

Role Types in Creative Teams – The importance of aggregated ambidexterity within startup teams in the cultural and creative sector

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to understand how individual behaviors shape the collective phenomenon of team ambidexterity in the cultural and creative sectors and how paradoxical decisions and strategies are managed in entrepreneurial teams operating in complex and volatile environments, such as the creative industries in particular. We define team ambidexterity as the aggregation and coordination of individual ambidextrous activities, shared routines and social interactions within a team. We develop a process model that focuses on the salient role of individuals acting as initiators in four different roles, where each role has a different influence on team-wide aggregation towards exploration or exploitation. Our results illustrate the aggregation process of individual ambidexterity within a group, as we emphasize the importance of individual initiators and role models within entrepreneurial teams in the cultural and creative sectors.

Keywords: individual and team ambidexterity | creative entrepreneurial teams | cultural and creative industries

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1. INTRODUCTION

Previous research on ambidexterity has focused on the organization in established companies, but ambidexterity can also work on multiple levels, e.g., in individuals and teams (Turner et al., 2013). Given today's complex demands and dynamic conditions, especially in the highly team-based dominated creative sector, teams need to develop ambidexterity (Nemanich and Vera, 2009). Developing ambidexterity in teams is critical as it provides ambidextrous teams with distinct advantages that enable them to effectively accomplish multiple tasks, pursue high levels of exploration and exploitation, and achieve multiple goals (Liu et al., 2019). This study focuses on the phenomenon of ambidexterity at the level of individual entrepreneurs and their (startup) teams in the cultural and creative sectors. First, we acknowledge that individual ambidexterity relies on individuals making their own conscious decisions about how to divide their time between exploration and exploitation behaviors and doing so in their workplace (Zhang et al., 2021). We define team ambidexterity as the extent to which teams collectively emphasize and engage in both exploration and exploitation over time (Jørgensen and Becker, 2017). A deeper understanding of how team ambidexterity emerges from individual activities can help us understand why some teams in the creative sector achieve ambidexterity while others fail. Studies suggest that team ambidexterity can be aggregated from ambidextrous activities, routines and interactions at the micro-level (Christofi et al., 2019) and that the aggregation of individual exploration and exploitation activities is subsumed under higher-level ambidexterity (Schnellbacher et al., 2019). To date, no dominant conceptualization of team ambidexterity has emerged, and insights into the underlying dynamics of the relationship between individual ambidexterity and team ambidexterity are far from complete, despite its relevance in and for the creative sector. For example, the current literature lacks an understanding of whether ambidexterity in a team is created by a few individuals who act as initiating role models by actively steering the aggregation process, or whether all team members contribute equally to a collective outcome.

But what happens in teams without a formal leadership structure, without a top-down hierarchy or with team members of equal rank, as in most entrepreneurial teams? Studies suggest that in addition to the steering process of leaders, social interaction within the team can improve the ambidextrous behavior of a team. Group dynamics can facilitate the division of exploration and exploitation (Barbosa et al., 2020). As a result, teams can react and adapt more quickly and efficiently, allowing them to achieve more than individuals alone (Dean, 2021). The extent to which a creative team achieves ambidexterity depends on the effectiveness of its process-related and social mechanisms, communication, knowledge sharing and behavioral integration.

Integrative dynamics and attention shifts enable aggregate alignment to function effectively and efficiently (Dean, 2022). The behaviors of individuals who take the initiative coalesce into a dense web of interactions that translate into team-level capabilities and are reshaped from the ground up (Salvato and Vassolo, 2018). Consequently, we hypothesize that focusing joint attention on either exploratory or exploitative strategies means to guide the ambidextrous formation of team strategy.

However, the key research questions for the cultural and creative sectors in particular are: How are such catalysts identified? What support do they need to reach their full potential, and what behaviors do they exhibit to encourage other team members to align their actions with them? This study provides new theoretical insights into how and under what conditions individual behaviors in a creative team are aggregated into a collective team ambidexterity and how paradoxical decisions and strategies are managed in entrepreneurial teams operating in a complex and volatile environment.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Entrepreneurial players in the cultural and creative industries

Research in the field of Cultural and Creative Entrepreneurship (CCE) has become increasingly important in recent years. CCE refers not only to the creation of businesses in cultural and creative sectors, but also to the unique dynamics and challenges associated with these ventures in the creative industries. The cultural and creative industries (CCI) have enormous economic significance, if you only look at the employment figures, value creation, innovative strength and self-employment and start-up rates (European Commission, 2021, BMWK, 2023). However, due to the high complexity, diversity and small-scale nature of the sector, the research perspectives on it are also very diverse and not very uniform (Thorsby 2008). Due to the relevance of the sector, CCE is an emerging research discipline that deals with the interplay of entrepreneurship, success, culture and creativity as well as innovation (Koch et al. 2023). The question of how cultural and creative entrepreneurs as the main actors of CCI can achieve business success (and which factors contribute to this) is of central importance in this context. The focus here is not only on the economic perspective, but also on the cultural, creative, social and artistic dimensions of these companies.

