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# *The Experience of Being Creative at Work: Embracing Paradox, Polarity and Tension*

**By**

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the University's requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

**January 2022**

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## Abstract

This research explores how creative workers experience being creative at work and how parts of the organisational system influence and shape the experience of creativity, through the theoretical lens of social and systems models of creativity. Whilst creativity is acknowledged as important to businesses involved in this research, there is limited understanding of the emotional experience of creativity or how creative workers might be better managed and supported to facilitate creativity. Three studies were conducted using multiple qualitative methods. Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis. Study 1 explored, through semi-structured interviews, how 11 creative workers within eight different organisations experienced being creative. Findings highlighted participants' needs for close and supportive relationships and to feel valued for their work. Study 2 was a case study of how one creative organisation, its creative employees and leaders experienced and coped with the creative process as a team. Data were collected through five semi-structured interviews with leaders, three focus groups with junior creative workers, observation of three meetings and analysis of corporate documentation. Findings highlighted tensions arising from the need to balance the child-like qualities of creativity with the ability to safely function within a rational organisational context. Study 3, an autoethnography, reflected on how the research changed my approach to work and proposed ways in which managers might behave to lead creativity more effectively. The research expands Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) social and systemic models of creativity by highlighting the subjective, phenomenological experience of being creative at work, considering how the individual and organisational context contribute to this. By explicitly examining the emotional experience of creativity, a theoretical perspective that considers creativity's impact on employee wellbeing is provided. The research proposes MERMA-ID as a new third wave positive psychology model of creativity, reflecting the complex and paradoxical nature of creativity. The research contributes to positive organisational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) by articulating individual and systemic experiences of creativity, describing systemic tensions and ways in which managers might lead creativity more effectively.

## Acknowledgements

An African proverb states, “it takes a village to raise a child”. This thesis has been brought into existence because of the support of some extraordinary people who have been there for me, especially through the inevitable challenges and darker moments of the process.

To my supervisors, Dr Genevieve Cseh and Dr Piers Worth. What can I say? You are the embodiment of positive psychology, and I am deeply grateful to have had you both accompany me on this journey. At the beginning of the PhD, I declared that I intended to enjoy this adventure. The fact that I did is in large part due to your care and support.

I would like to thank all the participants in the studies who so openly gave me their insights about how they experienced creativity. My thanks to the case study organisation who generously gave their time and perspectives.

To some truly inspirational women, Lucy, Rosie, Lisa, Julie, Sharon, Helen, and Elizabeth, who have provided support, encouragement, perspective, and company along the way.

Finally, to my husband, Sean. You make everything worthwhile. Thank you for your unquestioning love, support, and patience.



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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In a world of rapid and far-reaching change, organisations depend on the ability of their people to create. Creativity is a driver of human and organisational performance, a source of wellbeing, and a mechanism for coping with and resolving uncertainty. It might follow, therefore, that organisations would wish to maximise the creativity of their people. However, from my experience working as a director of major organisations, my perception is that maximising creativity at work seems difficult, uncomfortable, and elusive in practice. Indeed, research (e.g., Hadjimanolis, 2003; Sandberg & Aarikka-Stenroos, 2014) points to external barriers such as short-term thinking, risk aversion or uncertainty avoidance by stakeholders, and internal, psychosocial barriers such as resistance to change or job security concerns. My curiosity about how organisations might harness their people's creativity despite these psychological barriers was a primary motivation for this research.

The research explores how workers in creative industries subjectively experience the creative process and how parts of the organisational system influence and shape this experience of creativity through the lens of Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) models of social and systemic creativity. Understanding how employees experience creativity at work in typically “creative” industries is crucial in thinking about how to encourage creativity in organisations more broadly. In this context, creative industries refer to organisations where the aim is explicitly to be creative and offer creative outputs, with individuals who work in roles where creativity is an explicit part of their job description. Creative problem solving takes place in all industries and sectors (Hicks, 2013), and it is expected that understanding the phenomenology of that process from the perspective of creative workers will extend the general theoretical understanding of workplace creativity and be of practical help to all organisations, whether they are expressly labelled as creative or not.

### **Background to the Concept of Creativity**

There is much debate in the literature regarding what creativity is and how to define it. There are debates as to whether creativity is rare or ubiquitous, personal or social,

domain-specific or domain-general, qualitative or quantitative (Mayer, 1999). It is interesting how creativity is often dichotomised. Creativity is all those things (and more), which is, in part, what makes it so hard to define precisely. In answering the question “what is creativity?” Baer (2017, p. 298) suggests the answer is “it depends”: on who is creating, what their motivation for creating is, what the end goal is, whether they are producing a creative product, and for what purpose and the cultural norms and beliefs of the creator. Csíkszentmihályi (1994, p.143) captured the difficulty in precisely defining creativity when he described it as an undertaking that “moves on very thin ice”. In attempting to define creativity in “scientific” terms, there is a danger that the construct of creativity loses some of its essence and complexity, potentially resulting in a misunderstanding of what creativity is and how it may happen. Creativity is a constellation of paradoxical and delicately balanced motivations and behaviours.

Kaufman and Sternberg (2007) suggest three essential elements of creativity: that the output is i) something new; ii) has value and, iii) that it is appropriate for the task at hand. For something to be considered creative in an organisational setting, it must be novel and of value (George, 2007). The definition used in this thesis is that creativity is “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile et al., 1996, p.1155) which is seen as the standard definition used. This definition was chosen as it is broad enough to capture both “everyday” and rarer forms of creativity. Creativity in the workplace is broadened to include the production of novel and useful ideas or solutions concerning products, services, processes, and procedures (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Jing Zhou & Shalley, 2003).

A major debate in creativity research is whether creativity is a fundamental aspect of human functioning and psychological wellbeing (e.g. Richards, 2010; Sawyer, 2006; Simonton, 2000) or whether the term creativity is over-used, being instead a rare and special talent that belongs to an elite few (Barzun, 1989; Tusa, 2003). A paradox of creativity is that it is both. Creativity is as much present in everyday problem solving as it is in exquisite artistic creation. Elite creativity is typically defined as the ability to produce novel, high-quality work that transforms the field with a game-changing idea (Amabile, 2012), what Beghetto and Kaufman (2007) labelled “Big C” creativity (compared to more mundane, everyday versions of creativity underlying problem solving and learning, such

as “mini c” or “little c” creativity, or, at work, “Pro C”). However, everyday creativity applies to everyone and occurs in various contexts. Examples include people's hobbies and passions, such as painting a picture, writing a poem, or developing new recipes (Conner & Silvia, 2015; Richards, 2010). It also includes everyday situations like adapting to new places or cultures (Richards, 2007). Everyday creativity can also be seen at work when resolving a conflict with a boss, writing a report, or planning an advertising campaign (Richards & Goslin-Jones, 2018). If creativity is considered as something uniquely and universally human (Vygotsky, 1991), the tensions and paradoxes associated with creativity may be experienced similarly irrespective of whether individuals are creative by identity or whether the organisation recognises the importance of problem solving, novelty and adaptability to their daily business.

Weisberg (2006) argues that the cognitive processes underlying creativity are the same, whether elite or everyday, scientific, or artistic, and are positive psychological traits all humans share. Similarly, the characteristics often associated with creativity (openness to experience, tolerance of ambiguity, and risk-taking: Barron & Harrington, 1981) are present, to some extent and in certain situations, in everyone. However, just because the underlying process and characteristics of creativity are common, it does not mean that the creative output is the same or that everyone is equally creative (Sawyer, 2012). Scholars (e.g., Amabile, 1983; Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Gardner, 2011) argue that those who excel creatively demonstrate particular strengths or talents in domain-relevant skills and strong intrinsic motivation to put in the hours of hard work necessary. Arguably, another key differentiator between elite and everyday creativity is finding a novel and useful problem to solve and doing so in unexpected ways (Abdulla et al., 2020; Csíkszentmihályi & Getzels, 1976). Finding solutions to increasingly complex or “wicked” problems is critical to organisational success (Grint, 2008). Whilst not everyone may be equally able to generate highly unexpected or novel solutions, the ability to incrementally improve is no less important to businesses. The process of creative problem solving involves looking at existing problems in new ways. Organisations need both adaptors (who excel in solving everyday tasks and improving on existing processes) and innovators, who prefer to break the mould and find new solutions or, indeed, identify new problems (Kirton, 1989).

Creativity precedes innovation, which Anderson et al. (2014) define as the implementation of creative ideas. The extent to which work environments support and enhance employee creativity as a precursor to organisational innovation and growth has been a topic of interest to scholars (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Martins & Terblanche, 2003). Research examining organisational influences on creativity – such as leadership (e.g., Tierney et al., 1999), and corporate and team climate (Isaksen et al., 1999; West & Sacramento, 2012) – consistently demonstrates the importance of contextual factors in encouraging creativity in organisations. Moreover, some of the literature highlights the importance of social context for creativity, with systems perspectives of creativity proposing that complex relationships between individuals and their social context are vital for creativity to flourish (e.g., Amabile, 1983, 1996; Csíkszentmihályi, 1988, 1999; Ford, 1996; Glăveanu, 2010c).

