow et al., 2006, p.82).

Finally, Oliver and Ashley (2012), investigated strategies to successfully lead advertising creativity. To do so they analysed more than one hundred interviews of the Wall Street Journal's Creative Leaders Series, published within the past 30 years. For creative leaders, the creative advertising process is surrounded by an open, collaborative, fun and energy-charged environment and enacted by curious, driven people, who share responsibility ideas and work respectfully with each other by collaborating in flexible teams. In addition, creative leaders stressed the importance of strict quality standards 'to keep people stimulated' although different modes of enforcement seem to exist. Different views also existed on the use of formulas and rigid guidelines in the creative process. Whereas some creative leaders argued that rules and formulas are the worst enemies of creativity, others argued that "creative rules allowed for freedom without the creation of chaos" (Oliver and Ashley, 2012, p.339).

The above literature review thus highlights that similar to general creative contexts evaluation is also a sensitive component of advertising creation. Unsurprisingly, initiatives supporting the passion of creative individuals have been found to be crucial. In this context, however, factors suggested to motivate individuals, such as limited workgroup support, high pressure and limited resources are rather surprising and in stark contrast to those identified in the literature on general creativity. In addition, the above literature review highlights that

much of the discussion on environmental factors is concentrated around the influence of clients. Clients are discussed in terms of their risk affinity as well as the breadth or depth of knowledge they add to advertising agencies. Interestingly, similar to the discussions in the literature on general creativity, confusion about the right amount of knowledge as some type of enhancing but also limiting factor of creativity seems to exist. This is also reflected in the discussion of leadership in advertising creativity, where mixed opinions about the use of creativity rules and their enforcement seem to exist.

In this context, an additional ‘press’-factor was identified in the literature which, compared to the general creativity literature, seems to be quite unique to advertising creativity research. That is, due to the pivotal role of creativity in advertising development processes, and different ‘understandings of how advertising works,’ some researchers regard beliefs concerning the nature of good advertising as ‘external factors’ that can either foster or hinder development of creative work as well. Given the significance of aesthetic understandings for this research, but most importantly the inconstancy in the research available, this particular stream of literature, discussing ‘understandings of how advertising works,’ will be examined separately in the final section of this sub-chapter below.

### **Examining confusions about advertising creativity understandings**

As indicated above and described in more detail below, research suggests ‘understandings of how advertising works’ to be something external to advertising creation that can either foster or hinder the creative possibilities of advertising practitioners. At the same time, however, inconsistencies in the research on ‘understandings of how advertising works’ concerning their homogeneity exist; that is, whereas some research argues that advertising practitioners share similar creativity understandings and thus beliefs about how advertisements should be produced and how they should look, other research suggests the

opposite is true and reports tensions and even severe conflict at advertising agencies resulting thereof.

Before the research comparing creativity understandings of advertising practitioners is discussed, however, similar research comparing taste patterns of advertising practitioners with those of consumers will be reviewed briefly. Its brief discussion is useful since it provides first explanations as to why advertising practitioners come to certain tastes in general and tastes that are different to those of certain colleagues in particular.

So far, research comparing creativity understandings between advertising practitioners and consumers constitutes the largest part investigating taste differences in advertising – for quite obvious reasons: Hackley's (2010, p.118) notion, introduced above (“clients are more interested in their marketing objectives than creative awards”), somewhat points out a current dilemma in advertising, which is the inconsistency in creative judgments between those producing advertising ideas and those consuming them. If creativity leads to more effective advertising, why are creative awards regarded as something separate, almost detached from what advertising should really be about?

White and Smith (2001), for example, investigated whether professionals working in advertising agencies judge advertising creativity in the same way as college students and the general public. They used a scale comprised of novelty (originality), resolution (logic) and elaboration and synthesis in order to measure perceived advertising creativity. By comparing the judgments of the three groups the researchers found that results were significantly different. Whereas groups judged the originality and logic of advertisements similarly, the study found substantial differences in the way the groups decided how well-crafted the advertisements were. Moreover, by comparing judgments using demographic data White and Smith (2001) found, for example, that people of different ages, genders or regional origins judged the creativity of the shown advertisements differently. These findings suggest that

consumers' individual characteristics play a significant role in how they judge the creativity of an advertisement. Similarly, more recently, Kim et al. (2010) found that views on advertising creativity and their definitions of appropriate advertising are immersed in cultural norms: understandings of advertising creativity differ between Western and Eastern culture. How culture operates in the perception of advertising creativity in the global marketplace is particularly interesting for multinational organizations which try to standardize their advertising efforts.

A further area of difference was highlighted by West et al. (2008), who researched whether professionals working in advertising agencies judge advertising creativity in the same way as the general public. In a two-stage process participants were firstly asked to define creative advertising in their own words. Secondly, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which the advertisement viewed met their reported definition. The researchers found that professionals view advertising creativity differently than the general public. Professionals defined creativity on the basis of "relevance," "originality," and "goal-directed," whereas the general public defined creativity by the execution employed in the commercial. Thus, there were clear differences, but insufficient clarity about how these differences arose. As one possible cause, the researchers suggested that "practitioners seem to be rather more in line with what their clients want, which does not necessarily translate to what viewers want" (West et al., 2008, p.43).

Recently, Kowalkowski et al. (2012), analysed consumers and employees of a large grocery retailer's attempts to co-create value propositions for two different marketing instruments. Building on the work of Jensen Schau et al. (2009), the researchers found that consumers and employees build on 'scripts,' comprised of 'understandings' ("practice-related knowledge (know-how), skills, and experiences"), 'procedures' ("practice-related rules, principles, and cultural norms"), as well as 'engagements' ("practice-related wants and needs,

goals, and purposes") during the process of co-creation (Kowalkowski et al., 2012, p.1556). However, due to the different contexts in which each member's understandings, procedures, and engagements were developed, different ways in which they provided, evaluated, altered or accepted inputs were found (Kowalkowski et al., 2012). This influenced the success of both projects. Whereas in one project differences could be overcome, in the other project differences were "incommensurable," preventing discourse and co-creation (Kowalkowski et al., 2012, p.1566).

As revealed above, however, whilst advertising creativity researchers generally agree that creativity understandings of consumers are quite different to those of advertising practitioners, research investigating similarities and differences in creativity understandings among advertising practitioners themselves is less clear-cut. Whereas some researchers draw quite a homogenous picture, other researchers suggest advertising practitioners to have highly distinct understandings about how to produce advertisements as well as how advertisements should look, leading to severe tensions and even conflict in their day-to-day work, as the following sections will explain.

Nyilasy and Reid (2009, p.93), for example, found that advertising practitioners share certain ideas about how advertising works and how it works better. In terms of how advertising works advertising practitioners believe that advertisements influence consumers "human cognition, emotions, and behavior," either directly or indirectly (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.86). However, advertising practitioners agree that their effects are limited – it is not a 'magic tool' that can simply make people do whatever advertisers want. Regarding the timely order of advertising effects, they believed that first advertising "creates awareness" and then "engages people emotionally or rationally" (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.87). As the authors noted "beyond these simple two steps, ad practitioners seem to believe there is no further sequentiality in the order of how potential effects may occur" (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.87).

When it comes to ‘what works better,’ advertising practitioners strongly believe in the effect of advertising creativity. “They believe that there is only one rule for advertising to work effectively. It has to be creative” (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.88). Interestingly, Nyilasy and Reid (2009) provide insights into what creativity means to advertising practitioners, by explaining that it is conceptualized as something that ‘breaks the rules.’ This finding, however, was somehow contradicted, since advertising practitioners explicitly admit that certain “directives that would ‘make advertising better,’” such as entertainment, humour, and relevance do exist (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.89). These would be “creativity compliance” directives, whereas “shameful knowledge” directives and thus rather formulaic techniques would be in crass contrast to creative approaches to advertising (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, p.89).

Recently, Nyilasy et al. (2013) extended their research on ‘mental models,’ investigating the creativity understandings of advertising agency managers in particular. The researchers found four different types of models which, taken together, constitute their creativity understandings. First, substantive models and thus beliefs about the “substantive nature” of creativity (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1696). On the one hand, creativity is understood as “the ability to come up with new ideas”, on the other it is understood as an “artistic craft” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1697). Moreover, it is seen as “deep and fundamental ways to approach [...] problems” instead of applying formulaic concepts, as shortcuts (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1697). Second, developmental models and thus beliefs concerning “the origin of creativity on the level of the individual” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1696). Learning creativity is seen as learning an instrument whilst knowing creativity is seen as having an “intuitive, gut reaction to problems” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1700). Third, social models and thus “conceptions about the social contexts within which the models live” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1696). Creativity is conceptualized as something that scares clients but also as something that happens in “professional circles” with “shared styles and ways of doing creativity” and

awards (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1701). Finally, effectiveness models and thus “ideas about the impact of creativity on consumers” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1696). Creativity is understood as an “investment where high risk is often aligned with high rewards” and as the only means to break through the accumulated advertising knowledge (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1701). In addition, the researchers found relationships between the above models, for example, between developmental and substantial models. The advertising practitioners, believe that “rookies are more likely to come up with clichéd concepts and use formulaic artistry, while seasoned pros are more likely to be truly innovative both in concept and execution” (Nyilasy et al., 2013, p.1702). Similar links were identified between social and effectiveness models. Creativity philosophies of clients, agencies and the wider community were seen as factors that either foster or hinder the effectiveness of ideas (Nyilasy et al., 2013). Finally, links were found between substantive and effectiveness models, since the nature of creativity was at the same time the reason why advertising creativity remains the only effective measure in an increasingly fuzzy advertising environment (Nyilasy et al., 2013).

Stuhlfaut (2011), finally, took a more distant view by looking at the organizational level of creativity understandings. Conducting interviews with advertising creatives at different stages in their career, Stuhlfaut (2011, pp.284-285, see above) found what he termed “a creative code” in advertising agencies: “a collection of implicit theories about how to produce the creative product, including how the product should look.” Besides conceptual criteria, the creative code specified executional aspects as well. This code would mainly be evident in products, but also in the style and fashion of people working at advertising agencies (Stuhlfaut, 2011). He argues that an advertising agency’s creative code is socially constructed and evolves over time. An advertising agency’s creative code is influenced formally, for example, by corporate documents but also informally by the understandings of advertising practitioners interacting with each other in their day-to-day work, as well as the wider advertising community. Particularly creative directors, as “role models” but also “supervisors,”

“omnipotent judges” and “arbiters of acceptable creativity,” were identified as the most influential people on an advertising agency’s creative code (Stuhlfaut, 2011, p.294). For applicants and new employees, knowing an advertising agency’s creative code is important, he argues. “The creative code could be said to help creatives at the agency determine which expressions and techniques will increase their stature with their peers, and which will be more likely to be approved by the creative director and, ultimately, by clients” (Stuhlfaut, 2011, p.297). In contrast, deviating from the advertising agency’s code would require advertising agencies to fire employees and reject businesses (Stuhlfaut, 2011). Stuhlfaut (2011) thus points out that an advertising agency’s creative code somehow limits an employee’s creative possibilities.

However, as revealed above, different to Nyilasy and Reid (2009), Nyilasy et al. (2013), and Stuhlfaut (2011) other research suggests quite a different picture. Advertising practitioners would share fundamentally different aesthetic understandings; and reports about severe tensions and even conflict at advertising agencies resulting thereof exist. Interestingly, as described above, the underlying reasons for taste-differences suggested, appear to be quite similar to those suggested for taste-differences between advertising practitioners and consumers. That is, different contexts in which advertising practitioners operated appear to lead to different creativity understandings (c.f. Kowalkowski et al., 2012).

Different understandings of creativity have, for example, been identified in the research of Koslow et al. (2003), which specifically examined perceptual differences of creativity among creatives and non-creatives. To measure perceptions of advertising creativity a scale comprised of strategy, originality, and artistry was used. By comparing the judgments of the two groups, the researchers found that results were significantly different. Whereas originality perceptions did not differ among agency roles, non-creatives seem to perceive appropriateness as strategy whereas creatives seem to perceive appropriateness as artistry.

Moreover they found that creatives have a distinctive preference for a strong originality component in strategy whereas non-creatives are so focused on strategy they will often accept artistic advertisements as a substitute for truly original work. Whereas the identification of unusual advertisements seems to be relatively straightforward and independent of personal characteristics, the perceived appropriateness of advertisements appears to differ from person to person due to the different ‘contextual frames’ being used. According to Koslow et al. (2003, p.98) “for originality, one only needs to recognize it [the advertisement] is different, but for appropriateness, the judgments are [...] more ‘subjective.’”

In a later study, these results were somewhat replicated (Koslow et al., 2006). Asking advertising practitioners to rate their own advertising campaigns, the research found that creatives evaluated their own work the highest, followed by account executives and media as well as other employees. Moreover, they found that age, as well as experience in the advertising business (measured in years), affects the judgments of advertising practitioners. As Koslow et al. (2006, p.96) point out, “perceptions of creativity decrease with age, but increase with years in advertising business.”

Deviating creativity understandings as some type of shared aesthetic knowledge are not surprising, when looking at the different practices in which creatives and non-creatives are immersed. Particularly, those of creatives and account executives seem to diverge. As shown above, clients and advertising agencies share fundamentally different organizational environments, although it should be noted that different degrees of discrepancy exist. Thus, in the working relationship between clients and advertising agencies there is an inherent “tension between the values of art and aesthetics on the one hand, and commercial reality on the other” (Hackley and Kover, 2007, p.2), as well as “two competing milieu: the creative and liberal arts milieu that informs the creative mentality, and the bureaucratic, scientific milieu of management practice” (Hackley and Kover, 2007, p.67). Furthermore, as a consequence of

the ‘two competing milieu,’ many advertising practitioners and researchers believe that “creative environments, and client marketer organizations function best when separated by firewalls” (Sasser and Koslow, 2008, p.14). A “creative firewall between the client and agency” would ensure “that only carefully screened creative ideas pass through to ignite the marketing organization” (Sasser and Koslow, 2008, p.14).

As a firewall, advertising agencies place considerable stress on the account management discipline. In the literature, account managers are thus often described as ‘generalists,’ arbitrating and bridging the gap between the client and the advertising agency’s ‘specialists’ (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986) to overcome the “...‘great divide’ between creativity and commerce” (Bilton, 2007, p.13). In other words, account managers function as a “managerial buffer between the creative team and the client” (Bilton, 2007, p.30). However, it seems that by introducing the account manager discipline, advertising agencies simply move the tension between aesthetic and commercial orientation into their own four walls, leading to inter-departmental conflict (Hirschman, 1989, Hackley and Kover, 2007, De Gregorio et al., 2012).

Account managers are responsible for managing the client-agency relationship, presenting the creative teams’ ideas to clients and delivering clients’ feedback to creative teams as well as organizing the overall development process (see above), they adopt the views of their client organizations in an effort to show that they ‘get’ the client’s interests and can help them to achieve their commercial objectives (Hirschman, 1989). Approval is obtained by meeting the client's communication objectives. As noted by De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010, p.337) account managers are involved in the development of creative material to suit the client’s brand; they “provide input, eliminate ideas, and suggest new areas to develop.” In this their primary motivation is not necessarily creative: “they work to ensure that the ideas

are innovative, but their primary concern and focus is maintaining stability with their client”  
(De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010, p.341)

Creatives, on the other hand, work ‘at arms-length’ from customer propositions to generate and refine advertising ideas (Lange, 2001, Morais, 2007). To come up with ideas that are original, creatives spend a lot of time searching for inspiration as well as monitoring ideas already produced by their peers. As noted by Morais (2007, p.151) “...creatives are conceptual, imaginative people who invent, design, and produce ‘the work.’” The ‘telos’ of creatives immersed in the activity of ‘developing ideas’ is to gain approval by peers, who “share their aesthetic sense” (Hackley and Kover, 2007, p.70). Although the “approval of clients and account executives [...] is necessary to keep their jobs” the approval from peers is “more intrinsically important” (Hackley and Kover, 2007, pp.70-71). Creatives thus see work on a brand as a means for demonstrating creative talent that leads to approbation in the form of public and professional critical opinion (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010). While account managers favour “safe work,” which “pleases the client,” creatives seek to “challenge their clients’ comfort levels” and tend to argue for the ideas, which might enhance their portfolio (Morais, 2007, p.152).

Although deadlines and limited duration of projects have been reported to “provide antidotes against lock-ins into particular cognitive or aesthetic patterns” as well as “disintegration and collaborative paralysis” (Grabher, 2002, p.249), it appears that the effectiveness of these measures is doubtful. Due to the “ongoing confrontation” of these different logics, the creative process in advertising “is rife with conflict” (Grabher, 2002, p.248). This confrontation not only poses “creative challenges” but also “provides causes for power struggles and rivalry” (Grabher, 2002, p.248). Although conflicts between a variety of disciplines exist, conflicts between account services and creatives have been proven to be most severe (Kover and Goldberg, 1995, Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). A study by Hackley and

Kover (2007, p.69) reported that account people and creatives even used the word ‘hate’ frequently when speaking about their working relationship, and that “such conditions are typical of advertising agencies.” Not surprisingly, particularly in the early stages of the advertising development process, tensions between these “competing agendas” (MacRury, 2009, p.64) occur, as Farh et al. (2010) discovered.

Advertising agencies are becoming aware of these inter-departmental conflicts (De Gregorio et al., 2012) and realize that “the separation of creatives from the strategic and commercial realities is no longer sustainable” (Bilton, 2007, p.30). Existing strategies aimed to resolve these tensions, such as ‘finding a middle way’ or using research results as an “arbiter in deciding where to go with a campaign”, do not seem to be very effective (MacRury, 2009, p.66). Thus, more and more advertising agencies are moving away from the divisional and ‘Tayloristic’ agency model (Kocheilas, 2008) to a more integrative cross-functional organizational structure (Bilton, 2007). In the course of this change, some agencies even abandoned the role of account managers completely, substituting them with project managers (Hipperson, 2012). This is because controlling for intra-organizational conflicts is of importance for advertising practitioners, since destructive conflict impacts negatively on the perceived product quality of an agency (De Gregorio et al., 2012).

The above literature thus indicates that confusion exists as to whether advertising practitioners share similar or highly divergent tastes. The research of Nyilasy and Reid (2009), Nyilasy et al. (2013), and Stuhlfaut (2011) indicates that advertising practitioners share socially constructed, rule-like beliefs about how advertising works. However, by treating creativity understandings as a unified entity the authors ignore much of the creativity literature in general and several studies proving creativity understandings to be a highly subjective construct – even though practitioners are working in the same industry. That is, research from Koslow et al. (2003), Koslow et al. (2006), Hackley and Kover (2007) and

others indicates that advertising practitioners have very different creativity understandings, resulting in tensions and conflict at advertising agencies. In all cases, creativity understandings differ mainly because of different meanings advertising practitioners and the general public attach to creative ideas. Whereas originality ratings did not differ that much, appropriateness ratings diverged. However, the literature review highlights that there is insufficient evidence as to why different understandings exist. Indications exist that differing creativity understandings exist due to the different practices in which they are immersed.

## **Conclusion**

Overall the literature on advertising creativity suggests that creative advertising ideas and thus advertisements that are perceived as original and meaningful by the target audience at hand (e.g. Sheinin et al., 2011) are more effective than non-creative advertisements (e.g. Pieters et al., 2010).

Advertising creativity is the main offering of advertising agencies (Verbeke et al., 2008) and, because of its effects on consumers, marketers commission advertising agencies to develop campaigns for them (e.g. Moeran, 2009). Most advertising agencies use awards to prove their creative competencies, although their actual influence on advertising agency selection can be questioned. Advertising agencies differ in size, specialization and corporate structure as well as understanding how advertising works. Furthermore, differing understandings on how advertising works imply different ways that advertisements are produced (e.g. Stuhlfaut, 2011). However, as has been explained, theories describing how advertising creative processes are organized are largely missing. The limited number of studies investigating ways in which creative processes are organized is surprising given the confusion that exists on whether advertising practitioners share similar creativity understandings or whether tastes are fundamentally different (e.g. Koslow et al., 2003, Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, De Gregorio et al., 2012).

What is there concentrates on the individual level and creative thinking techniques (e.g. Griffin, 2008). At a group level research is even more limited. Albeit literature offering highly generic step-by-step advertising development models (e.g. Pratt, 2006), research which describes how advertising practitioners organize creativity collectively hardly exists. The very few cases available suggest collective creative processes are organized through ritual processes (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010) in which tensions inherent in brands are solved. Others suggest the organization of creative advertising to be a performance of authenticity, in which in order to sell ideas tastes of clients are favoured over tastes of consumers and in which rationalization of ideas takes place after they have been invented, as well as divergent goals and creative influence, resulting in agency anxiety (Moeran, 2005, Morais, 2007).

Moreover, one the one hand indications suggest that advertising practitioners have differing creativity understandings due to the distinct practices in which they are immersed and thus that ways in which creativity is organized at advertising agencies and creativity understandings interlink (e.g. Kowalkowski et al., 2012). This would explain the discrepancies between creatives and non-creatives in general, and the consequential conflicts between creatives and account managers in particular (e.g. De Gregorio et al., 2012). Going further, it would also explain the recent trend in advertising agencies to take more integrative approaches to advertising creation, that is, more collaborative ways of advertising development, in which functional boundaries are increasingly blurred (e.g. Bilton, 2007). On the other hand, research exists suggesting that the opposite is true by drawing quite a consensual picture. That is, advertising practitioners would have largely overlapping understandings about creativity and how advertising works (e.g. Nyilasy et al., 2013).

However, so far there is insufficient evidence which would have settled the debate which led to the *second* research direction of this study:

To see whether advertising practitioners shared highly similar or different tastes or whether both impressions paradoxically co-exist.

Creative judgments are inherently aesthetic in nature, as the literature review on general creativity highlighted. Thus, to contextualized differing creativity understandings in theory, in the last sub-chapter literature on organizational aesthetics will be discussed in detail.

## Organizational aesthetics

### **Introduction**

As the following section will demonstrate, individuals take on aesthetic knowledge “by the continual stream of sense impressions that provide the backdrop of [their] everyday life” (Warren, 2008, p.561). Through “intersubjectively constructed appraisal” of these sense impressions individuals learn to judge certain aesthetic experiences (Warren, 2008, p.561) and, for example, to favour one type of advertising idea or procedure in advertising development over another. As Ottensmeyer (1996, p.196) notes “reflective product designers, graphic designers, workplace designers and architects – that is, those professions whose work is often the most direct manifestation of art and beauty in business firms – may have much to tell us about values, emotions, philosophy and creativity.” However, as will be explained, aesthetic categories include much more than beauty. Moreover, aesthetic knowledge also matters in industries “in which the products are primarily defined in terms of [...] their utilitarian value” (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1222). The ubiquity of aesthetic knowledge is emphasized by Ottensmeyer (1996, p.189), who points out that at organizations “an aesthetic dimension is ever present.”

Although the notion of aesthetic knowledge can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Strati, 2007), the “aesthetic sphere” was included to organizational theory during the 1990s emerging from a “search for alternate methods of knowledge building” in general and “the ‘crisis of representation’ within organizational research” in particular (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, pp.1211-1212). Organizational studies prior to the 1970s were dominated by a rationalist positivist paradigm, which “failed to take into account [...] a fundamental part of human experience: the way we perceive and feel reality and the sensory experience, giving rise to attraction and repulsion, pleasure and disgust, suffering and joy”

(Gagliardi, 2007, p.332). In the late 1970s, this rationalist positivist paradigm, in Gagliardi's (2007) words, 'lost its purity,' with the introduction of the 'organization as culture' concept and its constituting paradigms, values and beliefs. This movement, however, was still cognitively based (Gagliardi, 2007). It was only in the 1990s (see above) "the awareness began to spread, that there exists a third fundamental component to human experience, 'pathos,' the way we perceive and feel reality, and that 'tastes' and 'sensory' knowledge are at least as important as 'beliefs,' 'values' and intellectual knowledge" (Gagliardi, 2007, p.336).

This "new awareness" changed research objects, subjects, as well as the methods used (Gagliardi, 2007, p.336). However, different types of approaches to organizational aesthetics exist (Hancock, 2005). Witz et al. (2003, p.42 and p.44), for example, differentiate between 'aesthetics *of* organizations,' and thus "the symbols and artefacts which are intended to influence the sense of people;" 'aesthetics *in* organizations' and thus the behaviour of employees "associated with 'getting in' and 'getting on' in organizations," such as impression management or non-verbal influencing; as well as 'aesthetics *as* organizations' and thus seeing organizations through an aesthetic lens, "making fundamentally new claims about the ontology of organization or ways of organizing," that is, "organizing is aesthetic." Similarly, Hancock (2005, p.31 and p.45) differentiate between "organizational performativity, which promotes the utility of aesthetics as a potential technology of market competitiveness and success;" "epistemological account of the aesthetic, grounded in what is considered to be its fundamentally embodied and thus non-rational capacity for unmediated access to reality;" as well as a "aesthetically, sensitive, semiotic approach to the interrogation of organizational artefacts." This research takes an "aesthetics *as* organization" approach (Witz et al., 2003, p.33) (italics added). As Hancock (2005, p.34) points out, "perhaps the leading figure associated with this approach is Strati." The underlying assumptions of an "aesthetics as organization" approach (Witz et al., 2003, p.33) will be described in more detail below.

*For this reason, the section is structured as follows, in four parts:*

First, in order to discuss the core assumptions of organizational aesthetics as an “aesthetics as organization” approach (Witz et al., 2003, p.33), examples of aesthetic knowledge in different occupational practices are presented. Subsequently, the work of Strati (1999), Strati (2005), and Strati (2007), will be introduced. Second, additional theories describing the application and negotiation of aesthetic knowledge in organizations in particular will be explained. The section finishes with some methodological considerations, which are important when pursuing an “aesthetics as organization” approach (Witz et al., 2003, p.33) and a brief conclusion.

### **Discussing aesthetics as organization**

As disclosed above, aesthetic knowledge is routinely used in organizational practices (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). As Ewenstein and Whyte (2007, p.689) point out, “management consultants, for instance, reflexively enact aesthetic knowledge when they employ PowerPoint to communicate a strategy and advise a client to adopt it. Medical doctors enact aesthetic knowledge when they inspect a bruise or skin irritation. Engineers enact it when they interpret the component shapes in technical drawing.” Not surprisingly, various researchers have studied its development and application in the past. Fine (1992), for example, describes, how cooks use aesthetic knowledge in their culinary work to make soups look ‘as nice as possible;’ Strati (2007) explains, how workers in plank stacking yards of sawmills apply sensual knowledge to determine the thickness of planks; the same year Hindmarsh and Pilnick (2007) shed light into the way medical doctors in operating theatres use their aesthetic understanding to insert tracheal tubes; relatively recently, Biehl-Missal (2011) described how managers in meetings and press conferences use aesthetic experiences to control the perceptions of what is being communicated; finally, Taylor (2013, p.78) broadened the perspective on the development and application of aesthetic knowledge, and explored, how

managers use aesthetic knowledge in their day-to-day jobs to sense their social environment and “and identify the previously unseen.”

Strati (1999) regards aesthetic knowledge as an alternative form of the positivist and functionalist understanding of knowledge and explains that forms of aesthetic knowledge “are forms of knowledge that cannot be explained in functionalist and positivist terms” (Strati, 1999, p.54). In particular Strati (2005, p.920) argues that “aesthetics provides organizational scholars, organizational students and organizational members with a language with which to express and understand the organizational work practices that scientific language is unable to grasp and explain.” As intimated above, Strati (1999, p.568) stresses “aesthetic awareness as a legitimatized form of understanding organizational life.” It is not only “one organizational theme among many,” but ‘elusive’ “as an objective of knowledge” in organizational contexts (Strati, 1999, p.468). In particular, Strati (2007, pp.74-75) regards aesthetic knowledge as an “important part of working and organizational practices” and thus of “practice-based knowledge and learning in organizations.” He explains that “practices of knowing and learning in organizations” are “not only mental and logical-analytical but also corporeal and multi-sensorial” (Strati, 2007, p.67). Several scholars even argue that intellectual/rational knowledge could depend upon and emerge from aesthetic/sensory experiences, since the drivers for the latter are more primary (Taylor and Hansen, 2005). Whereas “intellectual knowing is driven by a desire for clarity, objective truth and usually instrumental goals [...], aesthetic knowing is driven by a desire for subjective, personal truth usually for its own sake” (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1213).

Moreover, Strati (2005) emphasizes the embodied nature of aesthetic knowledge. As he points out, “aesthetic understanding activates our personal capabilities to perceive” (Strati, 2005, p.920). Strati (2007, p.62) also notes that aesthetic knowledge “concerns what is perceived through the senses, judged through the senses, and produced and reproduced

through the senses. It resides in the visual, the auditory, the olfactory, the gustatory, the touchable and in the sensitive-aesthetic judgement.” In addition, however, he emphasizes that aesthetic knowledge “generates dialectical relations with action and close relations with the emotions of organizational actors” (Strati, 2007, p.62). By doing so, he expands the concept of aesthetic knowledge from a “mere direct, physical and objectively observable relation” to “the subject’s intimate, personal and corporeal relation with the experience of the world” (Strati, 2007, p.62). In particular, aesthetic knowledge would include “what is ‘got’ emotionally, the affectivity connected with what is perceived, taste-based judgement, the style of action,” as Strati (2007, p.64) explains. Aesthetic knowledge thus includes both the very visible but also the highly “hidden aspects” of organizational life (Strati, 2007, p.63).

In this context, he emphasizes the variety of aesthetic categories that exist, each carrying different meanings depending on the specific individual using it “in discursive practices on organization” (Strati, 2007, p.67). In other words, individuals may judge the same sensual experience differently, due to a different “emotionality” and thus “affectivity connected with what is perceived and come to different “taste-based judgements” than others (Strati, 2007, p.64). However, Strati (2007, p.67) points out that the production of sensible knowledge not only includes other organizational actors, but also “the materiality of organizational life,” including “technologies [...], organizational spaces, [...], and [...] artefacts...”

In fact, several aesthetic categories exist. Strati (1992), for example, identified up to 64 different aesthetic categories in the relevant literature, which describe sensual experiences beyond the ‘beauty’ (as intimated above). Besides positive emotions, aesthetic experiences can also evoke negative feelings and thus aesthetic resistance, for example when certain identities that organizational managers wish to instil on employees are unwanted (Wasserman and Frenkel, 2011). This even includes disgust, and thus “the most extreme reaction to

perceptions, a reaction not only of considering right or wrong in a specific situation and arguing against it but an involuntary reaction, a revolt of the body against a perception of something unacceptable, harmful, damaging, poisoning” as Pelzer (2002, p.841) explains. Referring to the concept of the body and the novels of Kafka as in-depth descriptions of organizational disgust Pelzer (2002, p.859) argues that “organizations all too often tend to be systematically disgusting places to live and to work in.” They are only working “if this knowledge is separated from the workplace. If the merciful cover is removed for a moment the insight breaks through with a ‘Puke!’” (Pelzer, 2002, p.859).

Going further, Ewenstein and Whyte (2007, p.689) shed light into ways in which aesthetic knowledge is applied, pointing out that “aesthetic knowledge is embodied” and that “it comes from practitioners’ understanding the look, feel, smell, taste and sound of things in organizational life.” However, they differentiate between an experiential dimension and symbolic dimension of aesthetic knowledge. Whereas the experiential dimension describes aesthetic knowledge applied ‘in practice,’ the symbolic dimension describes aesthetic knowledge applied ‘outside of practice.’ That is, whereas the symbolic dimension of aesthetic knowledge would be some type of ‘style,’ consisting of signs and symbols, the experiential dimension would be a form of ‘competency,’ consisting of feelings and embodied experiences. These two dimensions of aesthetic knowledge are enacted through aesthetic reflexivity, which “involves an opening up and questioning of what is known” (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007, p.689). Just as with aesthetic knowledge itself, the authors separate the mechanism of aesthetic reflexivity into a symbolic and experiential dimension. Whereas the symbolic dimension of aesthetic reflexivity can be understood as a form of ‘reflection’ and “involves sensing, symbol-processing, interpreting, intuiting, and ‘thinking’ with aesthetic knowledge,” the experiential dimension could be understood as a ‘practice,’ involving “a reflex-like interaction with a changing material context, informed by aesthetic knowledge” (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007, p.690). Thus, aesthetic evaluation is also applied inside and outside of

practice – as a form of ‘reflection’ and as a ‘reflexive practice,’ as the authors point out. Interestingly, the authors argue that newcomers have to learn the symbolic dimensions before building on that knowledge as a competency or development of a style.

So far the literature review on organizational aesthetics thus pointed out that practitioners use aesthetic knowledge routinely to make sense of their day-to-day work activities and several pleasant as well as unpleasant aesthetic categories exist. As explained, aesthetics knowledge can be seen as an alternative view to the positivist and functionalist understanding of knowledge and was introduced to organizational theory only recently. Moreover, different approaches within organizational aesthetics exist. It was emphasized that this study takes an ‘aesthetics as organization’ approach, which roughly assumes that organizing is aesthetic and aesthetic knowledge is embodied in nature. Research, however, suggests that different degrees of embodiment exist and that newcomers have to learn what can be experienced ‘outside’ of practice before being able to apply what has been ‘inside’ a practice.

Having explained aesthetics as organization, in the following section the negotiation of aesthetics as organization will be described.

### **Describing the negotiation of aesthetics as organization**

Aesthetic understandings, however, are far from being static. Strati (2005, p.920) points out that aesthetic knowledge is in constant negotiation, based on “the multiple and diverse personal knowledges that pervade organizational life and ‘give form’ to an organization’s distinctive skills.” He argues that “similar to logical and intellectual understanding, aesthetic forms of knowing, constructing – and even destroying – organisational life, undergo social and collective negotiation” (Strati, 2005, p.920). Aesthetic knowledge undergoes social and collective negotiation, because aesthetic knowledge not only describes the ability to feel, but also the capability to value and make sense of certain

sensations (Strati, 2007). Individuals and their environments are in constant dialectical interaction, producing sensible knowledge collectively (Strati, 2007, p.63). Thus, different to Ewenstein and Whyte (2007), who describe aesthetic knowledge as something practitioners use and, once learned, develop competencies and individual styles upon it, Strati seems to have a more ‘dynamic’ understanding of organizational aesthetics.

Gherardi (2009) provides interesting insights into ways in which the negotiation of aesthetic understandings actually takes place. In particular, concentrating on larger epistemic communities such as schools of thoughts in Mathematics, Gherardi (2009, p.547) argues that through processes of taste-making particular “ways of doing things together” are socially sustained. Building on the sociological concept of attachment, she conceptualizes practitioners as ‘amateurs,’ who love what they do. Consequently, she argues that practitioners develop specific tastes, which enable them to appraise certain performances of practices in which they are immersed. Negotiation takes place through discursive practise that involves both the sayings and doings of practitioners. Through this joint “sense of what is aesthetically fitting within a community of practitioners” practices are “socially sustained, learnt and constantly refined” (Gherardi, 2009, p.535). More specifically, Gherardi (2009, p.541) suggests that taste-making sustains practices through “the collective development of a lexicon of taste,” which allows practitioners to discuss aesthetic experiences, to distinguish between different aesthetic categories, as well as to agree upon them within the community; “the formation of a sense of belonging to an epistemic community,” which strengthens the identities of practitioners, epistemic communities, and thus the feeling of practitioners to belong to them; and finally “the refining of performances through the negotiation of aesthetic judgements,” which constantly shapes and innovates the performances of practitioners whilst keeping the basis of them constant at the same time. As Gherardi (2009, p.547) summarizes, taste-making is “giving voice to passion and negotiating aesthetic criteria that support what constitutes ‘a good practice’ or ‘a sloppy one’ and ‘a beautiful practice’ or ‘an ugly one’

within a community of practitioners. The aesthetic judgement is made by being said – and therefore it presupposes the collective elaboration and mastery of a vocabulary for saying – and it is said by being made.”

Gherardi’s (2009) insights on processes of taste-making within larger epistemic communities can be perfectly explained with the empirical account of Case and Piñeiro (2006). The authors analysed narratives about the aesthetics of coding shared by computer programmers in an online forum. The researchers found that computer programmers use narratives about the aesthetics of coding to strengthen their belonging to the programming community. The researchers found that computer programmers use narratives on ‘hacker ethics’ but also more practical aspects of coding, such as ‘coding styles’, to negotiate values and aesthetics underpinning coding practice. In particular, they found that computer programmers often heavily disagreed about aesthetic standards, which was reflected in heated discussions that pervaded much of their exchange. This disagreement, however, would be part of the process of “forging community though self-expression” (Case and Piñeiro, 2006, p.777). Interestingly, the researchers found tensions between art and commerce in computer programming similar to those found in advertising development. Computer programmers would recognize the commercial context they are working in and the “asymmetries of capitalism” and “commercial constraints to which they are subjected” (Case and Piñeiro, 2006, p.777). That is, in narratives about the aesthetics of coding, computer programmers would, in the words of Case and Piñeiro (2006, p.774), ‘scapegoat the ‘Other,’’ that is, project managers or clients, using “language of resistance.” Thus, similar to Gherardi (2009), who conceptualizes taste as way to appraise certain performances of practices the authors conclude “the aesthetic is itself ideological; [...] programmers are making sense of their condition ideologically both through their practical pursuit or coding ideals and through espousing a hacker ethic that legitimates their passionate engagement with coding tasks” (Case and Piñeiro, 2006, pp.777-778).

The above research thus highlights that aesthetic knowledge goes beyond what can be observed. Sensual experiences create strong emotional relationships between individuals and their organizational activities, artefacts and surroundings, as well as other individuals sharing the same practices. Due to this emotionality individuals always judge sensual experiences somehow differently and come to individual ‘taste-based judgments.’ For the same reasons, however, joint senses of what is aesthetically fitting also exist. Through discourse, practitioners develop a shared vocabulary, helping practitioners to learn and sustain their practices but also to develop them further, as the research of Case and Piñeiro (2006) illustrates. Yet, by concentrating on larger epistemic communities such as schools of thought in mathematics or computer programmers, Gherardi (2009) as well as Case and Piñeiro (2006) instead of more proximate settings and, similar to Strati (2005), by focussing on similarities instead of disagreements within them, they fail to explain taste-making processes in advertising firms, which are characterized as aesthetically charged and highly conflictual arenas in the relevant literature.