Based on a conventional understanding of entrepreneurship, research primarily refers to entrepreneurial performance, according to which entrepreneurs are economically minded entities looking for opportunities to exploit (Bygrave and Hofer, 1991). However, cultural entrepreneurs have some distinctive characteristics, which are mostly due to a specific individual and artistic attitude, a *l'art pour l'art* mentality (DeFillippi et al., 2007). As a rule, creative people do not see their work as a source of income per se, but as an opportunity to express themselves and realize their artistic and creative visions (Ellmeier, 2003). Market-oriented and commercial endeavors are subordinated or even fought against, but nevertheless remain the key to survival in the economic sector (Eikhof and Haunschild, 2007).

However, it is often from the artistic-creative sector that the new and risky ideas that serve as the basis for entrepreneurship and innovation come (Swedberg, 2006). This leads to ambiguous or even contradictory institutional logics between which creative people can be torn (Nielsen et al., 2018). However, due to the inconsistency and divergence in the orientation of cultural and creative professionals, a general definition of these logics is hardly possible. As a result, traditional entrepreneurship performance research is limited when it comes to the cultural and creative industries, where there are no clear-cut findings on success factors (Chaston and Sandler-Smith, 2012).

Adapted and modified research questions will continue to be necessary to address the complexity and diversity of founders and entrepreneurs in the CCI by identifying and analyzing factors influencing the business success of creative freelancers and cultural entrepreneurs at the individual and company level (Konrad, 2013). The team-based perspective logically follows on from this individual perspective. Especially in the creative industries, e.g. communication or media design, but also gaming, team formation is not only the rule, but the almost exclusive case (Höllén et al. 2020). Due to the dynamics of founding teams in cultural and creative companies, more research is needed into questions such as What factors shape successful team start-ups in this context? How does collaboration between creative individuals, who often have different artistic and entrepreneurial perspectives, work? This will be addressed specifically in the following chapters.

2.2 The importance of the individual for the skill of the collective

The ambidexterity of an organization refers to its ability to simultaneously pursue explorative strategies to identify new opportunities and exploitative strategies to refine and leverage existing capabilities (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004). It was March (1991) who related organizational learning to the tension between exploration and exploitation. Ultimately, ambidexterity means that both exploration and exploitation are successfully managed simultaneously (O'Reilly and Tushman, 2008). Earlier research on the concept of ambidexterity initially focused on the organizational level in established companies. For these, ambidexterity is a well-known factor and indicator of innovation and organizational performance (March, 1991). However, several scholars have recently recognized that individuals and teams are increasingly confronted with the challenge of exploring and exploiting new products while taking care of existing customers (Tempelaar and Rosenkranz, 2019).

While organizations can achieve ambidexterity through structural separation, this is not easily possible for teams and individuals within these organizations (Mu et al., 2022). Although ambidexterity theory originates at the organizational level, it is therefore extended to the individual and team level (Zhang et al., 2021). Extending the contextual approach, we define ambidexterity at the individual level as a self-regulated set of learnable behavioral skills and competencies (Rosing and Zacher, 2017) that lead to either exploratory activities such as "*discovering*" and "*experimenting*" or exploitative activities such as "*implementing*" and "*improving*" (Mom et al., 2007, p. 910).

We base our definition on recent literature and define individual ambidexterity as the extent to which individual employees value and pursue both exploitative and exploratory activities in their work role. However, these specific exploration and exploitation activities place different cognitive demands on the individual (Good and Michel, 2013). For example, an artistic designer shows high ambidexterity at work when he or she not only uses acquired skills to solve customer needs (exploitation), but also explores artificial intelligence-based techniques to respond directly to upcoming trends (exploration). The ability of ambidextrous teams to effectively coordinate tasks and resources gives them an obvious advantage in exploration and exploitation (Liu et al., 2019). For example, a design team demonstrates high team ambidexterity when they continuously refine their solutions for clients (exploitation) while seeking new opportunities by combining their work with new technological approaches (exploration).

2.3 Managers as role models for two-way processes in entrepreneurial teams

One way to fill the gap described above is offered by the literature that focuses on the key players in teams: the leaders. As with most entrepreneurial teams, the founder makes virtually all strategic decisions, suggesting that the creative-artistic founder may be the main driver of ambidexterity and thus the central leader in an organization (Volery et al. 2015). Findings from leadership research underline the importance of leaders as role models and their influence on the ambidextrous behavior of other team members (Zhang et al., 2021). Lubatkin et al. (2006), for example, state that top management teams play a central role in achieving ambidexterity. At the team level, Zhang et al. (2021) emphasize the important role of paradoxical leadership in fostering ambidexterity for teams and individuals. In particular, their study shows that it is possible for leaders to adapt divergent activities to enable the ambidextrous process by integrating seemingly competing but complementary leadership behaviors (Rosing et al., 2011). Furthermore, effective team leadership can influence and promote employees' exploration and usage behavior and the learning processes in the team for ambidexterity (Zacher et al., 2016). A leader's social influence behavior can teach and inspire other team members and acts as a role model behavior worth emulating (Hirst et al., 2018). In this way, leaders empower team members to be more synergistic, structured and flexible (Tempelaar and Rosenkranz, 2019). It also encourages new ideas and cognitive resources for others.