Historically, scholars have frequently portrayed creativity as an individualistic phenomenon (Montuori & Purser, 1995). However, theories concerning the systemic nature of creativity recognise that creativity happens as much because of the individuals interacting with their environment, and with other people, as it does through individual cognition (e.g., Amabile, 1988; Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Feldman et al., 1994; Gardner, 1988; Glăveanu, 2011a). Hennessey and Amabile (2010) suggest that systems models provide a framework for studying creativity that mitigates the risk of research becoming overly fragmented and specialised. Furthermore, Hennessey (2015, p. 32) argues that creativity is "decontextualised" in many studies by failing to consider the influence that the cultural and environmental context has on an individual's creativity. Despite the breadth and depth of research into contextual factors affecting creativity at work, the review of the literature which will be presented in [Chapter 2](#), reveals that there are fewer studies on how creative workers experience the process of being creative within their organisations.

Amabile (1998) argues that, paradoxically, creativity is often unintentionally stifled by organisations in an effort to maximise efficiency and control. Organisations typically establish structures and rules to minimise risk and reduce uncertainty (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Plowman et al., 2007; Rock, 2009). However, creativity requires a willingness to accept and live with uncertainty, risk, and failure (Kaufman & Gregoire, 2015) – precisely

what many organisations seem to work hard to minimise (Mueller et al., 2012). Creativity challenges existing norms and perceived wisdom which may be unwelcome within organisations seeking stability and predictability (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Plowman et al., 2007). Mueller et al. suggest that the motivation to reduce uncertainty stimulates people to have a subtle and, at times, unconscious negative bias towards creativity. Meusburger (2009) argues that new and original ideas frequently face resistance since they may threaten traditions and continuity, affect power relations and self-efficacy. Although organisations recognise the need for creativity to progress and maintain competitive advantage (Florida, 2012), it seems that they are also uneasy about its possible negative consequences.

Given this apparent love/hate relationship many organisations seem to have with creativity, this thesis questions how it feels to be tasked with fulfilling this ambiguously received role and how leaders can learn to be more comfortable with the contradictory feelings they may have about creativity in the workplace so that they do not unintentionally sabotage creativity. I will argue in the context of this study that at the time of undertaking this research, the phenomenology of being creative at work or how creative people could be better managed and supported to facilitate creativity was not yet understood. Extant literature has not captured the subjective experience of being creative, how it feels to be part of a creative system or how the experience of being within that system affects creativity. The purpose of this study is to step into this gap.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

The research articulates, and from this, theorises the experience of being creative at work and considers how organisations might better harness their workers' creativity by understanding and taking this experience into account. In doing so, the research considers the challenges individuals face in being creative within their organisation, challenges originating within themselves (such as their responses to uncertainty and tension), and those arising from organisational culture and leadership (such as attitudes to emotion, risk, and failure). The research explores the lived emotional experience of being creative within an organisation, how creative people cope when situations are uncertain, how organisational culture fosters creativity and how it copes with the

challenges of the creative process. Viewing the creative process in organisations as a living, breathing, feeling system may help organisations consider the psychological, emotional, and social experience of being creative. Furthermore, the research explores how best to support creative workers' wellbeing and how culture, values and leadership intersect to impact the creative process.

Furthermore, the research aims to reignite interest in creativity in the fields of positive psychology by articulating individual and systemic experiences of creativity, describing systemic tensions and ways in which managers might lead creativity more effectively. A practical aim of this research is to provide a helpful framework for developing an organisational culture that enables creativity and employees to thrive.

### **Research Questions**

Against this background, the research questions that guide the thesis are:

1. What is the lived experience of individuals working as creatives and collaborating with/leading creatives within an organisational context?
  - To what extent does understanding the lived experience of creativity in organisations help us facilitate future creativity in these settings?
2. To what extent do existing social and systemic models of creativity capture the lived experience of being creative within an organisational system, and how parts of the system influence and shape each other?
  - In what ways might existing social/systemic models be improved to reflect the lived experience of being creative and its impacts?
  - In what ways does the learning from the contrasts between social/systemic models of creativity and the lived individual experience of being creative inform and/or alter how organisations might manage and work with creatives?
3. To what extent is the newly proposed MERMA-ID model helpful in understanding and explaining creativity in a dialectic system?
4. In what ways can individuals and organisations use these updated models and the learning from this research to facilitate creativity and employee wellbeing in the workplace?

5. In what ways might the newly proposed MERMA-ID model help re-ignite interest in creativity within positive psychology theorising?

### **Research Approach**

Most creativity research has traditionally been quantitative (Long, 2014) and focused on individual traits and behaviours (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). However, Lomas et al. (2020) call for greater methodological diversity as part of the emergent third wave of positive psychology that broadens positive psychology's focus on individuals to consider the interconnected and systemic nature of flourishing.

This research is conducted within a social constructivist paradigm, consistent with my epistemological stance that reality is socially constructed through relationships, language, and cognition (Cottone, 2007). Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2020). Social constructivist epistemology explicates how people create systems to make sense of the world around them (Raskin, 2002). With its roots in post-modern and post-structuralist thinking, constructivism views meaning making as a series of individual, cognitive processes. However, social constructivism accentuates the importance of social context, cognition, and language in the construction of knowledge. Social constructivism is frequently associated with Vygotsky's (1978) developmental theory, which emphasises the interaction between interpersonal, cultural-historical and individual factors in knowledge development (Tudge & Scrimsher, 2002).

### **Significance of this Research**

One of the significant outcomes of this research was the development of a conceptual model, MERMA-ID (discussed in detail in [Chapter 8, General Discussion](#)), that adds to both creativity and positive psychology theory. A precursor to the MERMA-ID model – MERMA, as it was at the time – emerged as a possibility for future research at the end of my MSc Applied Positive Psychology dissertation as a simple model for examining the intersection of positive psychology and creativity in organisations (Herbert, 2016), mainly inspired by the influential PERMA (standing for Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) model of wellbeing and



flourishing in positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). I thought PERMA might be made more relevant to creative contexts and brought in line with updated thinking in positive psychology (i.e., integrating both the second and third waves of positive psychology discussed in greater detail in [Chapter 2, Literature Review](#)), which were (and still are) changing positive psychology into something more holistic, balanced, interdisciplinary, and systemic (Lomas et al., 2020). At the start of the PhD, MERMA was intended simply as a model for exploration of these areas during the PhD research. From there, it developed into a more theoretically- and empirically-informed model as a result of the studies underlying this PhD dissertation. Whilst speculative at the outset, by the end of the research, MERMA had developed and expanded into MERMA-ID and had become central to understanding the experience of creativity and the link between creativity and wellbeing at work. The original MERMA framework will be outlined in [Chapter 3](#), and [Chapter 8 \(General Discussion\)](#), will discuss how MERMA was reflected in the findings and how it developed from MERMA into the MERMA-ID model.

This new MERMA-ID model synthesises theories of creativity, second wave positive psychology (uniting the light/dark, dialectics) and third wave positive psychology (systems/complexity) to offer an integrated model that extends Csíkszentmihályi's and Amabile's work to include the phenomenological aspects of social and systems models. The research illuminates ways in which individuals subjectively experience creativity within an organisational system. MERMA-ID provides a model for considering what creative workers and leaders can practically do to facilitate creativity.

The original contributions of the thesis are:

- Proposing MERMA-ID as a new second (Ivtzan et al., 2016) and third wave positive psychology (Lomas et al., 2020) model of creativity that re-establishes creativity at the heart of positive psychology (PP) theorising and updates models of creative wellbeing.
- Expanding Amabile's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi (1988) social and systemic models of creativity by highlighting the lived experience of being creative at work and how both the individual and the broader context contribute to this.

- Blending social and systemic creativity theories, second/third wave PP, systems theory, and paradox theory research, to present an original understanding of how creativity may be experienced and thus influenced within the workplace.

### **Navigating the Thesis**

This first chapter has provided the context and rationale for the research questions. It has summarised the research aims and objectives together with the expected contributions of this research. The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows:

### **Chapter 2: General Literature Review**

[Chapter 2](#) considers past research that provides context and background to the thesis. The exploration of the experience of creativity involves a breadth and depth of theory that is ambitious and unusual within a single location. This thesis summarises that literature at different points, both in a literature review and, given the complexity, ahead of each Study (Chapters [5](#), [6](#) and [7](#)). The general literature review chapter comprises two bodies of literature that are distinct but interconnected. In [Part 1](#) of the literature review, creativity theories associated with social and systems models of creativity are explored, with emphasis on Amabile and Pratt's (2016) dynamic componential model and Csíkszentmihályi's systems model (1988) which are arguably the two most influential systems models (Gute, 2020). General systems theory will provide a broader context of how creativity may be experienced in complex systems such as organisations. [Part 2](#) of the literature review examines second and third wave positive psychology and considers the dialectic relationship between positive and negative phenomena. The chapter considers some of the known reasons why creativity might be uncomfortable and possibly problematic in an organisational setting that typically prefers safety, certainty, and easily resolvable problems. The chapter examines how scholars have theorised the role of paradox, polarity, and tension in the creative process.