Having described the negotiation of aesthetics as organization, in the following section methodological issues with the aesthetics as organization construct will be explained.

### **Explaining methodological issues with aesthetics as organization**

As revealed above, however, different approaches exist regarding studying organizational aesthetics as “ways of knowing” (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1214). In this respect, Taylor and Hansen (2005) offer the most comprehensive taxonomy of research studying aesthetics as organization. The researchers found that research approaches not only differ in terms of the research objects but also the research methods used. These research objects range from “instrumental content that considers mainstream organizational research questions of efficiency and effectiveness, impact on the bottom line, and power inequities” to “aesthetic issues that address the day-to-day feel of the organization, questions of beauty and

## *Chapter 2: Literature review*

ugliness, or in short aesthetic content that has been part of much of mainstream organizational research” (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1218). And the methods used from “intellectual methods that are the classic tools of social science research to artistic methods that draw on the use of art practices” (Taylor and Hansen, 2005, p.1218). This taxonomy allowed the authors to separate research on organizational aesthetics into four different fields, as illustrated in Table 1 taken from Taylor and Hansen (2005, p.1217). The authors, however, note that there is a lot of variation within and across fields.

		Content	
		Instrumental	Aesthetic
Method	Intellectual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic forms as metaphors for organizations</li> <li>• Lessons for management from the arts</li> <li>• Arguments for the importance of organizational aesthetics</li> <li>• Using aesthetics to deepen our understanding of traditional organizational topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industries and products that are fundamentally aesthetic in nature</li> <li>• Aesthetic forms within organizations</li> <li>• The direct sensory experience of day-to-day reality in organizations</li> </ul>
	Artistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic forms used to work with individual issues</li> <li>• Artistic forms used to work with organizational issues</li> <li>• Aesthetic forms used to illustrate/present intellectual arguments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artistic forms used to present the direct sensory day-to-day experience in organizations</li> </ul>

**Table 1 Categories of organizational aesthetics research**

No matter which approach is taken, however, central to studies investigating organizational aesthetics is the challenge of what Taylor (2002, p.821) describes as “aesthetic muteness.” Taylor (2002) argues that in organizations aesthetic experiences are not part of the day-to-day discourse. In interviews that he conducted, he recognized that talking about ‘thinking’ is much easier for organizational members than talking about ‘feeling.’ Some research participants even denied the existence of aesthetic experiences completely. The research argues that in organizations discussion concerning aesthetic experiences are often

muted to avoid “difficult, unpleasant and potentially costly” disagreements and conflicts (Taylor, 2002, p.838). As a consequence, the “aesthetic amnesia” has created a very narrow concept or organizational aesthetics, associated with domains in which aesthetic products or other aesthetic forms are “recognized as being important” only (Taylor, 2002, pp.835-836). He argues that overcoming aesthetic muteness would not only be important for research but also for organizations themselves to discuss “how it feels to be in an organization” (Taylor, 2002, p.383). In particular, he argues that by continuing to favour rational, cognitive, and intellectual approaches over aesthetic forms of understanding in practice and academia, practitioners and researchers will never get the complete picture of what it really means to take part in organizational life. As Taylor (2002, p.838) puts it, overcoming aesthetic muteness “allows us, perhaps will even require us, to be both left brained and right brained, to be touchy-feely and analytic – in short over-coming aesthetic muteness is necessary to be whole.”

To overcome aesthetic muteness in research settings Warren (2008) offers several suggestions. Research on organizational aesthetics, for example, needs to set up a clear “aesthetic frame of reference” and thus specify the object to which aesthetic experience and judgments refer (Warren, 2008, p.561). Second, similar to Taylor (2002) Warren (2008, p.561) notes that “aesthetic communication through language is difficult.” She thus argues that research needs to find ways in which the aforementioned “alternative languages and knowledge-creation processes with research participants” can be stimulated and eventually captured. Finally, besides the “momentary nature of much aesthetic experience,” Warren (2008, p.561) also stresses the subjectivity of aesthetic experiences and judgments as a challenge that research on organizational aesthetics needs to address. Most researchers would take a commentator approach and thus what Warren (2008, p.563) refers to as a “critical distance” or reflect upon organizational aesthetics from their very own point of view, as it was done in Strati’s (1992, p.569) analysis of the chairman’s and secretary’s office, in which he

tries to demonstrate the researcher's "direct access" to organizational aesthetic experiences. More sophisticated studies would take a "more immersive research strategy" and employ ethnographic research approaches, Warren (2008, p.564) notes. However, even in these cases the problem of how to "evoke and present others' aesthetic perspectives of organizational members" would remain (Warren, 2008, p.564). Warren (2008) thus suggests a sensual methodology. This method is based on interviews only but asks interviewees to tell stories about sensual experience. Moreover, it involves the discussion of pictures of organizational artefacts, which interviewees themselves take and bring to the interviews.

The literature review in this section has thus shown that different methodological approaches to the study of 'aesthetics as organization' exist. Moreover, it has pointed out that regardless of the approach taken, researchers have to overcome what Taylor (2002) refers to as 'aesthetic muteness' in organizations. However, it has also been demonstrated that techniques to overcome 'aesthetic muteness' exist.

## **Conclusion**

The literature review has pointed out that practitioners use aesthetic knowledge routinely to make sense of their day-to-day work activities (e.g. Taylor, 2013). As explained, aesthetics knowledge can be seen as an alternative view to the positivist and functionalist understanding of knowledge and was introduced to organizational theory only recently (e.g. Strati, 1999). Moreover, different approaches to the study of organizational aesthetics exist (e.g. Hancock, 2005).

This research takes an 'aesthetics as organization' approach, which assumes that organizing itself is aesthetic in nature (Witz et al., 2003) and emphasizes the embodied nature of aesthetic knowledge, including ways in which aesthetic knowledge is learned (e.g. Taylor and Hansen, 2005). Research on organizational aesthetics, however, suggests that different degrees of embodiment exist and that 'newcomers' have to make sense of certain aesthetics

‘outside’ of practice before applying what has been learned ‘inside’ of practice (Ewenstein and Whyte, 2007).

In this context, however, the organizational aesthetics literature has pointed out that aesthetic knowledge goes beyond what can be observed. That is, sensual experiences create strong emotional relationships between individuals and their organizational activities, artefacts and surroundings, as well as other individuals of the same practices (e.g. Strati, 2007). Due to this emotionality individuals always judge sensual experiences differently and come to individual ‘taste-based judgments’ (Strati, 2007).

At the same time the strong emotional relationships between individuals and their organizational surroundings leads to socially constructed aesthetic understandings as well (e.g. Strati, 2005). That is, notwithstanding the subjectivity of taste-based judgments ‘joint senses’ of what is aesthetically fitting also exists. Through a shared ‘vocabulary of taste,’ organizational practises are learned, preserved, and continuously developed further (Gherardi, 2009). Although addressed much later, the process of taste-making has been perfectly exemplified in the research of Case and Piñeiro (2006), as explained above.

The above literature review thus functioned as a first explanation of how taste-processes at advertising agencies might take place and thus how shared but also different tastes at advertising agencies might be developed. Yet, the above research accounts seem to concentrate on broader epistemic communities, rather than very proximate organizational settings. In addition they seem to concentrate on taste similarities rather than differences and focus on processes within rather than across epistemic communities or more proximate organizational settings. Consequently, the above research accounts somehow miss to explain how tastes at advertising agencies are negotiated – in particular in settings in which aesthetic understandings might significantly diverge.

In the light of the above organizational aesthetics research, a *third* research direction thus emerged:

To analyse the taste-making processes through which similarities and differences in the taste of advertising practitioners are negotiated and thus collective action is sustained.

Having discussed the relevant literature on organizational aesthetics, in the following integrative conceptualization the insights gained through all three literature reviews (i.e. general creativity, advertising creativity, and organizational aesthetics) are brought together and the research aims are explained in more detail.

## Integrative conceptualization and research aims

The above literature review highlights the complex nature of creativity. Although certain factors are required to develop creative ideas, such as certain types of understandings, motivations, specific cognitive and behavioural processes, as well as environmental contexts, the exact character of their relationship with creativity was largely unexplained. As explained, certain types of understandings and motivations can either foster or hinder the development of creative work, depending on their specific configuration (e.g. Forgeard and Mecklenburg, 2013, Hirunyawipada and Paswan, 2013). In addition, characteristics of creative individuals are in stark contrast to characteristics required to engage in group dynamics and thus work in collaboration (e.g. Silvia et al., 2011, Hoever et al., 2012). Creativity seems to be highly complex because of the different contexts in which it takes place. That is, factors in one context lead – either directly or indirectly – to different effects on creativity in others. As explained earlier, this is also reflected in the increasing amount of studies, trying to describe the sheer endless number of relationships between factors on the individual, group, and organizational level.

Most interestingly, however, the contexts dependency of creativity is evident in creative process models and thus, in frameworks, trying to conceptualize creative dynamics rather ‘holistically.’ For the individual and group level, general but also advertising creativity research proposes models which portray creative processes quite differently and in which creative processes lead to different types of creative outcomes, thus questioning the existence of a ‘one-fits-all scheme’ of creative development. Wallas’ (1926) model, for example, proposes a model which only considers creative individuals and ignores the social context in which creativity takes place. Amabile’s (1996) creative process model concentrates on the individual as well. However, she considers the social context in her model in general and the

judgments of others in particular. In Hargadon and Bechky's (2006) model the locus of the creative process shifts from the individual to the group and interpersonal contexts in which creativity take places are particularly emphasized. Individuals seek help and based on the help given, reframe their understandings. In the models of Harvey and Kou (2013) and Harvey (2014) collaboration is central and it is through the input of many that creative ideas come into existence. Nevertheless, the authors identify different ways in which groups can develop ideas leading to different creative outcomes.

It thus appears that general rules and propositions inherent in creative processes can only be identified by comparing in-depth accounts of creative processes. Consequently, context specific research has to be developed, accounting for a large variety of different contexts in which creativity and creative development takes place. This should particularly include contexts in which creativity constitutes its reason to be and thus in occupations in which creative work represents (one of) its core service(s).

It has been shown that in advertising, creativity *is* key to success. Creative advertisements and thus advertisements that are regarded as both new but also relevant by the target audience at hand (e.g. Sheinin et al., 2011) have constantly been tested as more effective than non-creative advertisements (e.g. Pieters et al., 2010). In order to deliver creative advertisements to target audiences, marketers consult advertising agencies (e.g. Moeran, 2009) whose core service is the development of creative ideas (e.g. Verbeke et al., 2008). Moreover, advertising agencies demonstrate their capabilities through creativity awards. As described earlier, advertising agencies come in different sizes, specializations and corporate structures as well as understandings of how advertising works. In addition, differing understandings how advertising works imply different ways advertisements are produced (Stuhlfaut, 2011).

However, so far in-depth accounts of creative processes in advertising are highly limited. The limited number of studies investigating ways in which creative processes are organized is surprising, for *two* reasons:

First, confusion exists whether tastes of advertising practitioners are homogeneous or rather heterogeneous in nature. On the one hand research suggests that advertising practitioners share socially constructed, rule-like beliefs about how advertising works (best), which inevitably includes creativity (e.g. Nyilasy et al., 2013, Nyilasy and Reid, 2009, Stuhlfaut, 2011). Moreover, these beliefs are regarded as external to advertising creation, enabling advertising practitioners to demonstrate advertising agency fit but also limiting their creative possibilities. On the other hand, however, research exists that draws a less homogenous picture, arguing that the advertising practitioners' creativity understandings not only differ from those of the general public (perhaps indicating why both creativity and effectiveness awards exist) (e.g. White and Smith, 2001, West et al., 2008, Kowalkowski et al., 2012) but also among advertising practitioners themselves (e.g. Koslow et al., 2006, Koslow et al., 2003, Farh et al., 2010). This would explain the discrepancies between creatives and non-creatives in general, and the consequential conflicts between creatives and account managers in particular (e.g. De Gregorio et al., 2012). Going further, it would also explain the recent trend in advertising agencies to take more integrative approaches to advertising creation, that is, more collaborative ways of advertising development, in which functional boundaries are increasingly blurred (e.g. Bilton, 2007). However, so far there is insufficient evidence as to whether different or shared tastes exist or if at advertising agencies both impressions paradoxically co-exist.

Second, creative process models available exemplified the social nature of creativity. Ideas do not possess an objective creative value. Only through the judgment of others, does creativity come into existence and the degree to which an idea is creative is defined (e.g.

Amabile, 1982). In creative processes, in which several individuals collaborate, judgments of others represent a significant mechanism through which creative ideas emerge. That is, in group creative processes motivational efforts and understandings of several individuals are synthesized through collective evaluation of the ideas that are put forth (e.g. Harvey and Kou, 2013). Consequently, there need to be mechanisms through which the similarities and differences in the tastes of advertising practitioners are balanced out and collective actions are negotiated. However, explanations about the ways in which tastes are socially negotiated and collective action is sustained at advertising agencies is not explained in the relevant literature either.

The limited research available concentrates on the individual level and creative thinking techniques (e.g. Griffin, 2008). At a group level research is even more limited. Albeit there is literature which offers highly generic step-by-step advertising development models (e.g. Pratt, 2006), hardly any research exists which describes how advertising practitioners organize creativity collectively. The very few cases available suggest collective creative processes are organized through ritual processes in which tensions between two conditions (stability and change) inherent in brands are solved as well as performance of authenticity in which, in order to sell ideas, tastes of clients are favoured over tastes of consumers (Moeran, 2005, De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010). Indications suggest that advertising practitioners have differing creativity understandings due to the distinct practices in which they are immersed and thus that ways in which creativity is organized at advertising agencies and creativity understandings interlink (e.g. Kowalkowski et al., 2012).

Given the pivotal role of aesthetics in creative processes as suggested by Wallas (1926), Mednick (1962) Amabile (1982), and Amabile (1996) to theorize ‘differences in creativity understandings,’ the literature on organizational aesthetics was reviewed. As explained earlier, different perspectives on organizational aesthetics exist (e.g. Hancock,

2005). This research took an ‘aesthetics as organization’ approach, which assumes that organizing itself is aesthetic in nature (Witz et al., 2003). By taking an aesthetic perspective on organization, this research considers the aesthetic dimension not as something taking place on top of the rational sphere at organizations but as something replacing it. The ‘aesthetics as organization’ approach was chosen deliberately in order to gain new, experiential understandings of organizing, which rational approaches fail to explain (e.g. Strati, 1999). Theorists, taking an ‘aesthetics as organization’ approach all emphasize the embodied nature of aesthetic knowledge, including ways in which aesthetic knowledge is learned (e.g. Taylor and Hansen, 2005). This also involves ‘joint senses’ of what is aesthetically fitting (e.g. Strati, 2005). Through a shared ‘vocabulary of taste,’ practises of larger epistemic communities are learned, preserved, and continuously developed (Gherardi, 2009).

In this context, however, it was pointed out that aesthetic knowledge goes beyond what can be observed: Sensual experiences create strong emotional relationships between individuals and their organizational activities, artefacts and surroundings, as well as other individuals of the same practices (Strati, 2007). Due to this emotionality individuals always judge sensual experiences differently (Strati, 2007). Thus, notwithstanding ‘joint senses’ of what is aesthetically fitting exist (e.g. Strati, 2007), the subjectivity in ‘taste-based judgments’ remains.

However, whilst the subjectivity of taste is acknowledged in the organizational aesthetics literature, so far differences in taste-making were rather ignored. Despite the mentioning of difference, for example between different schools of thought in Mathematics (Gherardi, 2009), ways in which they are overcome remained unexplained. This particularly refers to smaller settings, such as specific organizations, in which these differences have to be negotiated on a daily basis. Thus, whilst organizational aesthetics provides first indications regarding how taste-making in advertising agencies could take place, ways in which taste-

making processes take place in such highly proximate and aesthetically charged contexts remain unexplained.

*As explained earlier, the literature review in general and the above research gaps in particular led to three research aims, which are explained in more detail below:*

- First, to provide an in-depth account by which the specific practices advertising creative processes are organized. That is, to carve out the specific doings of advertising practitioners in the production of creative work.
- Second, by doing so, to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share. That is, to identify the tastes that stem from the advertising practitioners' practices as well as the similarities and differences between them.
- Third, to analyse how advertising agencies continuously negotiate similarities and/or differences of their tastes. That is, to explain how collective action is constantly reproduced.

However, as the research aims indicate, they were rather inductive than deductive in nature (c.f. Eisenhardt, 1989). And thus these research aims functioned as loose research directions rather than strictly pre-defined sets of research questions since it was expected that certain discoveries will emerge during data collection, which go beyond what has been initially asked. Expecting the research aims to shift (c.f. Eisenhardt, 1989) allowed this research to capture insights which were unforeseen and thus to offer descriptions that go beyond what was expected.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

In the following section the research methodology will be explained.

*This chapter is structured as follows, in six parts.*

First, and somewhat as a continuation of the section on organizational aesthetics discussed above, the epistemological and ontological assumptions underlying this research project will be explained. This research sheds light on the aesthetic understandings and processes of advertising practitioners by using practice theory as a lens. Practice theory assumes that organizational phenomena transpire through and are effects of practice-arrangement bundles. Second, the specific methods are explained, which were used in this research to grasp the different understandings practitioners share, the practices they are carrying out as well as how these practices are connected to other practices (including practices and the situations and processes through which they are enacted). In this research, ethnographic techniques, such as observation, participation, semi-structured interviews and the analysis of documentary sources were applied. Fourth, the characteristics of the research site will be discussed in detail. For data collection a major London based advertising agency with some distinctive characteristics and a ‘creative reputation’ (Wilson, 2010) was chosen. Fifth, the process of data analysis and evaluation will be described. As revealed above, a practice lens approach was taken. Thus, as a loose guide for analysis, Nicolini’s (2011, p.602) definition of practice was used with a focus on creative processes. However, this loose guide was used as a filter for selecting data, rather than a set of imposed categories. Finally, the last section discusses the ethical considerations, which were carefully considered and managed throughout the entire research process.

### Practice theory as a lens

As shown above, this research aims to provide an in-depth account of the specific practices by which advertising creative processes are organized in order to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share as well as to analyse how advertising agencies continuously negotiate similarities and/or differences of their tastes and thus sustain collective action.

As explained above, indicators exist that differing understandings arise due to different practices in which advertising practitioners are immersed (Kowalkowski et al., 2012). Thus, in order to achieve the research aims above, a practice-based approach to the study of the advertising practitioners' tastes was taken. Practice theory is still quite new to organizational research and different approaches to the concept of practice exist (Whittington, 2011). According to Geiger (2009, p.129) "the common starting point of [...] practice based approaches in organization studies is the desire to shed new light on organizational phenomena by getting closer to the 'real' work in organisations."

The essential idea of practice theory is that "the social" resides in "a mesh of practices and material arrangements" and that social life emerges out of such "practice-arrangement bundles" (Schatzki, 2005, pp.472-473). More broadly, Nicolini (2011, p.602) defined practices as "meaning-making, identity-forming, and order-producing activities." Applied to organizational studies, practice theory suggests that practice arrangement bundles constitute the site of an organization, and that organizational phenomena transpire through and are effects of these bundles (Nicolini, 2011). Thus, the recurrent reproduction of practices contributes to the production of social order in an organization as well as to other organizational phenomena such as knowledge and purposiveness (Gherardi, 2009, Nicolini,

2011). This led Gherardi (2009, p.536) conclude, that “practices are not only recurrent patterns of action [...] but also recurrent patterns of *socially* sustained action.”

Since practices are regarded as the site of the social, scholars of practice theory conceive knowledge as ‘performative’ and thus entwined with the practical accomplishments of human beings: Nicolini (2011, p.602), for example, argues that “knowledge is always a practical accomplishment, and practice is where knowledgeability manifests itself and agency becomes possible.” As knowing inherently transpires in, and through, sociomaterial practices, scholars conceive knowing and practicing as ontologically equivalent (Nicolini, 2011). Moreover, in practice theory, knowledge is not only limited to ‘knowing that,’ but also includes ways of understanding which are linked to each other within practice, such as knowing how, ways of wanting, as well as ways of feeling (Reckwitz, 2002). As Whittington (2011, p.185) points out, “a great deal of practice is fundamentally tacit.” Most importantly, however, in practice, without denying the integrity of the individual, knowledge is seen as an intrinsically social and collective phenomenon. As Brown and Duguid (2001, p.201) argue “what individuals learn always and inevitably reflects the social context in which they learn it and in which they put it into practice.” According to Reckwitz (2002, pp.253-254) “just as the bodily activities are ‘social’ as a consequence of their stable reproduction beyond limits of space, time and single individuals, their ‘corresponding’ forms of understanding must be ‘collective’ – right from the beginning, they are necessary components of a practice as a non-subjective pattern.”

That knowledge is not considered as a cognitive and mental capacity, but rather as a practical accomplishment, was particularly evident in Gherardi’s (2009) concept of ‘taste-making,’ which was discussed earlier. Moreover, given the collective nature knowledge, discourse is another prominent theme in practice theory, which has also been described in Gherardi’s (2009) research. Through the comparison of the perspectives of all the co-

participants in a practice, organizational learning is fostered, shared understandings are reached, and collective actions produced (Gherardi and Nicolini, 2002). Gherardi's (2009) discussion of the process of taste-making serves as a good example of how knowledge can be analysed through discursive practices and, more specifically, through analysing language. Also other scholars such as Llewellyn and Spence (2009) or Nicolini (2009a) were able to describe the sensible knowledge of practitioners by analysing their 'classificatory language' (Gherardi, 2009). Language is termed a 'discursive practice,' as human beings, using language as a sign-system, meaningfully construct the world in which they are living. However, scholars of practice theory regard language as only *one* discursive practice among others. By referring to the main assumptions of practice, Nicolini (2011) points out that knowing not only transpires through the 'sayings and doings,' but also through the tempo and rhythm of a practice, the things used and ethno-method applied in a practice, as well as through the way deviations and innovations are taken into account and dealt with.

In addition to knowledge, the different objectives practitioners pursue when working together are prescribed in practice. Therefore, just as practices are shared with other practitioners the purposes of them are shared – they organize practitioners together. In this context, Schatzki (2005) introduces the concept of the 'teleoaffectionate structure' of practices. Individuals are motivated and embraced by certain ends and objectives (*telos*), which are prescribed in the practice that practitioners are carrying out, and can choose between a variety of ways to pursue these ends. Therefore, he points out, it is not the individuals who are holding '*telos*' but the practices themselves. Conflicts amongst individuals working in the same practice result from different understandings (gained in other practices) of how to pursue a certain objective as well as through interconnected practices that are not 'mutually sustaining' (Schatzki, 2005).

Another characteristic of practice theory lies in a different way of seeing the body (Reckwitz, 2002). Drawing primarily on the phenomenological literature of Merleau-Ponty (1962, as cited in Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009) and his concept of ‘corporeality,’ several scholars developed alternatives to the cognitive view of knowledge, and more specifically to the traditional Cartesian dualisms of mind and body, by focusing on the embodied nature of practice. Instead of ‘anatomizing,’ ‘fixating’ and ‘normalizing’ the body, these scholars are more interested in the ‘lived body’ and the various forms of bodily experience in practice (Hindmarsh and Pilnick, 2007). They argue that instead of simply using their bodies as an instrument to act, human beings use their bodies and activate their senses in order to learn practices. Thus, the body, and through it sensible knowledge, becomes central to the acquisition and transmission of practical knowledge, the formation of a professional vision, and the sharing of aesthetic judgments that sustain and reproduce working practices (Corradi et al., 2008). Know-how and skills “are both acquired and deployed in practical entailment with a definite social cosmos” (Wacquant, 2005, p.466). That does not mean that practice theorists deny the existence of mental activities. It simply means that sensual experience plays a crucial role in explaining how certain understandings emerge. The practice of conducting tracheal intubations, for example (Hindmarsh and Pilnick, 2007), is not solely concerned with bodily performances but also implies a certain know-how (medical know-how), particular ways of interpretation (of the other colleague’s behaviour or the alerts of electronic equipment) and emotional levels (a particular tension as the tracheal tube has to be inserted correctly within a certain amount of time).

Moreover, in seeking to overcome dualisms, scholars of practice theory not only reject the separation of body and mind but also the separation of subject and object (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009). Scholars of this ‘performative’ and ‘relational’ epistemology assume that objects, artefacts, and technologies “acquire meaning and agency only in a context of action and therefore in relation to the human actors that interact with them” (Corradi et al., 2008,

p.25). As Sandberg and Dall'Alba (2009, p.1356) point out, “a computer does not understand itself as a computer, only humans understand it as a computer. As being a thing does not involve understanding, things cannot understand themselves and other beings.” Moreover, things are capable of either extending or limiting the bodily performances of humans (Reckwitz, 2002). By using a stethoscope when listening to a patient’s heart rhythm, for example, a doctor is extending his bodily performances, as he or she is able to hear and distinguish sounds more precisely (Sandberg and Dall'Alba, 2009). Thus, similar to the body and mind, things are also the site of the social. Consequently, scholars agree that subject-object relations are as relevant as subject-subject relations for the production and reproduction of social order (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). As summarised by Orlikowski (2007, p.1437) “there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social.”

Practice theorists, however, do not only pay “close attention to individual activity” but also “the collective nature of practice,” as Whittington (2011, p.184) points out. Thus, in practice theory a particular emphasis is placed on the context (often referred to as the ‘site’) in which practitioners are working together and organizational phenomena emerge. Knowledge, for example, is described by Nicolini (2011, p.602) as a form of ‘knowledge-in-action,’ “situated in the historical, social, and cultural context from which it arises.” A particular emphasis is placed on the interconnectedness of practices. Through the interconnection of practices, certain understandings cross the boundaries of particular organizations and are spread among practitioners (Brown and Duguid, 2001). Gherardi and Perrotta (2011, p.598), for example, note that “practices are nested (or un-nested) within each other. They form a ‘texture’ of practices, and this texture is locally dense to a greater or lesser extent. The key to understanding texture is the idea of ‘connectedness in action’; this phrase brings out the definitive features of texture, its endless series of relationships which continually move into each other.” Consequently, there are not only micro phenomena that transpire through and are

the effects of interconnected practices, but also macro formations and structures as well (Schatzki, 2005).

When comparing the above literature from organizational aesthetics with research from practices theory, it becomes clear that many assumptions underlying both streams of research overlap. In addition, not only the organizational aesthetics literature but also literature of practice theory offer first explanatory approaches why similar but also differing taste among advertising practitioners might exist. Different understandings of advertising creativity identified in the research from Koslow et al. (2003), Koslow et al. (2006), Hackley and Kover (2007) and others might exist due to the different practices practitioners are placed in. Advertising professionals seemed to have a different knowledge of ‘how to do things’ and aesthetic understandings. Moreover, the objectives of practitioners prescribed in the interconnected practices they are carrying out could be not ‘mutually sustaining.’ Similarities, on the other hand, could be explained by the interconnectedness of practices, and thus understandings that cross the boundaries of particular organizations and are spread among practitioners (Brown and Duguid, 2001). Yet, to understand whether or not similar or differing creativity understandings exist as well as how similarities and/or differences are negotiated and collective action is sustained at advertising agencies requires further investigation, as this research has pointed out.

Methodologies applied in practice-based studies traditionally attempt to bring forth practices, make them visible, and turn them into an epistemic object (Nicolini, 2009b). In order to grasp the different understandings advertising practitioners share, the fundamental domain of study is thus the practices professionals are placed in as well as the wider nexuses of practices they are (loosely) connected with. As Gherardi and Perrotta (2011, p.598) point out, “the aim [of practice-based studies] is to understand the micro foundation of macro phenomena.” ‘Articulating practice’ therefore requires two practices at the same time: the

practice researchers are interested in and an epistemic practice, a ‘discursive work’ and ‘material activity’ (Nicolini, 2009b). However, as practice-based studies are often animated by different theoretical and philosophical presuppositions, not a single, unified tool but rather a variety of different research programmes and methodologies exists for studying practices empirically (Miettinen et al., 2009, p.1312).

Most practice-based studies follow the ‘follow the actors’ principle by Latour (1987, as cited in Gherardi, 2001). It says that researchers have to ““follow the actors” in order to identify the ways in which they associate the various elements that make up their social and natural world” (Latour, 1987, as cited in Gherardi, 2001, p.136). Not surprisingly, ethnography is the most commonly used methodology in practice theory as it provides various methods to both observe and participate in social and situated practices (Corradi et al., 2008). Because of the ‘multifaceted’ and ‘complex’ nature of practice, however, scholars of practice theory rarely use a single technique to capture the logic of practice. According to Nicolini (2009b, p.1395) “practice can only be approached through a toolkit-logic and a collage, heteroglossia, or even carnivalesque approach.” In order to understand and represent practice, Nicolini (2009b, p.1392) recommends a ‘zooming in and out’ technique, consisting of a variety of conceptual techniques. The technique aims to appreciate the different aspects of practice through constantly changing perspectives, or rather through ‘switching theoretical lenses.’ Whereas zooming in aims at understanding and representing practice, zooming out aims to capture the connection between the here-and-now of the situated practising and the elsewhere-and-then of other practices (Nicolini, 2009b).

### Ethnographic approach

As disclosed above, the specific kinds of knowledge are not in the possession of individuals but located in the practices they are carrying out. Knowing is “both acquired and deployed in practical entailment” (Wacquant, 2005, p.466). Therefore, in order to provide an in-depth account of the specific practices by which advertising creative processes are organized and to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share, as well as to analyse how advertising agencies continuously negotiate similarities and/or differences of their tastes and thus sustain collective action, the practices they are carrying out as well as how these practices are connected to other practices needed to be investigated. This included the identification of practices and the situations and processes through which they are enacted. It has been demonstrated that creativity is a complex construct and that different conceptualizations of creative process and their outputs exist. Thus, to investigate the everyday organizational practices of advertising practitioners an ethnographic approach was chosen. Ethnography is a powerful tool because it aims to shed light into the complexities of the everyday in an organizational setting (Ybema et al., 2009). Besides creativity this also includes ‘aesthetic muteness’ (Taylor, 2002).

Organizational ethnographers share an appreciation of the “‘ordinary language’ and conceptualizations used by members of the situation under study for making sense of their surroundings, their everyday activities, and the objects used in those settings and activities” (Miettinen et al., 2009, p.1315). In addition, they share a particular “sensitivity to the broader settings and the historical and institutional dynamics in which these emerge or are embedded” which includes to make “explicit the often-overlooked, tacitly known and/or concealed dimensions of meaning-making, including its emotional and political aspects. Such ethnographies can, at times, have a somewhat critical, even ‘raw’ – direct, unpolished and

sometimes shocking – quality, laying bare harsh and/or hidden social realities and exposing the entanglement of culture with power” (Ybema et al., 2009, p.7). As Miettinen et al. (2009, p.1315) note, it is this ethnographer’s “first-hand encounter with the actors in their own settings” that sets ethnography apart from a solely interview- or document based research.

Therefore, in order to uncover the complexities of the everyday in an organizational setting organizational ethnography offers a range of different techniques of observing and participating, but also conversing (e.g. formal interviews), and the close reading of documentary sources (e.g. written documents) play a role (Ybema et al., 2009, Miettinen et al., 2009). This combination of field research techniques allows organizational ethnographers to develop a ‘thick description’ of organizational activities (see Geertz, 1973) and makes ethnography to a particularly powerful methodology in practice theory (Ybema et al., 2009). By ‘going out into the field,’ they are not attempting to describe phenomena from a distance but, instead, are trying to get a grounded, practice-based understanding of organizational life (Ybema et al., 2009). This research was primarily based on participant observation and – to a certain degree – on observant participation. Participant observation, as defined by Van der Waal (2009, p.35) means “immersing oneself in the social context that is being studied and being open to the events and interactions taking place. In organizational ethnography this research strategy often means using fragmented bits of immersion wherever this seems viable, for instance, attending a meeting, having lunch with someone involved in the everyday running of an organization, and attending to small talk.”

Not surprisingly, because of its ability to capture the complexities of the everyday in an organizational setting (Van der Waal, 2009), besides practice-based studies, many research accounts describing creative processes in greater depth, and thus literature with which this research aimed to connect, made use of ethnographic research techniques as well. That is, unlike literature trying to depict the effects of certain factors on creative outputs, research

which describes the collective nature of creative processes in general, such as the research of Hargadon and Bechky (2006) and Harvey and Kou (2013), but also in advertising in particular such as the research of De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010), Moeran (2009), Moeran (2005), as well as Morais (2007) are based on ethnographic research techniques. As some of the researchers put forth, organizational ethnography has helped them “to uncover the perspectives of the people in the organization” (Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, p.489), including “the customary discrepancy between what people say they do and what they actually do” (Moeran, 2009, p.964).

However, whilst organizational ethnography is a powerful method to shed light onto the complexities of the everyday in an organizational setting (Ybema et al., 2009) several risks were also considered prior to, as well as whilst conducting this research: Alvesson (2003, p.172) for example points out that ethnographic research is often “time-consuming,” as well as “personally tiresome and stressful to carry out.” Moreover, there would be the risk of ‘going native’ on the one hand and of being too inflexible in challenging pre-existing assumptions on the other. Eventually, he points out that it would be difficult to capture and adequately represent what has been experienced during ethnographic research in published text. In addition, Cunliffe (2010), points out that there would often be the risk of deemphasizing specific particularities in ethnographic research (i.e. unique phenomena) because of the continuous inclination to represent findings in a more generalizable light. Eventually, she puts forth that in order to handle all the empirical material (see above) and thus to provide what Geertz (1973) describes as a truly ‘thick description’ of the phenomena under investigation specific abilities would be required. As Cunliffe (2010, p.227) explains, “it takes skill to write good ethnographies that convey a sense of the richness and intricacy of the culture being studied, are reflexive in/about the process, and offer insights and ideas that resonate with a wider audience.”

### Research site and data collection

For ethnographic research, a well-known advertising agency based in London was chosen. London is acknowledged as one of the three global capitals for advertising alongside New York and Tokyo and became the ‘creative hub’ for major agency networks and media agencies alike (NESTA, 2008, Technology Strategy Board, 2009, UKTI, 2009, Chapain and Comunian, 2009). Two thirds of all international advertising agencies have their European headquarters in London, with offices often employing more than 200 advertising practitioners (IPA, 2012). According to the last Creative Choices Footprint Report (2008) 95% of people working in the advertising industry are working in England, 51% of them do so in London and the South East. The advertising agencies employing them form ‘an industrial cluster’ – “a geographical agglomeration of firms from the same sector that collaborate and compete with each other, and have links with other actors in the location [...]” (De Propris et al., 2009, p.2).

The advertising agency was founded two decades ago and is still led by some of its founders. Along with the headquarters the agency runs two offices in other locations and has around 400 employees. Taking into account the multiple ways in which the advertising field can be mapped out, the advertising firm can be best described as a large, independent, full-service agency (e.g. Michell, 1984, Morrison and Haley, 2006, Horsky, 2006, McLeod et al., 2011, Sasser et al., 2013). Most importantly, however, the advertising agency described itself as ‘creativity led’ and was known as such in and beyond the advertising industry. The advertising practitioners working at the advertising agency thus believed in the effects of creativity on consumers and gave particular importance to the development of creative work in advertising development. Not surprisingly, for its creative work the agency has won several highly prestigious awards.

Without anticipating the results of the study, articles in industry magazines suggested that the advertising agency's strong focus on creativity would be evident in a range of organizational measures and practices. The advertising agency was, for example, particularly interesting as a research site, since it abandoned the account management role. As will be explained in the findings, due to the importance given to creativity the advertising agency's management substituted account managers with project managers and asks all 'specialists,' including creatives, to engage with clients directly. Thus, all 'specialists' working at the advertising agency were 'client facing' (c.f. Bilton, 2007). Consequently, within this agency, the main disciplinary focuses were creative, strategy, production and project management, with support provided by finance, human resources and business development – traditional disciplines common in most advertising industry firms, such as account management or media planning and buying, were missing (c.f. Lange, 2001).

In sum, the advertising agency was thus chosen because it constituted what Eisenhardt (1989) and Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007), building on the work of Pettigrew (1988) and Yin (1994), referred to as an 'extreme example' of creativity understandings as some type of shared aesthetic knowledge; it was thus expected to be 'unusually revelatory' and a highly powerful case for theory building concerning a phenomenon about which only conflicting literature as well as research with little empirical substantiation existed. The characteristics as well as the suitability of the advertising agency as a research site will be described in more detail below. It should be noted that, originally, whether to extend the research and, for example, compare multiple cases with each other was left open. However, after an initial phase of data collection because of the value and volume of insights that were already gained the original plan was rejected. Given the unique nature of the research site it was argued that additional cases would have led to oversimplified explanations resembling those highly generic creative process models which are already available in the literature, thus jeopardizing this research's aim of providing an in-depth account by which the specific practices

advertising creative processes are organized and, thus, to carve out the specific doings of advertising practitioners in the production of creative work. It was agreed to use the scope of this PhD research to provide concentrated descriptions of the ‘extreme example’ and to set the findings into the context of already existing research instead.

In order to provide an in-depth account of the specific practices by which advertising creative processes are organized and to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share as well as to analyse how advertising agencies continuously negotiate similarities and/or differences of their tastes and thus sustain collective action the research site was attended daily, throughout the working week, over a period of five months. As the development of an advertising campaign generally takes several months, staying at the advertising agency for five months was important to observe the entire development process at least a couple of times. The aim was to follow the decision-making taking place around an advertising campaign during different stages of its development in order to observe as many different situations as possible in which taste-based judgments concerning the various doings of advertising practitioners but also the ideas that they produce are discussed.

As revealed above, besides observing the advertising practitioners in their daily working routines and participating in their everyday activities, additionally, 40 semi-structured interviews with members of the agency’s main disciplines (strategy, creative, production, project management, and others) were conducted. In particular, nine strategists, nine creatives, seven creative directors, eight producers, eight project managers, and three others, that is, two founders as well as a creative resource manager, were interviewed. Interviewees differed in terms of their seniority and experience as well as gender and age. Interviews lasted 35 minutes on average, and led to roughly 650 pages of transcribed interviews. In order to ask questions most relevant to the agency at hand, interviews were conducted after an initial period of observation (i.e. in which the primary researcher was able

to become socialized and sensitive to processes within the organization). Finally, to grasp “a sense of the working practices” of the agency (Hackley, 2003, p.316) documentary sources such as emails, briefings, and scripts for TV advertisements were collected. The main focus, however – the fundamental domain of study – remained the practices which the practitioners carry out in their everyday doings, as through their practice their creativity understandings as some type of shared aesthetic knowledge became apparent – as the findings will later demonstrate.