2.4 Targeted joint team attention: the team-internal aggregation process of the individual players

A team is more than the sum of its individual team members and their leaders, for the same reasons team ambidexterity is not just individual ambidexterity aggregated collectively (Dean, 2022). Zimmermann and Birkinshaw (2016) stated that the aggregation of groups and individuals is the basic building blocks of organizational life. Because individuals must consciously switch between exploratory and exploitative behaviors, it can be incredibly difficult for an individual to be ambidextrous, as the contradictory nature of exploratory and exploitative behaviors, particularly in the

cultural and creative sectors, requires different and shifting mindsets (Mom et al., 2007). Cognitive abilities, information processing capacity and the ability to focus attention are limited at the individual level, which could mean that adopting a single strategy is more effective for individuals than pursuing exploration and exploitation simultaneously (Dean, 2021). However, at the group level, it is possible to develop group arrangements and implement a collective dynamic that allows for a division of exploration and exploitation (Barbosa et al., 2020). This allows teams to respond and adapt more quickly and efficiently and achieve more than their individual efforts (Dean, 2021). Whether a particular team fully exploits this potential to achieve ambidexterity necessarily depends on the effectiveness of its process-related and social mechanisms, communication and behavioral integration, and ultimately knowledge sharing (Christofi et al., 2019).

One would expect to find little to no hierarchy or leadership in the more compartmentalized artistic and creative industries. Although these results show the importance of leadership, it is clear that it is not only hierarchical leaders that influence the overall aggregated team dynamic. It is the team itself with its individual members that largely shape the intra-team alignment and attention shift and thus the aggregation of behavior. The collective actions of individual members shape aggregate and emergent mechanisms from the ground up (Salvato and Vassolo, 2018). The behaviors of individuals condense into a dense web of interactions that translate into team-level capabilities (Christofi et al., 2019). Thus, a team's ability to develop ambidexterity tends to become a common team quality when its members actively participate and are integrative in their overall team pattern. A team adapts through the interaction of its individual processes, including the cognitive and behavioral practices of team members (Randall et al., 2011). A careful review of the existing literature raises the question of who directs the collective focus of attention within a team, who controls the direction of individual behaviors, and who ultimately persuades whom in an entrepreneurial team. In light of the recent literature, we assume that a guided aggregation process emerges through a role model-initiated process from individual ambidexterity to team ambidexterity. It can be assumed that corresponding role types exist and/or emerge in creative teams.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

We conducted iterative, inductive analyses after selecting and collecting theoretically relevant cases (Yin, 1994), based on the prescribed methods for comparative case studies (Eisenhardt, 1989). This method promoted a combination of depth and breadth and allowed for immersion in multiple, two-handed creative teams.

3.1 Research context and sample

An essential component of qualitative research is the targeted selection of samples to enable precise knowledge extraction from information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest. In order to sharpen the focus, the study observed start-up teams in the cultural and creative sector in Germany, which is a very suitable context for several reasons. First, individuals in the cultural and creative sector are confronted with several paradoxes (DeFillippi et al., 2007), as they have to channel their artistic intention and creativity into successful business models that simultaneously meet the demands of the market and the arts (Potts and Cunningham, 2008). Secondly, practices in the creative industries can serve as a template for other innovative and knowledge-intensive industries. Finally, third, exploring individual ambidexterity requires the observation of individuals who can autonomously decide on the allocation and distribution of their personal resources (Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004), a condition that creative teams usually fulfill. We selected teams with a similar structure in order to achieve reproducible comparability and generalizability. The teams were usually small and had a flat hierarchy. In this way, we were able to draw direct conclusions about individual influences and avoid possible distortions due to power and authority in training.

3.2 Data sources

The primary data source was 47 semi-structured interviews from 20 cases; in addition, 14 strategy workshops were held with the teams. Secondary data such as business plans, the homepage, internal documents and other media such as podcasts supplemented the primary data sources. A case overview can be found in the appendix.

The interview guide targeted individual exploratory and exploitative behavior, but did not include terms related to dilemmas or tensions (Andriopoulos and Lewis 2009), leading questions, or speculative questions. Instead, we gathered specific information through non-directive questions that focused on events. Interviews covered individual work behaviors, typical work days, descriptions of situational team moments, and personal and contextual factors and challenges. In particular, we asked informants to describe important events in the life of the team that they had personally experienced. Using the Critical Incident Technique, participants were encouraged to describe situations as systematically as possible. The focus of the workshops was on the problems and needs of the teams. Tailoring the workshops to the actual concerns of the participants is a proven method from systemic consulting. The obvious benefit for the participants is that they can get straight back into their usual working mode. The main aim of the workshops was to create an environment that allowed as much free collective work as possible on a real task. This allowed us to observe the teams directly as they worked together on a focused and isolated topic, which complemented the retrospective descriptions of the interviews well.