### **Chapter 3: The Evolution of MERMA**

This chapter introduces the MERMA model and describes how it was used in the studies within this dissertation. Inspired by Seligman's (2011) PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment), MERMA is proposed as a new

and unique theoretical model for understanding the individual lived experience of creativity in organisations and provides a bridge between employee creativity and wellbeing.

#### ***Chapter 4: General Research Design and Methodology***

Multiple qualitative methods are used in this research to access the lived experience of a particular type of person and environment. The research comprises three studies that address the question from different perspectives. General aspects of the analytic process and research decisions that apply across all three studies are detailed in [Chapter 4](#). Each study's specific methods and analytical process are addressed in the separate study chapters (Chapters 5, 6, and 7).

#### ***Chapter 5, Study 1 – How do Creative Individuals Experience and Cope with Being Creative Within an Organisation?***

This first study explores how individuals working within a creative organisation experienced the process of being creative, to what extent they perceived it to be a source of uncertainty and tension, and how they coped with the process of being creative at work. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 11 creative workers in eight different organisations in which creativity was a core activity and critical source of their competitive success. The sample was heterogeneous in terms of participants' roles and organisations in which they worked.

#### ***Chapter 6, Study 2 – A Case Study Exploring how Creative Workers and Leaders Experience and Cope with Being Creative at Work***

The second study examined the organisational context in which creativity happens from the perspectives of both those leading creative efforts and those being led. Study 2 is a case study (through a combination of interviews, focus groups, meeting observation and document analysis) of how one creative organisation and its creative employees and leaders experienced and coped with the creative process as a team. It explores the competing tensions of organisational growth and creativity, and the extent to which safe and supportive relationships influence the experience of creativity within the organisation.

***Chapter 7, Study 3: Study 3 – Embracing Polarity, Paradox and Tension: How Studying this Subject has Changed Me and My Work***

Recognising I have a dynamic and active role in the research process, Study 3 is an autoethnography spanning the entire length of the PhD journey, which seeks to connect self-narrative, reflections on the data from Studies 1 and 2, and the broader social and cultural context. The purpose of Study 3 is to understand how the research influenced and changed me and my approach to creative work. Viewing the process of completing a PhD as a creative endeavour, the chapter considers how I experienced being part of a creative system. The chapter offers novel and crucial insights from the research data into ways in which leaders may facilitate creativity and reflections on my lived experience of the creative process.

***Chapter 8: General Discussion***

The general discussion chapter will discuss the collective findings of the three studies. The chapter will consider how the research builds on and develops positive psychology and positive organisational scholarship, how the MERMA model developed as a conceptual model to become MERMA-ID, and findings that are more tenuously connected to MERMA-ID, but which contribute to understanding the experience of social and systemic creativity.

***Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations***

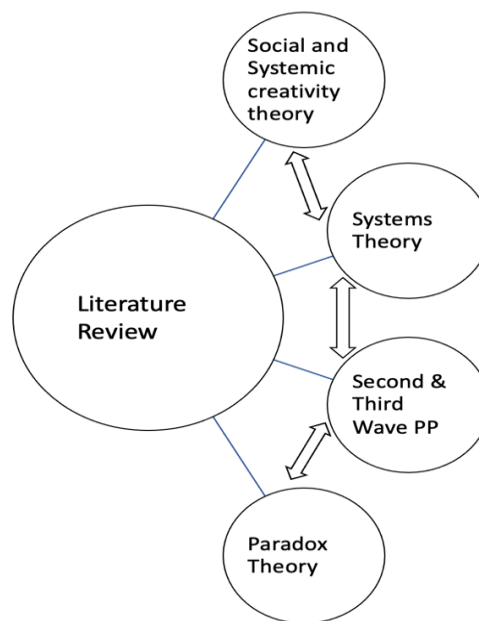
The final chapter draws on the introduction and reconsiders the research objectives and questions. The original contributions to knowledge are summarised. The chapter makes recommendations for organisational practice based on the research findings and offers recommendations for future research. The limitations of this research are considered.

## Chapter 2: General Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of being creative at work and how parts of the organisational system influence and shape the experience of creativity through the theoretical lens of Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) models of social and systemic creativity. This chapter will situate the study in the relevant research, theory, and empirical material. Since there is little literature on the individual experience of creativity within an organisational context, this literature review considers several discrete theoretical domains (illustrated in Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Literature Review Diagram*



In Part 1 of this review, creativity theory associated with the social and systemic context of creativity will be explored. Emphasis is placed on Csíkszentmihályi (1988) systems model and the dynamic componential model (DCM: Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Dimensions such as affect, meaning and relationships will be discussed in the context of the DCM. Additionally, consideration will be given to broader systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1972) to provide context and understanding of how creativity may be experienced within complex systems, such as organisations.

Part 2 will examine creativity in the context of second wave positive psychology (SWPP: Ivtzan et al., 2016) theory which considers the dialectic relationship between positive and negative phenomena, the light and dark aspects of life, including the role of polarities, paradox and tension. Given the complex and multifaceted nature of the experience of creativity and SWPP's tendency to focus on the individual, organisational paradox theory (Lewis, 2000; Quinn & Cameron, 1988) is considered as well, to shed light on how individuals might experience polarity, paradox and tension in an organisational context.

### **Part 1: Social and Systemic Creativity**

A popular romantic view of creativity is the creator sitting alone when a flash of inspiration suddenly brings new insight (Hampden-Turner, 1999). The individualistic perspective traditionally formed the backbone of creativity research (Ford & Gioia, 1995). The myth of creativity as a solitary pursuit (Montuori & Purser, 1995) underestimates the extent to which social, cultural and historical contexts influence life experiences and the expression of creativity (Mockros & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014).

Whilst there has been more emphasis on the systemic nature of creativity in the last 30 years, it is not a new concept. Glăveanu (2011b) credits Vygotsky (1978) with laying the foundations of a social and cultural approach to creativity. Moran and John-Steiner (2003) further argue that social constructivist and social psychological approaches to creativity, such as Csíkszentmihályi's (1996) and Amabile's (1983) componential model have many parallels to Vygotsky's work, recognising the centrality of social context in creativity. However, Moran and John-Steiner argue that, unlike Vygotsky, social models of creativity tend to discount subjective individual experience and focus on social forces, whereas Vygotsky viewed them as dialectically interconnected.

Vygotsky (1997) asserted that works of art were founded on contradiction between affect and intellect, the resultant tension causing individuals' aesthetic reactions to the art (Khinkanina, 2014; Lindqvist, 2003). Furthermore, he theorised that creativity was a higher psychological function, a complex multidimensional concept that distinguishes humans from other species. According to Vygotsky (1991), creativity exists not just in renowned creative works, but anywhere human imagination makes new combinations or

changes to existing phenomena, a precursor to more recent theories of creativity as “little/mini c” (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) or “everyday” creativity (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016a; Richards, 2007). Vygotsky (1971, p. 249) viewed creativity as being profoundly social, stating that “art is the social technique of emotion, a tool of society which brings the most intimate and personal aspects of our being into the circle of social life.” He emphasised the subjective experience of creativity and considered the creative process to be interactive, full of tension and influenced by historical and cultural development (Moran & John-Steiner, 2003).

A core premise of systems models is that creativity involves the confluence of multiple social and contextual factors (Robert J. Sternberg et al., 2004). Precisely what those factors are has been the subject of much debate (McIntyre, 2007). Creativity is viewed as a process shaped by the interactions between multiple forces and positions the person creating within a socio-cultural context (Mockros & Csíkszentmihályi, 2014). Rather than paying attention to a single cause of creativity, systemic approaches consider relationships within and between parts of the system (Rathunde, 1999). Many researchers have pointed out that creativity does not happen in a social vacuum (e.g., Sawyer, 2012). As such, the importance of meaningful social interactions between people is central to understanding social creativity (Glăveanu, 2010) and research has stressed the importance of relationships, collaboration, and communication in the creative process (e.g., Madjar, 2005; Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003).

The importance of the socio-cultural context to creativity is such that Montuori and Purser (2000) pose a philosophical question about whether individuals can create without any input from their environment or social context. Could a creative “genius” exist without others to assign or define that label? Whether creativity is social or individualistic raises the epistemological question about the nature of what can be known. Those with an individualistic perspective are likely to reject the notion of creativity as a social process (e.g., Greening, 1995; Hale, 1995), seeing a collectivist view of creativity as undermining the importance of the individual in the creative process (Montuori & Purser, 1995). Emergentist and systemic theories postulate that creativity can only be understood by looking at the whole and the interaction between the parts rather than examining the parts in isolation (Capra, 1996; Piccardo, 2017).

Taking a contrary perspective, Runco (2015) questions whether social recognition is essential for creativity. In his “parsimonious theory” of creativity, Runco argues that only those aspects of creativity integral to the creative process should be included. Social recognition occurs, he argues, after the creative act. Runco further suggests that the differentiator between eminent creativity and the type of everyday creativity that individuals habitually engage in is social recognition rather than differences in the creative process itself. Runco asserts that whilst social validation of creativity has a role to play, it should be proportionate, arguing that creativity is not dependent on others' opinions; reputation is governed by the field's judgement and may vary over time (Runco, 2014). Runco suggests that Kasof's (1995) attributional theory of creativity makes similar assumptions to Glăveanu (2014) regarding the need for the social evaluation of something as creative. He suggests that “to say that recognition is a part of creativity is much like saying that winning a race is a part of driving” (p. 25).