## Data analysis and evaluation

Taking a practice perspective, I identified primary categories of three kinds in the analysis. These were: practices (and ‘bundles’ of practices); participant understandings about how such practices constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes in the organization; and participant understandings about how participation in such practices impacted on themselves and their working lives.

In a first step, the interviews were transcribed manually. Transcribing the interviews manually enabled me to produce interesting thoughts during transcription and to become highly familiar with the material produced. This is what Saldaña (2009, p.16) terms the pre-coding of text: “highlighting, bolding, underlining, or coloring rich or significant participant quotes or passages” that the researcher finds particularly interesting.

In a second step, I analysed the transcribed interviews and the other ethnographic data sources (e.g. field notes) in greater depth. As a loose guide to first level coding, Nicolini’s (2011, p.602) definition of practice was used with a focus on advertising creative processes. But this loose guide was used as a filter for selecting data, rather than a set of imposed categories. I decided to analyse the content on hard-copy printouts first to have “more control over and ownership of the work” (Saldaña, 2009, p.22) and to avoid the risk of needlessly expanding the coding (Welsh, 2002). After the first coding cycle, the codes were discussed, renamed, grouped, and regrouped to identify emerging themes and concepts (Saldaña, 2009).

In a third step, I conducted a second cycle of coding building on the first in order to develop the category structure. This time, however, the data coding and structuring processes were conducted electronically using NVivo 10. After the second cycle, codes were discussed with supervisors and peers, that is, in annual review and supervision meetings, to challenge the interpretations drawn, and then renamed, grouped, and regrouped again to substantiate

emergent themes and concepts. Whereas some of the codes were organized in categories containing child activities (i.e. ‘tree codes’) others remained ‘stand-alone’ (i.e. ‘free codes’). In total I generated 583 codes, categorized into 18 tree categories.

In a fourth step, where applicable, I interlinked codes with each other, using ‘relationships.’ By interlinking codes with each other, I was able to make ‘practice bundles’ and shared participant understandings visible, and map them out in diagrams for further discussion. In total 155 relationships were coded. As with the rest of the coding, the validity of the relationships identified, as well as their type and direction were discussed with supervisors and peers.

In a last step I isolated the most prominent ‘tree codes’ and visualized their interconnection with other ‘tree-’ and ‘free-codes’ including their ‘relationships.’ During this final critical reflection on the codes and relationships developed, further adjustments were made.

The above three categories (practices and two types of voiced participant understandings) proved to be significant since they all provide lenses on the advertising creative processes this research aimed to investigate and thus ways in which creativity was organized at the advertising agency. I then proceeded with the construction of theory, which necessarily involves writing (Feldman, 2004). As noted by Feldman (2004, p.298), in the process of writing “questions arise that did not arise from any of the previous analytical efforts.” My writing process involved the continuous reflection upon my understanding of the data. It forced me to specify my theory as well as to decide which observations were relevant to the ideas proposed (Feldman, 2004).

Reflecting on the own assumptions and prejudices throughout the whole research process was crucial (Lynch, 2000). Social researchers are as placed in highly situated

practices as the research participants they are studying (Lynch, 2000). Taking into consideration that the understanding of the researcher is also situated in a historical, social, and cultural context from which it arises allows us to identify “forgotten choices, expose hidden alternatives, lay bare epistemological limits and empower voices which had been subjugated by objective discourse” (Lynch, 2000, p.36). This not only included the data analysis and evaluation stage, but also the early beginnings and later phases leading up to the conclusion of this research. Discussions with my supervisors, presentations at annual reviews and conferences, as well as engaging in journal submission processes allowed me to ‘engage otherness’ and thus to engage in conversations with other scholars of different worldviews but also to ‘enact connectedness’ and thus to relationally reflect upon my surroundings and to identify “new contexts, new ideas, and new possibilities for theorizing” (Hibbert et al., 2014, pp.283-284).

Bearing in mind my own role in theory development, it is expected that the ‘formal theory’ will change, as “we may be exposed to new contexts, new ideas, and new possibilities for theorizing” (Hibbert et al., 2014, pp.283-284). This research thus does not aim to develop generic propositional statements, which fully reflect features of a pre-given world (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011). Instead of offering ‘statistical generalization,’ the formal theory developed thus offers ‘heuristic generalization’ and the “opportunities for refining our understanding of certain phenomena, namely opportunities for making more incisive distinctions than hitherto available” (Tsoukas, 2009, p.295). In other words, the theory developed through this research has to be seen as an indicator “that guides the search for better understanding, encouraging researchers to look for family resemblances – namely for the similarities and differences among the empirical phenomena” under investigation (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011, p.353).

## Ethical considerations

There were important ethical implications, which had to be considered throughout the research process. According to Marvasti (2004, p.133, as cited in Silverman, 2006, p.316) “the researcher enters a relationship with those she or he studies. The ethics of social research have to do with the nature of the researcher’s responsibilities in this relationship, or the things that should or should not be done regarding the people being observed and written about. This is not significantly different from what we do in other relationships. We try to be polite, treat people with respect, and do not do or say anything that will harm them. Good manners are a good beginning, but actual research scenarios may require guidelines that go beyond common courtesy.” The ethical implications, which emerged from the methodology, described above, were addressed through the normal ethical approval processes and the approval letter is included in this thesis as Appendix 1 Ethical approval.

## Chapter 4: Findings

To provide an in-depth account of the specific practices by which advertising creative processes are organized and to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share as well as to analyse how advertising agencies continuously negotiate similarities and/or differences of their tastes and thus sustain collective action, in the following sections the findings are presented.

*The findings chapter is structured as follows, in two parts:*

First, ‘everyday development process practices’, as I term them, will be described briefly. ‘Everyday development process practices’ can be roughly divided into ‘kicking off the creative process,’ ‘developing strategies,’ ‘generating ideas,’ ‘realising concepts,’ as well as ‘evaluating the effects of ideas.’ Moreover, the discontinuity, in which the advertising practitioner’s day-to-day work took place, will be addressed briefly (“working in discontinuity”). Then several ‘dynamic creative process practices,’ and thus practices in which the advertising practitioners’ distinct understanding about how advertising works was reproduced, will be explained. The ‘dynamic creative process practices’ can be roughly divided into ‘facing the client,’ ‘collaboration and conversation,’ as well as ‘aesthetic filtering.’

Although ‘everyday development process practices’ resemble the steps of highly aggregated advertising development models, such as the one proposed by Pratt (2006), their brief treatise at the outset of this findings chapter is necessary. As shown above, “the development process differs in detail in each advertising agency” and “these differences are important” (Hackley, 2005, p.95). Its brief review helps to contextualize the ‘everyday development process practices’ into the context of the particular advertising agency, which has been investigated.

Much more importantly, however, as will be explained, it is in the tension between the ‘everyday development process practices’ and the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ that much of the differences in the advertising practitioners’ views on advertising creation can be elucidated. For this reason, alongside the above practices, two different kinds of voiced understandings will be explained. In particular, voiced participant understandings of advertising practitioners about how such practices constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes in the organization as well as voiced participant understandings about how participation in such practices impacted on themselves and their working lives will be discussed.

As intimated earlier, despite the description of practices themselves, which were important to provide an in-depth account of the specific practices advertising creative processes are organized by and to draw conclusions about the specific tastes advertising practitioners share, the discussion of the two types of voiced understandings were particularly helpful to carve out the rather concealed and emotionally charged dimensions (c.f. Ybema et al., 2009, Strati, 2007) of the advertising practitioners’ tastes in general and the continuous negotiation of similarities and/or differences in tastes and thus the maintenance of collective action in particular. In short, alongside the practices themselves, the different voiced participant understandings offer additional perspectives into the ways the creative processes at the advertising agency were organized.

## Everyday development process practices

### **Introduction**

As detailed above, many practices carried out by advertising practitioners resemble the steps of highly aggregated advertising development models, such as the one proposed by Pratt (2006). In the following section, those ‘everyday development process practices’ will be addressed briefly.

*The section is structured as follows, in six parts:*

First, the ‘kicking off the creative process’ practice will be described. ‘Kicking off the creative process’ describes the practice in which advertising practitioners tried to elaborate the clients situation further by studying all types of information about the client as well its consumer base. Second, the ‘developing strategies’ practice will be addressed briefly. As will be described, strategists made choices based on the information collected, which were then synthesized into a creative brief – a document that functioned as guidelines but also as a ‘jumping off’ point for creative teams. Third, the ‘generating ideas’ practice will be explained. In ‘generating ideas’ creatives tried to generate ideas that answered the creative brief. Ideas were narrowed down from many to only a few by advertising managers, clients, as well as small groups of consumers. For TV and photography, external directors were also asked for their interpretations. Fourth, the ‘realizing concepts’ practice will be explained, which describes how advertising practitioners brought ideas to life. ‘Realizing concepts’ consisted of a highly complex pre-production, production, as well as post-production phase, planned and managed by producers. Fifth, the ‘evaluating the effects of ideas’ practice will be elaborated. In ‘evaluating the effects of ideas,’ strategists, creatives, as well as (mainly digital and experiential) producers monitored the performance of the ideas launched on the market. However, the interest in evaluating ideas and the type of data used seemed to vary. Finally,

this section explains how this process involved advertising practitioners ‘working in great discontinuity,’ since they were involved in different projects, for different brands, that were at different stages of the advertising development process.

### **Kicking off the creative process**

The advertising agency’s advertising development started shortly after the organization received clients’ briefs, which included outlines of the communication problem they were facing. This could have either been briefs from (potentially) new clients (e.g. in the course of a ‘pitch’) or briefs from already existing clients (e.g. for projects as part of already existing advertising campaigns). Client briefs served to define the problems clients were facing at that time and thus the reasons why clients were approaching the advertising agency for help. Unsurprisingly, advertising practitioners therefore described their day-to-day job as ‘problem solving.’ As S9<sup>2</sup> noted, for example, “it’s just about problem solving at its simplest. And yeah, helping clients to solve their problems to be able to exploit it for competitive advantage, really.”

However, often clients were unsure about the exact outline of the issues they were facing or thought they had to tackle certain problems although the real troubles lay somewhere else. As CD5, for example, pointed out, “I guess probably the most common problem is just not having enough information or a client is not entirely sure exactly what they’re wanting to get, you know? They know they have to do something and they know they have a budget that they have to spend but they’re not entirely sure [...] what they want to do with it or they don’t have a specific angle in mind of ways in which they want to communicate about something.” Therefore, in addition to the information provided in clients’ briefs, strategists normally gathered more information, both quantitative and qualitative in nature, as

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<sup>2</sup> Participants in the research are identified by codes of this kind in order to maintain their anonymity. In this context, C refers to creative; CD to creative director; S to strategist; P to producer; PM to project manager; CRM to creative resource manager; as well as F to founder.

well as processed and analysed it, to get closer to the clients' situations. As S2 noted, "you'd take the brief from the client and kind of try and flesh [it] out as much as you can with the client, you know, the brief in terms of if you think there are any holes in it, if you think there are any sort of discrepancies or anything, or you think you're missing any information – [just] trying to get it sort of as shaped as you can."

Sometimes this meant that clients provided access to business relevant information only, to allow the strategist to develop a client brief for them. On these occasions it was thus not about shaping clients' briefs but engaging in their development. As S8, for example, described, "on [brand name], which we just started working on, you know, it's very much [colleague's name] and I just sat down to talk about it and the briefing. That's very much... We haven't done anything on this. We don't know what this brand is [all] about. We haven't even had the briefs [...] from the client yet. So we've just been given a load of information. So him and I sitting down and saying, 'actually we think that, kind of, from our initial reading and thinking, and we think that these are the things that we think are really interesting.' And I had some thoughts; he had some thoughts about how we might possibly take that brief forward." Through the shaping of the information provided by the clients, the advertising practitioners not only made sense of the problem at hand but also began developing initial ideas on how to tackle it. As noted by S4 "very much what we do is we pose the advertising problem and then we solve the advertising problem."

In addition to information about the clients (e.g. sales data, product portfolio, or their competitors), as much information as possible about the clients' target audiences was collected. Besides demographic information, such as age, gender or residency, strategists were particularly keen to identify 'consumer insights,' and thus rather hidden and hitherto unknown consumer characteristics they could build their solutions upon. For them, finding those hidden consumer characteristics was important to increase the solution's relevance as

well as its unexpectedness. As CD5 noted “I think the best creative ideas are when they’re rooted in an insight, so you’ve got like a strong fundamental reason why they make sense. But then there is a twist on it – something that’s unexpected and fresh and makes you think ‘oh [I would have never] thought of that’ or, you know, just have this twist there of original thinking which is what I think makes a great creative idea.” At the advertising agency, the act of strategizing thus appeared to be an act of creativity in itself. Sometimes the advertising practitioners tried to combine multiple consumer insights in order to connect with a broader range of people. To remain original, the particular consumer insight advertising practitioners would build upon would be “different in every situation,” as S3 noted, but generally “there should be something human and interesting about it – not just a regurgitation of all the stuff that client’s brought you.”

The identification of ‘consumer insights’ could take multiple forms. Strategists made use of specific cultural research services (e.g. trend reports), commissioned their own research (e.g. focus groups), and even used academic literature to get closer to the peculiarities of the target audiences (e.g. research studies). In addition, several advertising practitioners reported that they would interview family members and friends that match their clients’ consumers. As CD5 noted, “what we’re trying incorporate is to do a little bit of research [...] ourselves, like, for instance we’re doing a project at the moment that’s aimed at mums and I’ve spent a lot of time talking with my friends who are mums and people who are mums in the agency. I mean obviously we’ve done the, you know, formal research groups and things as well but just to [...] get out and trying [to] talk to your audience and make sure that you understand the nuances of them.” S9 even reported that she reads books with titles such as “The Mommy Myth,” “Confessions of a Scary Mommy,” or “Mommy Wars” to sharpen her understanding of mothers, which were the target audience for a project she was developing a strategy for. Often, however, gathering information about the client as well as consumers appeared to be

deductive rather than inductive in nature. It aimed to “verify your own instinct,” as S9 noted, and thus to confirm the advertising practitioners’ initial gut feelings.

### **Developing strategies**

After all of the information that has been gathered throughout the ‘kicking off the creative process’ has been processed and analysed it was synthesized and transformed into a specific strategy, which defined the specific steps required to solve the clients’ problems and thus to achieve their marketing objectives. As S2 noted “...well, technically my job is a strategist, which nobody ever understands if I am asked by somebody ‘what do you do?’ and you say [that] you work in communications or advertising. They go 'do you make the ads?' and you go 'no' and they go 'but what do you do then?...' So I guess I kind of rationalize what I do to myself as kind of helping us understand what we should be saying to whom and some potential ways into how we might say that. [That] is I guess a simple way of putting it.” In a similar vein S9 noted “so I am in the strategy department and I am a strategy director. And I've worked on [brand name] and I'm currently on the [brand name] pitch. So I think what that means is [...] setting the strategy for all the work... So understanding who we should be talking to, what we should be saying, when we should be saying it, what the tone should be and... [...] I kind of look at my job in the simplest form as taking, like, lots and lots of information and then distilling it down to its simplest, the simplest possible way of telling a story. Just getting to the facts which is about making choices from the facts that you've got.”

‘Developing strategies’ usually went hand in hand with the development of a creative brief, which was somewhat a short record of the strategy on paper. As S1 noted, “in general as a strategist the role is somehow synthesizing all manner of information at the beginning of a process, so the kind of commercial objectives from the client, what are they looking to achieve, what's the business problem they're trying to resolve, looking at the wider world, culturally, what's going on at the moment, what kind of cultural factors might kind of come to

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bear on that particular, kind of, business problem, commercial objective, you know? Looking at all kinds of research if we are targeting a certain particular group of people, you know? So we're going 'why?', what message they want to hear, all these kind of things. Usually at the beginning of the process that then gets synthesized into, you know, kind of, briefed to the creatives, who then go and make it work." In a similar vein S1 noted "so my role is to help identify what the business problems are, if there are any, and what the market context is, who we should be talking to, why we should be talking to them, what we should say, and then write that in theory, write that into a brief, which then I give to the creatives and they write an ad." The advertising practitioners, however, emphasized that strategies can involve a range of different solutions, of which only one would be the production of 'ads.' Despite classical advertisements (e.g. TV, radio, or print advertisements), the advertising agency developed business solutions (e.g. setting up a call centre to increase customer satisfaction), experiential solutions (e.g. setting up events, to activate a new product), as well as complex digital installations (e.g. a solution which involved augmented reality to increase brand engagement). As shown above, however, due to its reputation in television, most solutions were constructed around ideas that had been developed for TV. Other forms of communication were then used to support the clients' activities on TV instead of forming the foundation of campaigns themselves.

Creative briefs were an important working document in the creative teams' efforts to develop ideas. Creative briefs contained the essential information required to develop ideas that support the clients' marketing objectives (e.g. the advertising objectives, motivation, thoughts, and feelings of the target audience, or the brand positioning and personality, primary outcome or 'take away,' as explained in Shimp and Andrews, 2013), and thus lay down the framework in which 'generating ideas' had to take place. Most importantly, however, they gave directions to start with and thus functioned as inspirational input and 'jumping off points' for creative teams. As noted by S2 "I am not somebody who's good at

being brief, and that's my kind of weakness, so I'm always trying to remind myself it's called a briefing, it's not a longing [...]. So normally I try and condense a lot of what's their brief into a [...] one liner on what we need to do. Then, depending on whether they know the audience or not, I might put an audience section in but if it's a kind of on-going brief, the same campaign for the same audience and then teams know it inside out then there is not a lot of point me putting it in there [...]. Then channels, [...] and then [...] any kind of mandatories [...] like [...] I don't know if it's 30 second TV or we have to include a certain logo or those sort of things. So I try to just keep it quite functional to the kind of very sort of functional information and then sort of talk around it really." Before creative briefs were passed on to creative teams, the clients signed them off. Thus, since the creative brief combines input the client, the agency, as well as consumers (e.g. through consumer research) it somehow captured the expectations of all gatekeepers of creative work. An excerpt of a creative brief, collected during fieldwork, is displayed in Appendix 2.

### **Generating ideas**

After creative briefs were signed off, they were communicated to creative teams. In contrast to strategists, who were responsible to lay out the underlying strategy of the clients' solutions, creative teams were responsible to deliver the specific 'means:' that is, specific ideas for TV, radio, print, business, experiential, or digital solutions, that would support the clients' marketing objectives. Thus, as soon as the strategists shared creative briefs with the creative department, creative teams went away to develop creative executions. However, before they actually started they were 'kicking off the creative process' themselves; that is, they conducted research on clients and target audiences as well, to sharpen their very own understanding of the clients and consumers for whom they were creating ideas. In addition, creative teams looked for inspiration. Besides websites, many creative teams reported working outside the office to be closer to the people they are supposed to reach in order to gain inspiration. As CD1, for example noted, "my inspiration is mainly from life and living

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and chatting to people.” In a similar vein, also CD7 noted, “we'll leave the meeting and probably go upstairs [a bar above the advertising agency], leave the office... We'll block out a few hours and, first of all, we might take a little bit..., like we are going to have a bit of internet research on say [brand name]. We might have to learn a little bit more about the course, and check we understand the brand and then we'll start with the most basic conversation about what would make us react to that brief, like what would we talk to our friends about or, you know,... We're trying to think about things that would get us motivated as individuals before we start thinking about the audience. So that's like total crap chat that we would hate anyone else to hear. And then hopefully of that something will come and then we'll start. That's when we sit at the computer and start trying to write it or mock it up.”

Similar to other advertising agencies, creatives worked as a team of two (comprising a copywriter and an art director), enabling them to bounce ideas off each other before they were presented to the wider team. ‘Generating ideas’ was commonly referred to as ‘delivering against the brief’ (e.g. CRM1), circumscribing the limitations the creative brief puts onto the creative team’s practice. Besides being ‘original,’ the creative executions had to be relevant and thus take all the information stated in the creative brief into consideration. To ensure that ideas were original, idea generation took place under the supervision of creative directors who judged ideas, suggested how promising ideas can be developed further, and made decisions as to which ideas should not be pursued. As noted by CD2 “my job title is creative director. And I think it's a pretty explanatory title. A lot of what we do is related to creativity, which is basically coming up with ideas to solve problems and that's pretty much the role of the creative department. So there are lots of creatives, there are either art directors or copywriters that work in teams. And they get briefed and they go away, spend some time trying to solve problems, and the creative director is in charge of sifting through their ideas, their thinking, guiding them, directing them to get the best out of each project.” In addition, to ensure creative ideas are ‘relevant’ and thus meet all requirements as stated in the creative briefs,

idea generation took place under the supervision of strategists. As S4 noted, “my job title at [this advertising agency] is, I am a strategy director. And my responsibility is basically to make sure that the advertising that we produce works.” Finally, to make sure that ideas could be realized within time and budget, and meet all legal requirements (for example, when creating ideas for an alcohol brand) at certain times of the advertising development process creative teams were assisted by producers (e.g. experiential, TV, or digital producers), who were familiar with those practicalities.

Creative executions were regularly presented in reviews. Whereas ‘creative reviews’ were reviews in which ideas were presented internally to creative directors (and strategists), ‘client reviews’ were meetings in which clients judged ideas and decided which ideas should be developed further. During these meetings ‘routes,’ i.e. advertising messages that could be executed in various, different ways, which initially appeared to be promising were suddenly found to be inappropriate and were dropped and others were opened up for exploration. The practice of ‘generating ideas’ was therefore highly iterative in nature. As in academia, advertising practitioners were “trying to discover [‘right’ ideas] through writing stuff” (C2). As CD1 noted, “certainly on [brand name] we’re reinventing the brand so we’re learning and setting up principles as we write.” In a similar vein S7 explained, “a lot of closing the doors to possible strategies happens when you look at work and you realize it’s just not going to do something. Then you have to say ‘okay, that is not working. It’s not leading to good work right now. So maybe that’s actually a good sign. Let’s shut that door down and let’s pursue a different angle.’”

As soon as clients favoured specific ideas, creative teams developed variations of those ideas. This included suggestions about how these ideas might translate into other communication channels and thus what an entire campaign might look like. If the initial idea was, for example an idea for a TV advertisement, suggestions were made how this idea might

come out in a digital, print, or radio environment. As CD7 noted, “...you [...] come up with, kind of, the overview and then detail it out, like TV scripts and press and posters and other bigger ideas.” Moreover, favoured ideas were taken into ‘advertisement testing’ and consumers were asked to evaluate them. The feedback of consumers could impact heavily on the clients’ final decision – particularly if it was in line with the judgments of clients.

Eventually, the clients’ signed an idea off which was then passed on into production. If it was an idea for TV, directors were approached and asked to suggest their interpretation of the idea. Directors were expected to add their take on an idea (e.g. by shooting an idea in a ‘Wes Anderson style’). The directors’ “treatments” (an in-depth, visual as well as discursive translation of the creative team’s script) were pre-selected by the creative team and those most outstanding were suggested to the client. As P7 noted “...normally you approach three or four directors and you send them the script and notes and all that kind of stuff that the guys which you know want to sell their script to the director. And if the director likes the script, he'll jump on a phone call, he or she will jump on a call with you and you can just talk it through. And then if that's all good they'll go and write treatment. [...] [Creative teams] will have an idea in their head of what they want to do and how to bring it to life. But the director will add to that, they'll put their spin on it...” Finally, as soon as the client decided on a director’s treatment, the idea was made.

### **Realizing concepts**

In ‘realizing concepts,’ advertising practitioners turned the creative execution that the creative teams came up with “into something more tangible, more practical” (P5). At this stage, producers seemed to take over the advertising development process. However, although producers became highly involved at this stage of the advertising development process, they worked in close contact with the creative team, who created the ideas and wanted to make sure that ideas were realized as envisioned. The process of production began with the pre-

production of the idea that has been signed off, which meant the detailed planning of its realization. As with ‘generating ideas,’ the production took place within strict frameworks, which were mainly defined by the timing and budget allocated to the project at hand. In pre-production all factors constituting an idea, such as the location and people involved, as well as a timetable, were discussed and decided upon with the advertising agency’s staff, clients and external production companies. Due to the number of people involved in the realization of an advertising idea, production days were heavily expensive and thus had to be kept to an absolute minimum. Through pre-planning, unforeseen troubles, which might risk the production in time and on budget, were avoided to the greatest possible extent. In pre-planning the signed off ‘treatment’ of the director which, as revealed above, included illustrations of the scenes and which compromised ideas, formed the basis on which producers planned the production. As noted by P2, pre-planning takes place “in quite a logical way. So if I’ve got a script I’ll break it down and work out how many people are in it. And therefore how many artists I need to cost for, kind of generally chat to the creatives to trying get an idea of the scale of it, to work out how many days you think you might need quite roughly. But often things like that are dictated by how much money you have. So you’ve got a certain amount of money, it might be a script that you could shoot in five days but there is no way – [so] you have to shoot it in three. [...] So if you look through and you work out, you know, just a really logical almost quite non-creative way, it’s just what are the key elements, what are they gonna cost, how long are they gonna take and then that’s your basic structure of maybe a ballpark estimate. And then the creative conversations around that will help inform how that needs to move around and develop.” The above quote demonstrates the rational manner in which producers go on with planning the execution of an idea, which seems to be in stark contrast to the ways creatives work in ‘generating ideas.’

Producers were familiar with laws and regulations, and knew how much things cost. Moreover, when realizing concepts the advertising agency was dependent on the expertise of

a range of external people and the advertising development process became heavily complex. As a producer, knowing the right external resources and being able to manage them as the production progressed was thus fundamentally important. As P7 noted, “basically you're the one who takes the script and says 'this is how much it's gonna cost,' 'this is how long it's gonna take' you help them creatively pull in, you know, the director, production company,... you know, you get all those people working together and you keep the time and budget. It's probably kind of fundamentally what the job is.” Often producers had a large network of suppliers, which they had established over years and knew the right production companies to go to for each job and were highly experienced in resourcing them. Overall, they not only knew what to consider but also whom, when producing an idea. As noted by P7 “I think you need to have a good understanding of who's out there, what people are doing, and what people at [this advertising agency] would like.”

In actual production, the material (e.g. video, photo, or audio footage) required to construct the story, as illustrated in the directors’ ‘treatment,’ was produced. In this step all people involved (e.g. creative teams, creative directors, the producer, clients as well as people from external production companies) came together at the production site and followed the detailed production plan that was worked out in pre-production. Creative teams as well as creative directors made sure that the director executed the idea as envisioned and agreed upon. Moreover, they made sure that the clients were happy with the production. As C6 noted, “the main thing you do [at a production site] is try and make sure that what you've imagined in your head or on paper, or however you imagined it, fully comes to life on the shoot. On top of that, you have to make sure that, obviously, it's gonna be something that the clients are happy with as well as you would be, 'cause otherwise it's never gonna run. But that's the kind of main job.” The producer, on the other hand was responsible for ensuring that the production took place on time (and thus on budget). As P7 noted, “on the actual shoot day you get a shooting schedule from the production company, which is basically your storyboard, but it's

saying 'between eight o'clock in the morning and ten o'clock in the morning we're shooting these things then this and then this and then this.' So my main job is making sure that happens." Since everything was strictly pre-planned, at the production site there was only minor space for variation. Therefore, the nature of the working procedures at the production site itself was rather executional as opposed to highly explorative and creative.

After the raw material required to bring an idea to life was captured, it was passed on into 'post-production.' The raw material was then reviewed to identify those visuals that were most suitable to tell the creative teams' story. As CD1 explained, "so, for example, we just shot eight ten-second ads. So we shot them for three days and we've probably got, oh my god, 40 hours of footage. And out of that you need to find 80 seconds. So we went in and we attempted to find one shot for each ad but some of them are two shots, some of them are three shots. But yeah, so you're basically, I finish shooting, I come back to the office, the director and the editor spend a couple of days selecting their favourites and how to go in and we fiddle around a bit and then the client comes in and they fiddle around a bit." The material, which was filtered out, was then strung together to compile the first draft of the later TV, radio, print, business, experiential, or digital solution. Finally, the draft was refined further. For a TV commercial that meant that the draft was processed in edit or sound suites, where it was graded and also sound, sound effects, and computer animated elements were added. Also in post-production, producers gave structure to the overall process and ensured that the finalization of the campaign took place on time and on budget. However, also at the final stage of production, producers always worked closely together with the creative teams which the ideas that were being made originated from.

### **Evaluating the effects of ideas**

Soon after ideas had been produced, they were launched in the market. Since the advertising agency did not have a media planning and buying department, the communication

and implementation of ideas in the respective channels was taken over by other companies. Nevertheless, the advertising practitioners evaluated the performance of the advertising agency's ideas based on a range of different data – at least to a certain extent.

The process upon which the evaluation was based depended on the specific client the advertising practitioners were working with. Clients normally had their very own methods of evaluation, as S8, for example, explained: “Different clients have different ways of doing it and we tend to fall in line with the way that the client wants to evaluate the research, rather than have our own set way of doing.” In a similar vein S2 noted “people do it in different ways. I am quite lucky on [brand name] because they have a process in place. So you actually have to fill in a kind of deck that talks about 'okay so what was your idea,' ‘what was the insight,’ ‘how did that manifest itself in work,’ ‘what was the work like?’ And then each agency has to, sort of, do the same thing from their perspective but then the client has to fill in what were our objectives, what were our business targets, what did we actually achieve, how did that map out across the period, what were the problems, what the challenges...”

Surprisingly, however, some advertising practitioners reported that not all clients would be interested in the evaluation of their campaigns or that data to evaluate campaigns would exist, but would not be shared with the advertising practitioners. Whereas P5 noted that “in the digital world it's very easy to find out how effective something was,” evaluating TV, radio, print, business, and experiential solutions would be more complex to assess. As S2 noted, “getting that information out of people [is often complicated]. So often clients don't have it [and] it'll come out of some, like, marketing intelligence unit [...] at the client's side. They have to, sort of, go away and extract it or it can come from, like, the research agency if they do anything like brand tracking and stuff. So yeah, it's never sort of a single source.” Therefore, as she pointed out “understanding how it's working can sometimes be quite complex enough in itself.” It should be noted, however, that not all clients evaluated the

advertisements launched. Although some clients would assess the performance of ideas, “not many clients, I don't think, necessarily do it,” as S2 pointed out. For those who did, learnings out of these evaluation results were used in subsequent work for clients. As S1 explained, “once a route gets chosen and is made, then your job is to, kind of, track the success or failure of that work and see what you can learn from how it lives in the real world, and then feed that back into, kind of, ongoing briefs. So, you know, the next brief might be kind of, you know, ‘last year we've tried to do this, we had limited success, we weren't able to win over the housewives, for instance – what can learn from the previous advertising?’” Also digital producers were involved in the evaluation of ideas based on numbers. For P5, measuring the success and failure of a campaign and thus to know how well a digital campaign has worked out was considered “a sort of pride thing.”

However, also on the advertising agency side, different levels of interest in the evaluation of the performance of ideas existed. Whereas strategists (as well as digital and experiential producers) seemed to care about the performance of ideas, creative teams were less interested. As C8 explained, “it's good to know if it's helped business and stuff, but I think that's kind of out of our bounds a little bit, you know?” If creative teams monitored the success or failure of their idea, they were rather more interested in its very immediate effects and thus preferred qualitative instead of quantitative data. As C9 noted “I've been much more interested to know how entertaining people found an ad rather how many extra chairs it sold.” Thus, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube were the favourite channels for creative teams to see how their ideas performed. As CD7, for example, described, “I do have like on my tweet deck I have like a section for all the ads I've recently done to see what the public says about them.”

CD2 explained the advantages of Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube as follows: “It's incredible 'cause like it's so immediate and it's so raw and visceral, unmoderated. [...] You get what it is – what it says on the tin.” Similarly, C9 also noted that “it is interesting to know

what actual people, not our mates or our bosses or people we work with, but like actual people out there think of stuff.” There would be no “politics involved with it or anything, you know? It's not anything within the industry [...]. If people have written about something on Twitter, they've sort of done that out of their own free will and, you know, put their own opinion out there. So it sort of makes it more valid than anything else, I think” (C8). But also clients and other advertising practitioners use these communication channels to monitor the performance of ideas, in addition to the evaluation of conventional measures. As S6 noted, “as soon as an ad goes on air, the client will look straight [...] to YouTube views and they're looking on Twitter about what somebody said about their new commercial [...]. So unless you got your arms around that and see if you can respond accordingly and manage the client, what this all means accordingly then, yeah, you kind of need to do it basically.”

### **Working in discontinuity**

The day-to-day work of the advertising practitioners was characterized by a great deal of discontinuity, due to the requirement to switch practices as well as the extent of the advertising practitioners' involvement. The advertising practitioners were working across different brands, across different projects of a brand, and across projects involving different forms of media, which impacted on the specific design of the advertising development processes in which they were involved. Moreover, the projects were normally at different stages of the advertising development process and thus demanded different types of action. Thus, the practices of ‘kicking off the creative process,’ ‘developing strategies,’ ‘generating ideas,’ and ‘realizing concepts’ often overlapped. Consequently, there was not simply one advertising development process taking place at the advertising agency, but multiple advertising development processes at the same time.

As C1 noted, it ‘would completely depend’ what he is doing: “Sometimes you're just coming up with ideas, so you are sitting there, other times you are having meetings, being

briefed or having meetings about the work you've come up with, or just meetings in general – brainstorms. If you have work bought then you could be looking at directors, reading directors' treatments. You could be in town watching an edit – it depends on at what part of the process of an advert you are in." In similar vein C2 explained, "normally we've got about three projects on the go and sometimes they are all at different stages. So one would be first ideas, one would be kind of trying to sell in final scripts, one would be in production, and so depending on what stages each thing is at you'll have to, you know... For one you'll be looking at directors' reels or, you know, checking wardrobes, for another you'll be sitting there thinking, you know, just coming up with ideas, and for another you'll be putting a presentation together for... kind of to show the client."

But there were a few exceptions: Producers, for example, were working on larger production and thus allocated to a few projects only. As P2, for example, reported, producers would work at "usually one at a time, one campaign." However, it would 'depend on the size of projects,' as she explained, "because if it's a bigger one, like I work on [brand name] quite a lot and for the size of project, they are quite fast turnaround – we're always trying push more time in the schedule and we never get it so it ends up being quite a lot to do in a short period of time. So generally I've been just work[ing] on that one, but within that it's kind of a music video, a 60 second ad, a 30 second ad and there are various support media that I need to feed into and work with other producers as well, so generally at the moment one project at a time."

## **Conclusion**

As shown above, the 'everyday development process practices' performed by advertising practitioners at this advertising agency resemble the steps of highly aggregated advertising development models, such as the one proposed by Pratt (2006). All types of categories identified as part of the 'Everyday development process practices' theme are summarized in Table 2.

Category	Description
Kicking off the creative process	The gathering and analysis of a wide range of information to localize the clients' problems.
Developing strategies	The identification of interesting insights within information gathered and analysed and their synthesis into creative briefs.
Generating ideas	The development of ideas for advertisements, which build upon the creative briefs.
Realizing concepts	The production and thus transformation of ideas into final advertisements, after ideas were signed off by clients.
Evaluating the effects of ideas	The analysis of the effect of ideas on consumers, once they were launched in markets.
Working in discontinuity	The advertising practitioners' constant 'shifting' between one of the above practices and the other.

**Table 2 Summary of the ‘Everyday development process practices’ theme’s categories**

‘Kicking off the creative process’ described the practice in which advertising practitioners tried to elaborate the client’s situation further by studying all types of information about the client as well its consumer base. In ‘developing strategies’ strategists made choices based on the information collected, which were then synthesized into a creative brief – a document that functioned as guidelines but also as a ‘jumping off’ point for creative teams. In ‘generating ideas’ creatives generated ideas intended to answer the creative brief. Ideas were narrowed down from many to only a few by advertising managers and clients as well as small groups of consumers. For TV and photography, external directors were asked for their take on ideas. ‘Realizing concepts’ then consisted of a highly complex pre-production, production and post-production phase, planned and managed by producers. Finally, in ‘evaluating the effects of ideas,’ strategist, creatives and (mainly digital and experiential) producers monitored the performance of the ideas launched on the market. Yet, as demonstrated, the interest in evaluating ideas and the type of data used seemed to vary. As explained, however, there was not simply a single advertising development process at the advertising agency but multiple processes, which took place at the same time, which were at

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different stages of their respective life cycles. Consequently, advertising practitioners were working in great discontinuity.

However, the organization of the advertising creative process is more complex, as the following sections demonstrate, and further nuances in the ways advertising practitioners prefer to work together exist.

## Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising

### **Introduction**

After having explained the ‘everyday development process practices’ that advertising practitioners are immersed in during their day-to-day work, the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ will now be discussed. As revealed above ‘dynamic creative process practices’ are those practices, which are fundamentally different to the conventional practices that are common to many advertising agencies.

Advertising practitioners put their distinct and shared creativity understandings into practice through dynamic creative process practices. By describing these ‘dynamic’ practices the advertising practitioners’ distinct and shared aesthetic understandings about how to develop creative advertisements as well as their later, sensual, appearance will be explained. At the same time, however, through the close analysis of voiced participant understandings, specific tensions in these overlapping creative processes, as well as in these ways in which these tensions were negotiated and thus collective action was sustained, were identified, questioning the existence of an entirely consensual picture.

*The section is structured as follows, in four parts:*

First, the advertising practitioners’ shared aesthetic understanding about how advertising works will be elaborated. As will be described, the advertising practitioners believe that only creative work will break through the consumers’ advertising clutter. Moreover, how this belief is reflected in the advertising agency’s output will be explained. In addition, emerging difficulties to produce highly creative work, for example due to shifts in the aesthetic understandings of advertising practitioners, will be described.

Second, how the advertising practitioners' strong belief in creativity is reflected in the way advertising practitioners were organized will be discussed. Besides fostering creativity internally, the pushing and pulling of clients was seen as most important in the development of creative work. Since creative teams would be the best advocates of creativity, the advertising agency abandoned the account management discipline completely. Thus, all remaining advertising practitioners were 'client-facing.' As will be shown, conventional account management practices had to be taken over by others. Most importantly, 'presenting and selling ideas' was performed by creatives themselves.