3.3 Analysis of the data

We followed a four-step process suggested by Miles et al. (2020) to analyze the data. Before analyzing the cross-case data, we examined the within-case data (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We developed preliminary constructs based on individual cases, which we compared between cases. By switching back and forth between the emerging theory and the data, logical arguments were strengthened.

- In phase 1 we identified initial categories for individual ambidextrous behavior in each case. From the interview data, we first created separate case studies for each team. Examining all interview transcripts, we identified patterns and variance in the descriptions of exploratory and exploitative behaviors using language indicators such as routine, systematic processes, repetition, refinement, improvement, experience, experimentation, iteration, creative freedom, and variation. Conceptual coding used vivocodes (i.e., first-order concepts consisting of the language used by informants) when possible, or a simple descriptive formulation when one was not available. MAXQDA 2022 software and spreadsheets were used to support conceptual coding.
- Phase 2 involved the link between related concepts and looked for the stimulating effects of individual behavior on the behavior of other team members in each case. We examined the links between the second-order concepts and their relationship to the overall behavior of the team. To this end, we examined the second-order themes that emerged in a case in combination with the team members' influence on other team members. We also looked for team-wide behavioral alignment, defined as the aggregation of individual actions. In addition, we drew on the data from the workshops to uncover the direct effects of collaboration and stimulation.
- In Phase 3 we used standard cross-case analysis techniques to look for similar concepts and relationships between cases and to compare the categories created in Phase 2. We summarized similar patterns in aggregate dimensions that served as the basis for our framework.
- In Phase 4 we refined our concepts and labels by using existing research on ambidexterity and paradox to develop our process model. Only solid findings were analyzed to arrive at a concise set of constructs. For our model, we derived four role types with different configurations, characteristics and effects on the aggregation process.

4. RESULTS

4.1 General results of the aggregation process

Systematically structuring the recruitment of new employees and onboarding was the main concern of one founder in a workshop, even though the team pointed out that a small startup could manage without such formalities. In a workshop on team development and hiring new employees, one founder advocated developing a fixed structure for efficient onboarding so that the quality of work remains high even with new employees. After the founder had started to draft a personnel strategy, a standardized recruitment process was proclaimed as a future common agenda in the team, even if time and resources had to be spent on it. The above observation fits well with our definition of team-wide aggregation as a collective alignment of individual actions. In our cases, however, we did not find a uniform aggregation process of individual ambidexterity. Rather, we observed that aggregation occurs in different forms.

Nevertheless, there was one common aspect: collective and team-wide ambidextrous behaviors are usually triggered or controlled by the action of an initiating person. Under certain conditions, the team members direct their actions towards the initiator, so that the individual activities converge into an aggregated form of team ambidexterity. During the aggregation process, the initiator slips into different *role types* within the team depending on the situation. Depending on the role of the initiator, the collective team behavior is condensed more into explorative or more into exploitative actions. We observed that collective team actions (i.e. aggregations) emerge from individual actions when at least one of the four roles is assumed. We named the roles after the characteristic narratives we encountered during our research with the teams: *Visionary*, *Strategist*, *Energizer* and *Pragmatist*.

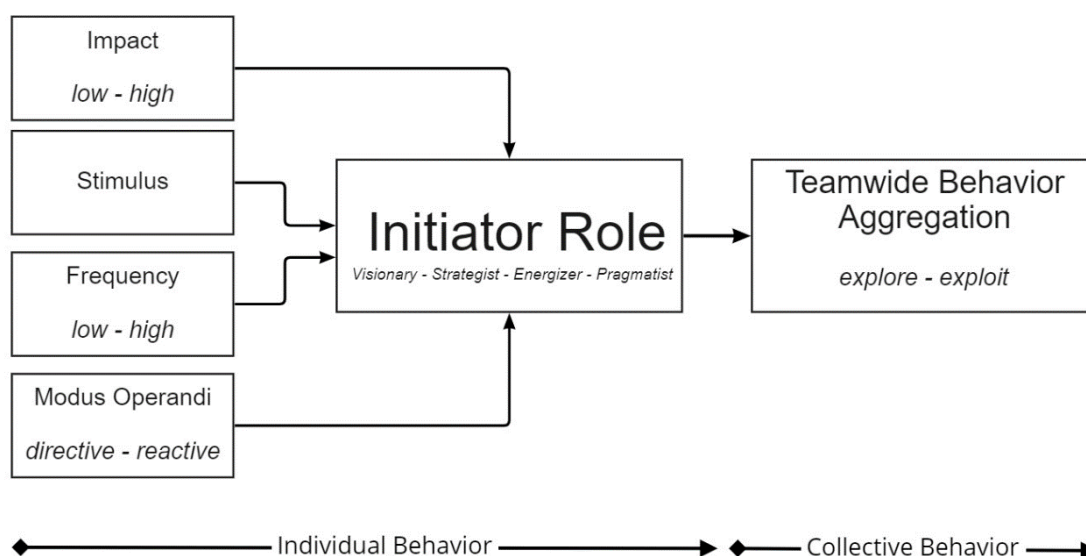


Figure: Combinatorial representation of the role allocation within our cases and their impact on the teamwide aggregation of ambidextrous behaviors

We observed that one and the same team member took on different roles depending on the work situation. In addition, several people within a team can take on one or more roles at the same time, resulting in combined forms of aggregation. The figure below shows a model of the aggregation process triggered by the four role types we identified and their impact on collective team behavior towards exploration or exploitation.