However, it could be argued that the importance of recognising creativity may depend on what the individual is seeking to achieve. If, for example, they are producing a piece of artwork which they are hoping to sell to meet financial commitments, they may be creating within that context, paying attention to what is likely to appeal to their audience and therefore most likely to sell (Freeman, 1993). What Runco appears to be arguing is that, yes, opinion matters, especially when something is being produced to sell, but the product would be creative whether or not it sold. To reduce creativity to something that can only exist if validated by a subjective “other” misses the point that creativity is one of the aspects that differentiates us as human beings and is a source of psychological wellbeing (Barron, 1995; Gruber & Davis, 1988; Richards, 2007; Rogers, 1959; Runco, 2015). However, in focusing on whether social recognition is a requirement for creativity, Runco appears to be taking a product-centric perspective rather than recognising the importance of social support in the creative process.

Rather than quibbling over whether creativity is purely individual or purely social, findings from research presented in the literature generally suggests it is both. Capturing the potential dangers of polarising creativity as either individualistic or social, Simonton (2003, p. 304) cautions against what he refers to as “socio-cultural reductionism” as an antithetical response to the individualistic nature of much prior creativity research. As

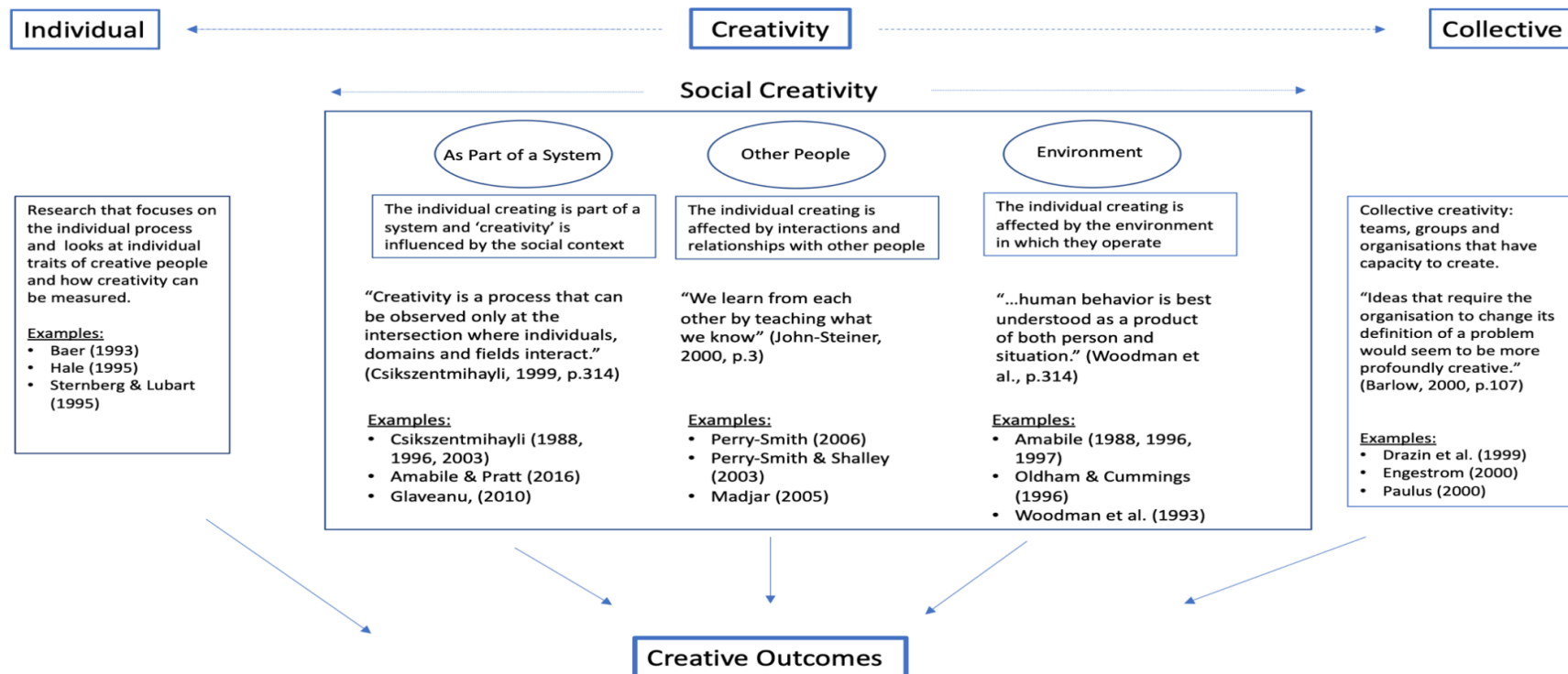


Runco (1999) argues, the contributions of the individual are integral to the creative process. A domain will have nothing to evaluate without the creative efforts of the individual. It is also important to differentiate between social and collaborative creativity. Social creativity can be individual – it is acknowledged that the environment influences individuals whether they are creating alone or in a collective. Collaborative creativity refers to a product or outcome created by multiple individuals (such as a workgroup or team) and is inherently social (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003; Sawyer, 2012). Instead of a Ptolemaic view where the individual is at the centre of the creative universe, systems approaches offer what (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988, p.336) calls a Copernican view, where “the person is part of a system of mutual influences and information.” As Glăveanu (2020, p. 1) contends, “if socio-cultural psychology challenges old dichotomies between mind and body, individual and society, then creativity is ideally placed to demonstrate their interdependence.”

Figure 2 maps the terrain of individual and collective creativity to represent the positioning of this study in the context of the extensive body of creativity research. The area of interest for this study is the central box that depicts creativity as being influenced and shaped by the individual as part of a gestalt through relationships with other people and the environment. Whilst representing different areas of emphasis in research and theorising, all three areas have been captured within one boundary of social creativit

Figure 2

Conceptual Map of Social Creativity (adapted from Watson, 2007)



Arguably the most well-known and influential social and systemic models of creativity are Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model and Amabile's componential model (Amabile, 1988; Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Their models built on earlier "systemic" approaches (such as Rhodes' (1961) foundational "4P" model), recognising the importance of social and environmental context to creativity. Rhodes' (1961) "4P" model describes four important dimensions of the creative process: the characteristics of the creative *person*, the *process* of being creative, the creative output (*product*) and the environment in which the creativity takes place (*press*). Simonton (1995) added *persuasion* to the model arguing that creativity is a form of leadership given the importance of being able to influence and persuade others of the merits of the creative idea. Furthermore, the social skills of influencing and bringing about a change of mind can be seen as a form of creativity and a route towards accepting something as creative (Gardner, 2006).

Amabile and Csíkszentmihályi were among the first to consider creativity's social, cultural, and historical context (Kaufman et al., 2019; Sawyer, 2012). Both Amabile and Csíkszentmihályi have inspired decades of creativity research. Amabile's (1983, 1996) componential model is credited with establishing the argument for a socio-cultural approach to creativity (Gute, 2020). Her primary argument, that the social environment influences creativity through intrinsic motivation, has influenced numerous creativity theories, including Oldham and Cummings (1996) research on contextual factors that affect creativity at work; Woodman et al.'s (1993) theory of organisational creativity and Sternberg and Lubart's (1991) investment theory of creativity. Csíkszentmihályi's systems model has been similarly impactful (Gute, 2020), having influenced a range of theoretical and empirical creativity research, including the application of the systems model as a framework for positive ageing (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2006), and using the model as a strengths-based approach for explaining the creative process of eminently creative individuals (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2003).

However, other scholars have developed system-based approaches to creativity, including:

- The evolving systems approach (Gruber, 1988) is described as both a theory and method of studying and understanding creativity (Stahl & Brower, 2011). The

model considers the purpose, affect and knowledge of the creative person, and emphasises the influence of environment on creativity (Gute, 2020).

- The multivariate approach (Lubart et al., 2003) argues that creativity results from the relationship between cognitive, affective, conative and environmental factors. The authors propose that individuals have a specific profile of different factors which may make them suited to a particular domain.
- The interactionist model (Woodman & Schoenfeldt, 1990) proposes that individual creativity is affected by pre-existing conditions, cognitive styles, ability, personality, motivations to create and knowledge of the domain. Using the “4P” (Rhodes, 1961) framework, the authors propose that creativity occurs as a result of the dynamic interaction of these components.
- The “5As” framework (Glăveanu, 2013) also builds on Rhodes (1961) to include the socio-cultural elements of creativity that are not so explicit in the “4P” model. Glăveanu splits “press” into “audience” and “affordances” to reflect the importance of the physical environment in shaping and influencing creativity as well as the role that other people play in assessing, judging, and contributing to creativity.
- Ecological approaches: Simonton (1999, p. 309) suggested that creativity is analogous a Darwinian evolutionary process of “blind variation and selective retention”. Whereas Barron (1995) uses the metaphor of “ecology” to illustrate the interactionist nature of creativity, comparing the way that components of a creative system relate to each other much like the interaction of elements within a complex and interconnected ecosystem (Isaksen et al., 1993; Simonton, 2001).