Third, voiced participant understandings about the effects of a client-facing approach will be discussed. As it will be explained, advertising practitioners reported feelings of confusion as well as increased responsibilities caused by client facing activities but also decreased levels of conflict were observed. This was partly due to specific empowering benefits of 'presenting and selling ideas' that creative teams reported, including having control over the way an idea is sold; having the chance to receive clients' feedback immediately, without being filtered or worked up by account managers; and the ability to react to the feedback in an equally immediate and unfiltered manner.

However, fourth, It will also be explained how the direct exposure to clients enabled creatives to adapt to or incorporate their aesthetic understandings and develop 'sales strategies' causing a dilemma in the company, which regarded producing creative work as its top priority. In addition, how the advertising agency's management reacted to the problem of creative teams adapting to or incorporating the aesthetic understandings of clients will be discussed, including the protection of creative teams as well as the continuous resourcing of creatives, who were new to the industry.

### **Sharing collective understandings about how advertising works**

#### *Championing creativity*

As S2 noted “we're all very you know... we are creatively led and that's the thing that we prioritize above everything else.” This is indicative of this agency and the industry in general, where “creativity is king” (P1). The advertising agency’s management believed that in advertising strong creative work is the only way to achieve the client’s marketing objectives. Thus F1 noted, “I believe that by [communicating pieces of information] in the most original way, then that gives it – that piece of communication – the best chance of cutting through. 'Cause it's competing with a lot of other... everyone is trying to communicate with you it seems, so you know, advertisers. And I guess as a company we believe that, you know, that we can by not doing things, by not communicating necessarily in the way people have done before, that the benefit of that is that more people will hear us when we do communicate.”

In interviews, advertising practitioners particularly emphasized the ‘stopping power’ (see Pieters et al., 2010) of advertisements that are perceived as ‘creative.’ As S7 noted, for example, “what you really do believe at the end of it is that it is best to come up with a piece of outstanding work than it is to come up with a strategically brilliant bit of average work. Because, ultimately, we work for the most part in an industry where our product interrupts people and asks for people to give up some of their time. And in order to do stuff that performs the best, you need to get past that barrier first and the better creative work *will* get past that barrier first. [However,] a better creative [work] doesn't mean ‘wacky,’ it just means a much better creative solution.” In addition, according to several advertising practitioners, creativity was not only seen as a means to break through the consumers’ advertising clutter but also an effective method to impact on the key cognitive, affective and behavioural stages of the consumer’s response, which are activated *after* an advertisement caught the consumers’

attention. As CRM1 noted “we believe, and most good agencies believe, that if you just let creativity lead the other things will follow.”

Practitioners of all disciplines working at the agency generally shared the understanding of the management’s beliefs about how advertising works, although slight deviations existed as subsequent sections will point out. As CD2 for example noted, “the biggest quality of this place is it attracts the same kind of like-minded people. They want to do the exact same things and have the same vibes, same mentality and drive.” The shared motivation to develop creative work was also evident in a statement of P1, who worked at the advertising agency as an ‘experiential’ producer: “When I came to this [advertising agency] I was exposed to worlds of experience and events that I haven’t necessarily been exposed to. And I think [this advertising agency] creatively is a more challenging – in a good way – place. So you have people who are interested in multiple fields, in different areas. I think here, there is more kind of a pro-activity to create something, whether it’s unique or unusual or bespoke or whatever it might be.”

Eventually, “to be one of the places where great people want to work” (F1) the advertising agency turned its premises into a space of creativity itself. Large graffiti in the reception hall, all kinds of vintage items, as well as a variety of objects used in (previous) advertising campaigns comprise its physical appearance. Different to other advertising agencies, whose physical set up is plastered with corporate design and thus corporate colours, corporate typography, and corporate logos, at the advertising agency researched none of this existed. It appears that the advertising agency’s management preferred to use their office as an inspirational resource instead of advertising space. When I asked PM2, for example, why they did not have any corporate logos on the walls, like a service led advertising agency that I had visited a few days before, he noted “why we would want to? We all know where we work. We don’t need any constant reminder – what’s the point?”

*Signifying creativity in the output produced*

Unsurprisingly, the advertising practitioners shared creativity understanding was reflected in the output the advertising agency produced. S4 explained how the advertising agency's understanding, (that what works is what is (creatively) good), was reflected in the 'product:' "there is an absolute unwillingness here to let something go out what we don't think is good. So, again, at a lot of places they will stop at the point at which either they know the client will buy it or that it's good enough or even that they've done as much work as they can afford to do to have the account remain profitable. So, all sorts of other equations come into it. But I think at [this advertising agency] the main thing [is] that nobody takes a job here unless they have that mind-set that they really only want to do good stuff... They're probably more interested in doing good stuff than they are in advancing their career in the industry. So, that means that [...] the type of work is different, and the way of working."

Through their output the advertising agency managed to build up a strong creative reputation both in the advertising industry as well as on the client side. As C9 noted "I think [our agency is] known for being quite creative and quite kind of out there with the work that they do. [...] Or [this agency's] work didn't seem as safe as normal. I think they are known for being quite kind of, yeah, controversial with their work, and stuff like that. Which is obviously appealing as a creative because you want to go somewhere where you have the most kind of freedom and the most opportunity to get out, you know, the most creative work, I guess." Moreover, the agency became famous for their humorous approach to advertising as well as their tendency to use 'story telling' as a way to package their humorous ideas. Finally, the advertising agency became famous for the use of TV as a means to communicate their advertising ideas, which was probably partly due to the specific era in which the agency was founded but most likely also due to the un-restrictedness of the advertising channel *per se*.

*Experiencing shifts in the championing of creativity*

It should be noted, however, that the ‘prioritization of creativity above everything else’ (as S2 put it) has been relativized over the past couple of years, due to a changing client base and their somewhat different understanding about how to develop creative advertisements as well as their later, sensual appearance. As C3 noted, “the more they have grown, they have clients that are more formulaic and less brave.” Larger clients would have a lower affinity to risk and demand stronger strategic planning than smaller clients. Therefore, as the clients grew, also the strategic focus of the advertising agency became stronger – a trend, which was also reflected in the increasing ratio of strategists working at the advertising agency. As PM2 explained, “when we first started it was probably more 'seat-of-the-pants' stuff. And we just went on a gut feeling. You can't do that with the big clients. You have to work out *why* it is the best way to do something and come up with more of a strategic, a more thought-out strategic plan than what we used to, you know? In the early days it was more a question of saying 'this is gonna... people will smile...' And it's a bit of a shame that you can't do that anymore.” In a similar vein, C3 pointed out, “the way that the agency has grown has been good and bad, because now it's bigger... bigger clients. But bigger clients often have more to lose and are therefore more afraid of taking risks. And we get better return from the work that we do for them, so we can continue, but it also means that we aren't producing quite as much unique and interesting work always, I think. But that's not... that's not for all clients. And I think that's the same problem everyone has in the industry.”

Even the agency’s reputation for funny, narrative TV advertisements could have lost its sharpness, due to shifts in the client base as well as changes in the media landscape, as several advertising practitioners noted. CD1, for example, explained, “...we used to be known for comedy TV, like, daft, silly television and quite edgy, funny, telly... And I think a lot of people started doing that work, so we became one of many. And so now I think [this agency]

is still seen as generally a bit more edgy than other agencies, but I wouldn't say we're known for one medium so much, you know?" In a similar vein, CD5 noted, "I don't know, I mean I think when [this agency] started out they might have been more of a particular style. I think now that we've grown and our client base has grown I think we've got much more variation in our style." One of the partners even mentioned that their work became more sincere over recent years, when he noted "[I] think we used to express it more obviously through comedy when we started. I think we are a little bit more heartfelt now" (F2).

For some advertising practitioners, however, the strategic focus of the advertising agency was still not strong enough. Particularly, strategists noted in interviews that they would like to see a stronger planning of ideas than currently put into practice and anticipated by the firm's management. As S2, for example, noted, "I think that's the bit where it can sometimes get lost. So I think, 'cause we are an agency, we're all very creatively led and that's the thing that we prioritize above everything else, sometimes to sort of just [...] putting steps in places to check that the work we make actually works – that bit can kind of get forgotten. Whereas at other agencies, you know, they would have to write an effectiveness model coming out of the back of the work, made before it actually went out and then when the work wasn't right start to go 'well did it do what we wanted it to do? What evidence have we got to prove that?' you know? 'Is it working the way we thought it would work?' So I think that's primarily sort of a strategist's need to do that but I think it can also be encouraged, I guess, by creative directors as well in terms of them wanting to make work that's working."

Moreover, although a review of the advertising agency's portfolio revealed, that indeed not all of the work produced fell into humorous, narrative, TV advertising, most advertising ideas still fell in those categories. Most creatives started at the agency since they shared a disposition for TV and the corresponding freedom to bring their imagination to life. Furthermore, they shared the agency's humorous, story-telling approach and saw 'having a

laugh' as the return for consumers for spending time to engage with the advertisements they produce. The relevance of humour in the advertising practitioners' day-to-day work was also evident in the emails that they sent around. It felt as if saying something funny was a requirement to take part in the 'chit-chat' going on; this is best exemplified with an email displayed in Appendix 3. Thus, although the shared aesthetic understanding has somewhat changed over time, its foundation remained. Regardless of the exact way in which the agency's reputation has developed, however, the findings demonstrate that the agency's shared understanding about how to develop creative advertisements as well as their later, sensual appearance is influenced by a range of different people interacting with each other in a client-facing framework for advertising creation and this is thus a dynamic phenomenon.

### **Facing clients in advertising development**

Despite these minor shifts and/or aesthetic disagreements, the shared belief in creativity remained and had certain effects on the specific practices the advertising practitioners were immersed in, of which several will be discussed in this chapter. Most significantly, all specialists working at the advertising agency were client facing, as the following sections will explain in more detail.

#### *Promoting and demanding creativity*

The strong belief in the effects of creativity on consumers meant first and foremost that the advertising agency's management tried everything which allows for producing highly creative work and thus to set up an environment in which creative ideas can emerge. Instead of rejecting risky ideas before they end up on the client's desk, people from other disciplines would be encouraging and would help to sell these ideas; as C8 pointed out: "creatives are given a lot more freedom here and I think, you know, there is a lot more encouragement and you will be backed in... you know, the management will back your ideas a lot more here. And although they want what's best for the client they also tend to push the client a little bit more

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to go that little bit further with the work, rather than saying 'no' to certain ideas before they even get to client presentation stage. Which is good!"

At the same time, if ideas that were being developed did not fit the advertising agency's own standards, they were not presented to clients and deadlines were asked to be extended. As C2 noted "[this advertising agency] [...] they always ask 'do we really want to present this?' you know?" CRM1, for example, described, how the agency has decided to hold back parts of their work since it did not satisfy their own aesthetic standards: "I think we presented the idea and the client... it sounded like the client loved it but we didn't present all the body of work behind it. Because we didn't feel that was strong enough. And we want more [time] to craft it." In such situations, deadlines were asked to be extended knowing that postponing deadlines would make clients feel uncomfortable and thus add pressure to the advertising agency-client relationship. To avoid troubles, as PM4 noted, "I have to fill [clients] with confidence that we know what the deadlines are and we will adhere to them but in the first instance the most immediate deadline of a... say a presentation, we're not ready for that! The reason is we don't want to show you work that we're not happy with, that we wouldn't be happy with making and that we know that you wouldn't be happy with making. So it's trying to suggest that this is beneficial to the process as a whole [...]. Often [...], you know, you might have to use a white lie here or there."

### *Pushing and pulling clients*

Most importantly, fighting for truly creative work was seen as the advertising agency's top priority. As S7 explained, "creative is king is most evident in our conversation with the clients." Often the client would be "prescriptive about what they believe they want" (S7). However, it would then be the agency's job to evaluate if what they want is really a good way to go and most importantly to "present creative work" (S7). As S7 noted, "often it is a million miles away from where they're at. And first time presentations can be very, very tough but

[creative ideas are] presented knowing that the creative answer is a good one or is hoped to be a good one, because that's all it is really. We don't know if everything is the right thing to do. But we should ourselves help try to go for it and sometimes that means I'm arguing for things that other places wouldn't argue for and standing up and not agreeing to do the solution that a client believes is right." But also at later stages of the advertising creative process the pushing and pulling of clients would be part of the advertising practitioners day-to-day business, as C2 pointed out: "[At this advertising agency] [...] they stand up for work they want to make rather than just saying 'yeah we will change it, yeah, we will change it.'"

The advertising agency's credo to fight for creative work had significant consequences on the ways in which development of creative work was organized. As creative director CD2 noted, "I think this agency is a very weird beast – in a good way, because it's a very different structure to most traditional agencies. They reinvented the way that ad agencies run. "Instead of using account managers to translate between clients and the specialists working at the advertising agency and thus turning the "great divide between creativity and commerce" (Bilton, 2007, p. 13, see above) into an internal conflict, they eliminated the role and asked the specialist to face and interact with clients themselves. According the advertising agency's management, specialists in general and creatives in particular would be much better advocates of creativity than account managers, who are said to be in line with what clients want (as explained in the literature review). The advertising agency's management was aware that by eliminating account managers, fighting for creative ideas would become the organization's 'greatest day-to-day challenge' (F2 and F1). As F1 pointed out, "if you decided that you're [going to] do creative, original solutions, that includes fighting a lot with the clients, you know? So immediately you haven't chosen the easy path – you've chosen the difficult way. And what we do a lot around here is just fighting every day to get our creative work, you know... to deliver it as good as we think it can be."

In addition, instead of spanning the great divide between creativity and commerce, between the risk aversion and risk appetite with ‘generalists,’ the advertising agency saw the overcoming of this chasm by standing up for work and engaging with clients in intense debates, as a necessity to fulfil its clients’ marketing objectives but also to remain able to develop creative ideas in the future and to stay successful in the advertising business. Not fighting for truly creative work and thus letting the advertising agency’s top priority slide would harm the agency’s creative integrity and reputation. According to the founders, they would lose creative talents as well as clients, which would make the development of creative work even more difficult. As F1 noted “the ads we are doing for our clients aren’t just ads for themselves they’re ads for us as well. And it’s how we maintain our creative presence, our creative standards, is by doing great work.” He continued by stating “our long term goal is... to be a destination for creative people. And that’s not just the art directors and copywriters but that’s strategists and clients as well you know? And, you know, we’ve done it all wrong with the minute this place stops being one of the places where great people want to work.”

*Distributing and dissolving commercial activities*

Not surprisingly, operating under a ‘client-facing’ structure had various implications for the ‘specialists’ working at the agency and the practices in which they were immersed. All ‘specialists’ had to take over activities which usually fall into the sphere of account management practices. More specifically, account management activities such as managing the agency-client relationship; presenting and selling ideas; delivering feedback and representing the clients point of view; as well as managing and structuring the overall development process (see De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010) were taken over by ‘specialists’ and integrated into their practices. As CD2 pointed out, “there is no account man here [...]. And in that way [our agency] not having that, all of us are exposed to that kind of job and have to do a bit of it.”

*Managing the agency-client relationship:* Since everybody was asked to ‘face the client,’ it was everybody’s job to maintain the agency-client relationship. ‘Specialists,’ such as strategists, creative teams, as well as producers suggested, discussed, and negotiated matters of advertising creation with clients directly, without having account managers mediating for them.

*Managing and structuring the overall development process:* In order to give structure to the process, as well as to make sure output is delivered on time and on budget project managers have been introduced. Project managers develop timing plans, set up meetings and make sure that “the right people are in the right place” (PM7). Project managers had only recently been introduced, due to growth in the agency’s client base and their demands. Before their introduction, managing and structuring the overall development process fell into the practice repertoire of producers.

*Presenting and selling ideas:* Most importantly, however, the presentation and selling of ideas was taken over by creative teams themselves. It was thus the responsibility of the creative teams to present and sell their ideas and thus “to be articulate about their own work” (Bilton, 2007, p.30). As C5 noted, “[At this agency] you [...] present all your work. It is your idea; you sell it in to the client; and then you get it made. [...]. You’re responsible for it – if you want it to get made, you sell it really well.”

This also included *delivering feedback and representing the client’s point of view*: Since creative teams ‘faced clients’ in meetings, they received feedback directly from the “horse’s mouth” (as C7 and C8 described it). And PM2 noted, “we don’t hide the creative teams or anybody on the agency from the clients. We make sure they interact and they interface.”

In fact, creatives presenting and selling ideas themselves and directly receiving feedback from their clients can be regarded as the strongest impact of eliminating account managers. Therefore, due to its significance in the data, in the following section the practice of presenting and selling ideas will be described in some more depth.

*Presenting and selling ideas*

As described above, as a result of the advertising agency's 'client facing' approach, creative teams had to present and sell concepts to clients themselves. Although creative teams might have lacked the "client-facing skills" (Bilton, 2007, p.30) required to negotiate the acceptance of their ideas and to convince clients (many creative teams who started at the advertising agency came fresh out of college), from the very first day the activity of presenting and selling ideas to clients was part of their daily routine. As noted by C2 "it's normally a kind of cycle of coming up with stuff, writing it, presenting it internally, redoing stuff and presenting it externally." In one of the interviews, C7 described his experience when he had to present work to a client the first time. In his statement, the perceived differences between creatives and 'suits' as well as the emerging discomfort when facing those differences become evident. "The first time I had to present to a client was like 'well we [are going to] go over to [brand name] and you [are going to] present these scripts that you've written.' You know, getting in a taxi, you go to [brand name] in [location] and you're like, ... I remember I was twenty-three, twenty-four or whatever and this is your first experience of big business and you get to the top floor of this building in [location] and sit around an enormous board room table, I was faced with... a load of marketers wearing suits and I was just like 'fuck' I was sweating so much and sort of [participant looks down on his trembling hands]... I butchered the scripts and they didn't get bought. But then it was an amazing experience because I think, you know, it's almost the same with anything in life isn't it? You face your fears – you kind of, like, you learn from that."

To make the client buy their idea, creative teams put great effort into presenting their scripts to clients in the most comprehensible and convincing way. Creative teams tried their best to make the client envision the same aspects of an idea they envisioned when developing it. “When you sell an idea to a client usually what you’re trying to do is get them to see what you see that’s good about it. You know, that is the essence of it” (S4). Thus, a lot of effort was spent on the ‘packaging’ of ideas. As CD2 noted, “packaging is as important as any great idea. So if you can’t package it, if you can’t put it into kind of like a concise easy to follow flow, you never [going to] sell anything.” Creative teams changed the words of their TV or radio script until shortly before presentations started in order to find the best words, sentence structures and script-melody as possible. Moreover, creative teams prepared themselves with as much ‘stimuli’ as they could, in order to present their ideas as clearly and concisely as possible. Sound-, video-, or image references were used in order to clarify aspects of any idea that are particularly difficult to verbalize. As noted by C2 “for client presentations you spend a lot of time, especially here, making mood films, finding image reference,— they [even] hire picture researchers to just come in to search for stuff that can take ages.” Additionally, CD3 pointed out, “I think with any of those things, it’s all about preparation. You need to just prepare yourself with as much stimulus as you can to present your idea in a clear way. [...] Reference clips or mood films or anything like that always help to tell the story more, and some clients need more of it than others.” In presentations themselves, scripts were read out with strong enthusiasm. Similar to a poet presenting an excerpt from a poem, words and sentences were pronounced as audibly as possible and particular emphases were placed. As CD2 explained, “you just pour it all out and let them see what you love so much about it. People feel it. They can feel it, like, people see it when you love something a lot. It comes across. The way you sell it in, the way you describe it, the way your voice behaves – it just, kind of, like, comes out of you.” An example of a script, collected during fieldwork,

demonstrates the efforts creative teams put into presenting and selling their ideas and is displayed in Appendix 4.

The activity of ‘presenting and selling ideas’ was thus learned in practice. As noted by C6 “there [are] [...] no shortcuts to learning that” – it “comes through presenting ideas.” – “You just learn it by just not getting anything out, because no one is [going to] buy it, 'cause it's a stupid idea.” Since creative teams starting at the advertising agency did not receive any training into how to present and sell ideas well, creative teams “learn[ed] [...] things like client presentations, like what's the best way to present the work” (CD3) on their way up from junior- to senior-level. Learning took place within the various client presentations creative teams engaged with. In client meetings, creative teams experienced which type of packaging worked best to get ideas across and which type of packaging was perceived as particularly impressive. That is, they developed different ‘sales strategies’ to get an idea across. As C3 explained, “the way [my creative partner] and I do it is we tend to include a little bit of our own working out, so to speak up front, so that people can see how we got to where we got to.”

However, since the direct exposure to clients is not limited to idea presentations only, creative teams also learned how to present and sell ideas outside of meetings, for example, when suggesting or justifying approaches via email or telephone. Throughout the advertising development process details regarding the realization of an idea were in constant negotiation. Even though work has been accepted in a client meeting, for example, creative teams had to discuss aspects of an idea with clients over and over again in the process of transforming the idea “into something more tangible” (P5) and “practical” (P3). After ‘advertisement testing’ for a TV advertisement, for example, creative teams suggested how to react best to certain research results; In the pre-production phase creative teams recommended certain directors that they found most useful for their idea; and after a shoot creative teams commended

specific cutting sequences for the different versions that TV advertisements were produced in. In all these debates about an idea's executional aspects creative teams learned from the clients' reactions and evaluated the best strategies to negotiate the acceptance of their ideas.

After having explained how the strong belief in creativity was put into practice at the organizations several voiced participant understandings about how such practices constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes in the organization, as well as voiced participant understandings about how participation in such practices influenced the advertising practitioners and their working lives will be discussed. As the following section will demonstrate negative perceptions of the advertising agency's client facing approach existed. However, positive impressions prevailed.

### **Making sense of creativity and client-facing processes in advertising**

#### *Coping with confusion and increased responsibilities*

Several advertising practitioners, for example, reported that the changes to the practice repertoires of 'specialists' and thus the accommodation of account management practices by others confuse the conventional role understandings of newcomers. As P4 explained, "new people don't really know what they're supposed to be doing." Finding ones place within the organization in general and the advertising creative process in particular was thus rather difficult, as several advertising practitioners put forth. Moreover, participants, already working at the advertising agency perceived the workload as higher than at other advertising agencies operating under a 'traditional' agency model. Thus, compared to other advertising agencies they had previously worked at, the elimination of account managers gave everyone more to do, somewhat constraining creative and commercial processes in the organization. As P2 noted "[cutting out account management] gives you more work to do, 'cause you can't just hand something over to somebody else and they have to go off and explain it to the client – you have to do it."

However, despite confusions about conventional role understandings as well as increased responsibilities positive impressions prevailed, as demonstrated by the following voiced participant understandings concerning how participation in the above client-facing practices impacted on the advertising practitioners and their working lives.

*Experiencing decreased levels of conflict*

Creative teams, for example, and thus those advertising practitioners who were supposed to come up with ideas, recognised the particular importance given to creativity in their everyday doings. In contrast to other agencies in which the professional legitimacy of creatives is doubted and creativity downplayed as ‘mimesis’ (see Hackley and Kover, 2007), creative teams felt generally supported by their colleagues in ‘generating ideas.’ In addition, through abandoning the account management discipline, the advertising management was able to avoid inter-departmental conflicts which, as described in the literature review, are common at other advertising agencies where the divide between creativity and commerce is simply moved into the agency’s four walls and spanned by ‘generalists.’ As C8 explained, “I definitely feel that cutting [out] the account men [...] really helps and works, because [...] at our last agency, when you've done a piece of work and then someone goes away and to sell it in and then come back and just say 'oh we can't do it.' You don't really understand what they've been through trying to sell it [...]. [So] you end up with quite a lot of friction between account men and creative teams, just because neither understands really the process of what's going on with the client.”

Moreover, not only creative teams themselves appreciated the fact that they presented and sold ideas to clients directly, but also several ‘specialists’ reported that cutting out the account manager and thus bringing together the activities of developing ideas with presenting and selling ideas generally helped to reduce intra-departmental conflicts. For example, PM1, who had previously worked as an account manager in an advertising agency with a traditional

agency model, reported that “[here] the creative teams can share their own work; they can hear the client feedback face-to-face; and I don't have to be the middle man. So I don't have to take their work, present it, take the feedback and then go back to them – that can cause friction.” It should be noted, however, that although abandoning the account management discipline has been reported to have significant effects, several other organizational phenomena – such as sharing a strong empathy towards other disciplines – helped to reduce intra-departmental conflicts as well, as the section on ‘Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity in advertising’ will describe in more detail.

Not surprisingly, due to the significant effects of eliminating account managers on the practice of presenting and selling ideas in particular, much of the voiced participant understandings that have been identified, were raised by creative teams, as the following sections will demonstrate, in greater depth.

*Cherishing empowering benefits of presenting and selling ideas*

Although creative teams reported to feelings of discomfort when facing clients for the first time (as explained above), for example, it was put forth that soon after they have started at the agency they quickly recognized the advantages of presenting and selling ideas to clients and regarded it as “half of the battle” (C1).

In fact, creative teams saw the development of the capability to present and sell ideas as an advantage on their way into creative directorship and a skill, which differentiated them to their colleagues at advertising agencies operating under a traditional structure. As CD2 stated, “that's why this agency is amazing. 'Cause it creates great thinkers, creative teams, strategists, as sales people. We are sales people – we sell ideas! That's what we do. We sell it to clients, they sell it to the world, you know?” C1 described the ability required “to get someone to buy it, or a group of people to buy it, who aren't necessarily that creative” as “a very tricky skill.” Without being capable to successfully present and sell ideas and thus to

make clients buy the work produced, the best concepts would be worthless, as CD2 noted: “An idea is only amazing if you can sell it. Like there are so many stories of like amazing ideas in bottom drawers and back pockets and note pads. They're worth nothing, you know? An idea is only good if you can sell it.” He continued, “if you can't walk into a room full of strangers and like contaminate the place with enthusiasm, make people kind of like as excited as you are and seeing what you see, then you're a nobody in this industry. 'Cause you [going to] have to be doing that all the time.”

Overall, voiced participant understandings suggest three empowering benefits of presenting and selling ideas, which would foster creative and commercial processes at the advertising agency and thus exceed much of the negative aspects accompanying a client-facing approach, such as feelings of discomfort (as discussed above).

*Having control over the way an idea is sold:* Creative teams enjoyed the influence they have on the way the idea is perceived by clients. In particular, it was the control over the way the script was read out which made creative teams feel more capable to present ideas than account managers. As C7 noted, “[after some time] I kind of relished the chance to read a script to people because then it's on your shoulders really how well it is perceived, how well a joke is read out, or how surely people understand the tone of a script. So you really can emphasize that when you are reading it, rather than relying on someone else, because you're the best person to do it - you've written it.” This was important because to make the client buy their idea creative teams had to make sure that clients understood the idea in the same way they had envisioned it in the creative process. The ‘client-facing’ approach thus re-established the balance between the creatives’ accountability for the success or failure of an idea and their actual influence.

*Having the chance to receive clients' feedback immediately:* In presentations, clients usually expressed initial feedback followed by more extensive feedback a couple of days later.

Creatives were excited to observe the client's reaction, if he or she liked the idea and the reasons why. It was what Morais (2007, p.156) refers to as 'reading the room' – "they scan faces for confusion, comprehension, and delight. They study eyes and body language. They pay attention to how many notes clients are taking and they watch for client reactions to specific graphics and copy." In the 'client-facing' agency however, 'reading the room' did not describe the behaviour of account executives, but the creatives themselves. The immediacy and authenticity of feedback provided gave them a better feel for balancing out the chances of their idea and thus for "choosing their battles" (CD3). Moreover, compared to feedback provided by account managers it helped them to understand the clients' concerns better and to react to them more appropriately. In other agencies, there would often be "an element of it being 'information being lost in translation'" (C7).

*Having the ability to justify ideas:* Finally, being there and listening to client feedback gave creatives the opportunity to clarify their thoughts behind an idea themselves – in an equally immediate and authentic manner. Since they developed the ideas, they held the view that it is them who are most capable to defend it. "If you've written some work, only you really understand why you've done it. So it's either for you to defend it than someone else who hasn't, I think, really" (C8). For account managers it would be "easy to promise something," which "might ruin the whole thing" (C2). Abandoning account managers as "a buffer" would avoid the "death by a thousand cuts type of thing" (C2). In addition, creatives felt that directly interacting with the client minimizes the risk that something 'gets lost in some bigger system.' As C2 stated, "here just, you know, a 'strat' and a creative [are] working on it and it doesn't get lost in some bigger system. Whereas I've been at other companies where things almost get

bought, you get told 'the client loves it' and then something happens and everything just sort of dissipates.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Encountering a dilemma**

Asking creative teams to face clients, however, also posed a dilemma in the advertising agency, somehow retraining the organization's creative processes, as highlighted by the following voiced participant understandings. Although the findings suggest many advantages interlinked with the ‘client-facing’ approach for the agency in general and creative teams in particular, there were “negatives [with being ‘client-facing’] as well” (CD6). Creative teams would be immersed in activities, which run contrary to the intended effects of facing the client, which is fighting for creative work. Instead, they would adapt to and incorporate the clients’ tastes and thus temper the ideas they presented to increase the chance that they get made, as the following section will explain in greater detail.

#### *Adapting to and incorporating clients’ tastes*

As explained above, besides learning “the best way to present the work” (CD3) creative teams were also exposed to the feedback of clients regarding ideas as such. As C5 explained, in client meetings clients would “say which [ideas] they like on instinct, which one they like, why they liked it, anything they didn't like and why they didn't like it.” Often clients opened up and questioned the aesthetic understandings of creative teams. Creative teams reflected upon the reaction of clients, they processed, visualized and interpreted the comments they made. Thus, on the one hand, creative teams learned which ideas clients perceived as particularly new, original or unique and thus what they found ‘exciting.’ On the other hand creative teams learned which ideas clients perceived as particularly appropriate, useful or of value to the problem at hand and hence what they found ‘strategically right.’ Knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> The term ‘strat’ is the abbreviated term for strategist and was commonly used by advertising practitioners.

about what clients liked and disliked about an idea was also shared internally, for example, in agency meetings. As S4 noted “you spend a massive amount of time talking about this is what this clients [going to] want to hear, this is what we know this person's issues are, this is what they have done before and liked, you know – loads of that. Because the process of making the idea is the process of steering it through the organization.”

Since “clients are the gatekeepers for creative work” that “must be convinced” (Morais, 2007, p.151) creative teams adapted to and incorporated the aesthetic understandings of clients. As CD6 explained, “the difficult thing with younger teams is, you know, because they're hearing all the client's issues, they'll often start to temper their ideas because they think, you know, 'oh well they'll never like this, the client will never like that,' you know, so I should come up with something more conservative and more, you know, more, I guess, sellable.” Knowing the client's taste enabled creative teams to forecast the chance of the ideas they have and to differentiate between ideas that are ‘sellable’ and ‘not sellable.’ As CD7 noted “you [become] much quicker at [...] knowing what's right and what's wrong. And that's through, I think, when you see so many ideas and you present so many things and you start to realize what's [going to be] bought or not.” The practice of ‘aesthetic filtering’ as well as the role of clients as gatekeepers in the sieving of ideas the creative teams came up with, will be described in the section on ‘Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising’ in more detail.

Adapting and incorporating aesthetic understandings of clients can be seen as a process that happens over time. Adapting to the taste of clients refers to creative teams who temper their ideas in order to make them more suitable to the aesthetic understanding of clients. Evidence across the data suggests that particularly young creative teams, who came fresh out of college and had little industry experience, tempered their ideas in order to make them more sellable. Although they would like to present risky ideas they decided to hand in

safe work in order to increase the chances that their work gets bought. Young creative teams are under enormous pressure to build up their portfolio and to prove themselves in the market (Stuhlfaut, 2011). Over time however, through the ‘continual negotiation’ of aesthetic categories with the clients, creative teams assimilated and incorporated the aesthetic categories applied by their clients into their own aesthetic feel. As indicated by Morais (2007), clients evaluate an idea in terms of its strategic fit. Aesthetic categories applied by clients when evaluating ideas aim to assess the degree to which an idea fulfils the marketing objectives. Aesthetic categories include, for example, how well the idea suits their brand and the target audience; its competitiveness and its ability to cut through the advertising clutter; and, how well an idea fits in the overall context of the larger campaign (Morais, 2007). Through their engagement in constant negotiation, creatives accommodated this ‘mental checklist’ (Morais, 2007) into their own. It can be inferred that instead of pulling and pushing clients, creative teams started to apply very similar aesthetic categories when evaluating ideas.

*Protecting creatives and retrofitting their ideas*

Advertising agency managers tried to control for the negative effects of the client-facing approach on the creativity of creative teams and to overcome the dilemma of over-accommodating commercial interests creative directors and strategists felt the need to protect creative teams from a temptation to ‘grow up’ and develop an aesthetic understanding too rigidly oriented towards the aesthetic categories applied by clients. In particular, advertising managers felt the need to shield creatives from clients’ concerns and by retrofitting their ideas as well as to hire young creatives in order to protect the organization’s creative offering.

In the opinion of the advertising managers creatives should be as free as possible when coming up with ideas, protected from the business context they are practicing in. As CD6 explained, “what we try to instil in them is... we want them to come up with really edgy, different, [stuff] even if it's not stuff that's [going to] be actually sell and let us be the sort of

## *Chapter 4: Findings*

more responsible ones, I guess. Because it's out of their sort of irresponsible unbridled thinking that much more interesting stuff will come." And he added "we want them to keep their naivety to a certain extent." In a similar vein CD2 noted, "we want them to have that naivety and that kind of like almost childlike property of going crazy and letting go and just exploring everything and not being too grown up in terms of having ideas." Creative teams "shouldn't know like half of the story, they should feel like 'let's push it, let's make it crazy, let's make it beautiful'" (CD2). Although ideas should always make "a bit of sense," creative directors should "nurture the craziness 'cause if you have a bunch of people thinking straight, you wouldn't have anything that stands out. You just have very practical solutions for very practical problems – [that is] very intelligent but expected solutions" (CD2).

Consequently, creative directors and strategists regarded it as their job to make the thinking of creative teams 'appropriate' and to 'retro-fit' it to the client problem at hand. S4 noted that it is his job "to try and make it better fit with either the client's objectives or what I know about how advertising works." In a similar vein, C6 stated "a lot of the time what we used to do in reviews is, we used to take the fucking crazy idea and it can be completely off strategy and make no sense and then the strategist would have to 'retro-fit' it to the idea, they just have to work it backwards." However, in line with the recent shift to a more strategically oriented approach to advertising creation, he noted that nowadays, the scope for 'retro-fitting' ideas would be more and more limited.

### *Ensuring constant inflows of young creatives*

Most importantly, however, the advertising agency was under enormous pressure to hire young creative teams that are still unaffected by the way clients think. Junior creative teams were hired because they 'threatened' creative directors – "by the way their brains work" (CD1). As CRM1 mentioned, "creative directors want somebody who scares them, you know, that come with ideas that they would never have thought of and that scare them and make

them worried that you know this idea could lose us the business if we went and presented this to a client [...], you know?" In order to get the 'fresh thinking' that young creatives bring with them, the advertising agency maintained close contacts with advertising colleges around the world. On a regular basis the advertising agency hosted colleges, ran workshops and initiated 'book crits' (events in which portfolios of young creative are judged). In particular, creative directors were heavily involved in the recruitment of young, promising creative teams.

This research thus suggests that the young creative teams' most valuable asset, their light-heartedness or carefreeness regarding business concerns, which enables them to think 'outside the box,' was at the same time the advertising agency's most decisive factor of production. In addition, young creative teams "have their ears to the ground. They know what's cool in modern culture. Another way of phrasing it is, you know, that they are in tune with the 'Zeitgeist' of what's going on today, you know," as CD6 explained. Without "newcomers" or "kids" (F1) who delivered 'business risking ideas,' the advertising agency would not have the ideas enabling them to pull and push clients. Instead, the advertising agency would be left with very experienced and strategically concerned senior practitioners, who would know all too well about clients' needs, 'think straight,' and thus produce "very intelligent but expected solutions" for "very practical problems" (see above, CD2). However, the hiring process young creative teams have to go through is far from being easy to pass and follows rather Darwinian mechanisms, as the section on 'Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising' will describe in more depth.

## **Conclusion**

As explained above, in addition to 'everyday development practices' three different sets of 'dynamic creative process practices' were identified, of which one is the client facing practices discussed in the above sub-chapter.

All categories identified as part of the ‘Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising’ theme are summarized in Table 3.

Category	Description
Championing creativity	The understanding that creativity is the most effective ingredient in the communication of advertising messages.
Signifying creativity in the output produced	The manifestation of the belief in creativity as the most effective ingredient in the communication of advertising messages in the advertisements produced.
Experiencing shifts in the championing of creativity	The observation that the championing of creativity in client projects became increasingly difficult due to the increased size of clients the advertising agency was working with as well as their demand for ‘safer’ advertisements.
Promoting and demanding creativity	The organization’s attempt to create an environment in which creative ideas can emerge by providing creative teams with support in pursuing risky as opposed to safe ideas and at the same time demanding such ideas.
Pushing and pulling clients	The understanding that fighting for creative ideas to push risky ideas through and thus the elimination of account managers and the takeover of a client facing approach.
Distributing and dissolving commercial practices	The elimination of account managers and thus the distribution of account management practices to all advertising practitioners. Most importantly, everyone worked ‘client-facing’ and creative teams had to present and sell their ideas themselves.
Presenting and selling ideas	The presenting and selling of ideas by creative teams themselves, including their packaging to communicate ideas as convincingly as possible.
Coping with confusion and increased responsibilities	The experience of confusion as well as increased responsibilities resulting from the changes to the practice repertoires of specialists.
Experiencing decreased levels of conflicts	The feeling of having less conflict due to the elimination of the account management role in general and the takeover of presenting and selling ideas by creative teams in particular.
Cherishing empowering benefits of presenting and selling ideas	The feeling of having greater influence on the advertising creative process by having control over the way an idea is sold; having the chance to receive clients’ feedback immediately, without being filtered or worked up by account managers; as well as the ability to react to the feedback in an equally immediate and unfiltered manner.
Adapting to and incorporating clients’ tastes	The observation that creative teams temper their ideas according to the clients’ concerns and thus develop less creative work.
Protecting creatives and retrofitting their ideas	The attempt to shield creative teams from client concerns, e.g. by retrofitting ideas to the problem at hand.
Ensuring constant inflows of young creatives	The continuous lookout and employment of creatives, which are new to the advertising industry and thus unaffected by client concerns.