4.2 Aggregation effects based on different dimensions

We have observed that individuals show behavioral tendencies towards exploration and exploitation in various situations. In some cases, the individual behavior expands and spreads to the team. This leads to an aggregation process that also affects the behavior of other team members. Our data suggest that aggregation effects occur on different dimensions, such as *impact*, *stimulus*, *frequency* and *modus operandi*. The form of aggregation is determined by the composition of the four dimensions and thus shapes the role of the initiator. The establishment of long-term structures to increase the efficiency and profitable marketing of current artistic offerings or creative product portfolios shows the high impact of the exploitative influence on the aggregated actions of the team.

On the other hand, the development of new offers and products is characterized by a high explorative effect of the influence on the team as a collective. The stimulus describes the impulses emanating from the role model for the team and indicates how the person contributes to the general team dynamics. We found that the role models influence their teams at intervals and either appear frequently or rarely. When analyzing the situation described in the interviews or observed during the workshops, we categorize a low frequency when the influence occurs only sporadically, randomly or casually and without a recurring narrative. A high frequency includes recurring influences of the role model. The directive mode is characterized by logical decisions and intentions with strategic foresight. When someone acts directive, they anticipate the future and base their decisions on this anticipation in the present, emphasizing the strategic component for the entire team. The other *modus operandi* we observed is reactive. At their influence on the team using examples from everyday work, workshops or interviews.

An overview of the combinations of the dimensions and the resulting role compositions can be found in the following table. In the following, the four roles are described individually based on their characteristics. We begin with a description of how one imagines a person in a particular role with their individual behavioral tendencies and then use examples from everyday work, workshops, or interviews to illustrate their impact on the creative team.

	Visionary	Strategist	Energizer	Pragmatist
Impact	<i>High</i> Enrich portfolio and skillset, Sustain infrastructure for innovation and experimental development	<i>High</i> Longterm strategy adaption, Efficient structuring, and workflow creation	<i>Low</i> Experimental small-scale solutions and developments	<i>Low</i> Micro-structuring and efficiency increase
Stimulus	Promote team development and experimental learning, Improve communication and co-working, boundary spanning and integration of team knowledge, develop a shared explorative vision	Developing efficient structures and workflows, Team development and learning, Budgeting, Process setup and rebuild, Intervention, Shared mental mode	Increase in motivation, Intervention, Promotion of small experimental workarounds	Advocating for small efficiency increase in workflows, Intervention, Increase motivation and discipline
Frequency	<i>Low</i> Randomly during workdays but with returning elements	<i>High</i> Recurring intervals with returning elements	<i>Low</i> Occasionally and without returning elements	<i>High</i> Often but without returning elements
Modus Operandi	<i>Directive</i>	<i>Directive</i>	<i>Reactive</i>	<i>Reactive</i>
Teamwide Behavior Aggregation	<i>Exploration</i> Formation of overarching explorative activities	<i>Exploitation</i> Alignment towards efficiency increase and long-term exploitative strategies	<i>Exploration</i> Teamwide motivation increases and collective trust in small explorative solutions	<i>Exploitation</i> Building up work discipline and capacity to handle larger workloads

Table: Role compositions with their respective dimensions

4.3 The four role types

4.3.1 Visionaries: conscious experimentation and logical irrationality

Visionaries in cultural and creative sector teams are constantly on the lookout for experiments and the latest developments, niches and innovations. They show creativity paired with strategic foresight. Visionaries are directive as they look far into the future and know where their team needs to go. They recognize which skills and resources they and their team already possess and which skills may still need to be learned in order for the team to achieve the desired goal. However, visionaries are restless and jump from one new idea to the next, which can be counterproductive for the team, as the long-term goal is clear to the visionary but not to the other team members.

So I think in the use of non-established things. I think without me, TM1 would not have many [...] solutions in deployment, which he would see as enriching now. (TM2 – Beta)

Visionaries show their influence on the team, especially when making creative adjustments and restructuring work processes. In this way, they form a shared explorative vision. In our cases, we found that visionaries fostered team development and aligned the team by communicating explorative strategies. In many cases, the visionaries exhibited characteristics of boundary spanners and led the knowledge integration of the internal and external team.