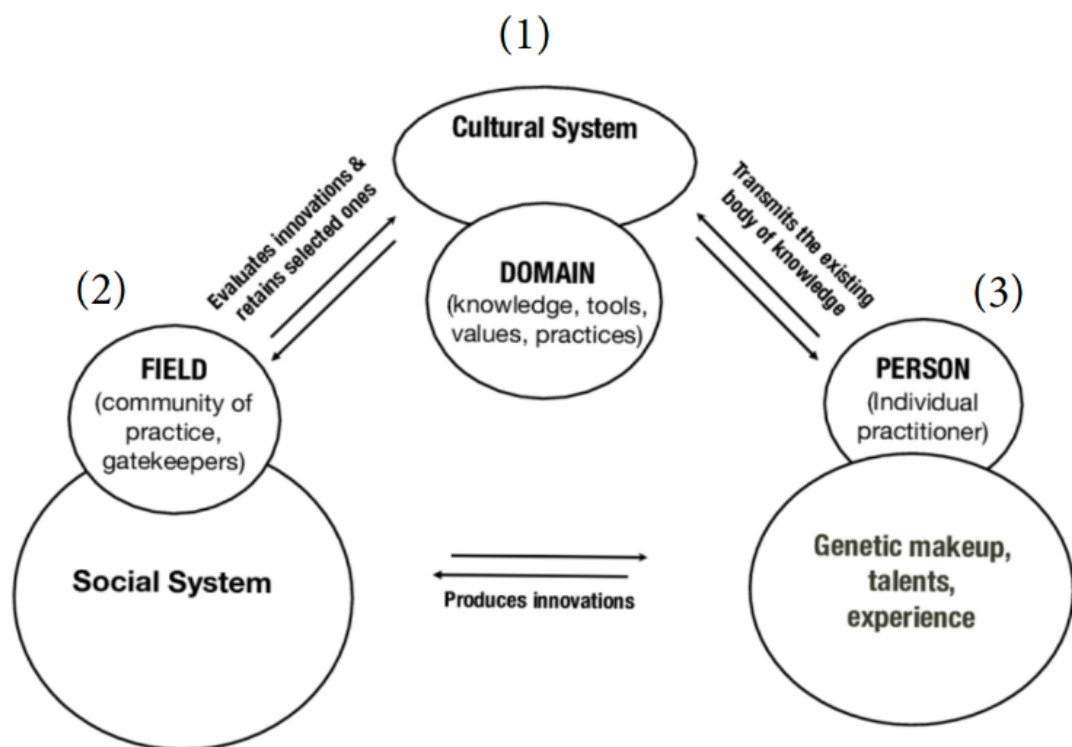
### ***Csikszentmihályi's Systems Model***

The systems model proposed by (Csikszentmihályi, 1988; 1996: Figure 1) posed questions about “where” and “how” creativity is rather than the more usual question of “what” creativity is. Csikszentmihályi argued that psychology traditionally viewed creativity as a cognitive process that did not consider the social and cultural context in which creativity happens, nor the complexity of the creative process. Instead, he posited that creativity occurs at the intersection of the domain, the field, and the individual. The domain (Figure 3, element 1) sets the cultural context for creativity, and the rules or

conventions that govern what counts as being creative. The field (Figure 3, element 2) is the system's social structure. It comprises the gatekeepers or “intermediaries” (Stein, 1963, p.123) who decide whether a creative output is significant enough to alter, or be added to, the domain. The individual (Figure 3, element 3) produces the creative idea or output. A central argument of Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) theory is that an idea cannot be considered creative unless a social process of judgement deems it to be. As such, creativity is subjective and socially constructed (Glăveanu, 2011b). As Csíkszentmihályi, 1999, p. 313) states, “creativity is not the product of single individuals, but social systems making judgements about individuals' products.”

**Figure 3**

*Systems Model of Creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988)*



Csíkszentmihályi (1988, p. 329) emphasised the model's dynamism, describing a circular process of causality, where each element “affects the others and is affected by them in turn.” Csíkszentmihályi (1996) posits that a generative spiral of influence exists between the system components rather than a linear progression of stages. Each component of the system (individual, domain and field) is equally important in producing creative work, and each interacts with the systemic structures within cultures. Runco

(2004, p. 661; 2007) appeared to misinterpret this fundamental premise of the model by suggesting that, in the systems theory, “creative ideas originate with an individual [who] may then influence a particular field...and may eventually even have an impact on the more general domain.”

In systems theory, the concept of equifinality proposes that any number of possible means can lead to a similar outcome (Rathunde, 1999). The historical-cultural context into which individuals are born, access to resources such as education, and support from others within the field, are factors that influence the likelihood of domain-changing creativity occurring (Csíkszentmihályi, 1999). Similarly, Csíkszentmihályi contends that the presence of sufficient economic resources appears necessary for creativity to emerge. If a society experiences poverty, it is unlikely (but not impossible) that there would be spare time, money or energy to divert to creative activity. Csíkszentmihályi (1996) gives the example of Florence in the Renaissance of the 1400s. He points out that the availability of resources (money), patrons, and inter-city rivalry created conditions for creative output to flourish and were significant factors in the prevalence of creativity and the golden age of Florentine artistic achievement.

### ***The Domain***

Sawyer (2012, p. 216) defines the domain as “all of the created products that have been accepted by the field in the past, and all of the conventions that are shared by members of the field: the languages, symbols and notations.” For example, modern art could be considered a domain in which symbolic rules determine what constitutes “modern art”. The individual uses their knowledge of those rules and conventions to produce variations. Boden (2004) argues that to understand works of art or scientific theories, one must consider what preceded them. Csíkszentmihályi (1996) argues that for something to be creative, it must make an enduring change to the domain. Pope (2005) suggests that the systems model does not sufficiently consider activity between domains, such as inter-disciplinary or cross-cultural creativity, that might lead to “hybrid forms” (p. 68). However, Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 88) states that “some of the most creative breakthroughs occur when an idea that works well in one domain gets grafted to another and revitalises it.”

While time is still an essential attribute for some forms of culture-changing creativity, creativity that is more “disposable”, such as jokes or improvisation, is not designed to

endure over time. Also, the proliferation of digital creative content on the internet is such that it may well be more complex, and perhaps, less relevant for much of that content to stand the test of time. Does that make the content less creative? The requirement for the domain and field to judge something as creative is problematic for current times. In the years since Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model was created, technology and globalisation have made access to creative offerings more easily accessible and, it could be argued, more egalitarian and inclusive. Digital natives see creativity as being more social, more interconnected than previous generations (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016). Glăveanu (2010b) refers to the “We” paradigm to describe the shift from the conceptualisation of creativity as individualistic to seeing creativity as distributed (Literat & Glăveanu, 2016), democratic (Sawyer, 2012) and networked (Montuori & Donnelly, 2016).

In an era where tools for creating content are readily accessible (e.g., the high-quality video recording available on a smartphone or easily available photo- or audio-editing software), the ability of individuals to create and post content to an external audience has expanded significantly. Perhaps the amount of “likes” on a YouTube video constitute the field assigning creativity in today’s world? In domains such as visual art, television, or film, for example, it could be argued that one does not need to be an expert in the domain represent the field. A layperson looking at a piece of art or watching a television programme can decide whether they consider something creative or not according to their tastes. Indeed, Cropley (1997) questions whether “creative” may simply be a label assigned to a product by the domain, experts in and increasingly consumers of creative output (e.g., YouTube viewers) who collectively agree that something should be considered creative, irrespective of more domain-traditional measures of quality.

However, a potential challenge of such distributed, democratic, and networked creativity is that quality standards maybe become less clear when trying to appeal to everyone, not just specific domain experts, and when domain rules are potentially less clear. But does it matter who decides whether something is creative?

### ***The Field***

Sawyer (2012, p. 216) defines the field as “a complex network of experts, with varying expertise, status and power.” Continuing the example of modern art, the field might include art historians, museum curators and academics, who have the necessary

expertise to influence the acceptance (or otherwise) of something as creative. However, Kaufman and Baer (2012) observe the paradox of experts judging creative outcomes that may change the rules that established them within the field. This paradox highlights the difficulty of recognising ideas as creative within a field that is “defensive, rigid or embedded in a social system that discourages novelty” (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014, p. 53).

Weisberg (2006) criticises Csíkszentmihályi’s requirement that for something to be creative it must be positively valued by the field, arguing that focusing merely on the concept of value to others discounts the value of creative output that was novel when created. He maintains that the creativity of a product should be separated from its value to others, arguing that a product’s value can alter over time, and can switch between being considered creative or not over time. In support of his argument, Weisberg (2015) refers to Csíkszentmihályi’s (1988) example of Botticelli, whose work the art establishment rejected for many years after he died. His creative reputation was only established in the mid-18th century (some 300 years after his death) when, rather than considering his work as clumsy, it was re-evaluated in the context of contemporary taste. Weisberg’s criticism goes to the heart of the debate about the scope of the term “creativity”, whether it should be reserved for rare and special talent that belongs to an elite few (Barzun, 1989; Tusa, 2003) or whether creativity is a fundamental aspect of human nature and an essential part of our psychological wellbeing (e.g., Richards, 2010; Sawyer, 2012; Simonton, 2000). Another paradox of creativity is that it is likely both.