**Table 3 Summary of the ‘Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising’ theme’s categories**

Overall, the advertising practitioners believed that only creative work breaks through the consumers’ advertising clutter. Moreover, the advertising practitioners believed that creative work has a much stronger impact on all other key cognitive stages of consumer processing compared to mediocre work. Consequently, creative teams were given the support required for developing and selling risky ideas and work that did not meet the advertising practitioners’ shared aesthetic understanding was not presented to clients.

The advertising practitioners’ belief in creativity was also reflected in the firm’s portfolio. Over time, the advertising agency had built up a strong reputation for highly creative work. However, it was noted that the advertising practitioners’ views on how advertising works became more strategically aligned over recent years due to a changing client as well as employee base. Although different interpretations of this shift existed, it demonstrated the dynamic nature the organization’s taste formation over time.

The advertising practitioners’ strong belief in creativity was also reflected in the firm’s disciplinary set up. The agency’s management refrained from ‘hiding away’ creative teams from commercial reality. Instead, the account management discipline was abandoned. Fighting for creativity to overcome the divide between creativity and commerce was regarded as the top priority – not only for the clients’ interests but also for the benefits of the agency itself. Mediocre output would attract less like-minded people, which would make the creation of creative work even more gruelling.

As a consequence, account management practices had to be taken over by the remaining practitioners. Whilst increasing their workload, it fostered a more integrative way of working together. Most importantly, however, ‘presenting and selling ideas’ was

performed by creative teams themselves. By doing so, intra-departmental conflicts, common at advertising agencies that work with account managers, were avoided. Although it seemed to have felt somewhat bizarre at the beginning, creative teams quickly cherished presenting and selling ideas themselves and took great effort in this performance.

However, the direct exposure to clients not only enabled them to improve their ‘sales strategies’ but also to adapt to or incorporate the taste of their clients as such. This caused a dilemma in the organization, which regards producing creative work as its top priority. Thus, the advertising agency’s management tried to protect the creative teams against the commercial concerns of their clients, somewhat moving the ‘great divide’ between creativity and commerce back into their organization again. Moreover, the advertising agency’s management was trying to sustain a continuous flow of ‘fresh talent,’ still unaffected by the commercial realities surrounding them, to ensure that the organization’s creative competencies were maintained.

## Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity in advertising

### **Introduction**

After the ‘client-facing’ approach has been explained, and thus a way of working together, in which the advertising practitioners’ creativity understandings become particularly evident, as well as first tensions emerging thereof, more subtle, practical demonstrations of the advertising practitioners’ creativity understandings will be discussed.

*The section is structured as follows, in three parts:*

First, the advertising practitioners’ informal way of working together will be explained. Regardless of the abolishment of account managers described in the previous sub-chapter, there was a strong desire amongst advertising practitioners to abdicate any type of bureaucracy; instead, advertising practitioners constructed spaces of collaboration and enacted spaces of collaboration through conversation. Moreover, how the advertising agency’s management tried to foster the collaborative and conversational character of the firm through the spatial set up of the office – as well as other organizational initiatives – will be explained.

Second, voiced participant understandings about the impact of participation in collaboration and conversation will be discussed. How the collaborative and conversational way of working together strengthened feelings of responsibility for the work produced as well as the relationships between disciplines will be elaborated upon. This will show how collaboration and conversation led to greater empathy between disciplines, helped to reduce intra-departmental conflict further, and impacted positively on the mutual recognition of disciplines as contributors to created advertising campaigns.

However, voiced participant understanding about the impact of participation in collaboration and conversation included negative effects of the informal way of working

together as well, which will be discussed in the final section of this sub-chapter. Besides matters which affected all advertising practitioners in the firm – such as the large number of meetings – matters which only affect individuals in particular disciplines will also be expanded upon. As will be described later, underneath collaboration and conversation, loneliness, troubles in making the process work and limits of togetherness have been identified. These particularly affected those regarded as non-creatives in the advertising agency.

### **Pursuing an integrative way to advertising creation**

As mentioned above, in their day-to-day work the advertising practitioners generally pursued a rather integrative way of advertising development, which is less characterized by formal structures and processes but functions through collaboration and conversation instead, as the following sections will clarify.

#### *Avoiding formal structures*

According to most advertising practitioners that have been interviewed, the best environment to enable working creatively would be as flexible as possible. Consequently, the firm avoided any formal structures during the development of advertising ideas. According to them, formal structures are the worst enemies of creative work. Formal structures would over-organize the arrangement and interconnection of disciplines and thus thwart the interaction and exchange of ideas between disciplines. “Working in silos from one another” (C7) would be contrary to the associative character of creativity and thus the recognition of things which have not been seen in association yet (see Mednick, 1962’s associative theory of creative thinking explained above). Similarly, advertising practitioners cherished the loose hierarchical structure *within* disciplines. Flat structures enabled them to concentrate on the work itself rather than on status or authority. Finally, advertising practitioners saw the rejection of formal structures as a huge time saver. Instead of being thwarted by formal structures, they would be

able to deal with and push things forward themselves. In interviews several advertising practitioners noted that they are able to develop ideas at a faster pace than at the structure-driven advertising agencies where they had worked previously, and that the rejection of formal structures led to a greater throughput.

As PM1 explained, “I remember when I first came here from my old agency, and in my old agency if you wanted to make an amend on an ad you'd mark it up, and then you go give it to the traffic manager in the studio, and then it would sit on his desk with a pile of stuff, and then it would go through to the art worker, he would brief the art worker, and then the amend was done and then it would be passed on to the copywriter's desk for approval and it would sit on his desk for like hours while he checks everything else and then it would go to the art director's desk and it's on his desk for hours while he checked everything else and then it would come back to me and it would be wrong and my amendments wouldn't have been made and someone didn't check it. And it used to really frustrate me... [...] often there is like paperwork for the sake of paperwork. [...]. Here you can just get an ad or whatever your piece of document you're working on [is], put it in the studio and mark [it] up yourself. So then it's back in an hour [...]. You kind of manage that for yourself [...]. So I think that's the way things generally work here with everything. I think things happen quicker.”

#### *Avoiding formal processes*

In addition to formal structures formal processes which define activities, actors, and the outputs and inputs for each activity, were avoided. Similar to formal structures, they would bureaucratize the development of advertising ideas and thus limit the exploration of possibilities required to generate truly creative work (from the perspective of the agency studied). According to strategists and creatives the development of advertising ideas would never be a straightforward process. Contrary to the proposition of most models in the advertising literature, they argued that advertising creation should not take place step wise

## *Chapter 4: Findings*

with different disciplines involved at different stages, but integrative and in constant discussion with everyone involved. Additionally, the advertising development process should not be organized in linear sequences with set inputs and outputs at specific times of the process, but with the possibility to go back and forth and comment on and change aspects of an idea at any time in its creation. Most importantly, however, the advertising development process itself should remain adaptive to deliver to the varying requirements of the clients on the one hand and the agency's commitment to deliver different solutions on the other. The advertising practitioners argued that if the shape of the clients' problems is different every time the shape of finding appropriate solutions in itself also has to remain flexible. As C4 explained: "I believe [from] being before in a very rigid place, very strict, and where the process was the king, coming to a place where creative is the king makes a creative person from the creative department much happier, you know? Because creativity, like, based on my personal work [and] my... previous experiences as a creative, running my own projects, I feel... I feel free, you know? And sometimes some creative people think the process is just about setting up meetings and organizing the budget and making sure that the project is running on time and on brief, you know, to answer quickly the client's questions, deliver the projects and don't waste money [and time]. And I think if you have a bit more freedom, we might lose a bit more time and possibly we lose a bit of money, but we get much better work from all of us, you know?"

During fieldwork, particularly the 'creative brief,' usually developed and passed on as a sheet of white paper in most advertising agencies, was seen as the epitome of formality. As S3 noted "...in terms of process there aren't really any briefs – you kind of have to go with the flow." In the eyes of most strategists and creatives, creative briefs would not only standardize the problems of clients, and possible solutions, but also represent an artefact which symbolizes an idea generation process characterized by set sections, fixed in- and outputs, as well as linearity (see above). As S1 explained, "after a while you find these sheets to be a bit

of a tyranny [...], because, I mean, the hardest thing to get is a genuine leap, you know, a bit of magic in your ideas [...] ...and the more restrictions you put on someone else's thought processes, you know, the more you narrow [them] down." He added, "each and every problem deserves its own, kind of, 'way of thinking.' If the problem is different then this thing [points on a piece of paper] shouldn't be consistent every time. This thing isn't necessarily a master key that's going to solve every problem." Most strategists working at the advertising agency therefore rejected the use of a physical briefing template – a practice, which is in stark contrast to other advertising agencies and thus had to be learned as part of becoming a member of the advertising agency. As S3 explained, "they may get a bit of a shock when they come from really corporate agencies beforehand, because they think 'fuck, this is out of control' but it is liberating and I still write briefs, so [I] write my own briefs, so [I] don't have a proper template but I write something to order my thoughts, but it's quite nice not to have it done." Consequently, varying degrees of 'formality' in the development of creative briefs existed.

Overall, practicing without prescribed rules somehow became a rule itself. As PM1 summarized, "[at this agency] there is almost, I suppose, a bit of a 'method' to do things without too much process." As a consequence advertising practitioners often described their everyday work as highly disorganized and even chaotic. As P1 highlighted, "it's chaotic – creativity is king. And I sort of think sometimes from being very creatively led and creatively kind of focussed, there is this kind of '[constant] feeling of chaos.'" In a similar vein S3 noted, "I would say [this advertising agency] probably thinks that nothing good comes unless there is a little bit of, like, 'hazard' to [it] – fly by the seat of your pants. And that doesn't mean that that should become the way that we do it, but we are more relaxed about not having a solution at x o'clock. Because we gonna have something at some point. And so you have to let go of... any panic or anything like that at [this advertising agency], I'd say."

*Fostering collaboration*

As revealed above, instead of relying on formal structures, advertising practitioners preferred to be engaged in a more integrative approach to advertising production, which is based on collaboration rather than segregation, and put strong emphasis on the construction of those spaces. As S1 pointed out, “[this agency] tends to work very differently to other places. [...] In other places it tends to be more, kind of, baton passing, [...] – here everyone is coming in together.” Different disciplines did not join the project at different phases of the process, but worked as a team on projects at all times. As PM5 noted, “it's never, you know one person or one discipline trying to solve the problem, so it's very much... and I guess what's different about [this agency] is, you know, as a team you travel together.” In a similar vein, also S1 emphasized that “at every step of that kind of process, you're all kind of in it together.” It should be pointed out, however, that at the beginning only strategists, creative teams, and creative directors were part of the team working on a project. Project managers were facilitating projects administratively. Unless it was clear that it would be a digital project producers joined the team at a later stage of the advertising development process, shortly before first ideas were presented to the client and the time and money required for their production needed to be estimated. Moreover, as will be explained in upcoming sections, individuals had some different understandings of what ‘working on a project together’ meant.

In general, however, the collaborative way of working together led to an overlapping of the different stages the advertising development process is usually constituted by. Strategy generation and idea generation, for example, took place almost simultaneously. Normally, creative directors and strategists developed the creative brief together. Thus, in strategy development, input from one discipline triggered and informed the input of the other, which, according to the advertising practitioners would lead to more rounded creative executions. As S6 described, in “a normal strategic process in a lot of the larger agencies it's more 'baton

passing.' So the brief would come into the account team, the strategists will work on a creative brief for two or three weeks and then that's physically passed to a creative team [...]. Whereas at [this agency] it's more all disciplines receive the brief at the same time and then often the strategic and the creative processes are just, kind of, like... done in parallel because a lot of the creative teams are sympathetic to the strategic process and a lot of the strategists can try and help inspire creatives as they're starting to think about it. So it's more of a collaborative process that's done in parallel as opposed to a linear baton passing process basically."

As with creativity, described in 'Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising' the collaborative design of the advertising development process was also evident in organizational set up and artefacts. As F2 highlighted, "one of the big things that most companies don't really appreciate is that the way you work affects the outcome. So you can have all the same people in a building but if they're organized differently the outcome will be different. And that's because physical space and internal geography affects the way that people interact." Large meeting areas and comfy sofas characterized the physical space of the advertising agency. Most importantly, however, there were no walls dividing the agency's physical space into offices. Instead, the advertising agency had a 250 feet long and 14 feet wide concrete table, cutting through the office like a racetrack, which seated all of its employees. As F1 explained, "when we started the company there [...] we could all fit around [one] table and that's where all the work was done and that's where we ate our lunch [...] – it was all around one table and then we moved to our next office and we [wanted] to hire some more people but we liked the idea of one table, everyone around one table, so the table got bigger. So what you see now is it looks like a series of tables but when you see it from above it runs like a track, runs around like that [draws an big oval with his hand], so we just wanted to keep it all just one table. So we didn't want any... no offices, so no closed doors, to allow information to flow free."

Additionally, the collaborative character of the advertising development process was fostered by certain measures that have been put into place by the advertising agency's management. Most importantly, the advertising agency's management tried to foster collaboration by the way they seated their employees. Instead of grouping them around clients, brands, or disciplines they were mixed up, regardless of any affiliation. Thus, creative teams sat next to finance people, who sat next to producers, who sat next to strategists and so on. As F2 explained "if you've got a copywriter next to a designer next to a producer next to an accountant or next to a [strategist] you will get interesting bubbling conversations going on. If you just got creatives in rabbit hutches here, [strategists] in a department here, accounts over here, you get 'siloed thinking' and therefore different points of reference, even just culturally within the company, make it that much more interesting." Moreover, every sixth Monday employees were assigned to new desks. Employees however, not only changed their desks (e.g. to have a change of scenery) but also their neighbours: F1 explained the intentions behind regularly changing seats as follows: "It's just to... to get people to meet, is a good thing, you know? Otherwise a lot of people would never, you know... Somebody from one discipline would never talk to someone from another, so it's you know... We move around and you find yourself sitting next to someone who's not in the same discipline as you, you know? If you're a TV producer you might be sitting between an accountant and an art director, you know? [...] I think we're trying to keep the process accessible." An exemplary presentation of a seating plan, which was distributed every sixth Monday, is displayed in Appendix 5.

*Fostering conversation*

On a day-to-day basis, spaces of collaboration were enacted via conversation. Instead of relying on formal processes to cooperate with each other, advertising practitioners preferred to take projects forward by discussion. It was thus through conversing that

advertising practitioners put their need for creative freedom and integrative advertising development into practice. As S3 explained, “it seems to be that the bulk of stuff is done via conversations. Whether that is a big meaty creative review that takes four hours where you sit and you kind of pour out everything, or whether it is instead of banging an email out, walking to someone’s desk and be like ‘can I get ten minutes with you.’ That’s how I’ve always been trained from all of the other agencies I’ve worked at and this is definitely more of a... a kind of process here – even though it’s not a process. It seems to be more than at any other agency the way stuff happens.” Thus, not only rejecting processes but also engaging in conversation somewhat became a ‘method’ (PM1) in itself (see above).

Additionally, instead of interacting via email or telephone advertising practitioners cherished the opportunity to chat with their colleagues *personally*. P5, for example, noted, “at [this agency] within the organization most of the communication is done face-to-face. So the ways we are set up here you know there is no walls, there is no offices, you know, if I want to speak to somebody or I need to speak somebody I just walk up to them, you know?” Surely, conversations could also be undertaken via email or telephone. However, according to several advertising practitioners it would only be in those immediate interactions in which ideas could be bounced off each other and contributions from one side could inspire others. S3, for example, explained how most of the idea generation takes place in strategic development: “often [strategic thinking] only exists in conversations or in something maybe a [creative] team has done and you go: ‘hang on, you know, you’ve done something really smart there which is this...’ You have to almost like... articulate what they’ve done...” Conversing face-to-face, however, was not only a means to an end but also a practice of mutual trust. As PM3, pointed out, “I don’t think anybody within the agency... within these walls will go, you know, ‘you told me something different.’ And I think everybody is smart enough and we communicate well enough that we all kind of understand what the other person wants. I don’t

think I would ever have to cover myself with someone in the agency, unless it was like, you know, kind of a final decision or something."

In conversations, for example meetings, advertising practitioners were expected to contribute through discussion rather than through presenting fully fleshed out 'solutions,' which had been developed prior to the conversation. Instead of offering solutions as an individual, advertising practitioners were meant to offer interesting thoughts which, then, through discussion led to a solution of the collective. As F2 explained, "...our principle here is about open source. So we don't talk about 'my idea,' we talk about 'the idea.' It doesn't matter who you are, if your idea is the best there will be a natural gravitational pull towards that idea. We tend to share." Consequently, on a day-to-day basis the conversational character of the advertising agency manifests itself in a high number of meetings. Meetings took place in the various meeting areas, which are spread across the building. In meetings for a specific project all team members, including all creative teams, working on that project were present and ideas were presented, discussed and developed further. As noted by S4 "probably two thirds of [my day-to-day activity], I think, will be sitting with people at [this agency] trying to solve problems or come up with ideas or you know make things work – so working with creatives, working with producers, working with other strategists and working with [project managers] to try and take the raw material what we have and make it into something which we think will fulfil the clients' needs." However, as described above, and explained in more detail below, not all advertising practitioners are allowed to or felt comfortable to engage in all discussions underlying the advertising development process.

#### *Contributing beyond disciplinary boundaries*

Finally, several participants emphasized that at the agency advertising practitioners are allowed to comment on any aspect of an idea and thus contribute beyond their traditional disciplinary boundaries. This 'democratic' (PM8) environment would be highly encouraged

by the advertising agency's management, according to several participants. Creatives, for example, would be able to comment on strategic aspects of an idea, whilst strategists would be able to comment on creative aspects of an idea. As PM1 noted, "...everyone at [this agency] has got the right to do that you know. You and everyone you know in meetings you can chip in. It's quite sort of informal." Similarly, also PM2 pointed out, "everyone within the agency is entitled to have an opinion." It was, for example, emphasized that creativity is not only the realm of the creative department but of everyone working in the agency. As C3 explained, "I found that that's better and it breeds more creativity generally and doesn't keep it the exclusive domain of the creatives." Thus, not only the different stages the advertising development process is usually constituted by (as described above) but also specific activities of advertising practitioners overlapped.

However, blurring disciplinary boundaries not only refer to interactions in conversations but also to a range of other activities, comprising the advertising practitioners' repertoire of practices: First, due to the non-existence of formal structures and process, advertising practitioners felt that they were able to define the specific activities constituting their practices at the advertising agency themselves. Thus, they were able to immerse themselves into activities, which were not part of their practice repertoire in the traditional sense. As PM7 noted, "[here] it's all very fluid. [...] [This agency] gives you a lot of freedom. So I think you can shape your role here to how you want it a little bit. It's not as rigid as it in another agency would be." In a similar vein S9 noted, "I go to pre-production meetings, you know, I go to shoots, I wouldn't necessarily do that if I'd been at another agency. And I always have been to pre-production meetings but you're never expected to, whereas *here* they're like 'oh it would be great to if you could come to the pre-production meeting.' That's really nice. So they kind of invite you into the creative process and you're kind of really in it." Moreover, there were no set descriptions or colleagues they could rely on in difficult situations. Instead of being embedded in structural layers and set processes on which they can draw in a difficult

situation, the advertising agency's management expected employees to make their "field of activity" work themselves. As noted by P1 "to become part of the [agency's] family you need to not be afraid of working hard, some late nights but also quite not reliant [on] processes – like, quite independent and able to kind of not fight your own way, that sounds maybe too strong, but kind of make your own way. No-one is gonna hold your hand basically." Thus, in their day-to-day job, advertising practitioners were rather proactive and took on work which went beyond their usual doings before figuring out who was actually responsible for it. Consequently, a range of overlapping practices existed.

However, immersing oneself in the 'open source principle' (F2) had to be learned by advertising practitioners joining the agency. As noted by C3 "I think that you have to learn the attitude of being open minded and nothing being wrong and to just sort of run with things even if they seem crazy, and to not be afraid of saying something stupid." Firstly, advertising practitioners had to learn to be confident enough to articulate ideas although they are not fully fleshed out. They had to absorb "selflessness" (S6) and understand a different way of contributing to a solution. Since most of the ideas articulated in the process were not fully fleshed out, their individual weight was less significant. It was only through challenging and building on the contributions of others that solutions came to life. Secondly, contributing through chipping in, rather than presenting fully fleshed out solutions, required confidence. Bouncing ideas around, which were not fully fleshed out and thought through, posed the risk of "saying something stupid" (C3). Contributing to a conversation thus could only be for those advertising practitioners who had learned to be confident enough to face this risk. Finally, a specific understanding of ownership of a solution had to be learned. Since advertising practitioners contributed through discussion rather than through presenting fully fleshed out 'solutions' developed prior to the conversation, at the end of the advertising development process it was difficult to trace back an idea's specific origins.

### **Experiencing feelings of contribution and commonness**

Being immersed in practices of collaboration and conversation led to certain understandings about how practices of collaboration and conversation constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes in the organization as well as about how participation in such practices impacted on themselves and their working lives. Whereas many of them describe rather positive effects about how participation in collaboration and conversation impacted on themselves and their working lives as well as certain processes at the advertising agency, others were rather negative in nature, as the following sections demonstrate.

#### *Developing feelings of responsibility for the work produced*

Through collaboration and conversation, advertising practitioners, for example, felt a greater share in the work produced as well as a change in the way their contribution is seen by others. In particular, the greater perceived responsibility within the highly informal advertising development process led to a greater perceived contribution to its output. Although creative directors, creative teams and strategists would still be credited most for the advertising ideas produced, non-creative advertising practitioners felt a greater share in the work than they had felt at other, more traditional advertising agencies. As noted by C1 “here [...] it's more everyone helps out on it. So... it's less about my piece of work, it's more the agency's piece of work, which is a good thing, because... you share the bone but you also... a lot of people, especially the ‘non-creatives,’ get the feel like it's theirs as well.” In a similar vein, PM7 pointed out, “I think people are conscious that everyone is being involved. I mean obviously the first people that everyone credits used to [to be] the creatives, but people definitely credit the whole team, everyone [who is] involved. In the same way that helping working on a big project or a pitch – I'll always respect everybody from studio to runners to everyone who's helped out.”

The advertising agency's management tried to foster the equal recognition of all disciplines in advertising creation when publishing work. Instead of assigning the individual names of the advertising development processes' protagonists to work (e.g. creative directors, the creative team, and strategists), which is standard procedure in the advertising industry, they put only the agency's name on it. As noted by PM2 "when we send stuff off to for Campaign we don't put 'art director: such and such person,' 'copywriter: such and such person,' we put [our advertising agency's name] against each, you know, because the job was not just coming out of a creative team. It's a collaboration between strategy, production, whether it be print or TV production and design, and artwork. And everybody has had, you know, an interest in producing that job. It's not two people - it's a whole team of being responsible for making sure that that job has been done and been done in the best way they possibly can. So just to send it off and say, it's the creatives that are the responsible ones for this is unfair to all the other people that contributed."

*Developing mutual understanding and recognition for others*

Most importantly, however, through the collaborative and conversational character of the advertising development process, advertising practitioners developed great empathy towards other disciplines in general and their responsibilities in particular. In an interview, S2, for example, explained how working in collaboration has led to a greater empathy towards the work of creatives and how this changed her perspective on her own doing: "The way the agency is set up, so here it's very fluid and you work with creative teams to solve a problem or come to a solution whereas [at my old agency] it was very much like the planner writes the brief and then feeds into the creative teams and then sort of work gets spat out at the end. But I found it quite hard to understand how they translated what I would write on briefs and how it became work. And also it could be quite a lot of friction and I understand now having spent a bit more time in the industry, as a creative that must be quite frustrating... Because they got

a point of view on what the solution is or what the answer is... and they are not necessarily sort of consulted, you just walk up there with your brief and go 'there you go there is the answer, can I have some ads please?'" Both the greater feeling of responsibility as well as the development of mutual understanding and recognition further decreased conflict amongst advertising practitioners, as described in 'Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising.' As P7, for example, noted, "it does change you as a producer [...] You're by default a lot more in control of the production because everything comes through *you*, you know? So [...] you have not passed on responsibility for something to someone else. So you kind of can't say 'oh the reason that the client didn't approve it was because you sold it in wrong,' you know? I have to go 'well, actually, it was me that sent the email, or it was me that had the meeting.'"'

Finally, severe conflict was averted for quite practical reasons. Through the constant interaction between the different project team members everyone remained in touch with what was going on, further decreasing the emergence of conflict. That is, if advertising practitioners were unhappy with certain aspects of ideas or how things were done, they could intervene immediately at any point of the advertising development process instead of being presented with *faits accomplis*. As noted by CRM1 "at other agencies, because they have set reviews [...], it all has to come out there or it's not gonna come out. But because we're all open plan and people are encouraged to go and tap each other on the shoulder, you know, and talk openly off the clock, I think [...] a lot of those arguments and debates happen one to one." If tensions exist, they would "never really [really be] on a big scale," as PM4 explained. PM5 also pointed out, "most of the challenges or the tension would be between the client and the agency."

### **Encountering conditions of exclusion and discrimination**

As revealed above, however, besides rather positive voiced participant understandings about the implications of collaboration and conversation on processes and people, participants voiced understandings about negative effects of the informal way of doing as well, as the following section will demonstrate. It appears there are differences in the perceptions as to the extent the integrative approach to advertising creation is put into practice. Interestingly, the understandings voiced in this research mainly concerned the negative effects of participating in such practices on certain advertising practitioners themselves and their working lives rather than on the creative or commercial processes in the organization, as demonstrated in greater detail below.

#### *Experiencing limits of togetherness*

Several participants reported that the open plan environment and the continuous mixing up makes it particularly difficult for newcomers to become part of the agency's family and thus to build up relationships. As PM7 pointed out, "it takes a while, I think, to get to know people. Again, partly because of the physical layers: You're moving constantly so you're not sitting in a team, so it's... you know, you don't get to know people very personally. And everyone is so busy they're just running around, [so] that they don't often have the time to, you know, [to] chitchat. So it takes a while, I think, to actually get under the skin of the agency." Similarly, it would be highly difficult to remain informed about the projects others are involved in and to share experiences. As PM5 explained, "as a discipline there is not a lot of dialogue, because you don't know who the other [project managers] are. I think creatives are a bit more [connected] – they know who each other are, but for [project managers] unless you sit next to them or unless there are two [project managers] working on the same project, you might not be able to share knowledge." As a consequence, advertising practitioners began

to organize “monthly check ins” to get to know each other and to enable knowledge spill-overs “more easily” (PM5).

Further, although several advertising practitioners argued that hierarchical differences would not exist, they appear to be underneath the collaborative, conversational, and seemingly egalitarian practices the advertising practitioners like to be immersed in, posing particular challenges to newcomers in general and individuals from non-creative disciplines in particular. Whereas strategists and creatives, for example, were trying to be as free as possible when developing strategies and advertising ideas, the data suggests that at the same time project managers and producers had to processualize the environment around them. Whereas strategists and creatives were immersed in their creative endeavours, it was the responsibility of non-creative advertising practitioners to keep the process together. As P1 explained, “I would say creative and strategy are [this advertising agency’s] kind of, I don’t know, halo or whatever. And then all the other bits just kind of happen underneath.” Whilst allowing strategists and creatives enough space to generate ideas, project managers and producers make sure that results are delivered on time and on budget. As C1 explained “there are people like producers and [project managers] who make it... their job is to make the life easier for you, you know?”

The dominance of strategists and creatives in determining how to do things at the advertising agency also became visible in the discussion of advertising ideas. As P3, who has only worked at smaller creative but non-advertising firms before he was headhunted by the advertising agency, pointed out “I do get the impression that in advertising the roles are quite strict, even though I think people say at [this advertising agency], you know, it's very easy going and everyone does bits of everything – I'm not sure that's true really. And that's practical, you know, that's busy, 'busy big money,' and lots of responsibility of course, you know?” It could, for example, be observed that mainly strategists and creative directors

engaged in the discussion of advertising ideas. Other team members such as project managers or producers were rather taking a back seat in those conversations. The discussion of advertising ideas in general, and of its creative quality in particular, was thus not subject to all advertising practitioners, as suggested by creative advertising practitioners, but only a few. As P3 specified, “I feel like... people talk about everyone being creative at [at this agency], but if you need a creative idea you go to the creatives, you know? And I am currently a bit disappointed about that. [...] You're kind of the wrong cast, you know, here: They've Brahmins, and Brahmins are the ones that can communicate with God as a merchant – you may have ideas about it but you don't have the help line... to God.”

Eventually, even between those ‘cracking on and interacting’ in meetings, the alleged, ‘openness’ (F2) resulted in a rather competitive environment affecting the discussion of creative ideas. Instead of relying on a “natural gravitational pull” towards “the best idea,” as F2 noted, advertising practitioners saw the lack of formal structures as a chance to heighten their sphere of influence and profile. As S4 noted “there is a tendency in our industry and even here, [...] to sort of pretend that it's all cosy and collaborative and nice and friendly, but a massive part of it is 'do you have the jobs?', you know, can you talk articulately at meetings? Can you win a discussion? Can you have good ideas? And can you work on things that go through?” In a similar vein, P3, noted, “there are quite a lot of people prepared to be very brutal here [...] A lot of the time the relationships I have with people I work directly with are quite sort of [makes growl noises] and direct and 'don't do too much' and stuff but then I have lots of fun and friendly relationships with people I don't work with.” Most of the time, however, creative directors at the end of the day decided which ideas made it through the review process and were presented to the client. As C1, for example, explained, “the planners plan stuff and tick boxes [...], you know,... [but] the creative director at the end is the one who's gonna make it happen or put it in front of the client.”

Unsurprisingly, advertising practitioners tried to promote their ideas and ‘lobby’ outside of meetings and convince gatekeepers in more intimate conversations, turning meetings themselves into “rubber-stamping” as CRM1 articulated. This is perfectly exemplified in a field note, which captured a strategist’s comment and is displayed in Appendix 6.

*Undergoing intimidation in situations of separation*

Not surprisingly, non-creative advertising practitioners described the constant balancing out of structure and creative freedom as highly tiring. As PM7 noted “... you know, things don't necessarily have a process which is something that, I think, people value in [this agency] but there are times, I think, when it's needed. So that was a bit of a challenge – not to, like, over process things but at the same time keeping on top of everything.” In a similar vein PM8 describes her experience of balancing out structure versus creative freedom: “I tried [to use tools to structure the process] in the beginning, but you just feel, like... I tried to put [into place] template documents, status documents – all that stuff. And then you just realize that it's actually better kept in your head. And if you can retain the information in your head and just keep it going at quite a fast pace... like... no one reads status documents, no one gives a shit about that, so I sort of stopped caring as well.”

The limits of togetherness in collaboration and conversation described above and their impact on the advertising agency’s culture were even perceived as ‘intimidating’ by several advertising practitioners. Particularly, non-creative advertising practitioners explained that they felt uncomfortable to express their ideas when more senior advertising practitioners were around and knowing when and how to take part in conversations of meetings was described as challenging. As noted by PM7 “I think it can be quite intimidating because not being expected. So it's almost knowing when is the right time to contribute and when it's valuable. Sometimes depending on who you're in a meeting with you're in with really senior people –

what type of value are you going to add by contributing possibly, you know? And to hold things up so kind of ‘do your own job while everyone is doing theirs.’ Depending on [whom] you’re with basically. I think if you’re with people you are comfortable with, you are more likely to contribute as well.” In a similar vein, PM8 noted, “it’s a really intimidating work place. Big personalities, strong opinions – just an insecurity about your own ideas. So yeah I don’t think it’s the friendliest place to start working as a [project manager].” The struggle to balance out when it is the right time to contribute is also exemplified in a note that was taken during fieldwork and which is displayed in Appendix 7.

In one interview P3, who was new to the advertising industry, told me that he experienced difficulties in engaging in discussions due to the specific language the advertising practitioners were using when debating ideas. Thus, there seemed to be specific ways of speaking with each other that had to be learned when entering the advertising industry in general and the advertising agency in particular. As P3 identified, “how communication [is] most favoured here, I think, is short, direct, simple... keep it simple, you know? That isn’t how I like to work, you know? I like to chat, I like to knock ideas around a bit. I like language and I like it when people say ‘is this what you mean?’ And so I find it quite hard to be creative [...] here because of that.” And he added, “to show that I’m creative, I’m still struggling slightly to work out how I might do that. And I tell myself – and partly I think it’s true – that I don’t understand or I’m not really good at delivering a spiffy idea in a way they like and not gonna sell an idea generally and in a way they might like. But I think it’s also because I feel like the style of doing ideas and stuff here isn’t a style that I’m used to.”

Overall, it appears the constant struggle of accommodating the needs of creative advertising practitioners led to the inability to take on jobs, which exceed the scope of ‘simple stuff,’ as voiced participant understandings suggest. In other words, the advertising practitioners desire for ‘chaos’ (as described above) is accompanied with high costs. As S4

highlighted, “the other place that [this advertising agency] differs from other agencies [is] the ability to handle complex projects. So what we will excel at doing here is simple stuff that's very surprising, different. If it is a big complicated multi market, multi-channel campaign we're not as good at it – and the reason for that is that a lot of other agencies they have a much more rigid hierarchical structure. So it's easier to delegate and manage complexity. And I think [this advertising agency] could do with being a little bit more honest about that in terms of the type of projects that we take on. Because it's... as good as your own idea is, if people are kind of a little bit chaotic about how they implement things, it can be very difficult to take, you know, a thought and execute it in lots of channels and lots of countries and that kind of thing.”

## **Conclusion**

All categories identified as part of the ‘Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity in advertising’ theme are summarized in Table 4.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Description</b>
Avoiding formal structures	Working together without formal structures, due to the belief that formal rules hinder the development of creative ideas but also waste time.
Avoiding formal processes	Working together without formal processes, due to the belief that formal rules hinder the development of creative ideas but also waste time.
Fostering collaboration	Working together in close interaction, supported by various organizational measures, due to the belief that inputs from creative ideas can come from a variety of different sources.
Fostering conversation	Working together through face-to-face interaction, manifested in high numbers of daily meetings, due to the belief that many creative ideas are triggered by inputs of others and thus emerge rather spontaneously.
Contributing beyond disciplinary boundaries	Taking over activities beyond the advertising practitioners' disciplinary boundaries, due to the integrative approach to advertising creative development, not only with regards to conversations but other practices as well.
Developing feelings of responsibility for the work produced	The feeling of having a greater share in the work produced, fostered by the way work was presented in public, due to the integrative approach to advertising creative development.

Developing mutual understanding and recognition for others	The greater understanding among advertising practitioners of different disciplines, due to the integrative approach to advertising creative development.
Experiencing limits of togetherness	Voiced difficulties to become part of the family, to share knowledge amongst colleagues, as well as – based on assumed creative capabilities – to take part in creative discussions in particular in a supposedly integrative environment.
Undergoing intimidation in situations of separation	Reported feelings of intimidation in situations in which collaboration and conversation are perceived as unwanted in a supposedly integrative environment.

**Table 4 Summary of the ‘Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity in advertising’ theme’s categories**

The nature of the advertising practitioners’ day-to-day work was observed to be highly informal. Instead of being restricted by formal processes and structures, they preferred a rather ‘fluid’ way of working, in which the creative idea remains accessible at all times of the advertising development process. In particular, using paper for developing and passing on the creative brief was seen as an epitome of formality and thus often despised. Overall, doing things without ‘too much process’ became a process itself.

Instead, advertising practitioners constructed spaces of collaboration. According to the advertising practitioners, this would save time and allow them to concentrate on the work itself. Moreover, it would allow for more ‘rounded’ ideas. Through collaboration conventional stages of the advertising development process often overlapped (e.g. strategy development with ‘generating ideas’) and advertising practitioners blurred their disciplinary boundaries.

The informal way of working in general and the collaborative character of their day-to-day work in particular were constructed through conversation. However, instead of presenting fully fleshed out solutions in conversations, advertising practitioners were expected to contribute through discussion. This ‘open source principle’ (F2) required

selflessness and confidence and had to be learned by practitioners new to the advertising agency.

The collaborative and conversational way of working together was reinforced by the firm's spatial set up as well as a range of organizational initiatives. As a consequence, advertising practitioners felt a greater share in the work produced, which was fostered by the way work was disclosed in public. Moreover, the collaborative and conversational nature of the advertising development process was found to create empathy between disciplines and helped to reduce inter-departmental conflict. Conflict would of course occasionally occur, however, they would never be on a large scale. Most conflict would occur between the agency and the client.

However, several negative effects of the informal style the advertising practitioners preferred to work together were identified. Besides matters which affected all advertising practitioners, such as busy timetables due to the high amount of meetings taking place every day, matters which only affected individuals of particular disciplines existed. Project managers and producers had to constantly balance out the needs of creatives with the requirements of projects, and find ways to make both sides work, which made the managing of advertising development highly challenging. Since no formal processes existed, they employed processes learned at previous advertising agencies to make projects work. However, the advertising agency had difficulties to take on larger projects, due to the 'chaos' comprising their everyday doings.

Finally, the research revealed that there were different arenas of collaboration with different collaborators engaged in them. Particularly, in the collaboration around creative executions, and thus the development of the ideas' foundation, collaboration was rather exclusive. Whereas creative advertising practitioners were allowed to speak, 'non-creative advertising practitioners' had to balance out whether it was the right environment in which to

#### *Chapter 4: Findings*

contribute. Furthermore, even amongst creatives and strategists themselves, the alleged ‘openness’ led to limits of camaraderie where it was about telling each other to shut up in order to win the discussion.

## Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising

### **Introduction**

Having considered collaboration in the preceding section, the findings now turn in contrast to a key area of contestation. Accordingly, in this section, the practices and impact of the ‘aesthetic filtering’ of ideas in creative processes in the advertising firm are considered. Aesthetic filtering and its impact on the working lives of creative teams are the focus here, with a particular (emergent) focus on providing an empirical account of what creatives describe as ‘killing babies’ (the rejection of their creative output) and the effects it has on their working lives.