The influence rarely relates to exploitative projects, but rather to the promotion of processes that enable the team to successfully implement innovations and experiments in the long term and sustainably. As a result, the team can rely on and draw from the explorative infrastructure that has been created. Visionaries use various methods, such as creative methods, mentoring or coaching, to convey the explorative approach to their team. The conscious use of creative methods helps the team to maintain the explorative process.

Well, here I am the influencing factor [...] when it comes to what would potentially be a new topic for us, so to speak, in this very creative area of the projects. I always bring in ideas. (TM1 – Gamma)

As creative drivers, visionaries pursue an agenda but do not permanently influence the team. Their directive and strategic way of driving exploration, which is also characterized by a logical approach, is based on getting other team members to think outside the box with them. Setting creative impulses continues when visionaries create space for explorative solutions for themselves and the team. This usually happens when day-to-day work causes stress and the team's capacities are severely limited as a result. Visionaries create a common understanding for future-oriented, explorative work through their forward-looking and at the same time creative, playful and explorative actions.

In the beginning, she rethought the whole user experience from scratch. And then, in principle, she read through studies and asked what might be the biggest point for us? And so she came up with a digital solution that is simply a bit playful, easy to use, and fun. (TM1 – Epsilon)

4.3.2 Strategist: a goal in mind and a fixed course to achieve it

Strategists in cultural and creative sector teams are characterized by a keen eye for detail. They are critical of their own work and that of their team. Strategists avoid unprofessionalism wherever possible. They are well organized and can handle high workloads and stress, which has a positive impact on the overall performance of the team. Strategists are advocates of established routines and well thought-out structures. However, we have found that their focus on efficiency can also be stressful and (over)demanding for the team. Their strategic goals relate to feasibility, profitability and medium- to long-term solutions in the exploitative domain, which distinguishes them from visionaries, as visionaries are only focused on exploration. Their true value to the team is shown in the long-term development of overarching, convincing strategies, processes and procedures. In this way, they significantly shape the long-term direction of the team.

You always try to make it as uniform as possible so that routines are built into the process. (TM1 – Zeta)

Strategists are promoters of efficient utilization, and firm structures, in conjunction with the long-term strategies mentioned above, lead to a team-wide thoughtful and efficient utilization process that has a lasting impact on the team's day-to-day business and overarching agenda. We have observed that strategists help the team to develop various explorative coping strategies.

I had quite a lot of discussion on how to communicate properly, in the sense that it is comprehensible [...]. At some point, I wrote down the guideline for how we communicate [...], where to put important information, documents, e-mail and so on [...] Since that time, we have established slack channels and project overviews and so on. (TM1 – My)

Long-term strategies require financial resources from revenue, so we have found that another characteristic of strategists is their customer focus. In this context, they are the point of contact for customers and coordinate the processes.

Taking the customer along in the decision-making process, often with the idea that he has to have seen something to decide that he does not want that or that he wants that, and that is actually fun, but also much work, and that was something where I definitely changed our way of working. (TM2 – Alpha)

In a mixture of daily encouragement and guidance, the strategists are role models for the exploitative orientation of their teams over longer periods of time. In this way, they promote strategically portioned, recurring agendas that provide guidance to other team members for their own work. Strategists take responsibility for structuring and maintaining exploitation modes over an extended period of time and align the entire team strategy accordingly.

I often have to be a brakeman and say so no, no, we do not just run to the customer now without an overarching idea. (TM1 – My)

Strategists also intervene in the team dynamics if they recognize that the team's efforts run counter to the actual goals and plans. Strategists weigh up what capacities are available in the team and how the customer's wishes can best be fulfilled. To this end, resources are evaluated and allocated accordingly, schedules and budgets are assessed and finally coordinated with the team. In the following quote, the team member advocates a particular book genre, a regional thriller, knowing that other book genres would be far more exciting and interesting for the whole team to publish, but with less certainty of sales. The income generated from sales would then be reinvested to finance other projects.

I sometimes have to say that we need a crime novel as well, and maybe even a regional crime novel, where we have guaranteed sales figures and a certain amount of security. (TM2 – Kappa)

Our cases show that the strategists act as boundary spanners, as they integrate different knowledge complexes within the team and also combine them with the knowledge of external parties. Fostering the integration of different knowledge complexes leads to the growth and alignment of the knowledge of the entire team. As a result, this leads to a collective understanding and perception of the desired explorative strategy within the team.

4.3.3 Energizer: from creative impulses and spontaneous ideas

Energizers in cultural and creative sector teams are energetic, lively and jacks-of-all-trades. They are dissatisfied with themselves, their work and their environment, but also a bit sloppy. Energizers are great creative impulse generators, but they always put feasibility in the background. This is how they come up with brilliant, explorative ideas that still need to be implemented – but this is usually not done by the Energizers themselves, as they are already thinking about new ideas. In addition, attention to detail and strategic foresight are not among the strengths of Energizers.

I often look for exciting things visually and then start to knit something from it. I am always on the lookout. Always. (TM2 – Lambda)

Team members who take on the role of energizers promote small experimental solutions and developments. They motivate and encourage others to try out new things and experiment. This manifests itself in explorative impulses that are triggered in everyday working life and are transferred to other team members.