There has been a shift in the view of creativity as the preserve of an elite few (Big “C” Creativity: Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) to emphasising social creativity and “everyone, every day, everywhere” creativity (Eisler et al., 2016; Richards, 2007) in response to the increasing digitalisation and connectivity in society. Similarly, Beghetto and Kaufman’s (2007) concept of “mini c” creativity recognises that new and personally meaningful experiences can be considered creative processes, albeit judged as being so by the individual rather than by an external gatekeeper. Sawyer (2012) argues that creativity must be externally communicated – seen and understood by others – to be considered creative. However, the critique of Sawyer’s theory is that it does not account for creative self-expression, which is not necessarily externally communicated, but is a source of meaning and pleasure. May (1975) suggests a broader conceptualisation of creativity to



include appreciating art or listening to music because, he argues, by experiencing the creativity of others, we can bring something new into existence within ourselves.

Whilst the field is typically interpreted as the experts who judge a product's creative value or outcome, Csíkszentmihályi (1988) implies that the field may include supportive relationships – e.g., teachers and parents – that help talented children develop the necessary domain-relevant skills. Mockros and Csíkszentmihályi (2000) suggest there is a dialectical relationship between the creative person and the social context, which influences what aspects of creativity are valued and emphasised, shaped through indirect and direct feedback from “authority figures” (p.182) such as parents, teachers, colleagues. However, it is important to note that an individual’s internalised view of the field and their expectations of how they may be judged by the “experts” may also be a factor that influences what is created in the first place. Some ideas may never see the light of day because creators self-censor ideas due to their internal critic, built on previous experiences of the domain and/or field.

Lebuda and Csíkszentmihályi (2018) explored the importance of family and romantic partner relationships on creativity, concluding that creators needed “emotional support, unconditional acceptance, a sense of security, and a sense of belonging” (p. 11). However, this review of the literature has revealed that the importance of supportive work relationships is an under-developed theme of the systems model and creativity research more generally. If it is important for creators to be supported by their family or life partner, it is reasonable to assume individuals might need similar support from important figures in their work lives, such as co-workers and leaders.

As gatekeepers who judge whether an idea is accepted into the domain, leaders play a powerful role within the system. Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 28) describes creativity as changing “symbolic knowledge” affecting a person’s thoughts and feelings. As such, one can infer that an organisation's cultural tone and its behaviours influence the extent to which creativity happens at an individual level, just as individual behaviour influences whether an organisational system is willing to accept variation. Writing about the implications of the systems model for organisations, Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) describe organisational leaders as a field that decides whether a creative idea is suitable for their business domain. They note that whether a product becomes domain-changing in part depends on whether leaders recognise its potential. Just as a field of experts can

be rigid and defensive, leaders can also stifle creativity through risk aversion and reluctance to change. Creativity can be nurtured or hindered, depending on the environment in which one is operating. Amabile and colleagues (Amabile, 1998; Amabile et al., 1996) posit that management actions such as not ensuring an appropriate fit between person and job, not enough autonomy, time, or resource, organisational politics or lack of encouragement are factors likely to hinder creativity. Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer point out that complex external and internal forces influence creativity within organisations. Their examples of external forces impacting culture include consumer behaviour, government regulation or client behaviour. Examples of internal forces include the willingness of staff, major stakeholders, or the organisation's board to accept novelty.

### ***The Individual***

Csíkszentmihályi (1996) points out that the individual (Figure 3, element 3) who produces the creative idea or output needs to be sufficiently immersed in the domain to know how to vary its rules to make an original and valuable contribution. Continuing the example of modern art, Csíkszentmihályi argues that as much as an individual may appreciate modern art, without a detailed study over time of the theories, techniques, and conventions of the field of contemporary art, an individual will not make a creative contribution to the modern art field. Furthermore, an individual must be able to persuade the experts in this particular genre of art that the novel product or thought is sufficiently impactful and significant to be included in the domain (Feldman et al., 1994; Ford, 1996; Simonton, 1988).

The personality traits of creative individuals have provided a rich source of data for creativity research (e.g., Barron & Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Ford & Gioia, 1995; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 57) described the characteristics of creative individuals as complex and demonstrating contradictory extremes, with “tendencies of thought and action that in most people are segregated”, such as being rebellious and traditional, passionate, and objective, energetic, and quiet. Csíkszentmihályi reflected on the creative person's ability to bring together those complexities that exist in “dialectical tension” (pp. 57-58). He maintains that, unlike most people who are socialised to develop only one pole of the dialectic, creative people appear more likely to express the full range of personality traits. However, as Csíkszentmihályi's writing primarily focuses on eminent creative individuals, he does not

expand on how those dialectical tensions are experienced in workplace creativity. Furthermore, there is scope to expand on how the tensions that occur as aspects of the creative personality are coped with. Although Csíkszentmihályi highlights the possibility of tensions arising from personal experiences and working within a symbolic system, such as an organisation, the model is open to critique because it does not sufficiently explore the extent of interconnectedness and mutual influence between individuals in the system. As Marris (1993, p. 77) stated, “we rarely explore the interaction between each unique human actor and the social system of which they are part.”

A core trait of the creative person is the motivation to engage in an uncertain and complex process. Csíkszentmihályi (1997b) posited that most activity in life is *exotelic*, motivated by the desire to achieve a specific goal. By contrast, *autotelic* motivation (doing something for its own sake) is an important feature of creative activity. In his research of 91 eminent creatives, Csíkszentmihályi asked what they enjoyed doing most. A common response was “designing or discovering something new” (p. 108). Csíkszentmihályi observed characteristics of flow in the accounts of creators he interviewed. Flow is defined as a state of deep concentration and absorption in a task such that nothing else seems to matter in that moment (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). The flow experience is intrinsically motivating, encouraging individuals to engage with activities that create conditions of flow (Nakamura et al., 2019). The role of motivation in stimulating creativity is discussed more fully in the following section in the context of the dynamic componential model (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Csíkszentmihályi outlined seven conditions for achieving flow in creativity: i) clear goals; ii) timely feedback on how well one is doing; iii) an appropriate balance between challenge and skills where tasks are neither too difficult (leading to anxiety) nor too easy (resulting in boredom); iv) merging of action and awareness enabling deep involvement in the activity; v) removal of unnecessary distractions to protect focus and concentration; vi) losing sense of time, environment, and self; vii) creativity becomes autotelic. Reflecting on the conditions necessary for flow, I wonder how organisational leaders might create a culture that facilitates the experience of flow through clear goal setting, timely and appropriate feedback, and sufficiently challenging tasks.

The systems model has been used as a framework to explore creativity in a range of contexts such as education (Csíkszentmihályi & Wolfe, 2014) and artistic production, e.g.,

fiction writing, media and film production (see McIntyre et al., 2016). However, as is evidenced by this review of the literature, the research has typically explored the creative product or outcome rather than looking at creativity from the perspective of what it feels like to be creative. There appears to be little research examining how the systems model may apply in organisations. Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) briefly considered the organisational implications of the systems model, whereas Fulton (2016) explored creativity in print journalism through the lens of Csíkszentmihályi's systems model. There is an opportunity to further examine how the systems model may be used to understand creativity in organisations.

### ***Amabile's Componential Models***

Amabile (1983) developed the componential model of individual creativity to describe ways in which individual personality characteristics, cognitive abilities, and social context might contribute to creativity. The model comprises three internal factors that can influence individual creative performance: i) domain-relevant skills (cognitive ability, perceptual and motor skills, education); ii) creativity-relevant skills (training, idea generation ability, personal characteristics); iii) task motivation (intrinsic motivation (including self-efficacy), absence or presence of relevant extrinsic constraints in the social environment (i.e., whether the work environment places value on creativity) and the individual's ability to minimise extrinsic constraints).

Amabile (1988) further developed her componential model to consider individual creativity and innovation in organisational contexts. Amabile's (1983) model of individual creativity remained unchanged; however, she added that components influencing individual creativity might also influence the creativity of teams working closely together. Furthermore, the theory was expanded to include three concepts relevant to innovation: i) resources in the domain; ii) skills in innovation management; and iii) organisational motivation to innovate. Amabile asserted that organisational context and behaviours, such as managerial practices, structures and policies, and the values organisations communicated could "feed (or starve) individual and team creativity" (p.160). Similarly, Amabile underlined the influence of team dynamics and co-worker relationships on creative performance.