*This section is structured as follows, in three parts:*

First, ‘aesthetic filtering’ will be described in a broader sense by zooming out and briefly addressing the advertising agency’s careful acquisition of talents as well as businesses they wanted to work with. As will be described, however, also once ‘acquired’ employees and clients were under constant evaluation. Then, aesthetic filtering in its narrower sense will be elaborated upon. Zooming further in, aesthetic filtering describes the sieving of ideas based on the aesthetic judgments gatekeepers (i.e. creative directors, strategy directors, but also clients and small groups of consumers) made within the advertising development process.

Second, consideration will be given to how the practice of aesthetic filtering caused uncertainty amongst those people who were required to come up with ideas and deliver, against the gatekeepers’ ‘killing’ of ideas. For creative teams, it was impossible to predict whether their idea would make it through the process or not. It will then be discussed how the uncertainty led to pressure amongst creative teams, causing them to deliver as many and different ideas as possible and to ‘cover all angles’ to increase the chances of one of their ideas being ‘bought.’ In addition, also emotional conflicts, evident in the tension between the

creative teams' sense of dedication on the one hand and the often sudden dismissal of those ideas on the other, will be discussed.

Finally, having discussed voiced participant understandings about the rather negative implications of participating in practices of 'aesthetic filtering,' ways in which creative teams but also the advertising management reacted to the above tensions will be put forth. As will be described, creative teams developed specific tactics to cope with the uncertainty, pressure, and emotional conflicts caused by aesthetic filtering, whereas the advertising agency's management exploited the coping tactics of creative teams and increased the pressure amongst creative teams even further.

### **Choosing the right people and ideas**

As explained above, as a mechanism to sustain the advertising practitioners shared understanding about how advertising works in general and about the importance of creativity therein in particular, the advertising agency carefully selected the employees and clients they liked to work with. Moreover, on a day-to-day basis the advertising agency's output was closely monitored. This research thus defines the continuous evaluation of people and products as well as their separation into suitable and non-suitable 'production factors' as aesthetic filtering.

Regardless of the advertising agency's integrative approach to advertising creation, especially for creatives as 'the main source of creative ideas,' the practice of aesthetic filtering had serious implications, as the analysis suggests, since it was through aesthetic filtering, their 'babies got killed.' Thus, after describing aesthetic filtering in its broader context, the sieving of ideas and its effects on creative teams in particular will be explained in the following sections.

*Selecting ‘like-minded’ people*

In the first instance, the advertising agency ensured that only those people who shared the advertising agency’s understanding of its unique ‘creative code’ worked at the agency. The importance of creative employees for the agency is described by one of its partners. As F1 explained, “somebody else said all my assets walk out of the door every day, you know. And it’s true, yes, we have a certain amount of hardware like some pretty nice computers you know and a nice office but the real heart of the agency, the thing that makes [this advertising agency] different, walks out the door every day and it’s our people. So you know we spend a lot of time recruiting.” With this in mind, creative teams were recruited via book critiques and college courses: a strategy that aimed to find high potential. Potential was also tested by giving potential young recruits specific tasks and asking them to work in intense placement schemes to judge their creative abilities and ‘aesthetic fit.’ More experienced advertising practitioners were mainly recruited through word-of-mouth (emails were sent around with open vacancies, as noted during field work observations) and assessed by asking them to freelance and to go through lengthy interview procedures. More experienced advertising practitioners often came from agencies, which had been affiliated to the advertising agency studied in this research at some point in time, or from agencies that shared similar beliefs (from the perspective of the owners).

Besides demonstrating their competencies in the field, recruits had to have a strong creative personality. As S4 indicated, “individuals [coming here] have to have a strong style. Personality. I don’t mean like a certain dress sense, but, you know,... Somebody like [name] was accepted very quickly and became well known in the agency very quickly, because he is very brash, very working class, slightly racist occasionally, you know, and is just a little different from a lot of kind of quite smooth, slick advertising people, yeah? So people like that [...] [they] react well to it and you know, he gets known quickly. Or there is another girl,

[name], who was just grumpy all the time, and smoked a lot, was very French and people liked her because of that, you know what I mean? So it's just having that sense that you have got a very distinctive character, people like that and it makes them feel that you're more you know interesting, more creative, more [advertising agency's name]." In a similar vein, but on a more general note, P3, who was new to the agency and regarded himself as a 'nerd,' explained, "I guess you get into advertising, when I guess you like being cool. I mean I feel slightly cool 'cause I'm in advertising. And... I think I'm used to working in agencies with the brainy unpopular kids, who might have found that we have some status now. My guess is that advertising has more of the handsome popular kids, you know? Kids, who have lots of great and popular friends and go to bars and stuff. I mean [...] it's not jam-packed with softies and intellectuals, I suppose."

Also, with clients, the advertising agency made sure that they shared the advertising agency's aesthetic understanding about how to develop creative advertisements as well as their later, sensual appearance. F1 compared the agency-client relationship to a "marriage," pointing out the intensity of the relationship but also the often divergent perspectives that pervade the alliance. Since not only employees but also clients play a fundamental role in advertising creation and impact on the advertising agency's practices and output, new businesses were acquired with great caution. As C8 pointed out, "you know, to make great work you kind of need the clients that are willing to take risks." If not, the agency would have to produce work, which is not in-line with their own 'hand writing' and thus jeopardize their individual creative reputation.

In this respect, 'pitches' were not only a means to create new businesses, but also to test, if clients' tastes fit to the advertising agency's taste and to select accordingly. As F1 explained, "we have to have clients here who see the world of marketing communications in a similar way to we do which is what the pitch process is about, when we pitch a new piece of

business. And you know clients have to be excited to want to come here and work with us and excited about the solutions that we come up with. Otherwise it's just a fight." The agency's management reported to rather accept losing money in order to maintain the advertising agency's creative integrity. As CRM1 noted "you might resign a client even though they're paying money to get your work." To secure financial stability, the advertising agency's founders were involved in a range of other companies, which function as a financial backup to their main endeavour.

*Complying to the organization's 'statutes'*

Once hired, however, advertising practitioners had to comply with the organization's 'statutes.' Advertising practitioners who were hired but did not share their agency's creative code left the agency quickly. As an employee, you would either "accept" the particularities or "you [would] leave [the advertising agency] quite quickly," as S7 disclosed. In a similar vein S8 explained, "it's really interesting it's like [this advertising agency] has got a really specific culture but you don't create the culture, you're part of a culture that exists already. And I think, you know, at other agencies you might go and help to shape a culture, but here you don't and it's a really, like massive mistake to come in here and think that you can, you know? The culture exists and you can kind of contribute to it but you, you know... don't try to redefine and reshape it. I think there have been like, the time that I've been here there have been various little exercises to do that and it has always ended badly."

Unsurprisingly, existing clients were also in constant evaluation to check if their taste suited the taste of the advertising agency, and if they did not meet the organization's standards, the contract with the clients was terminated. As F1 explained, "You know, what's happened in the past and this will be the same for any ad agency [...], is that, you know, we may have had a good relationship for three or five years with a client and then a new head of

marketing comes in, who doesn't share our values and at that point, you know, we can either find a way of working together or we move on."

*Filtering advertising ideas*

Most importantly, however, despite a careful acquisition of advertising practitioners and new businesses, a rigid quality assessment of the work produced was set into place. That is, the advertising agency's output was constantly monitored and – based on the aesthetic judgments of certain gatekeepers – promising ideas from unpromising separated.

Thus, instead of "something being held up [and saying] this is what you gotta go for," as CD7 pointed out, however, the agency's style got "trickled down [...] through the people," and, even more precisely, through the practice of aesthetic filtering. Creative directors played a major role in the practice of aesthetic filtering, since they functioned as the first gatekeepers in the sieving of ideas and were most important for creative teams for keeping their jobs. They accepted or rejected the ideas creative teams came up with; decided which ideas end up on the clients' desk; protected ideas from clients' requests and changes, which might harm their distinctiveness; and gave input on creative teams' ideas helping them to develop promising ideas further. Consequently, they also played a major role in the reproduction of the advertising agency's taste. Although meeting the clients' requirements was part of their agenda, they first and foremost ensured that the work fulfilled the advertising agency's shared creative understanding and thus sustained the advertising agency's creative integrity. This is in line with Stuhlfaut (2011, p.288), who notes, "first and foremost, as originators of the creative product, people in the department act as the first filters of creative alternatives before any [other] stakeholders become involved." Through years of experience, creative directors themselves have learned the agency's specific taste. They have been promoted because their understanding of advertising was highly similar to the beliefs of the agency's managing partners. As highlighted by CD7 "they [...] pull creative directors in they know fit a certain

standard and heads of department and then that all... so there is like a standard check constantly."

Aesthetic filtering in its narrower sense mainly took place in or after situations in which ideas were presented to gatekeepers and judged, that is, creative reviews, client meetings and ‘advertisement testing.’ However, the aesthetic filtering of advertising ideas was not a straightforward process. Although generally the term ‘filtering’ implies a systematic reduction of ideas over time, it was constituted by an often irregularly initiated contraction and expansion of idea exploration. Often, ideas that had initially been considered as ‘good’ were dismissed in the course of the advertising development process, and creative teams were asked to develop completely new approaches to the client’s brief at hand. Therefore, although on a macro level the amount of possible advertising ideas was narrowed down, indeed, on a micro level a questioning of existing and thus the exploration of new ways to solve the clients’ problem was highly common. An exemplary description of the way in which aesthetic filtering was carried out by creative directors was captured in a field note, displayed in Appendix 8.

The advertising agency’s management saw the rigid quality assessment of the work produced as an important factor in the maintenance of the agency’s creative standing. According to the advertising practitioners, ‘bad’ output would attract less creative advertising practitioners and creativity seeking clients and would thus make the development of work which is in line with their shared understanding of good creative work even more difficult, further and further infiltrating their creative ideals. CRM1 explained this ‘vicious circle’ as follows: “If you start diluting that and chasing after, you know, just doing what you’re told because it’s making money or it’s pleasing the client then everyone will see that and less clients will come to you, you’ll win less awards, you’ll attract less talent, and it will all end up when you’re down the spiral even though you’re doing something in the short term, [...] you

know to please somebody, keep things on track, sometimes you've got to make a tough call to like let something go or not. You just got to have that integrity in the creative work, if you want the best people to be working here, you want to have fun doing it while you're here, and you want to attract more clients down the line." The practice of 'aesthetic filtering' thus played a major part in the reproduction of the advertising agency's taste regarding its output.

In addition, clients and consumers judged ideas that led to filtering of creative teams' ideas. Aesthetic filtering thus also aimed to fulfil the expectations of clients and consumers. By offering clients a large number of different advertising ideas from which they could choose, the agency increased their chances that the client liked at least a few. At the same time, listening to the client's feedback on each idea offered enabled the advertising practitioners to understand and adapt to the clients taste and offer additional and more pointed solutions in subsequent presentations. Particularly when working with new clients, advertising practitioners often did not really know what ideas clients liked or disliked and thus had to unearth and narrow down their tastes by delivering ideas first. Moreover, by offering clients a large number of different advertising ideas from which they may choose, the agency increased their chances that also the consumers would react positively to at least a few. In 'advertisement testing' groups of consumers were asked to evaluate a range of pre-selected ideas. Since it was the taste of the consumer which eventually decided an advertising idea's ultimate success or failure, the consumer groups' judgments were highly important for the continuance of ideas within the advertising development process and they informed the clients' decisions significantly.

It should be noted, however, although during this research judgments of consumers appeared to have only relevance if they supported the judgments of clients, the maintenance of the agency's own standards took place in a tense interrelation of the clients' and consumers' expectations. In order to make it through the advertising development process, an idea had to

meet all gatekeepers' aesthetic understandings. Whereas at the beginning of the advertising development process aesthetic filtering was mainly concentrated on the originality and appropriateness of ideas themselves, at later stages particular properties and executional aspects of specific ideas were under debate. Only if there were elements constituting ideas that were just producible under specific circumstances or conditions, executional aspects of ideas were debated early in the process. Unsurprisingly, although the advertising agencies realized and thus launched only a small number of campaigns during the time of my fieldwork, the number of ideas which had actually been generated throughout the advertising development process was far higher.

### **Dealing with uncertainty, pressure, and emotional conflicts**

As with the other practices identified, this research found several voiced participant understandings regarding how the practice of aesthetic filtering constrained or enabled creative and commercial processes in the organization as well as voiced participant understandings concerning how participation in such practices impacted on themselves and their working lives, as the following sections highlight.

#### *Creating ideas in uncertainty*

Participants, for example, identified that the practice of aesthetic filtering causes uncertainty. This mainly concerned those advertising practitioners that were required to come up with ideas, and thus creative teams. For creative teams it was impossible to predict whether their idea would progress through the process or not. As C1 explained "it's completely in the lap of the gods if it is your advert being made, you know? There are so many factors" and ideas can be dropped at any time and for any reason.

Uncertainty was, for example, caused by the large number of (internal and external) gatekeepers, which had to be convinced. As revealed above, creative teams had to convince their creative directors (and strategists) so that their ideas were presented to clients. Moreover,

they had to convince (often multiple layers of) clients so that their ideas were presented to groups of consumers. Groups of consumers, finally, had to be convinced so that the ideas were produced and launched. Consequently, for an idea to progress through advertising development, all gatekeepers had to share a similar taste.

In particular, aesthetic filtering based on ‘advertisement testing’ (and thus based on the judgments of small consumer groups) caused uncertainty among creative teams. Since ‘advertisement testing’ usually took place at the end of ‘generating ideas’ but just before their production, the basis on which consumers were asked to judge were drafts only (e.g. ‘animatics’; roughly outlined scenes of an idea for TV). According to several advertising practitioners, however, consumers would lack the imagination required to envision the drafts in their final form, and lacked the capabilities to be considered an appropriate judge able to evaluate ideas in a more draft form. As C2 pointed out, “great work gets killed in research, I think, because you're taking the aesthetic judgment of consumers who are not experts over a, you know, a potentially, kind of more imaginative creative director – it's a good way to kill work.” In a similar vein S4 explained, “consumer research in the theory is great, in practice it's very problematic. When you have something genuinely really good and quite well realized, it will usually sail through consumer research and you know 90% of the clients are gonna buy it as well. The problem that you have is when you have something that could *become* good, but isn't good yet. Okay? And that's when you get into a lot of difficulty.”

Moreover, the tastes of (internal and external) gatekeepers and thus the basis on which aesthetic filtering took place, was largely unknown, which fostered the uncertainty of creative teams even further. Feedback from gatekeepers (i.e. feedback from creative directors, strategists, or clients) was given to creative teams implicitly rather than explicitly and mainly concentrated on the positive rather than the negative aspects of ideas. Moreover, decisions whether to go on with ideas or not were mainly made amongst the gatekeepers themselves

instead of including all participants involved in the advertising development process, thus additionally disguising the gatekeepers' aesthetic understandings. Thus, creative teams learned to grasp the aesthetic understandings of the different sets of people that they had to convince only over time.

Finally, other equally incalculable reasons fostered uncertainty amongst creative teams during 'generating ideas.' Besides different tastes, factors such as reduced budgets or timelines could also lead to the sudden rejection of ideas. Often ideas were not producible any more due to a change in circumstances, for example, if budgets were cut off or advertising development time was shortened unexpectedly. Thus, even though all the gatekeepers involved liked an idea, it sometimes had to be dismissed. It was reported that even a strategic move of a competitor, which influenced the client's business, could lead to a change of the client brief and kill ideas that had already been developed.

Unsurprisingly, the rejection of ideas could have happened at any time. Ideas could be rejected due to taste differences in or after creative reviews, in client presentations as well as through consumer research, or out of the blue due to cuts in budgets and timings or changing business needs. One advertising practitioner reported that even shortly before an idea was about to be launched it was suddenly rejected. The day before it was about to air, it was shown to the client's top management, which had not been involved in the advertising development process so far. Since the client did not like the idea, the whole campaign was dropped – regardless of the efforts and money that had been invested.

#### *Developing ideas under pressure*

Uncertainty caused by the aesthetic filtering of gatekeepers led to pressure amongst creative teams to deliver as many different ideas as possible and thus to increase the chances that one of them gets produced and launched. This pressure is perfectly exemplified with a quote captured during fieldwork, displayed as a field note in Appendix 10. Moreover, the

uncertainty led to pressure amongst creative teams to deliver particularly ‘good’ ideas, as perceived as such by the groups of gatekeepers judging ideas during advertising development. Creative teams had to ‘cover all angles’ and anticipate as well as possible the taste of their creative director, strategists, clients as well as the target audience, in order to have a chance that their idea is ‘bought.’ C5 explained the negative impact pressure could have on idea generation: “When you're under pressure [it is] hard to think of ideas. It's kind of like you have to worry more about not performing, that you kind of... you basically panic. And if you panic, you stop thinking about ideas – you're just thinking about 'shit, I am gonna get in trouble, kind of, for not having ideas.'”

In particular, young creative teams (e.g. on placement scheme or junior level) were under pressure to deliver a range of different ideas. Young creatives are only at the (pre-) periphery of the advertising community, as they have to impress their peers by building up a portfolio to move closer to the advertising community’s centre (see McLeod et al., 2011). As C5 noted, “we've never had anything made or something. We only had a few print stuff made. We never made a TV ad so that's kind of why we've come to [this advertising agency]. We want to have a TV ad made and... for [brand name] we'll gonna have a few ten seconds made and we've only been here like five weeks. So that's great. But even they are not the most exciting ads – they are only [brand name] – for us it's like a stepping-stone for some more interesting [things].”

The tastes of creative novices, however, and consequently their ability to judge the quality of their own ideas were not as developed as the taste of more experienced creative teams. It took them longer to identify ideas with potential, as well as to craft and refine them. Only over time creative novices improved their taste, which allowed them to filter out promising ideas more quickly. Whereas the actual creative process of ‘coming up with an idea’ does not seem to change, practitioners seem to refine their aesthetic categories by which they

judge ideas. CD6 described the process of taste development as follows: “You learn a lot about what's gone [on] before and what you become better and better at I think is recognizing avenues that might lead to something interesting. [...]. So I guess the thing that you get really experienced [in] is working out when you're onto something that is new or feels different.” In a similar vein, C6 explained, “when you get older you have that judgment, so that you don't, if you've got a brief on for mums, you don't come back with something with dicks in it, you know? [...]. But when you're a student you get a brief for mums and you have no sense so you're just like 'oh, well, 'cause it's for mums, wouldn't it be amazing if we put a lot of penises in it, 'cause no-one ever does that – that's brilliant' and you present it to someone like [creative director's name] or something and he's like 'no, 'cause... you can't'... 'why?'... '[It] doesn't make any sense.’”

C6's contribution exemplifies the dichotomous picture creative teams had of their superiors. On the one hand, they were responsible for rejecting creative teams' ideas so that creative teams tried to “squeeze” and “sneak” (CD2) ideas past them; on the other hand, they were seen as valuable teachers who “teach you what is good and what is bad” (C6). This view was also supported by CD5, who pointed out, “I think it's good to have someone guiding you through the process. I mean, when I was starting out I would have [had] a million ideas for one ad and I wouldn't know which one was the good one, you know? You need someone to help you shape and learn what is going to be a good idea that's effective and fun and that you can afford to do it. You know all these things that you learn through experience, that you don't have an idea of when you're starting out and so you need someone to help channel those ideas.” In particular, creatives had to learn the aesthetic categories applied by the creative director and strategist quickly in order to produce work, which will end up on the client's desk. This is consistent with the research of Stuhlfaut (2011, p.297), who notes that creative teams have to ‘master’ the taste of their supervisors “to be successful within the creative department” and that creative teams would be “learning the type of creative work that their

supervisors would approve” – albeit within a more complex web of gatekeeper opinions evident in the data from this research.

Moreover, young creative teams have not yet been able to build a reputation which would have influenced positively the way their ideas were judged and which they could have relied on if they would have failed to deliver good ideas. As C1, explained “I think we were at a stage where we have been in the industry long enough to have confidence in what we are doing but starting at new places is always tricky – wherever you work. Because you are always presenting to new faces. People don't know if you are good or not, you know? Even now we present really bad ideas, but people know us from the past and know that we are okay, you know? Whereas when you start it's more nerve wracking and, you know, you don't know the processes here as much and you have to ask, but you know, you get on more projects and quickly you get busy, you know, and then you learn, you know, you get used to it, you know? Yeah, you get used to it fast.”

But also more experienced creative teams were under pressure to develop ideas which progress through the process. Whereas young creatives mainly aimed to impress their agency peers to get their ideas presented to the client and get them produced, experienced creatives were under pressure to demonstrate their talent beyond the agency's walls. To move from ‘middleweight’ to ‘heavyweight’ status (see McLeod et al., 2011) experienced creatives have to impress the wider advertising community by winning awards. As CRM1 put it “awards are really important to our industry 'cause they keep creative people motivated and they're a way of, you know, showing how you're doing against your peers.” Without advertising ideas that are produced and launched it was impossible for them to win the advertising community's main currency. Award winning ideas, however, were particularly difficult to get past gatekeepers since they are generally highly creative and thus highly risky to the clients at hand. Although the taste of more experienced creative teams and thus their personal ‘hit rate’

had improved over time and they had learned to adapt to the tastes of gatekeepers, they were still dependent on the their subjective judgments.

The pressure amongst both young and experienced creative teams was reflected in the long hours they spent in the advertising agency on producing or refining ideas. During fieldwork, in contrast to practitioners of other disciplines, creative teams often stayed until after midnight or even slept at the agency to deliver against briefs. As C5 explained, “that's why you stay late and you put the effort in because, one, you want to impress, two, you don't want to embarrass yourself, you don't want come to a meeting and say 'look, I've got no ideas.' It kind of looks bad on you and you almost feel they're gonna... not look down on you but you kind of let them down. They trusted you to come up with stuff. They don't work on ideas themselves, they kind of brief you whatever, give you advice but they don't work on it, they need *you* to come up with stuff and if you're not coming up with stuff, then... yeah, if you are letting them down they're gonna need to go to another team.”

*Experiencing emotional conflicts and frustration*

In addition to uncertainty and pressure, emotional conflicts arose due to the tension between the creative teams' sense of dedication on the one hand, where they are required to generate as many different ideas as possible in short periods of time, and the often sudden dismissal of those ideas on the other. As CRM1 indicated, as a creative team “you're giving your ideas away, you're giving your thoughts, your insights into life and into people. It's all quite personal.” As soon as an idea was dismissed, the long hours they have spent and the personal input they had invested to come up with an idea, crafted and refined it were of no avail. Thus, as C2 noted, “it's a massively frustrating business. [It] drives you crazy.” Moreover, quickly after an idea had been rejected, creative teams had to regain motivation and self-confidence, in order to apply the same commitment again in subsequent phases of idea generation. As revealed above, ‘advertising testing’ was reported to be particularly

challenging for creative teams. As S4 noted, “creatives funny enough, despite having less understanding a lot of the time about the theory of advertising, probably have the better gut understanding of that point and tend to find research massively frustrating for that reason. Also, emotionally it's very difficult for them, because you basically have to sit there and watch a guy who doesn't really understand what you were trying to do with the work, present it to a bunch of people, who then, you know, kind of slaughter it, you know? So it's difficult for them.”

### **Coping with stresses of aesthetic filtering and facing exploitation**

Finally, certain reactions to the consequences of aesthetic filtering have been identified. That is, advertising practitioners engaged in certain activities to cope with the stress related to aesthetic filtering and to regain motivation required to engage in creative work, but also the advertising agency management's attempts to foster and even exploit the miserable situation creative teams were facing, as the following section will explain in more detail.

#### *Applying coping tactics*

In situations of idea rejection, creative teams received support from project managers. Project managers saw it as their responsibility to nurture creative teams and to help them gain new motivation after ideas have been killed. As PM8 described, “[creative teams] can be annoyed because the client doesn't like something or they've been forced to go back and do it in a different way. There is a lot of frustration about that sometimes because jobs can go on and on and on and, you know, five, six, seven months of speculation and no work is made. And people get fed up. So you have to kind of remain positive throughout it even when you're not feeling particularly positive about a situation [too]. [...] You have to go 'come on it's not that bad. It'll be fine.'” In a similar vein, P6, (who as noted above was himself responsible for telling creative teams from time to time that ideas cannot be executed the way they envisioned

them), noted that to work in his discipline “you definitely have to be a people person, you need to be able to kind of manage peoples' mood, you know? You need to be [a] good person [and] to be able to deal with bad moods in a nice way.”

Most importantly, however, to handle the systematic ‘killing of babies,’ as C6 referred to, and to remain passionate, creative teams developed coping tactics through which they balanced out personal dedication with professional detachment. Instead of fighting for ideas creative teams tried to distance themselves from the work they do and to simply accept the judgments of creative and strategy directors, clients and consumers. As noted by C5, “you think 'ah shit they just killed my baby' but then you just get on with it... you learn to live with it and you learn to do other stuff.” In a similar vein C1 described how he copes with the rejection of ideas: “It's more, I suppose, taking it if they don't like the idea you present. [...] They're in a position higher than you, they've earned that, and you just, kind of go 'well, that's their opinion...' you know?” Instead of seeing advertising as an environment to express themselves as artists, as F2 asserted (“the people here tend to be on higher quality and a higher character than in other agencies, because they know that if they come here they gonna have great opportunity to express themselves”), creative teams forced themselves to regard their day-to-day work as a job for living.

Expressing themselves was instead done outside of the advertising agency, for example in hobbies such as graphic design, music production, filmmaking, or fashion blog writing. Since they were free from constraints such as budgets, timings, or (often changing) briefing specifications, in hobbies creatives could live out their perfectionism (c.f. Fletcher, 1999, as cited in McLeod, O'Donohoe, and Townley, 2011) and actually turn their imaginations into something tangible. Most importantly, however, since in creative hobbies creative teams were in full control over the development of their ideas, they were able to

overcome the persistent uncertainty by which the advertising development process was strongly characterized.

*Exploiting coping tactics*

Instead of reflecting on the creative teams' situations and taking appropriate actions to help them, however, the advertising agency's management also tried to exploit the personal creative endeavours of their employees by offering them space to display their output to their colleagues. For creative teams being involved in creative endeavours outside the advertising agency was not only a means to cope with the aesthetic filtering of their ideas, but also a vital source of inspiration. Whilst being engaged in graphic design, music production, film-making, or fashion blog writing creative teams were constantly absorbing input. It was seen as an important source of developmental input and informed the creative teams' work for clients. Although there is a range of content shared in their professional context (e.g. at industry events or via industry websites), there were risks related to them. As P5 pointed out, "I think there is a flip side to that where all the advertising creatives go and see the same films and then they all kind of write from it? And I think that's a shame." The work these advertising practitioners produced, would all look the same.

Not surprisingly, the advertising agency's management tried to capitalize on the creative endeavours of their employees by offering them space to display their output to their colleagues. By doing so, output generated by creative teams was turned into inspirational resources for others. During my fieldwork, several times the work of creatives produced outside of the workplace was displayed in the advertising agency; for example, a small private view in the reception area of the agency at which CD6 displayed catchy phrases, colourfully designed and of different font styles on wooden boards. For other advertising practitioners these exhibitions were a great source of inspiration. As C9 explained, "there is a lot of stuff in the office, in the agency actually, like '[name of the event].'" [You] always have exhibitions

## *Chapter 4: Findings*

and events, [and those] kind of things, which is quite interesting to go and see. So there is like a culture of creativity and trying to get everyone to at least see interesting stuff, even if you're not participating in it or involved or however." In a similar vein, also S8 noted, "in terms of the liveliness and the temperature of stuff that's going" she would get her inspiration from her immediate peers.

Moreover, the advertising agency's management not only expected but also highly encouraged creative teams to be immersed in creative activities outside their occupation as advertisers. As CD6 pointed out, "every creative who comes has to show you know has to have work that makes them different to the other ten who are gonna come show their books and so usually it's... as an essential starting point, your portfolio has to have more than advertising in it, it has to show that you've got interests outside of advertising." Creative teams already working at the agency were provided with resources that enabled them to explore fields that were not directly related to their occupation *per se*. In an interview, one creative team, for example, reported that the advertising agency's management provided them with money to take part in a programme, in which they learned more about video production. And there was an expectation that creative teams used the opportunities offered by the advertising agency. As explained by CRM1 "besides filling the gap maybe skills wise or creatively and besides scaring... just being creatively excellent, I think [placement teams] need to show that they understand what this place is all about [...] We are trying to do a lot of stuff that's not client based... that's just creative things that we want to do."

### *Creating ideas in competition*

In addition, instead of reflecting on the uncertainty and pressure creative teams were operating under, the advertising agency added competition to it by asking several creative teams to work on a project, adding to the already existent pressure of creative teams. Generally, more than one creative team was assigned to a project and asked to offer solutions

to the creative brief. Only those teams whose ideas ‘stayed in the race’ remained assigned to projects. Creative teams whose ideas did not stay in the race were pulled off and were usually assigned to smaller, less exciting ‘jobs’ until bigger projects turned up again. For creative teams that meant that they had failed to impress and lost the chance to generate output which they could put in their portfolio or hand in to awards shows. As C1 noted, “in agencies, it's very much, with the creatives particularly, a very much [sort] of a competitive... thing of that you are competing next to someone two desks along for an advert. So it might be your advert on the table... your script on the table and their script on the table. And it can change a career which one gets bought, you know?”

Finally, the advertising agency’s management assigned creative teams of different seniority to projects. The advertising agency’s management expected the differences of seniority amongst creative teams to foster their ‘motivation.’ The advertising agency’s management expects that the younger teams will try everything to beat the experienced team, whereas the experienced team will try everything to avoid being eclipsed by the creative newcomers. The competitive design of the advertising development process was even part of the advertising agency’s hiring practice. To impress the advertising agency’s decision makers and ‘to stay on board’ young creative teams had to outdo their experienced colleagues. For placement teams, not outdoing the experienced colleagues meant that they had nothing new to offer to the advertising agency and had to leave the company. As CRM1 noted “we'll always put a placement and another team on a brief and if that placement team is getting this team scared and pushing them and making them, you know... and beating them on scripts or on concept work then you start thinking that placement team is hot and you want to keep them on.”

Due to competitive design of the advertising development process, creative teams operated as discrete entities within the advertising agency, mainly concentrating on their own

progress towards being the next ‘big shot,’ rather than the progress of the advertising agency as such. As C1 noted, “it’s strange when you work with two of you ‘cause you’re almost... For me ‘[name of the team]’ is kind of my community and then [this advertising agency] is where we have our job and we interact with people.” In a similar vein CRM1 explained, “these teams treat themselves as their own little unique brand and that’s where awards come in most importantly, you know? It’s a bit for the agency ‘cause it helps to get clients and it helps to pull talent, but a lot of what awards are about is for that team’s brand. And a lot of their, sort of, where they move to next, what salary they’re on next, how high they go [on] will be based on what awards they got for their work. So it means that it’s always geared towards a little competitive element between teams and sort of the focus on their career rather than the bigger picture.”

The competitive climate between creative teams became particularly evident in creative reviews. Although it could not be observed that the competitive design of the advertising development process led to hostility amongst creative teams, it was noticeable that creative teams were almost ‘uncaring’ or ‘apathetic’ and held back their emotions when other creative teams presented their ideas. Most of the time, they left the discussion of other people’s ideas to the creative and strategy director and interpreted their reactions in order to foresee the chances of their own work. As C6 pointed out, “I think internally [...], when it comes to other people presenting their ideas, I really try and *not* comment [on] others’ [ideas] – and some creatives differ in this [...] like some creatives [...] like trying to change someone else’s idea into something else, you know? They, like, try to mess with someone’s idea [...] [But I think], ‘that’s my stuff... I already have a vision to what I want to do with it, so... yeah.’”

## **Conclusion**

All categories identified as part of ‘Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising’ theme are summarized in Table 5.

Category	Description
Selecting ‘like-minded’ people	The strategic hiring of employees and businesses that fit the advertising agency’s aesthetic understanding, to ensure the continuous development of creative ideas.
Complying to the organization’s ‘statutes’	The continuous evaluation of employees and businesses regarding their aesthetic fit to ensure the continuous development of creative ideas.
Filtering advertising ideas	The sieving of ideas during advertising creative processes based on the tastes of gatekeepers, especially of creative directors, to ensure the continuous development of creative ideas.
Creating ideas in uncertainty	Reported feelings of uncertainty caused by the large number of gatekeepers’ tastes that have to be met and other equally incalculable reasons, and thus the possible ‘killing of their babies’ at any time of the advertising creative process.
Developing ideas under pressure	Reported feelings of pressure due to the requirement to deliver ideas that make it into final advertisements on the one hand, and arbitrariness and high level of idea rejection on the other.
Experiencing emotional conflicts and frustration	Voiced emotional conflicts and frustration due to the sense of dedication required to engage in creative endeavours on the one hand and the sudden ‘killing of their babies’ on the other.
Applying coping tactics	The employment of coping tactics to remain passionate and capable to deliver against the constant ‘killing of babies,’ such as distancing oneself as well as expressing oneself in hobbies outside of work.
Exploiting coping tactics	The exploitation of the creative teams’ coping tactics, by turning creative hobbies into a non-formal expectation and into insights for others to maintain a continuous flow of inspirational input.
Creating ideas in competition	The intensification of the creative teams’ frustrations by asking several teams to compete against each other on projects and by punishing those whose ideas are rejected, in order to receive better creative work, and thus by adding a win/lose competition to the advertising creative process.

**Table 5 Summary of the ‘Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising’ theme’s categories**

‘Aesthetic filtering’ in a broader sense describes the advertising agency’s careful acquisition of talents and business that they wanted to work with. The advertising agency’s management made sure that only those talents and clients worked at or with the advertising

agency who shared the firm's aesthetic understanding of how advertising ideas should look. Whereas for creative teams, the work they produced was the basis on which 'aesthetic filtering' took place, for clients 'pitches' were used to assess the aesthetic fit. Once hired, both employees as well as clients had to comply with the advertising agency's statutes.

Although creative teams and clients were carefully selected, the advertising agency's management had also put a strict quality assessment in place, which concentrated on the work produced *per se*. A slippage in the output would harm their creative standing in the market. Creative talents as well as creativity seeking clients would choose other advertising agencies, which would make the development of creative output at the advertising agency even more challenging.

Aesthetic filtering in its narrower sense thus aimed to make sure that the output generated met the organization's creative standards. Creative directors played a major role in the selection of 'right' ideas and thus in the reproduction of the advertising agency's taste. In addition, aesthetic filtering also aimed to fulfil the needs of clients and consumers. Also clients and consumers judged the ideas of creative teams in the course of advertising development. To progress through aesthetic filtering, an idea had to meet all gatekeepers' tastes.

Unsurprisingly, creative teams developed a larger number of ideas on each project, to increase their chances that one of their ideas appealed to all gatekeepers and was made. However, as explained, aesthetic filtering caused uncertainty, pressure, and emotional conflicts amongst creative teams, required to deliver against the 'killing of their babies,' due to the large number of gatekeepers, their unknown tastes, as well as other incalculable reasons. To remain passionate creative teams developed coping tactics and 'expressing themselves' was done outside the advertising agency.

Nevertheless, instead of reflecting on the creative teams' situation and take appropriate actions, the advertising agency's management tried to exploit the creative endeavours of creative teams by offering them space to display their output to their colleagues. Moreover, the advertising agency increased the pressure on creative teams by adding competition to their day-to-day work and assigning teams of different seniority to projects. In competition, the 'killing of babies' was even extended to 'the killing of people.' Placement teams who failed to deliver ideas that remained on the table were asked to leave the agency.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions

In the following section, theoretical as well as practical implications, which emerged from the data analysis and later findings will be discussed.

*The section on discussion and conclusions is structured as follows, in four parts:*

First, implications for theoretical debate that arise from the work will be drawn out. Second, implications for practice in the advertising industry will be developed. Third, suggestions for further research will be offered. This research concludes with a brief overview of all contributions made.

### Theoretical implications

#### **Introduction**

As explained above, the discussion and conclusion begins with the elaboration of theoretical implications that emerged from the above findings.

*The section on theoretical implications is structured as follows, in four parts:*

First, findings concerning the ‘everyday development process practices,’ will be briefly discussed. As explained earlier, although most of these ‘inflexible’ practices resemble steps found at other advertising agencies, their brief treatise was important to place them in the context of the advertising agency in general and the rather ‘dynamic’ practices identified in this research in particular.

Second, findings concerning the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ will be elaborated in more detail (i.e. the themes ‘Keeping it fresh: Creativity and client-facing processes in advertising,’ ‘Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity

in advertising,’ and ‘Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering’). As described, through ‘dynamic creative process practices’ the advertising practitioners put their distinct creativity understandings as some type of shared aesthetic knowledge into practice.

Third, specific tensions accompanying ‘dynamic creative process practices’ will be discussed. That is, despite shared tastes considerable disagreement about ways things should be done existed as well. While highlighting specific issues about which advertising practitioners disagree, the tensions identified confirm that practices and aesthetic understandings interlink.

Finally, the ways in which advertising practitioners negotiated the tensions accompanying the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ and sustained collective action and thus what Gherardi (2009) refers to as taste-making processes will be discussed and elaborated in detail.

### **Everyday development process practices**

As described earlier, ‘everyday development process practices’ resemble the step-by-step creative process models commonly put forth in the advertising literature, such as Pratt (2006) and others. ‘Kicking off the creative process’ describes the practice in which advertising practitioners try to elaborate the client situation further. In ‘developing strategies,’ strategists make choices based on the information collected which are then synthesized into a creative brief. In ‘generating ideas’ creatives try to generate ideas that answer the creative brief that are constantly evaluated. In ‘realizing concepts,’ advertising practitioners and external producers bring ideas to life. Finally, in ‘evaluating the effects of ideas,’ the impact of ideas launched on the market was assessed. It has been explained that these practices are merely in place to get the work done, thus to produce some sort of output, regardless of its creative qualities.