In principle, I would say that I am never the guiding hand that somehow strongly influences [...] Mostly, I try to give somehow an impulse, and most of the time, the others are on fire again after a short time and low phase of creativity. (TM4 – Xi)

Energizers think outside the box and have spontaneous ideas. We have observed that energizers increase the motivation of the team and support the behavioural change of others. This often involved small breaks from rigid thinking and learning from others together. This was evident in situations where others were encouraged to try out new skills, expand their portfolio or make small changes on the spur of the moment. Energizers find out about new things or stumble upon novelties by chance, which they want to share with their team members immediately and without direct strategic thinking. We have observed that teams with Energizers get into action faster.

I have gotten into the habit of first getting into a quick design phase, producing quickly, generating diversity quickly, and then at some point, choosing: what is the best? (TM1 – Beta)

Energizers increase motivation and explorative learning processes in the team. In this way, they contribute to positively influencing other team members in their work by showing them new approaches from areas in which the energizer already has experience and the other team member does not. They also do not hesitate to tell their team members new things that they have just picked up spontaneously. In our cases, Energizers have often been shown to help others learn new things at the beginning. However, the help is very superficial and not detailed.

TM2, for example, has an unbelievable strength in that she can read into various papers extremely well and also compile new knowledge very quickly. Then there is definitely a new bridge, for example, on the conceptual level. This creates a good foundation from which I can then pick out the most important points. (TM3 – Lambda)

4.3.4 Pragmatists: quick solutions and practical knowledge

Pragmatists in cultural and creative sector teams are attentive and detail-oriented and always have quick solutions for implementation. They need visible results. They are the doers in the team and help others to realize their projects. Their strength lies in getting the team to the implementation phase first. In stressful times, they find peace in routine. This has a positive effect on the other team members' perception of stress. They differ from strategists because they are rarely driven by grand strategic plans. We have observed that pragmatists tend to react to the situation at hand rather than actively anticipate it. In our cases, we have found a mentality that says: if there is work on the table, it has to be done. They are the counterpart to the Energizers. Both roles are characterized by the fact that they set initial impulses, but Pragmatists set impulses for implementation and are not promoters of creative workarounds, ideas or explorative impulses like Energizers. Pragmatists differ from visionaries in that they concentrate on the given situational requirements with their explorative perspective, but overlook the long-term explorative view in their daily work.

TM1 noticed that instead of calling quickly, I wrote everything down on pieces of paper and then forgot about it. At some point TM1 said, call quickly and clarify it. Then I just consciously adopted this into my daily work routine. Of course I immediately noticed what a difference it makes and that it is much more effective. (TM4 – Ny)

It is often the little things that serve as a model for other team members. We have also observed that pragmatists like to pass on their structured working style to other team members. This happens, for example, through time management workshops or the introduction to proven data structures or small software solutions to increase efficiency. In this way, they help others to optimize their process with their little tricks. However, we have observed that Pragmatists can be perfectionist and detail-oriented in the work of their team members. Most of the time, when they were asked to review things or give feedback, it was always taken very seriously, resulting in an overall increase in the quality of the team's work. While they are reactive to the situation the team members are experiencing, when their expertise is essential, they are happy to take on the work for others. In our cases, this included proofreading, preparatory work, dealing with customer queries, resolving delivery issues or driving sales. Pragmatists support their team by taking up and implementing explorative ideas rather than developing such ideas themselves.

The job of the bee hive is to watch their [other team members'] backs. (TM4 – Ny)

In addition, their effect on the team can be described as motivating other team members to get things done by tackling usually unpopular tasks. It is solid work and fixed routines that are developed in this way. Whether it's writing invoices or customizing customer requests.

Because TM1 is really ultra hardworking, that also infects me to be generally more diligent. Even if sometimes I just want to go out and enjoy the sun. (TM2 – Epsilon)

Pragmatists push for quick results. We have observed that it is important for pragmatists that measurable results must always be produced. They also encourage their team to produce something presentable. In our cases, pragmatists often initiated the implementation within the teams.

We are all very, very creative and want to add a lot and everywhere. Without me, it's hard for them to say ok, we don't care, we're not going to continue, we're really going to start now. Otherwise we could continue designing for another year. (TM2 – Lambda)

For pragmatists, teams are, metaphorically speaking, functioning machines that need to be maintained. If the machine (the team) is not running, there are no results. Other team members often describe them as an energy-giving haven of peace.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1 Summary of the role types in the aggregation process