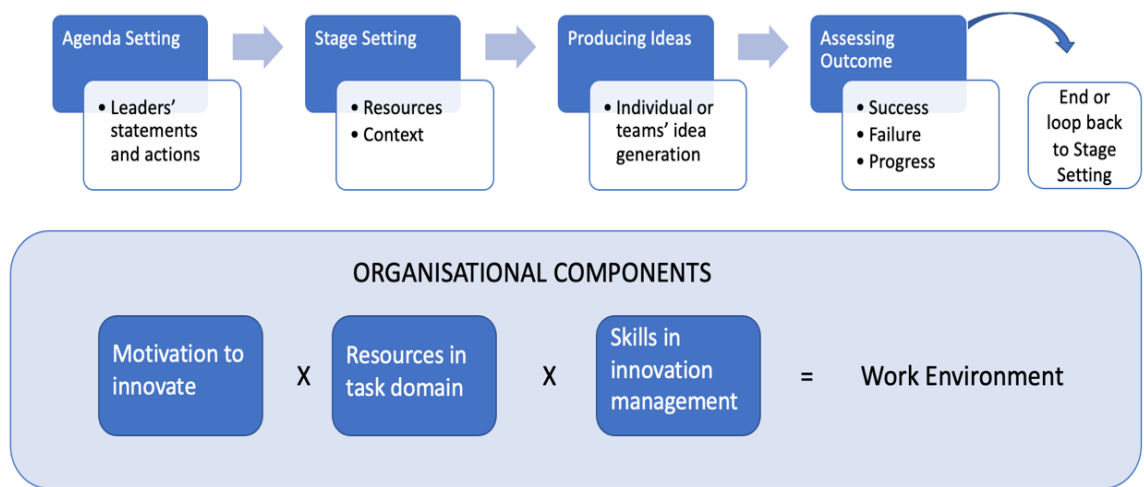
Amabile and Pratt (2016) significantly updated the componential model to reflect developments in creativity research since the original models were proposed (Figure 4). They renamed it the dynamic componential model (DCM), introducing several “feedback loops” (p.164) that reflected the interconnection between elements of the model. Amabile and Pratt highlight two theoretical approaches that inspired the dynamic perspective of the model: i) Drazin et al.'s (1999) sociological model of sensemaking in organisational creativity and; ii) creativity as an evolutionary process (Campbell, 1960; Simonton, 1999; Staw, 1990). Drazin et al. explore the dynamics of interpersonal and inter-organisational sensemaking over time, describing the organisation as an open system subject to several internal and external forces that influence creativity. Simonton (2007) argued that considering creativity as a Darwinian process is appropriate since creativity is too complex and multifaceted to be explained by any one approach or mechanism. However, Gabora (2005) prefers the term “evolution” to refer to an adaptive change process rather than implying that a selection process is involved. She suggests that creativity may still be an evolving process, one of “context-driven actualisation of potential” (p. 83).

Amabile and Pratt's (2016) updated dynamic componential model introduced four new constructs and proposed ways in which the work environment influences individual psychological processes. The constructs added to the model were:

- Progress in idea development
- Meaningful work
- Affect
- Synergistic external motivation

**Figure 4**

*The Dynamic Componential Model (adapted from Amabile & Pratt, 2016)*



Additionally, Amabile and Pratt (2016, p. 169) emphasise the dynamic nature of creativity, captured by “progress loops” that signify the interaction between elements of the system. They argue that a positive work life leads to higher levels of creative performance, engagement, productivity, and collegiality, leading to perceptions of progress in meaningful work, looping back to positive inner work life. The DCM also considers contextual factors that impact intrinsic motivation, such as whether the work environment is supportive of creativity or how the person is feeling.

### ***Progress in Idea Development***

Amabile and Kramer (2011) propose that the “progress principle” (p. 166) indicates that making progress in meaningful work positively affects intrinsic motivation and, conversely, intrinsic motivation positively impacts progress. In Amabile and Kramer’s study of 238 professionals in seven different organisations, participants were asked to complete a daily diary entry, capturing their subjective experience and write about one experience that day that stood out to them. The research found that meaningful accomplishment, either individually or as part of a team, was the most prominent feature of days when participants reported their most positive subjective experience. Setbacks and failure tended to be associated with days when participants reported negative subjective experience and decreased intrinsic motivation. Bandura (2000) demonstrated that self-efficacy, the drive towards seeing oneself as capable of achieving desired goals, increased intrinsic motivation, wellbeing, and a sense of personal accomplishment. Amabile and Pratt (2016) reported that when teams experienced high levels of

psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999), failure could lead to higher intrinsic motivation and engagement in the creative process. In conditions of high psychological safety, failure was considered an opportunity for learning.

Amabile and Pratt (2016, p. 168) further argue that aspects of the work environment could act as a “catalyst” or “inhibitor” to the sense of achievement of individuals. They describe catalysts as including clear goals, support for risk-taking, and sufficient time (but not too much). Conversely, frequent change, unclear goals, too much or too little time are considered inhibitors of progress. The importance of the work environment and leadership behaviours on creativity is underlined by the factors that facilitate or inhibit making progress and having a sense of meaningful accomplishment. Amabile and Pratt argue that leaders impact creativity throughout the organisation through the values communicated, and the strategies, structures and policies that are put in place. Additionally, creativity is affected by the behaviours and attitudes of co-workers, whether individuals are working alone or in teams. Research has demonstrated that supportive relationships with supervisors and co-workers enhance individual creative performance (Amabile et al., 1996; Madjar et al., 2002; Oldham & Cummings, 1996). Conversely, the work environment can result in feelings of alienation and lack of meaningfulness, resulting in lower levels of wellbeing, motivation, and, therefore, performance (Rosso et al., 2010).

However, defining which aspects of culture and climate affect creativity is a complex task. Reichers and Schneider (1990) suggest that culture and climate relate to how individuals make sense of their environment, manifested by shared meanings that shape attitudes and behaviours. They define culture as the beliefs regarding how to behave within an organisation and climate and how it feels to be an organisational member. Wong (2002) defines work culture as the psychosocial aspects of the work environment, how workers react to decisions leaders make that affect them, and their feelings towards the organisation and its management.

Hunter et al. (2007) produced a taxonomy of 45 models of factors impacting organisational climates conducive to creativity. They propose a 14-item taxonomy which, they argue, covers 90% of the other models' variables, including factors such as positive and trusting relationships with supervisors and peers, autonomy to perform tasks, and a perception that the organisation is willing to take risks and cope with the uncertainty and

ambiguity of creative work. The “KEYS” model (Amabile et al., 1996) proposes six contextual factors that influence creative work environments: challenging work, freedom, sufficient resources, work group support, supervisory encouragement and organisational support. Tesluk et al. (1997) argued that organisations that have a culture supportive of creativity are likely to have certain features in common such as emotional engagement in work, recognition of the importance of the work, a healthy level of confrontation and debate and organisational systems that encourage risk-taking, challenge and growth. Furthermore, they suggest that creative cultures encourage open communication, autonomy, and a physical work environment that facilitates frequent interaction. Importantly, Tesluk and colleagues suggest that attitudes towards risk-taking and willingness to experiment are similar amongst employees and leaders within creative cultures. Wong (2002, p. 13) argues that, to encourage job satisfaction and productivity, leaders must consider individual needs and “embrace the positive psychology of management which emphasises meaning, respect, care, empathy, integrity, trust and courage.” He concludes that given the inter-related nature of those factors, the most effective way to improve work climate is to take a systematic and holistic approach to simultaneously improve all seven of these dimensions of positive work culture.

### ***Meaningful Work***

Amabile and Pratt (2016) emphasise that, whilst making progress is intrinsically motivating, the creative work needs to be meaningful to the individual. Amabile differentiates between meaningful work and meaning, arguing that the former suggests a positive overall experience, even though not every aspect of the work may be pleasurable (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). Meaningful work is defined as purposeful and significant for the individuals doing the work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). In contrast, Amabile points out that meaning can be positive, negative, or neutral depending on the circumstances and the context of an event. Ward and King (2017) distinguish between meaning *in* life, which they describe as a subjective state regarding how people feel about their lives at a particular point in time, and the meaning *of* life, which is a broader existential question regarding an individual’s purpose and a topic of specific interest in SWPP.

Understanding what makes work meaningful has been a topic of interest for organisational theorists (e.g., Martela & Pessi, 2018). Research findings on work as either



a “job” or a “calling” distinguish between perceptions of work as a necessity rather than pleasure and/or career-orientation that focuses on hierarchical progression (“job”-orientation), compared to a “calling”, which is described as work that is meaningful, fulfilling and socially useful (Rosso et al., 2010; Thompson & Bunderson, 2019). Wrzesniewski et al. (1997, p. 22) define a “calling” as work that brings meaning and is an integral part of one’s life. Whereas Dik et al. (2012, p. 259) posit that work perceived as a calling comprises three elements: “transcendent summons, purposeful work and prosocial orientation.” However, Thompson and Bunderson, (2019) argue that a contemporary view of work as a calling has less of an emphasis on duty and destiny, and more on self-expression and self-fulfilment, where callings reflect individual passion and interest rather than duty or social obligation. Studies (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al., 1997) have demonstrated that perceiving work as a calling is positively related to work and life satisfaction and a more meaningful life (Steger & Dik, 2009). Duffy et al. (2016) argue that self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2000) contributes to the experience of work as meaningful. Mirroring self-determination theory, Martela and Riekkari (2018) suggest that four psychological needs influence the meaningfulness of work: autonomy, competence, relatedness, and additionally, making a positive contribution, an essential aspect of which is the significance or perceived value of the work.