However, the brief treatise which was merely meant to contextualize the advertising agency in general and ‘dynamic creative process practices’ in particular, also brought forth new insights, which add to the advertising literature on creative processes and will be discussed briefly. In the analysis of ‘everyday development process practices,’ the ‘enactment of ideas,’ for example, and thus the production of physical representations of ideas were not only found to be useful in a collective context, as Harvey (2014) suggests, but also in individual contexts, to see if an idea is ‘leading to good work’, as advertising practitioners repeatedly phrased it. The discussion of ‘everyday development process practices’ also sheds light on the role of briefings in this context. It has been discussed that briefings somehow specify what is needed but also inspire creatives for their work, which has been well discussed in the literature. This research, however, indicated that briefings also function as a means of translation between the rather analytical sphere of strategists and the imaginative sphere of creatives. Strategists, for example, were aware that the amount of information and the way in which it is packaged, such as the length or language used, could harm the creatives’ imagination. In addition, it has been shown that advertising practitioners work in great discontinuity, jumping from project to project and are exposed to a range of different job contexts, which adds to the advertising literature which, through their cleaned up and even ‘sterile’ creative process models, suggests a highly uncluttered way of working together (e.g. Pratt, 2006 and others).

Finally, the analysis of ‘everyday development process practices’ exemplified the importance of knowledge and motivation in advertising creation, as emphasized in the literature on general creativity (e.g. Amabile, 1996, Ford, 1996, Amabile et al., 2005, Grant and Berry, 2011): In ‘kicking off the creative process’ advertising practitioners gained as much information as possible to be able to establish the originality and appropriateness levels by which creative ideas are identified. Unsurprisingly, it was not only strategists that were found to seek for additional information provided by clients but also creatives. Interestingly,

however, this research identified different terms used for the same process: Whereas strategists termed the information gathering ‘analysing,’ for creatives it was rather a matter of ‘inspiration seeking.’ Thus, similar practices carried different meanings. Motivation, then, was required to perform ‘kicking off the creative process,’ and thus to analyse client problems in more depth, to seek additional information, to identify problems beyond client briefs, and thus to develop advertisements with, instead of for, clients. The role of knowledge and motivation has somehow been acknowledged in advertising literature, for example, by Sasser and Koslow (2012); however, to date its specific role in the organization of advertising creativity has not been examined.

The discussion of ‘everyday development process practices’ finally, revealed that it is not only creative directors but also strategists, who ensure that ideas are creative. Strategists do not only deliver the strategy, which is then passed on to be ‘enforced’ by creative directors but ensures that advertising ideas work themselves, for example, in creative reviews. Whereas creative directors are meant to concentrate on the originality of ideas, strategists evaluate the appropriateness of ideas presented – a link that the advertising creativity literature has been overseen so far.

These contributions, however, although adding new insights to the advertising creativity literature, were not the main focus of this study. Instead, as explained above, this research was interested in the organization of advertising creative processes and the role of aesthetic understandings therein. And as revealed above, it was particularly in the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ the advertising practitioners’ particular desire for creativity was enacted. Thus, in the following section, findings on the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ will be discussed in more detail.

### **Dynamic creative process practices**

Since the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ strongly reflect the advertising practitioners’ shared creativity understandings, at first sight, much of the overlapping processes of creativity draw quite a consensual picture of the ways in which advertising practitioners prefer to interact. Several positive effects of these overlapping creative processes on the organization of creative and commercial processes generally and the advertising practitioners particularly somehow foster this amicable picture.

Due to the strong creative philosophy they share, the data suggested that the advertising agency regarded ‘fighting for truly creative work’ as its top priority. Whereas the industry as a whole had introduced account managers to avoid the tensions between risk aversion and appetite into an internal conflict (c.f. Hackley and Kover, 2007) this agency simply accepted the “‘great divide’ between creativity and commerce” (Bilton, 2007, p.13). Tensions between risk aversion and risk appetite were overcome directly by the specialists who the agency believed to be the best ambassadors of creative work; thus, all specialists were ‘client-facing.’ It was shown that operating under a ‘client-facing’ structure had various implications for the ‘specialists’ working at the agency. ‘Typical account management practices’ as described by De Waal Malefyt and Morais (2010) were taken over by ‘specialists.’ Most importantly, however, as explained, as a result of the advertising agency’s ‘client-facing’ structure, creative teams had to present and sell concepts to clients themselves. Creatives developed different ‘sales strategies’ and put great effort into presenting their scripts to clients in a clear way to get their ideas bought. The findings thus suggested that strong creative philosophies leading to more integrative, client-facing approaches to advertising creation (even if account management is not completely eliminated) have significant changes to the advertising practitioners’ repertoires of practices, making previous accounts of typical advertising practitioners’ doings obsolete. This also includes the requirement of skills to produce creative work at such agencies. As this research highlights,

there are *new*, creativity relevant skills emerging from changes in the way advertising agencies operate, which have not yet been discussed. Whereas Amabile (1996) suggested creativity-relevant skills to consist of specific cognitive styles, knowledge of heuristics, as well as particular working styles, this research suggests that in highly creative advertising agencies, sales and presentations skills are increasingly important.

When working together, the findings demonstrated that the advertising practitioners rejected formal structures and formal processes. Especially, the creative brief on paper was seen as an epitome of formality and was thus rejected by many strategists. Instead, the advertising practitioners preferred to construct spaces of collaboration. Furthermore, collaboration was enacted through conversation. The practices advertising practitioners were immersed in appeared to be highly improvised and thus a bricolage of practices learned at other advertising agencies, newly learned on site, or even taken over from the repertoire of practices of other disciplines. The findings thus suggested that advertising practitioners, who share strong beliefs in creativity operate in environments that are highly fluid, resembling the collaborative creative processes suggested by Hargadon and Bechky (2006), Harvey and Kou (2013), and Harvey (2014) described earlier instead of highly structured processes suggested elsewhere. At the same time, they insinuate that the doings of advertising practitioners in more integrative advertising agencies to advertising creation are also less constricted than definitions of roles in advertising literature put forth (e.g. Lange, 2001, Crosier et al., 2003, Foster, 2005, Morrison and Haley, 2006, Moeran, 2009). Most importantly, the findings indicated that the more integrative way of working together reduced inter-departmental conflicts considerably. Whereas the collaborative and conversational way of working together led to greater empathy and thus reduced conflicts between advertising practitioners in general, the abandonment of the account management discipline eliminated conflicts between account managers and creative teams in particular (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986, Kover and Goldberg, 1995, Hackley, 2003, Hackley and Kover, 2007, De Gregorio et al., 2012). In addition, it led

to more personal responsibility and perceived ownership in the work produced. These findings thus indicate that at advertising agencies that share a strong ‘creative code,’ a more integrative approach to advertising development is not simply a means to create better creative work, as postulated in recent literature (e.g. Oliver and Ashley, 2012), but also to avoid unnecessary conflict that has been reported in various research accounts (see Vanden Bergh et al., 1986, Kover and Goldberg, 1995, Hackley, 2003, Hackley and Kover, 2007, De Gregorio et al., 2012).

It has been demonstrated that with other ‘dynamic creative process practices’ advertising practitioners attempted to maintain the advertising agency’s taste by strictly assessing the practitioners and clients they wanted to produce advertisements with as well as the ideas generated. As explained, ‘aesthetic filtering’ in its broader sense described the advertising agency’s careful acquisition of talents and businesses they wanted to work with. Advertising practitioners sharing distinct creativity understandings thus protect their ‘creative code’ from ‘aesthetic infiltration,’ as this research terms it, even before working relationships are established, adding to Stuhlfaut’s (2011) research. In addition, different to Stuhlfaut (2011) the maintenance of the shared creativity understanding was not only aimed to attract clients but potential talents as well. In this context, it has been shown that for advertising agencies pitches are not only a performance of authenticity, as argued by Moeran (2005), but also a performance of evaluating the ‘aesthetic fit.’ This not only includes ‘chemistry meetings,’ as put forth by Powell (2009) but also the aesthetic negotiations underlying the pitch process *per se*: As intimated above, aesthetic filtering’ in its narrower sense refers to the strict assessment of ideas generated to ensure that the actual ideas generated suit the organization’s aesthetic standards as well. As the findings suggested, creative directors played a major role in the selection of the ‘right’ ideas and thus in the reproduction of the advertising agency’s taste, but a range of other gatekeepers, such as clients as well as groups of consumers played an important role in the filtering of ideas as well.

However, when looking closer at the practices and voiced participant understandings presented, they draw a much less consensual picture than the above section of the discussion suggests, as described in the following text. Yet, these much less consensual dynamics revealed highly interesting insights of *three* kinds, constituting this thesis' main contributions:

First, they helped to identify specific issues where advertising practitioners' tastes diverged, and thus to identify where much of their taste-making took place.

Second, they helped to explain why advertising practitioners' taste diverged and thus to clarify that the advertising practitioners' practices and tastes interlink.

Third, they helped to identify specific ways in which dissonances in the advertising practitioners' taste were negotiated and thus collective action was sustained.

### **Emerging tensions in overlapping creative processes**

As explained above, despite this strong belief in the effects of 'highly creative' advertising and thus shared perspectives about how to develop creative advertisements as well as their later, sensual appearance, also specific tensions, surrounding the stark focus on creativity in advertising creation have been identified. These tensions operated underneath certain agreed aesthetic beliefs (such as the appreciation of highly creative work) and the doings resulting thereof (such as a collaborative and conversational way of working together). Thus, aesthetic understandings at advertising agencies are neither solely homogenous as some research suggests nor solely heterogeneous as other research suggests; instead shared and highly different tastes *co-exist*. The tensions identified in this research and their underlying 'dynamic creative process practices' are summarized in Table 6.

'Dynamic creative process practices' theme	Tension
Collaboration and conversation: Constructing spaces of creativity in advertising	Collaboration versus segregation Conversation versus silence
Keeping it fresh: Client-facing processes and creativity in advertising	Collective engagement versus gatekeeper engagement
Killing your babies: The processes of aesthetic filtering in advertising	Expression versus suppression

**Table 6 Tensions identified alongside the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ themes**

The tensions identified in this research emerged from the discrepancies between everyday development practices and dynamic creative process practice, thus confirming that practices and aesthetic understandings interlink. However, the specific tastes resulting from the practices in which advertising practitioners were immersed and thus the reasons why at the advertising agency tensions existed are more complex than previous literature suggests. In literature on general creativity, so far tensions were simply described as discrepancies resulting from different risk tolerances, and thus different evaluation of specific ideas presented (e.g. Woodman et al., 1993). Similarly, in research on advertising creativity, tensions were brought back to differences between the artistic and commercial milieu and thus people seeking stability in ideas working together with others seeking disruption (e.g. Hackley and Kover, 2007, Farh et al., 2010, De Gregorio et al., 2012).

Whilst certain tensions identified in this research can be traced back to similar differences as well, it appears that the above research has ignored the interconnected and often blurred nature of practices. As demonstrated, due to overlapping practices, advertising practitioners with rather ‘commercial’ functions shared similar tastes to their creative colleagues and even a desire to be immersed in more creative activities. As will be described, however, many tensions occurred since advertising practitioners were unable to engage in activities fully reflecting their tastes, due to the alleged lack of creative expertise.

Interestingly, this not only affected advertising practitioners in commercial functions but those working as creatives at the advertising agency as well. The tensions as well as the taste-making processes are discussed in the following sections in more detail.

*Collaboration versus segregation*

Tensions could, for example, be observed in the collaborative way the advertising practitioners were engaging with each other. As explained earlier, for example, project managers regarded their day-to-day job as herding sheep or cats, pointing out the often-disorganized way creative advertising practitioners preferred to work together on the one hand, and the project managers' attempts to control or organize the chaos on the other. Considering the commercial context in which they were operating, creatives often appeared childish in their excitement to find, explore, and test out ideas, as suggested by Morais (2007). Project managers, in contrast, were rather organized people trying to coordinate the tight deadlines and tasks that had to be fulfilled, and thus highly aligned to the commercial reality in which they were operating. Consistent with this argument, project managers, responsible to ensure that creatives deliver ideas on budget and time, often used the expression 'mothering the team' to circumscribe their jobs and the different ways of working that come together herein. In particular, this meant that project managers had to 'balance out' the expectations of creative teams on the one hand with the commercial requirements of projects on the other. In meetings, for example, in which the tasks were defined and timings discussed, they had to make sure to organize the advertising development process on the one hand, whilst giving creative advertising practitioners enough freedom to develop ideas on the other.

Although the working style of the advertising practitioners could generally be described as collaborative, the research revealed that there were different 'spaces of collaboration' with different collaborators engaged in them. Particularly, in the collaboration around creative executions, and thus the development of the ideas' DNA, collaboration was

rather exclusive. Whereas creatives and strategists, were able to enter all spaces of collaboration, the ‘space of collaboration’ surrounding the discussion of creative ideas was open for creative individuals only. Non-creative advertising practitioners were excluded from ‘spaces of creativity,’ advertising practitioners carrying the ‘halos of creativity,’ as has been described, preferred to be immersed in. Thus, despite the strict ‘aesthetic filtering’ of people who were allowed to work for the agency, and the advertising practitioners’ claims that everyone is creative, different levels of creativity and thus integration into ‘spaces of creativity’ existed.

If collaboration in ‘spaces of creativity’ amongst creative and non-creative advertising practitioners existed, it appears that integrating non-creative advertising practitioners would have been a ‘gesture of generosity’ and a strategy to justify and buy the creative freedoms creative advertising practitioners wish to occupy. As research participants confirmed, non-creative advertising practitioners would like the idea of having creative thoughts but practically they were only allowed to engage with boring work (some advertising practitioners even referred to strategists when expressing such observations as this category’s data suggests). The research revealed that although it was some sort of organizational credo that ideas could come from everywhere, only creative teams were consulted if creative ideas were demanded. The others were articulated as being in the ‘wrong cast.’ In meetings, for example, whilst creative advertising practitioners engaged in discussion, non-creative advertising practitioners, keen to contribute with ideas as well, usually ‘let the big brains’ speak and took notes or outlined actions.

Overall, although more and more organizations claim that ‘good ideas can come from everywhere’ and “the creative role seems to have lost some of its charisma, status and prestige” and could not act as “prima donnas” anymore (Hackley and Hackley née Tiwsakul, 2013, p.81), this research questions its anchorage in practice. As the research demonstrated, in the

advertising agency creatives were still treated as the ‘Brahmins of creativity,’ as they were described, and credited most for the work that has been produced. This is particularly interesting, given the differing perceptions of creativity that have been identified among creative and non-creative advertising practitioners (c.f. Koslow et al., 2003). Given the different ‘spaces of collaboration,’ they do not seem to impact on the construction of an idea’s fundamental basis. As shown, literature on group creativity discusses the influence of group composition, group norms, and group cohesiveness, as well as group dynamics, such as perspective taking or knowledge sharing (Woodman et al., 1993, West and Anderson, 1996, Hoever et al., 2012, Gilson et al., 2013, Huang et al., 2014), however, the existence of distinct ‘spaces of creativity’ within groups that seem to perform creative work together, has been widely ignored. Most importantly, also in creative process models in general and advertising creative process models in particular, ‘spaces of creativity’ are widely ignored. Whereas some advertising practitioners engaged in conversations that affected an idea’s creative centre, others were only able to influence its creative periphery or had no impact on its design at all. That is, besides ‘spaces of creative expression,’ ‘spaces of creative suppression’ existed as well. This research thus adds to the above literature by suggesting that different creative spheres within collective creative processes exist.

*Conversation versus silence*

Not surprisingly, similar tensions could also be identified in the conversations advertising practitioners were immersed in. The research revealed that advertising practitioners contributed in conversation through ‘chipping in’ rather than presenting fully fleshed out solutions (one research participant described this idea as the ‘open source principle’). However, the ‘open source’ principle required confidence to say something silly, as well as ‘selflessness’ and a specific understanding of ‘ownership’ of the solutions that were being developed. Most importantly, however, advertising practitioners felt that they would

need to have ‘an opinion’ and thus an ‘informed’ point of view on the matter at hand in order to be eligible to take part in conversations. In contrast to creative advertising practitioners who had no issues with admitting that they judged and made decisions based on their instincts, non-creative advertising practitioners felt that they had to contribute on more substantiated almost verified bases. Having an opinion was closely tied to the respective job titles of the advertising practitioners. Thus, although advertising practitioners felt greater ownership in ideas than at other agencies, they often reported feeling uncomfortable to comment on aspects beyond their occupational expertise, turning the tensions between conversation and silence into some type of ‘vicious circle.’

The requirement to have an opinion became particularly evident in the discussion around an idea’s ‘DNA.’ Also in discussion, due to the firm’s ‘prioritization of creativity above everything else,’ it appeared that being regarded as creative or non-creative were the advertising agency’s ‘categories of exclusion.’ non-creative disciplines experienced trouble engaging in discussions around advertising ideas and had to ‘balance out’ speaking up with remaining silent, which usually meant that they waited until they were consulted.

Unsurprisingly, overall, advertising practitioners reported to have difficulties to share experiences as well as to build up relationships, which is somewhat contrary to the idea of the advertising agency’s management to improve their creative offering by enabling knowledge spill overs and contrary to the creative process models proposed by Hargadon and Bechky (2006), Harvey and Kou (2013), and Harvey (2014). Most importantly, however, these findings highlight problems related to the importance of ‘expert judgments’ in creative processes, which are much more fundamental than the risks of experts being biased, holding onto power, or simply being wrong, and thus as the risks put forth by Runco (2007) and De Sousa (2008): As the research pointed out, despite the organization’s motto that creativity can come from everywhere, the requirement to be a creative expert to judge ideas led to the

exclusion of those members of the advertising creative process that were not regarded or regarded themselves as experts. Organizational mottos stating that creativity can come from everywhere thus run contrary to processes which are highly evaluative in nature as described elsewhere (Harvey and Kou, 2013) but in which members have to be regarded as experts to express their opinions. Without the recognition of all colleagues as experts of creativity, the discussion of advertising creativity is left to only a few. Although the effects of distinctive conversational spaces on creative outcomes has not been tested, it is likely that they represent a barrier to group dynamics, such as knowledge sharing and perspective taking and thus diminish the advertising practitioners' many other, more positive efforts to generate highly creative work.

These 'categories of exclusion' even extended into 'prioritized disciplines,' and thus the conversations amongst creative advertising practitioners, themselves. It would be about winning discussions and even about telling others to 'shut up,' no matter if having the louder voice leads to people doing the wrong things, as was repeatedly confirmed. Whilst this type of interaction somehow resembles 'typical characteristics' of creative individuals (e.g. Gough, 1979, Feist, 1998, Silvia et al., 2011, Gino and Ariely, 2012, Gino and Wiltermuth, 2014, and others) and intensely competitive environments described by Amabile (1996) and Baer et al. (2010), this research suggests additional problems of espoused collaboration and conversation which go beyond confusions about perceived expert statuses: Personality characteristics such as individualism, self-confidence, egoism, dominance, arrogance, as well as hostility and impulsiveness described elsewhere, as well as what Amabile (1996) termed 'completion contingent rewards' seem to persist or even increase in collaborative, conversational and thus highly informal creative processes than it is currently anticipated in the creativity literature.

*Collective engagement versus gatekeeper engagement*

Furthermore, the findings indicated that tensions also occurred in relation to the ‘client-facing approach’ under which the advertising agency decided to operate. In particular, the tensions seem to emerge from the dual, contradictory involvement and treatment of clients in the advertising agency-client relationship. As explained, on the one hand clients were treated as ‘team members’ in the production of creative work, on the other they functioned as gatekeepers and decided which ideas were eventually made. Although by asking creative teams themselves to present, sell, and ‘fight for their ideas,’ the ‘client-facing approach’ was useful to sell more of the advertising agency’s ‘highly creative’ work, there were negatives with this agenda as well. That is, creative teams seemed to adapt to and even incorporate the aesthetic categories of clients, impacting negatively on their creative capabilities. This research thus suggests that there is a tension between originality and appropriateness (c.f. Smith and Yang, 2004) that develops through this exposure, thus adding to the ambivalent research on experience in the (advertising) creativity literature. This research suggests that in client-facing advertising agencies more experienced creatives, adapt to the aesthetic understandings of their clients and thus overlook potentially new ideas – either intentionally or unintentionally, to advance their current respect and future career prospects. These findings thus somehow contradict the research of McLeod et al. (2011) and others (e.g. Gino et al., 2010, Ng and Feldman, 2013, Chen et al., 2011), who argue that increasing experiences lead to more creative outcomes.

Moreover, further tensions caused by the client facing approach have been identified: As a consequence and to keep up the advantages of the ‘client-facing approach’ the advertising agency was under enormous pressure to hire creative teams, new to the advertising industry, that were still unaffected by the way clients were thinking. The data suggested that in creativity-led advertising agencies the young creative teams’ most valuable

## *Chapter 5: Discussion and conclusions*

asset, their light-heartedness and carefreeness regarding business concerns (which was thought to enable them to think ‘outside the box’) was the advertising agency’s most decisive factor in the production of ‘highly creative’ work. This is in stark contrast, to Nyilasy et al. (2013, p.1702), who note that “rookies are more likely to come up with clichéd concepts and use formulaic artistry, while seasoned pros are more likely to be truly innovative both in concept and execution.” Instead it supports the notion of a curvilinear relationship between advertising creativity and expertise. In particular, it was found that the advertising agency’s management tried to protect creative teams against the commercial concerns of clients. Important discussions with clients, for example, in which aspects of ideas were under debate or in decisions whether to go on with an idea or not, took place among the advertising agency’s management (i.e. strategy director and creative directors) only. Creative teams were often excluded from those negotiations and decision-making processes. In order to sustain the advertising agency’s aesthetic standards, in these situations collective engagement was substituted with gatekeeper engagement. In these situations the “great divide between creativity and commerce” (Bilton, 2007, p.13) is moved back into the advertising agency again, which somewhat works against the intentions the account management disciplines was initially abandoned for. Thus, as with collaboration and conversation, despite all ‘spaces of collective engagement’ also ‘spaces of gatekeeper engagement’ existed. As intimated above, it appears that account management is a function that is difficult to remove from advertising development – the practices involved with it seem to re-emerge even when the organization seeks to avoid them.

### *Expression versus suppression*

Finally, this research also revealed tensions related to the practice of ‘aesthetic filtering’ and thus the ‘requirement of recognition’ (Runco, 2007) in advertising development process that are rather ‘emotional’ in nature. The tensions seem to emerge from two

conflicting environments in which creative teams were operating – an environment of ‘expression’ on the one hand and an environment of ‘suppression’ on the other: On the one hand, creative teams were asked to explore and play around with ideas, expected to ‘express themselves,’ as referred to it in interviews through the work for clients and, on the other hand, they were asked to operate in an environment of rivalry and submission, in which they were competing against their colleagues and had to fear the often sudden and rigid ‘killing of their babies,’ as described by creatives, through gatekeeper judgments. Whereas the suppression by creative directors was somehow ‘accepted’ by creative teams the suppression of their creative endeavours through ‘advertisement testing’ was openly criticised. In interviews, advertisement testing was indeed often rejected because of its ‘antiethical’ set up or its alleged purpose as a political instrument to kill work, supporting the findings of Hackley (2003) and De Gregorio et al. (2012). Much more often, however, it was openly criticized because of the alleged laity of consumers: Consumer judgments in ‘advertisement testing’ were downplayed due to the alleged ‘fatuity,’ ‘suggestibility,’ and limited imagination of the general public. Only once advertisements were launched in the market did advertising practitioners pay attention to consumer feedback. However, new sources, such as social networks (YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook) were used and comments only seemed to be of relevance if they supported the advertising practitioners’ points of view. Nevertheless, the research suggests that perceived expert statuses even exclude those people from ‘spaces of creativity’ the advertisements are eventually made for.

To avoid ‘suppression’ and enable ‘expression,’ many creative teams had catchy brand names and portfolio websites aside from the advertising agency’s website. Presenting themselves as their own unique brand was important to them, since, in accord with Kasof’s (1995, p.349) argument “the creator’s self-presentation can affect the product’s subjective consensus and distinctiveness value and thus influence attributions.” Presenting themselves as ‘brands’ helped them to conduct effective impression management and gain advantage (e.g.

profiting from cumulative advantages or status expectation biases) in the organization's environment of rivalry and submission (c.f. Kasof, 1995). This finding is particularly relevant since, so far, the 'marriage' of creative teams was primarily discussed from a competency perspective. However, bearing in mind that the line between the skills of copywriters and art directors becomes increasingly blurred, the question remains why creatives still invest "a great deal [...] in sustaining these working relationships" (McLeod et al., 2011, p.115). In addition, as it has been shown in the literature review that creative teams risk being inward focused (Johar et al., 2001), further questioning the validity of the 'competence perspective.' A possible explanation emerging from this research thus might be that teaming up supports the creative teams' branding and in particular their impression management.

Nevertheless, as explained above, the practice of aesthetic filtering led to uncertainty amongst creative teams, caused by the large number of gatekeepers that they had to convince, the lack of knowledge about the gatekeepers' taste, as well as other incalculable reasons, that is, if budgets were cut off or advertising development time was shortened unexpectedly. This research thus contradicts the findings of Morais (2007, p.153), who speaks about "agency anxiety," by identifying the individual creative as the locus of judgmental fear. Additionally, creatives have not only been afraid to be judged before client reviews and pitching, but internal creative reviews as well. As intimated above, the uncertainty of the success or failure of ideas added to the pressure of creative teams to deliver as many different ideas as possible and to 'cover all angles' to increase the chances that one of their ideas gets bought. The pressure of creative teams was reflected in the long hours they spent in the advertising agency to create or refine ideas. In addition the research suggested that emotional conflicts were raised due to the tension between the creative teams' sense of dedication on the one hand and the often sudden dismissal of those ideas on the other. It has been shown that creative teams developed coping tactics, such as balancing out personal dedication with professional detachment or immersing oneself in creative hobbies, to remain passionate. So far, research

has discussed how judgments or negative experiences impact on the motivation of individuals but how individuals, working in industries in which inventing creative ideas is as a day-to-day responsibility and evaluation is rather a filtering than a (guided) synthesis, remain ‘reasonably passionate’ has not yet been discussed. This research highlights that being passionate is not the steady state of creatives as suggested by Hackley and Kover (2007). Instead, the passion of creatives is a highly sensible construct and thus heavily affected by the constant rejection of ideas. Coping tactics do not only affect superficial aspects of the creatives' day-to-day work and help them to sustain their status in advertising agencies as suggested by Hackley and Kover (2007), they are necessary for them to deal with the continuous killing of babies taking place in advertising agencies and to remain passionate.

This became particularly evident in the ways in which advertising managers reacted to these very obvious frustrations. Instead of reflecting on the creative team's situation and taking appropriate action, the advertising agency's management tried to further exploit their employees by taking their creative hobbies and turning their output into inspirational resources for the remaining workforce. The advertising agency's management not only encouraged, it expected creative teams to be immersed in creative, personal and unpaid endeavours to maintain a constant flow of inspirational input. Most importantly, the research revealed that the advertising agency's management added additional pressure to the daily work of creatives by asking creative teams of different seniority to compete against each other on the same project for the best ideas, fostering the win-lose competition and fiercely competitive environment (Amabile, 1996, Baer et al., 2010), as well as the delimitation of creative teams as independent brands described earlier. Competition was carried so far that creative teams had to compete against their own creative directors. Instead of evaluating and perfecting the creative teams' executions, they were trying to answer the clients brief themselves, comparing their ideas against the ideas of creative teams. Although some advertising agency managers criticized this ‘unfair competition,’ they did not intervene – the

opposite was the case. During the fieldwork several ideas were in production or about to be produced which were developed by creative directors and not by creative teams. So far, competition in advertising creation has attracted limited attention in advertising research. Hackley and Kover (2007) point out that creative teams live in a ‘world of suspicion,’ which impacts on whom they socialize and share ideas with. The researchers argue that this climate of suspicion emerges through the importance of peer approval for the creative teams’ career progression. The above findings, however, suggest it is advertising managers themselves who fuel the fiercely competitive ways of working at advertising agencies. In particular, this research suggests that advertising managers expect competition to increase creative output thus offering reasons why competitive environments in advertising agencies exist. Most importantly, however, it explains why, for creative placement teams, the ‘killing of their babies’ often meant the ‘killing of themselves.’ During fieldwork, several young creative teams which were working on placement schemes had to leave the company. The research indicates that competition in advertising agencies goes beyond conventional win-lose competitions discussed elsewhere. Instead, the Darwinian selection underlying all creative work as proposed by Simonton (1999) is extended to the level of the person. That is, only the fittest and thus creatives delivering the best ideas remain on board, thereby concentrating on the individual rather than group dynamic.

### **Negotiating tensions in overlapping creative processes**

The findings identified in this thesis, however, not only highlight where the advertising practitioners’ tastes diverged, and thus how the advertising practitioners’ practices and tastes interlinked, but also how tensions were continuously resolved and thus collective action sustained. That is, the findings specify how exactly the negotiation of taste took place at the advertising agency, the specific issues the taste-making processes were concentrated upon and the individuals involved.

As revealed in the literature review, so far the social nature of creative code has been mentioned (e.g. Stuhlfaut, 2011). However, accounts explaining the dynamics through which creative codes in advertising agencies are socially constructed did not exist. This research thus fills this gap. In addition, it has been demonstrated that the organizational aesthetics literature described negotiations on broad scales (i.e. larger epistemic communities), concentrating on similarities amongst practitioners. Accounts describing taste-making in smaller settings and conditions in which differences amongst practitioners are overcome did not exist. This research thus fills this gap.

Much more importantly, however, the findings offer a very new explanation of creative process dynamics. So far, in the literature of general creativity creative developments were merely defined as developments of ideas that are both original and appropriate (e.g. Amabile et al., 1996). Similarly, in the literature on advertising creativity creative developments were merely defined as developments of ideas that are both new and relevant to the product, brand, and audience at hand (e.g. Sheinin et al., 2011).

By demonstrating that ‘dynamic creative process practice’ and tensions co-occur, this research suggests that overlapping creative process and taste-making go hand in hand. In other words, overlapping creative processes are at the same time taste-making processes, in which aesthetic understandings are negotiated and thus collective action sustained. The definition of creative developments as simultaneously occurring processes of taste-making is new to the discussion of creative processes – regardless of the domain – and thus goes beyond traditional, highly output focussed descriptions portraying creative processes as individual or group dynamics leading to (more or less) creative ideas.

Overall *three* characteristics of negotiations were identified, which are described below in more detail.

*Negotiating through doing rather than saying*

First, the findings indicated that it was much more through *doing* rather than *saying* the advertising practitioners negotiated what is acceptable and what is not at the advertising agency. A possible explanation might be to the office's spatial design as well as the regular movement of people's seating positions in the office. Being engaged in discourse-on-practice was highly risky. Because of the physical arrangement and the ways advertising practitioners were seated, particularly negative comments on practices and practitioners involved therein ran the risk of leading to considerable irritation. This has been supported by voiced participant understandings, which reported that much of the malicious gossip would take place outside of the advertising agency, in pubs or bars, and is exemplified very well with a field note displayed in Appendix 9. However, also in client and creative reviews that pervaded the advertising agency's organizational life, and thus in situations in which intense discussions about the aesthetic features of ideas were excepted, it was more about 'filtering' as opposed to 'roiling debates,' the advertising agencies shared understanding was reproduced and thus taste-making took place. As revealed above, research accounts of the advertising creativity literature suggest that aesthetic understandings are socially constructed (e.g. Stuhlfaut, 2011). However, they fail to explain how exactly the social construction of taste takes place. The data suggested that it is through the doing rather than the saying that advertising practitioners negotiate what is aesthetically acceptable at advertising agencies. These insights thus offer the first explanations concerning the specific ways in which tastes are negotiated in advertising agencies and thus creative codes come into existence. At the same time, the above insights contradict the stark focus on language in the existing taste-making literature (Case and Piñeiro, 2006, Gherardi, 2009).

*Concentrating on processes rather than products*

Second, data indicated, most of the negotiations taking place to resolve tensions and enable collective action appeared to concern how things *should be done* rather than how things *should look*. That is, taste-making processes were much more about the activities comprising advertising creation than about the actual ideas produced. One possible explanation might be the amount of practices which interconnect in creative advertising development. As the research has shown, creative advertising processes involve much more practices than ‘coming up with ideas.’ Most importantly, however, ‘spaces of creativity’ turn taste-making processes regarding how ideas should look into the activities of simply a few. As described, spaces of creativity and thus collaboration and conversation concerning creative ideas were only accessible for those who were regarded as creative experts. Despite working on the same account teams and the advertising agency’s credo that creative ideas can come from everywhere, the input of many advertising practitioners was highly limited. The only exceptions were producers. As explained earlier, producers regarded their job as ‘turning an idea into something tangible,’ something ‘more real.’ In interviews, they identified the unconstrained and almost ‘dreamy’ way creative advertising practitioners preferred to work together, and the difficulties they experience when they have to suggest ways of realizing their ideas in time and on budget. Often ideas could not be produced as imagined and compromises had to be made. In order to deliver productions on time and budget in TV advertisements, for example, stories had to be simplified, scenes had to be reduced, locations had to be changed, and special effects had to be dropped. However, this happened once ideas were decided upon and involved, itself, fairly high tensions. These findings thus contradict previous research accounts that suggest that most of the aesthetic understandings of advertising practitioners and thus tensions between advertising practitioners concern how ideas should look (e.g. Koslow et al., 2003). Instead, it found that advertising creative processes consist of much more practices than developing ideas, constituting important antecedents of

creative ideas. Consequently, it suggests that much more of the taste-making going on at advertising agencies concerns the doings that lead to the development of creative ideas instead of the appearance of creative ideas themselves. Taste-making thus not only concerns ideas and takes place once ideas have been developed but concerns all aspects of its organization and thus constitutes an integral part of it. That is, as shown above, in advertising agencies, overlapping creative processes and taste-making go hand in hand.

*Imposing tastes rather than consenting to compromises*

Finally, the findings identified indicated that differences existed regarding the degrees to which people influence taste at advertising agencies. Some advertising practitioners seem to have more influence in defining ways of doing things together than others. For them taste-making is about saying and doing things. For the others it is rather about *not* saying and *not* doing things ways of working together are negotiated and collective action produced, as the research revealed. In the tensions between collaboration and segregation, for example, non-creative advertising practitioners recognized an inequality in the ways in which they contribute to campaign ideas. However, instead of making their voices heard, they accepted their exclusion and remained silent in situations in which ideas were supposed to be discussed. Similar circumstances have been observed in situations in which collective engagement was replaced by gatekeeper engagement. Instead of asking for reasons why ideas have been killed and fighting for them, creative teams (particularly those new to the advertising agency) did not speak up and ‘expressing themselves’ was done outside the advertising agency. During fieldwork, for example, the idea from a placement team was dropped in favour of an idea from the creative director. When I asked them why their idea was dropped, they just told me that they did not know and indicated their dissatisfaction about this situation. In the discussion of taste-making regarding ideas, previous accounts in the advertising creativity literature have suggested creative directors as key influencers of the advertising agencies’ tastes (e.g.

Stuhlfaut, 2011). However, by concentrating on their roles they overlooked the fact that it is the perceived creative capabilities and thus the perceived expert status that makes creative directors strong influencers of creative codes in advertising agencies. That is, they forgot that perceived expert statutes in general and perceived creative capabilities in particular are not only requirements to judge the creative qualities of ideas but properties which enable some advertising practitioners to influence advertising creative processes at creative advertising agencies more than others at the same time. Consequently, they missed the blurry nature of taste-making at advertising agencies, demonstrated in this research.

These rather hidden ‘shared discursive practices’ revealed that non-creative advertising practitioners tend to adapt to the particular demands of their creative dominators instead of finding ways of working that are satisfactory for *both* sides. Consequently, the result of the ‘shared discursive practices’ between creative advertising practitioners and non-creative advertising practitioners was more an imposition rather than a compromise – to the detriment of the non-creative advertising practitioners. This even extends to creative disciplines themselves. Even there, ‘heavyweight’ creatives who have allegedly proven their creative capabilities in the advertising industry influence taste-making processes to a greater extent than ‘light’ or ‘medium weight’ creatives. Although this has been reported to be ‘highly frustrating’ (e.g. not having a say in ‘aesthetic filtering’) instead of addressing these issues openly, creative teams find very personal ways (coping tactics) to deal with the very obvious and different world-views. Thus, also, *creative teams* were rather inclined to adapt to the particular demands of their creative dominators instead of trying to establish ways of working that are mutually satisfactory. Much of the negotiations around the tensions identified made advertising practitioners thus recognize that they are somehow segregated and set apart from certain doings that make up the creative processes’ final outcome. This research thus demonstrated, how in very small epistemic communities despite highly different tastes, collective action is maintained. Shared, strong beliefs in creativity on the one hand

enable advertising practitioners to accept strong aesthetic differences in favour of doings imposed on them by ‘creative experts’ which they would usually reject. As shown above, by describing taste-making processes in which shared but also strongly different tastes are negotiated at the same time, this research further develops the literature on organizational aesthetics in general and on taste-making in particular, which has so far concentrated on broader and more consensual processes in which aesthetic understandings and thus collective action were sustained (e.g. Gherardi, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

Besides some smaller contributions as part of the ‘everyday development processes practices,’ concerning the discontinuity in the doings of advertising practitioners as well as the importance of ‘prototypes’ in idea development, briefings to translate between analytical and creative spheres, and knowledge and motivation in advertising creative processes, as well as smaller contributions as part of the ‘dynamic creative process practices,’ through which advertising practitioners tried to put their strong appreciation for creativity into practice, concerning the high importance to face clients, to fight for creative work, to work in collaboration and conversation, and to carefully select inputs and outputs in advertising creation, including the implications this has on the practices, skill sets, and understandings of advertising practitioners, four types of tensions have been identified. All tensions identified are summarized again in Table 7.

Tension	Description
Collaboration versus segregation	The tension between the collaborative way of working of some advertising practitioners on the one hand and the exclusion thereof of other advertising practitioners on the other, due to perceived creative capabilities.
Conversation versus silence	The tension between the conversational way of working of some advertising practitioners on the one hand and the muteness in conversation of other advertising practitioners on the other, due to perceived creative capabilities.

Collective engagement versus gatekeeper engagement	The tension between the motivation to let creative teams directly engage with clients on the one hand and the need to protect and translate for them on the other.
Expression versus suppression	The tension between the expectation towards creativity teams to constantly express themselves with creative ideas on the one hand and the casual dismissal of these ideas and the exploitation of the frustrations resulting thereof on the other.