We observed that the aggregation of individual ambidextrous behaviors within a creative team is usually catalyzed by the action of an initiating person. During this aggregation process, the segments of individual ambidextrous behaviors are expanded and transferred to the team, which after a period of reflection can lead to a collective change in the overall direction of the team. Using our role lens, we observed that different roles trigger different orientations, i.e., towards either exploration or exploitation, and thus a difference in team-wide behavioral aggregation. Our data suggest that when the creative team views the initiator's decisions and actions as desirable in the long term, they align their actions with the initiator's actions (visionary and strategist) into a combined process with disruptive and long-term effects. Both roles require a certain level of trust within the team, which entails greater role authority, similar to top-down processes. Visionaries and strategists differ in the frequency with which their actions provide impetus for others and in their strategic tendency to either explore or exploit. Strategists' actions are channeled almost daily and are more focused on directly shaping exploitation for the future. Visionaries, on the other hand, are more focused on exploration, and their influence occurs less frequently. While visionaries and strategists actively shape the near future of the team, we have observed that reactive and affective action can also lead to team members following other team members. People act reactively when they respond directly to perceived problems without evaluating the background and consequences beyond the current situation. We refer to these reactive initiator roles as pragmatists or energizers. Pragmatists and Energizers act more often out of affect, which encourages other team members to align their actions with this team member in upcoming moments. These two roles support the spontaneous aggregation of individual actions during collaborative work processes and thus spontaneously open up new perspectives or initiate negotiation processes. As this usually happens spontaneously during collaborative work, their overall effect is often limited to individual situations and does not change the long-term direction of the entire team.

5.2 Discussion of the results and practical contributions

Since we have almost exclusively studied teams from the cultural and creative industries with a flat hierarchical structure that have no formal organizational leadership structures, the practical implications are primarily directed at agile and self-organized creative teams in which each team member has the freedom to take on an appropriate role at the right time. Ultimately, our findings are aimed not only at creative startup teams but also at managers in the cultural sector who want to weigh up which new team member best complements the existing team when hiring. We found that different roles are useful in different team contexts. We have observed that pragmatists deliver quick and efficient solutions to everyday problems with their approaches. This means that teams that lack the drive to implement their current business model profitably, whether due to a lack of motivation or a lack of drive, are complemented very well by a pragmatist. On the other hand, if there are dysfunctional structures, sluggish processes or unclear workflows, strategists support the team in the medium to long term in becoming more profitable and therefore more efficient as a team. We have also observed positive effects of role models and promoters not only in the increase in visible successes, but also in the general direction and cohesion of the team. If a team lacks a spiritual direction and a collective mindset, it is usually visionaries who provide cognitive and creative impetus. Visionaries support teams in finding their creative identity. Energizers then support the team in creative phases, help them out of motivational holes, give them confidence or appreciate the work of others.

The complementary effect of these roles is particularly evident in the interaction between visionaries and energizers as well as in the interaction between strategists and pragmatists. While the strategists set the beneficial direction, the pragmatists help the creative team to implement it. Where visionaries shape the creative vision, energizers provide the necessary explorative impetus with the team in their day-to-day work. We see this as the need for a mixture of different roles in the team. A mix of strategists and visionaries is also essential, as they form the overarching strategic agenda and the common mode of thinking, or pragmatists and energizers, as they give the team the impetus to implement it. An over-focus on the explorative side would result in the exploitative activities being neglected, or an over-focus on the exploitative side would lead to deficits on the exploration side in the long term.

If ambidexterity is understood as the balanced mixture of exploration and exploitation, then a team needs a mixture of all four roles found. However, this should not mean that there should only ever be one strategist, one pragmatist, etc. We observed that in some teams there were several visionaries whose impact was not cannibalized. In functional teams, there is a contextual change where one team member takes the lead and then the other. Always depending on the competencies and complementary impact. This interplay can be disrupted in dysfunctional teams if communication is disturbed, the balance of power is unclear or personal friction arises. Overall, open communication and a functioning, collegial team climate are always a prerequisite for successful role-based aggregation of team ambidexterity.

6. CONCLUSION

Our results illustrate the aggregation process of individual ambidexterity in cultural and creative industry teams, as we emphasize the importance of individual initiators and enablers in creative teams. An important finding is that any team member can take on this role and that the aggregation of ambidexterity tends to be fluid positions as opposed to rigid role models. We found that despite unchanging roles and responsibilities within a team, all team members can contribute to the ambidextrous behavior of the team. In this sense, each person within a team can take on a pioneering role and thus significantly control the aggregation process. This allows conclusions to be drawn about what helps and hinders teams in closing the ambidexterity gap and what strategies are necessary. It could be useful for teams to identify which person is a fluent ambidextrous leader and also to learn when that person should be empowered and have their voice heard more.

We are aware that our study has limitations. Although all authors worked closely together to develop the code system and theoretical constructs, it is difficult to rule out researcher bias. There is also the question of whether a team member can actively take on one of the four roles or whether it is rather the personality that determines which role someone takes on. We have observed that the same person could take on two very contrasting roles, e.g. energizer and strategist, but our data on whether this is due to the situation or the person themselves is limited. We would encourage other researchers to investigate how team members change or actively take on new roles. This research could be conducted using personality tests or by extending the workshop series with a longitudinal study design. Quantitative research is also conceivable. The results could shed light on how the roles can be used to carry out the desired strategic action depending on the situation, which then leads to collective ambidexterity.

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