**Table 7 Summary of the tensions identified alongside the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ themes**

Whilst this research revealed that shared and distinct tastes are closely linked to the practices in which advertising practitioners are immersed, the tensions identified contradict the findings of Nyilasy and Reid (2009), Nyilasy et al. (2013), and Stuhlfaut (2011), which suggest that among advertising practitioners some sort of ‘unified creativity understanding’ exists. This research demonstrates that the picture is more complex: Shared and distinct tastes paradoxically co-exist. At the same time, however, this research questions the findings of those researchers, reporting tensions as well (e.g. Hackley and Kover, 2007, Farh et al., 2010, De Gregorio et al., 2012). It seems that tastes are less clear-cut as the research of the above authors suggests. Taking the overlapping and often blurred nature of practices into account, this research identified more complex taste patterns among advertising practitioners in which perceived expert statuses play a crucial role, somehow manifesting the *status quo* of the advertising practitioners’ doings.

Moreover, this research reveals specific ways in which dissonances in the advertising practitioners’ taste were negotiated and thus collective action was sustained. Advertising practitioners negotiated tastes through doings rather than sayings, concentrated on processes rather than products and failed to make compromises. So far it was agreed that creative codes are socially constructed (e.g. Stuhlfaut, 2011). Research, however, failed to explain how the social construction takes place. The organizational aesthetic literature was of limited help (e.g. Strati, 2005, Case and Piñeiro, 2006, Gherardi, 2009), since it described negotiations within

larger epistemic communities only and concentrated on similarities instead of differences. By describing the taste-making process in an advertising agency through which tensions were overcome, this research not only adds to the advertising creativity but also to the organizational aesthetics literature.

Most importantly, however, by demonstrating that ‘dynamic creative process practice’ and tensions co-occur, this research suggests that overlapping creative process and taste-making go hand in hand. That is, overlapping creative processes are at the same time repeated performances of aesthetic negotiation in which ways of doings and how things should look and thus collective actions is reproduced. This research thus questions the dominance of idea centred definitions of creative and advertising creative processes (e.g. Amabile, 1996, Hargadon and Bechky, 2006, Harvey, 2014) and suggests a fundamentally new perspective on how advertising creative processes are organized.

Having discussed the theoretical implications of this research’s findings, in the following section several practical implications will be elaborated in more detail.

## Practical implications

Besides theoretical implications, this study has various implications on how advertising creative processes should be organized bearing in mind the important role of creativity understandings therein. Organizing creativity processes is crucial for advertising agencies. It has been demonstrated that creativity understandings played an important role for the ways in which the advertising agency's creative processes were organized. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that creativity understandings were constantly negotiated in these advertising creative processes, and in particular between everyday development process practices as well as dynamic creative processes practices, constituting the advertising practitioners' everyday doings.

The above findings clarified several positive side effects of the ways in which creative process at the advertising agency were organized. The positive side effects for all three findings themes are summarized below.

First, it has been revealed that, due to the specific creativity understandings the advertising practitioners shared, creative processes were organized without account managers. Everyone was 'facing the client' and had to take on practices which usually fell within the portfolio of doings of the account management discipline. This also included practices which aimed to translate ideas and information between the advertising agency's own disciplines. As a consequence, this research thus suggests that a 'client-facing' approach leads to a more integrative approach to advertising development. In particular, this research suggests that by taking a 'client-facing' approach and the collaborative distribution of account management practices the conflict that arises between the risk averse (typical of account managers) and those with an appetite for risk (typical of creatives) inside advertising agencies are diminished. Most importantly, however, creative teams had to present and sell their creative executions themselves and the research suggests that creatives, who are often regarded as 'trouble' in

traditional advertising agencies (Hackley and Kover, 2007), once immersed in the practice of presenting and selling ideas, can be transformed into highly motivated and enthusiastic sales people.

Second, this research revealed that, because of the advertising practitioners' specific creativity understandings, the creative processes were organized through collaboration and conversation. It was demonstrated that the advertising agency tried to foster the environment of collaboration and conversation with initiatives such as the mixing up of people, regularly changing seating orders, and the physical set up of the advertising agency. Further, this research has revealed that the collaborative and conversational character of the organization's day-to-day work led to greater empathy amongst advertising practitioners – at least in certain circumstances. Moreover, through collaboration and conversation shared perspectives were also negotiated (e.g. the strong appreciation of 'highly creative' work). This sensibility towards the understandings of colleagues from other disciplines decreased inter-departmental conflict further. Whilst distributing account management practices amongst advertising practitioners was found to increase their workload, this research suggest that the rejection of formality saved time and enabled the advertising practitioners to concentrate on the work itself. Overall, the research suggested that – despite certain limitations as described above – abandoning account management discipline as well as choosing a more collaborative and conversational way of working together led to a more integrative advertising development process.

Third, the data suggest that the important role of creativity understandings is reflected in what has been termed 'aesthetic filtering' and thus the sieving of ideas based on the judgments of several gatekeepers – a practice comprising much of the advertising practitioners' everyday doings in general, and the creative processes in particular. Through aesthetic filtering, the advertising agency's management maintains their creative offering and

thus their reputation in the market. The research suggests that maintaining the ‘creative offering’ is regarded as highly important by advertising practitioners to attract like-minded employees and clients, which enable the advertising agency to continue delivering work of similar creative quality in future. Moreover, aesthetic filtering aims to deliver ideas that are perceived as creative by both their clients as well as small groups of consumers. To be produced, an idea has to meet all gatekeepers’ tastes. Aesthetic filtering is thus a practice, which tries to accommodate the tastes of quite different groups in an attempt to find the ‘best’ idea. Therefore, to deliver against the subjective nature of aesthetic filtering creative teams try to tackle the clients’ problems from different angles and develop a range of ideas that the advertising agency, client, and consumers can choose from.

However, as explained, this research also functions as an example of the possible negative side effects of the ways in which creative process at the advertising agency were organized. That is, for all three categories of findings negative consequences on the organization of commercial and creative processes as well as the selves of advertising practitioners and their working lives, were identified, as the subsequent sections emphasize once again.

First, negative implications of a client-facing approach have been identified. Besides an increase of everyone’s workload, this research suggests that creatives immersed in the practice of presenting and selling can become ‘less original’ through taking on the tastes of clients. Creatives, regardless of their stage of career, under pressure to prove that they are able to deliver ideas which make it through the advertising development process, temper their ideas by either adapting to or incorporating the aesthetic understandings of their clients. The solutions to this problem within the agency were twofold. First, a strategy of protecting the freedom of creatives as much as possible was deployed, although this was difficult conceptually and practically in a team-oriented, ‘client-facing’ process. Second, a strong flow

of young talent through the agency was maintained through connections with (for example) colleges and competitions and the use of short-term contracts, such as ‘placement schemes’ – “a precarious, penurious apprenticeship” (McLeod et al., 2009, p.1031).

Second, negative effects with the advertising practitioners’ collaborative and conversational way of working together have been identified. There was, for example, no preparation for advertising practitioners starting at the advertising agency, although informal ‘processes’ in terms of how to do things clearly existed. Thus, advertising practitioners employed their own ‘processes,’ and adapted them to the specific needs of their superiors – in particular to the ways strategists and creatives, and thus the ‘brahims of creativity’, preferred to work together. This hindered them to stem more complex projects that extend beyond national borders. Additionally, since the mixing and moving of advertising practitioners made it difficult to develop relationships and exchange ‘know-how,’ advertising practitioners reported feelings of intimidation and loneliness during their first months at the advertising agency and beyond. Most importantly, however, limitations of the collaborative and conversational way of practicing did exist. This was particularly evident in ‘spaces of creativity’ in which the ‘pros and cons’ of creative executions were discussed. Only those regarded as creative experts engaged in collaboration and conversation. This research thus suggests that some things worked when the advertising agency was relatively small but became increasingly problematic the more the organization grew. Most importantly, however, it suggests that the requirement to be an expert to comment on ideas makes collaboration and conversation somehow difficult at advertising agencies.

Third, negative implications have also been identified with aesthetic filtering – both in a broader but also narrower sense. This research, for example, suggests that aesthetic filtering causes uncertainty and pressure as well as emotional conflicts among creative teams who are required to deliver against the rigid and often sudden ‘killing of their babies.’ The pressure

was fostered by the fiercely competitive environment the advertising agency's management installed. To increase creativity, the advertising agency's management not only asked creative teams to compete against their colleagues, but also their creative directors. This research suggests that this win-or-lose competition affects the generation of ideas negatively, by inhibiting the creative team's thought process, which is not surprising given the importance of motivation for the generation of highly creative work. Moreover, the research demonstrated that the 'killing of babies' also forces creative teams to develop coping tactics and escape into creative hobbies outside the advertising agency in order to remain passionate and able to deliver against the continuous 'sieving of their ideas.' The research thus suggests the enforcement of creativity understandings, as done through aesthetic filtering, can have quite different effects than initially intended.

Based on the lessons learnt in this research, recommendations on what advertising agencies should draw their attention to in future are offered. In particular, suggestions on how advertising agencies should operate creative processes to foster creativity in their everyday work are explained. However, instead of "solutions to immediate 'practical' concerns," "new ways of seeing" creative processes and the role of aesthetic understandings herein will be suggested (Zundel and Kokkalis, 2010, p.1209). These can be summarized as follows:

- Fostering collaboration and conversations to prevent separation and silence;
- Enabling collective engagement to avoid gatekeeper engagement;
- Fostering expression to avoid suppression.

All three suggestions will be discussed in the following section in more detail.

*Fostering collaboration and conversations to prevent separation and silence*

First, this research suggests that advertising agencies should decrease formality in advertising creative processes to the greatest possible extent. In particular, this research

recommends that advertising agencies organize creative processes through collaboration and conversation and thus to develop the exchange between advertising practitioners that are immersed in different sets of practices to the greatest possible extent. As the research demonstrates, this will foster greater empathy amongst advertising practitioners, decrease intra-departmental conflicts, and enable advertising agencies to develop ideas more organically.

However, advertising agencies have to ensure that highly integrative creative processes do not hinder their growth. As the research demonstrates, the highly informal way of working together became increasingly problematic the more the agency grew and thus they were asked to work on the large projects. Project managers were introduced to give creative processes at least some structure. Thus, advertising agencies have to identify and strengthen basic processes required to get more complex jobs done (e.g. jobs that go beyond national borders). This also includes addressing what is consistently informally enacted and thus *de facto* ‘standard process’ at the advertising agency. This will avoid advertising creative processes being comprised by ‘weird and wonderful processes’ and instead foster better matching between practices the advertising practitioners are immersed in. Newcomers should be introduced to these *de facto* ‘standard processes’ to be able to adapt to them and take part in the advertising creative processes quicker and with greater assurance.

Moreover, advertising agencies with low levels of formality have to avoid that the creation of collaborative and conversational spaces does not lead to new, unforeseen segregations. This means that advertising practitioners in highly informal contexts have to experiment more seriously with measures that allow greater thought exchange between members of different disciplines in general and specific disciplines in particular – this particularly applies to larger companies whereby the dissolving of silo thinking led to a strong mixing up of disciplines. Thus, when executed properly, the mixing of individuals regardless

of disciplines can open up new creative possibilities and strengthen the empathy for different perspectives; advertising managers ensure a close exchange between individuals from the same discipline as well, for example, by mixing advertising practitioners up pair-by-pair or by trying out team structures for projects using a similar set up. It is important, however, that these initiatives are integrative to the day-to-day work of advertising practitioners to facilitate ‘learning by practise’ and to avoid adding on top of their already heavy workload. This also has to include fostering companionship between advertising practitioners *per se*, to avoid feelings of intimidation and loneliness in highly informal, collaborative and conversational settings.

Most importantly, advertising agencies operating highly collaborative and conversational creative processes have to avoid the emergence of new, unforeseen segregations, based on perceived *expert statuses*. Building on the associative nature of creative work (Mednick, 1962), it is assumed that the exclusion of non-creative advertising practitioners in the discussion of creative ideas impacts negatively on the production of ‘highly creative’ work, since it hinders the ‘chipping in’ of ideas from advertising practitioners and thus of unforeseen associations. This research thus recommends to address the discrepancy between claiming that ‘ideas can come from everywhere’ on the one hand and distinguishing between creative and non-creative advertising practitioners on the other. As explained, the prioritization of creativity has strengthened the influence of creative advertising practitioners while it has weakened the influence of others. They were the experts on creativity and thus, according to non-creatives, the only ones eligible to comment on creative aspects of ideas. creative advertising practitioners in general, and ‘the creatives’ in particular, still had ‘prima donnas’-status (Hackley and Hackley née Tiwsakul, 2013). In order to truly prioritize creativity, advertising managers have to redress the gross imbalance between both parties. This has to include a radical rethinking of the creative role in advertising creation.

*Enabling collective engagement to avoid gatekeeper engagement*

Second, as part of a more integrative approach this research suggests advertising agencies need to organize their creative process using a client-facing approach, to diminish the inter-departmental conflict between creativity and commerce and to sell creative solutions most effectively. However, in order to successfully manage advertising creation, advertising practitioners need to control for an increase in the workload of those disciplines affected by the ‘client-facing’ approach, for example, by further delayering and simplifying the advertising development process wherever that is possible. The large number of meetings, for example, was often criticized by advertising practitioners. Whilst exemplifying the advertising practitioners’ conversational way of doing things together, meetings often only take place for their own sake, without furthering the advertising development process. Closely monitoring the requirement of meetings would thus help to simplify the advertising development process even further. In order to remain able to handle complex projects, however, this should not affect the major processes required to deliver ideas on time and on budget. As shown above, it is thus about identifying and formalizing those processes important for the completion of a project and disentangling those, which add to the already existing pressure of the advertising practitioners.

Most importantly, however, when operating under a client-facing approach, advertising agencies have to discard the rather output driven reward system, the advertising agency had in place. As the research demonstrates, ‘good creatives’ were those whose ideas were bought by clients. This led to a rather pragmatic adoption of clients’ concerns and relatively mundane work. In order to sustain the advertising agency’s creative offering, this research thus suggested that more thought needs to be given to protecting the creative team from the business environment in which they are operating and to avoid the rather crude Darwinian mechanism related to the hiring and firing of creative novices. As shown, the latter

approach merely fosters the pressure on creative teams to progress ideas through, regardless of their exact shape, but did not improve the creative quality of the advertising agency's output. This research indicates that it is the pressure to deliver ideas that will progress through the process (instead of the existence of the business context *per se*) that makes creative teams adapt to and incorporate the aesthetic understandings of clients. This can lead to a survival instinct, self-censorship and a drift towards less challenging ideas that are an easier fit with clients' tastes and therefore more likely to survive – but ultimately, also less likely to be impactful. Nevertheless instead of hiding creative teams away and shielding them against clients' business concerns, this research thus suggests that advertising agency managers take appropriate action to create an environment that gives more room for failure.

*Fostering expression to avoid suppression*

Finally, this research suggests that advertising agency managers thoroughly reflect on the negative effects of aesthetic filtering and thus the constant “‘killing’ of the creative teams’ babies” and take appropriate action. That is, advertising managers can help creative teams to “rediscover their creative confidence – the natural ability to come up with new ideas and the courage to try them out” (Kelley and Kelley, 2012, p.115). Uncertainty can, for example, be reduced by articulating feedback more explicitly to creative teams and allowing them to make sense of the reasons that led to the elimination of their ideas. Renouncing the competition amongst creative teams in general and teams of different seniority can decrease pressure in particular. Finally, emotional conflicts can be avoided by offering creative teams ‘spaces for creative expression’ instead of ‘spaces for creative presentation’ only.

Experimentation with the configuration of these processes will be necessary to obtain the best from them; however, this research leads to the suggestion that a playful and generative dynamic is a better alternative to the crushing waste of creative energy caused by Darwinian processes of competitive aesthetic filtering. This research thus argues for a creative

process in advertising agencies which is more similar to the process proposed by Hargadon and Bechky (2006), which consists of help seeking, help giving, reflective reframing and reinforcing rather than on presenting, judging and killing of ideas in order to re-establish the creative teams ‘creative confidence’ (Kelley and Kelley, 2012). This inevitably includes the abandoning of the perfidious link between ‘killing of ideas’ and ‘killing of people.’ Advertising agencies should understand better how to set up environments of creativity than taking such a strong output orientated approach in assessment of creative talent.

## Limitations and future research

As with all studies there are limitations to this PhD thesis. Limitations are mainly due to the scope of this research. This research concentrated on employees of one advertising agency only. In order to grasp the wider taste-making process and thus the wider net of practices in which the advertising agency's practitioners are immersed, future research should expand even further, by looking at the practices of those other practitioners temporarily involved in the advertising development process. This includes, for example, the practices of freelancers and directors as well as other employees from outsourced production companies (e.g. practitioners from sound or edit suites). Research could even look at practices of the wider advertising community. Most importantly, however, future research has to take into account more of the practices of clients in advertising creation, especially since these may involve processes in their home organizations that are not visible from an agency perspective.

Moreover, instead of offering 'statistical generalization' and functioning as a generic propositional statement the theoretical insights that emerged from the data offer 'heuristic generalization' and function as an encouragement for refining our understanding of certain phenomena. By demonstrating that creative processes and taste-making go hand in hand, they reframe perceptions of advertising creative processes into a new gestalt (c.f. Eisenhardt, 1989). However, the advantages related to this in-depth description of taste-making processes at the creativity-led advertising agency of this study are, at the same time, its main weaknesses. Whereas experienced agency employees regarded their interview observations around 'aesthetic filtering' to be typical of the industry, the observations around 'conversation and collaboration' but most importantly the 'client facing' processes at the advertising agency were reported to be very unique to the industry, due to the strong appreciation of creativity.

Thus, to provide some confirmation of the generalizability of these findings and the insights that have been derived from them, it would, of course, be useful to study practices of taste-making that have been identified in this research at other firms – in a range of geographies and agency types. In particular it would be interesting to see how the negotiation of taste takes place in advertising agencies with a different understanding of how advertising works compared to the organization that has been studied (i.e. ‘service led advertising agencies’). Whereas it is assumed that the taste-making processes are highly similar to the one identified in this study, the negotiated understandings and their effects on the working lives of advertising practitioners are assumed to be different, given the vociferous controversies that have been reported to exist at ‘traditional’ advertising agencies (c.f. De Gregorio et al., 2012). Confirmatory studies would thus provide additional confidence in, or extend and adapt, this study’s findings.

## Summary

This research investigated ways in which creativity at advertising agencies is organized and the role aesthetic understandings play therein. Besides some smaller contributions as part of the ‘everyday development processes practices,’ as well as ‘dynamic creative process practices,’ discussed earlier in this chapter, this thesis makes *six* main theoretical contributions:

- This research provides an in-depth account of ways in which creative processes at advertising agencies are organized. Besides ‘everyday development process practices,’ ‘dynamic creative process practices’ and thus practices through which advertising practitioners put their strong belief into practices have been identified.
- However, four tensions that accompany the ‘dynamic creative process practices’ have been identified, namely ‘collaboration versus segregation,’ ‘conversation versus silence,’ ‘collective engagement versus gatekeeper engagement,’ as well as ‘expression versus suppression’ highlighting aesthetic differences at advertising agencies depending on the practices in which advertising practitioners are immersed.
- This research thus demonstrates that shared aesthetic understandings at advertising agencies are less consensual than collective activities of advertising practitioners and certain egalitarian advertising agency/industry mottos suggest. In other words, shared but also distinct tastes co-exist at advertising agencies.
- Ways in which the above tensions are resolved at advertising agencies have been described. It has been demonstrated that advertising practitioners resolve tensions rather through doings than through sayings. Most importantly, most

taste-making concerns the doings of advertising practitioners instead of the actual ideas that are being produced. In this context, being a creative expert is not only a requirement to judge ideas but also an important criterion to have a say in taste-making processes.

- The negotiation of collective action despite the paradoxical co-existence of strong shared but also different tastes was only possible because of the strong belief in creativity on the one hand, and the ‘slavish complaisance’ to the expectations and requirements of alleged creative experts resulting thereof on the other.
- Most importantly, however, based on the above contributions, this research offers a new explanation of advertising creative processes by demonstrating that creative processes and taste-making go hand in hand. In other words, creative processes are at the same time repeated performances of aesthetic negotiation in which tastes and thus collective actions are reproduced.

By providing an in-depth account of creative processes of an industry where creativity is key to success and by clarifying taste differences as well as their continuous social construction which enable advertising practitioners to collaborate regardless of those aesthetic disagreements, important gaps are closed in literature of general creativity, advertising creativity, as well as organizational aesthetics.

In addition, this thesis offers practical contributions to the management of advertising creativity in *three* main ways, namely:

- This research recommends that advertising managers foster collaboration and conversations to prevent separation and silence. That is, to decrease formality to the greatest possible extend to enable more organic idea development and empathy among advertising practitioners but at the same ensure that the

decrease of formality does not hamper growth and create exclusion, particularly those based on perceived expert statuses.

- Moreover, this research recommends advertising managers to enable collective engagement to avoid gatekeeper engagement. That is, to implement client facing approaches to sell creative ideas more effectively and reduce conflict but at the same time to discard the rather crude Darwinian mechanism related to the hiring and firing of creative teams and, instead of protecting creative teams of clients, to give them more room for failure.
- Finally, this research recommends that advertising managers foster expression to avoid suppression. That is, to reflect upon the negative consequences of aesthetic filtering (i.e. the extent of the uncertainty, pressure, and emotional conflict) and to take appropriate action so that creative teams regain creative confidence. This inevitably has to include the perfidious link between the killing of ideas and the killing of people.

However, as shown above, these suggestions should function as “new ways of seeing” creative processes and the role of aesthetic understandings herein instead of “solutions to immediate ‘practical’ concerns” (Zundel and Kokkalis, 2010, p.1209, see above). As the literature review on creativity has demonstrated, creativity is a highly context specific construct. For that reason, it is expected that the specific measures advertising managers have to apply to foster collaboration and conversations to prevent separation and silence, to enable collective engagement to avoid gatekeeper engagement, as well as to foster expression to avoid suppression will be different.

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## Appendix



University of St Andrews

University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee

19 July 2012  
Christian Grahle  
School of Management

<b>Ethics Reference No:</b> <i>Please quote this ref on all correspondence</i>	<b>MN8985</b>
<b>Project Title:</b>	<b>Investigating creativity understandings of advertising practitioners</b>
<b>Researchers Name(s):</b>	<b>Christian Grahle</b>
<b>Supervisor(s):</b>	<b>Paul Hibbert/Gail Greig</b>

Thank you for submitting your application which was considered by the School of Management's Ethics Committee. The following documents were reviewed:

- |  |              |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Ethical Application Form              | 25 June 2012 |
| 2. Participant Consent Form              |              |
| 3. Participant Debriefing Form           |              |
| 4. Participant Information Sheet         |              |
| 5. Permission to access site of research |              |

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC.

Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice' (<http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/UTRECguidelines%20Feb%202008.pdf>) are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Dr Philip Roscoe  
Convenor of the School Ethics Committee

cc Shona Deigman

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UTREC Convenor, Mansefield, 3 St Mary's Place, St Andrews, KY16 9UY  
Email: [utrec@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:utrec@st-andrews.ac.uk) Tel: 01334 462866  
The University of St Andrews is a charity registered in Scotland: No SC013532

## Appendix 1 Ethical approval

### **Brief**

#### **Background**

[REDACTED] has been running for 10 years and, although awareness and trust levels have always been high, lack of investment in the last couple of years means that there's now the need to reintroduce [REDACTED] to young people who may be less familiar with [REDACTED] campaigning to date.

#### **Our Audience**

All UK 13-18 yr olds, with a male bias.

#### **The Role for Communications**

The 2012 campaign objectives are to increase [REDACTED] awareness, trust and credibility and signpost audiences towards the [REDACTED] service channel. Pretty much the same objectives against which we launched the service 10 years ago!

#### **Our Brief**

Use TV Sponsorship and a 40 / 10s digital film to introduce [REDACTED] to the younger end of our audience (and remind the older end why they love [REDACTED]). To be on air [REDACTED].

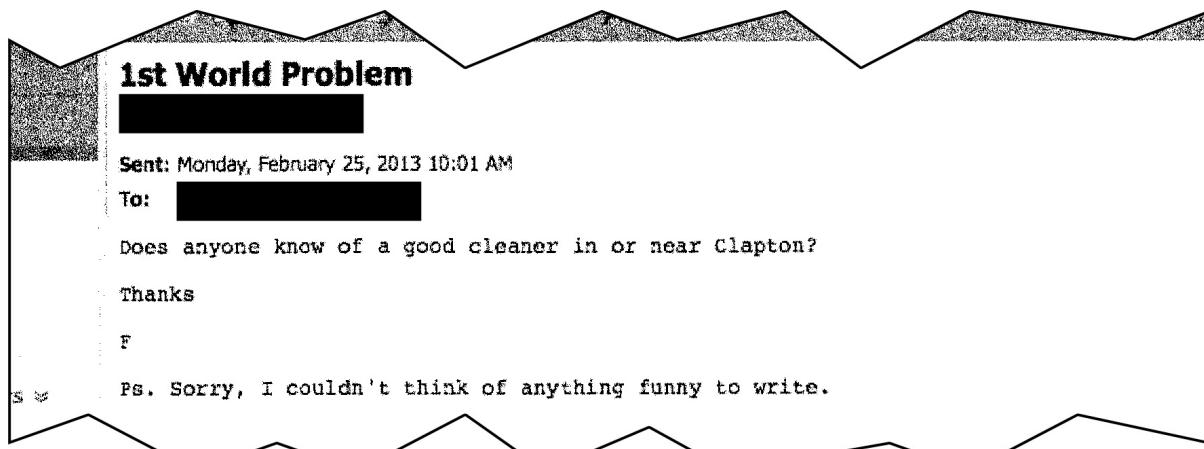
#### **Our Strategy**

Position [REDACTED] as [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

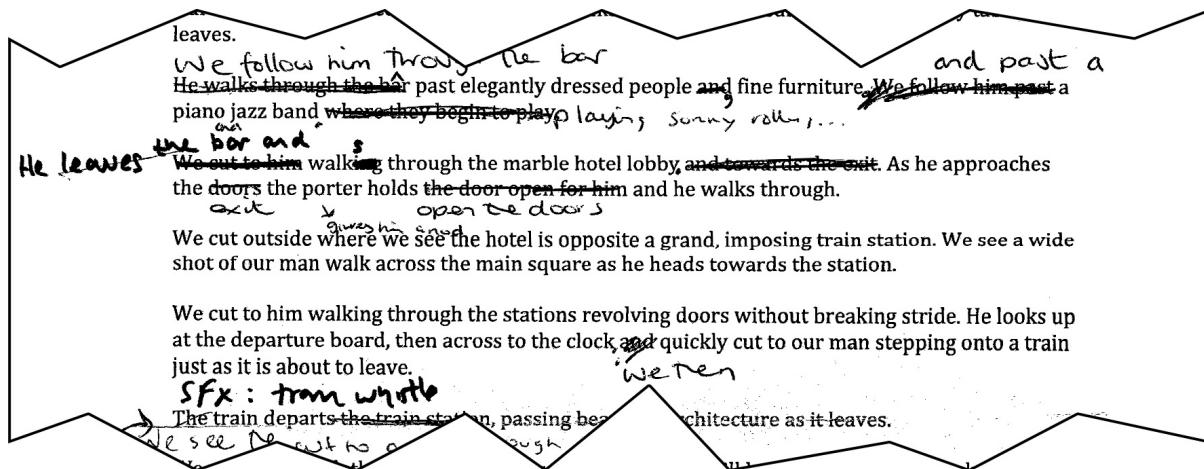
[REDACTED]  
Use an insight-based approach to demonstrate understanding and empathy on the long film (40 to 60s).

#### **Appendix 2 Excerpt from a creative brief**

## Appendix

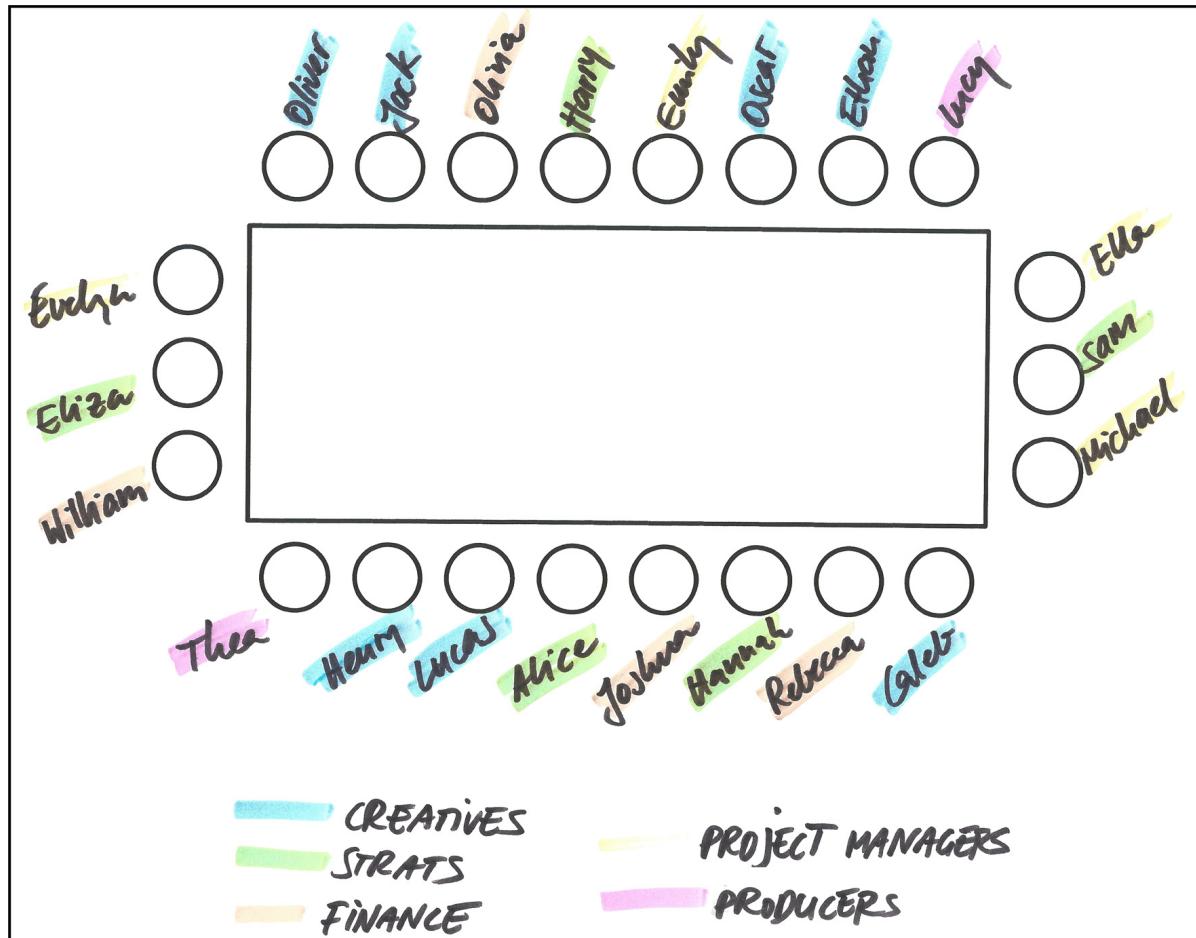


### Appendix 3 Excerpt from an advertising practitioner's email



### Appendix 4 Excerpt from a creative's script

## Appendix

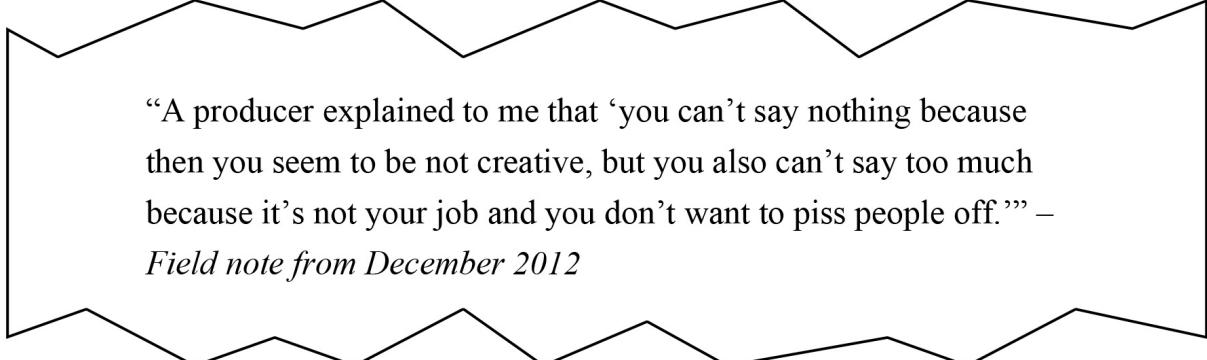


Appendix 5 Illustration of the advertising agency's mixed and changing seating order

“A strategist mentioned to me that ‘decisions are often made very spontaneously in your absence and you have to interpret how people might have thought about things based on the decisions made.’” –  
*Field note from December 2012*

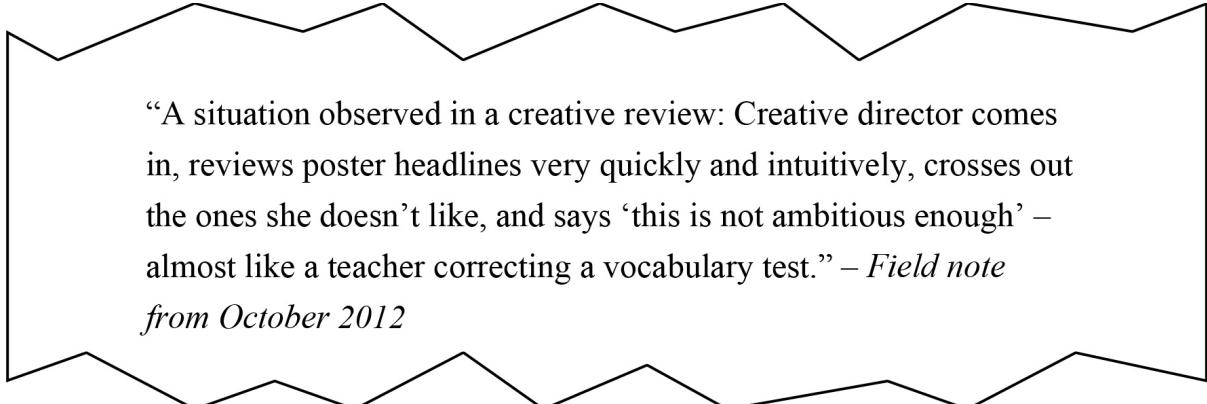
Appendix 6 Field note questioning the purpose of meetings

## *Appendix*



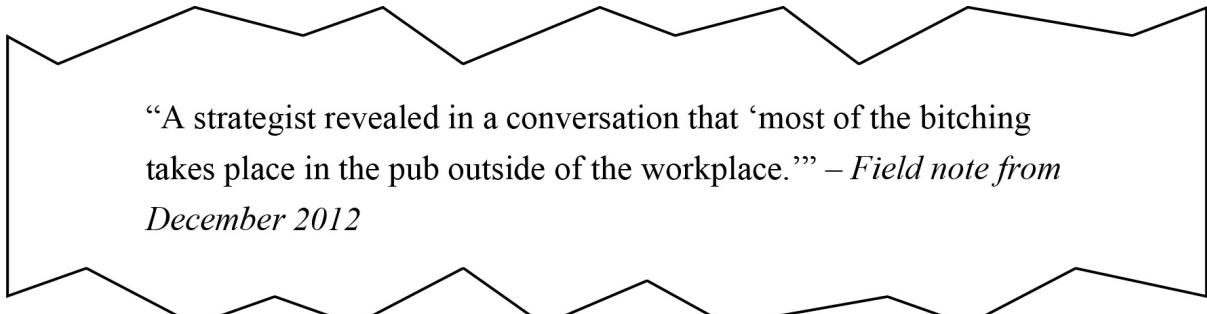
“A producer explained to me that ‘you can’t say nothing because then you seem to be not creative, but you also can’t say too much because it’s not your job and you don’t want to piss people off.’” – *Field note from December 2012*

### **Appendix 7 Field note describing conversations as balancing acts**



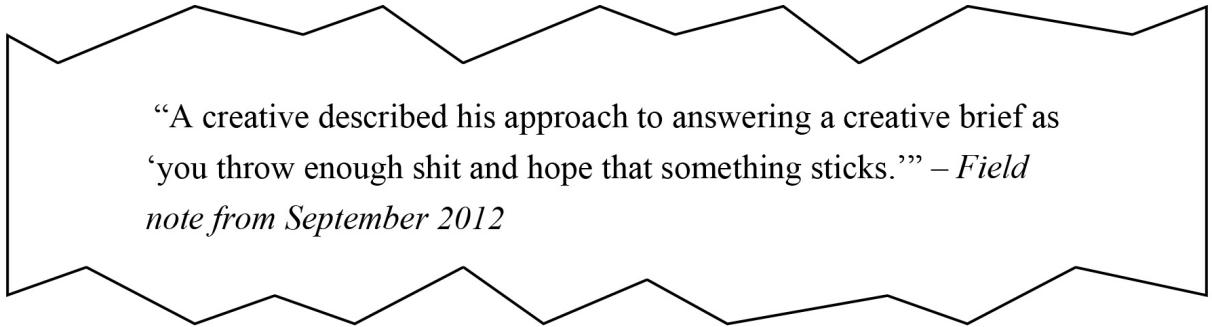
“A situation observed in a creative review: Creative director comes in, reviews poster headlines very quickly and intuitively, crosses out the ones she doesn’t like, and says ‘this is not ambitious enough’ – almost like a teacher correcting a vocabulary test.” – *Field note from October 2012*

### **Appendix 8 Field note portraying aesthetic filtering as it takes place**



“A strategist revealed in a conversation that ‘most of the bitching takes place in the pub outside of the workplace.’” – *Field note from December 2012*

### **Appendix 9 Field note indicating external places of negotiation**



“A creative described his approach to answering a creative brief as ‘you throw enough shit and hope that something sticks.’” – *Field note from September 2012*

**Appendix 10 Field note detailing a creative’s answer to aesthetic filtering**