For some, work can provide coherence, purpose, and significance, perhaps through their creative activity. However, for others work may be a means to an end, providing them with sufficient resources to pursue their creativity elsewhere. Whether meaning is found through work, outside of work, or both, Kaufman (2018) posits that creativity is a way of finding meaning in life. Kaufman compares creativity to meaning, seeing them both as universal constructs. Humanistic psychologists such as Maslow (1968) and May (1975) recognised the importance of creativity to a meaningful life. Similarly, Frankl (1985) underlines the role of creativity in finding meaning. Engaging in a creative activity such as expressive writing or producing art may help individuals make sense of life events (Pennebaker, 1997). For some, creativity eases anxieties about the inevitability of death. Perach and Wisman (2019) argue that leaving a legacy or achieving symbolic immortality through creativity can counterbalance existential anxiety. Furthermore, they suggest that self-actualisation and openness to experience are associated with creativity and reduce fear of death, the ultimate uncertainty (Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961). In one of

Csikszentmihályi's (1996, p.38) interviews with eminent creatives, Gyordy Fauldy, a writer and poet, responded to Csikszentmihályi's question as to why he became a poet by saying "because I was afraid to die."

Meaning is shaped by perceptions, significance and value individuals attach to a particular task or context (Buzzanell & D'Enbeau, 2013; Fetzner & Pratt, 2020; Rosso et al., 2010). Self-concordance, or the extent to which individuals feel that they are behaving in a way consistent with their self-concept and the work they perform, is one aspect of authenticity that has been linked with meaningfulness (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Rosso et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999). Thompson and Bunderson (2003, p. 572) discuss how "ideology-infused psychological contracts" (congruence between individual values and an organisation's mission or purpose) can promote meaningfulness and motivation when aligned, or alienation when breached.

Meaningful moments tend to be full of emotion and personal significance. The experience of meaningfulness is heightened by recognition by others (Bailey & Madden, 2016). Lepisto and Pratt (2017) distinguish between two potential sources of meaningfulness (or, indeed, meaninglessness) at work. The "realisation" (p.104) perspective addresses psychological needs, desires and motivations associated with self-actualisation. Lepisto and Pratt identify alienation as a core problem preventing meaningfulness at work, exemplified by controlling work conditions that limit autonomy. The "justification perspective" (p. 106) of meaningful work focuses on the impact of perceived uncertainty and ambiguity regarding the value or worth of an individual's work. Baumeister (1991, p. 119) argues that "the only need for meaning that work often fails to satisfy is value," which does not merely apply to the value of the work, but also the extent to which the work and the worker are valued. Meaningfulness is often associated with purpose, either organisational purpose, such as work that makes a difference to others, or personal purpose, enabling individuals to follow their passions (A. M. Grant, 2008; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001).

Ryff and Singer (1998, p. 8) argue that meaningfulness is "an ongoing, day-by-day, constantly unfolding phenomenon, not an end state that is once-and-for-all resolved." Bailey and Madden's (2016) research of 135 people in various occupations found that rather than being in an enduring state of mind as they had expected, participants talked about finding their work meaningful on unexpected and unplanned occasions. The

findings from that study revealed that whilst leaders did not feature in the description by study participants of meaningful moments, leaders featured prominently amongst the reasons for preventing meaning. The study also identified organisational and leader behaviours that provoked meaninglessness. Findings suggested that feeling unrecognised and unappreciated by leaders significantly impacted the extent to which work was experienced as meaningful. Furthermore, they found that feeling isolated or marginalised (deliberately or due to poor relationships between co-workers) provoked meaninglessness. The tension between an organisation's focus on commercial results and the individual's focus on the quality of work also negatively impacted meaning. Bailey and Madden's findings reflected Amabile and Kramer's (2011) research which, similarly, found that leadership behaviour could negatively impact meaningfulness at work. Factors contributing to meaningfulness at work included having a sense of pride and achievement, fulfilling one's potential, doing creative or interesting work, and receiving praise and recognition from others.

Meaning is not just purely hedonistic and positive. Eudaimonia is defined as "fulfilling or realising one's daimon or true nature...fulfilling one's virtuous potentials and living as one was inherently intended to live" (Deci & Ryan, 2008, p. 2). Aristotle considered eudaimonia to be the ability to balance opposing forces (polarities) of the soul (or daimon), learning to live harmoniously and creatively with one's daimon (Diamond, 1999). Sperber (1975, p. 47) described eudaimonia as the "integration of opposing forces within one's being – love and hate, creativity and destructiveness, power and impotence" that exist together in a constantly adjusting balance. The concept of eudaimonia does not assume that balancing opposing forces is necessarily easy or always pleasant (Ryan & Deci, 2001). However, the challenges of achieving something worthwhile provide a sense of meaning and purpose (Waterman, 1990). A eudaimonic perspective on meaning at work (e.g., Lepisto & Pratt, 2017; Waterman, 1993) appreciates the ebb and flow of positive, negative and ambivalent emotions.

Mitra and Buzzanell (2017) examine the dynamic nature of meaningful work, highlighting how workers' appraisal of situations as meaningful adjusts over time. Workers reinterpret what is meaningful about work as the organisational context shifts. Tensions between individual and organisational values, autonomy and control are continually negotiated, requiring constant movement between the poles. The challenge

with realising something, such as resolving a creative problem, may provide a sense of meaning *because* of the difficulty involved in achieving it. Fetzer and Pratt (2020) suggest that an opportunity for future research exists to examine the relationship between meaningfulness and creativity in the longer term rather than the relatively short-term perspective implied in the progress principle, which Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 8) describe as “the power of [making] progress to steer people’s thoughts, feelings, and drives.” Furthermore, Fetzer and Pratt suggest that future research considers the role of eudaimonia in maintaining progress over time, arguing that motivation may stem from desires for self-realisation (Huta & Waterman, 2013), not simply the pleasure of creating.

Work has become an increasingly important source of meaningfulness (Baumeister, 1991; Steger & Dik, 2009). Since a large proportion of adult life is spent at work, research regarding the benefits of meaning in life is likely to apply to work life (Wong et al., 2017). A meaningful life is typically considered one in which one uses the best of oneself for a broader or higher concern (Park et al., 2009; Seligman, 2002). Research findings (e.g., Heintzelman & King, 2013; Martela & Steger, 2016) point towards three primary dimensions of meaning: coherence, purpose and significance. Coherence captures the cognitive process of making sense of one’s life, making it understandable and enabling individuals to experience internal and external events as part of a coherent whole (Delle Fave, 2020; Heine et al., 2006; Reker & Wong, 2014). Purpose is motivational and relates to having goals and future direction (Frankl, 1985; Steger et al., 2009), and is described by Moran (2015, p. 3) as being like an “internal compass” that motivates and guides an individual’s behaviour. Significance relates to the attribution of inherent value to one’s life, perceiving it as worthwhile and, in turn, feeling valued by others (George & Park, 2014, 2016). Delle Fave and Soosai-Nathan (2014) suggest that connectedness and belonging contribute to coherence, purpose, and significance. Belonging and connectedness relate to feeling part of something bigger than the self, which provides a sense of meaning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Schnell, 2010).

At its core, meaning is embedded in cultural symbols such as language and can be constructed personally or by shared norms (Baumeister et al., 2013; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Similarly, Martela and Pessi (2018) argue that how we appraise and understand the world is primarily determined through socially and culturally constructed meaning frameworks described by George and Park (2016, p. 206) as a “complex web of

propositions that we hold about how things are in the world and how things will be.” Moran (2015) describes culture as operating through meaning. Socially agreed-on ways of describing the world help to mediate uncertainty. In uncertain situations, making sense of life and finding meaning helps people cope with the discomfort of uncertainty (Stillman & Baumeister, 2009). Stillman and Baumeister posit that uncertainty detracts from the extent to which individuals feel they have a sense of purpose and control over life events. Meaning is a framework for making sense of experiences, easing confusion, creating a sense of stability in life and enabling future planning based upon pre-established norms and expectations (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).

### ***Affect***

A significant addition to the dynamic componential model is the inclusion of affect, recognising the body of literature linking affect and creativity (e.g., Bledow et al., 2013; Russ, 2013). Amabile and Kramer (2007) reflect that workers experience a wide range of emotions, motivation, and perceptions as they attempt to make sense of their work environment. Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 36) use the term “inner work life” to describe the internal process of perceiving and reacting to what is happening at work and what it means. Inner work life refers to emotions experienced, such as joy in response to creative success, frustration in response to setbacks, motivation to complete a task, or feeling states at a particular moment such as positive or negative mood. They argue that because inner work life is typically not discussed openly in organisations, either by workers or leaders, private thoughts and feelings are frequently suppressed or ignored.

There is a close relationship between emotion and motivation, with Izard and Ackerman (2000) seeing emotions as a primary motivation for human behaviour. The action-tendency associated with negative emotions such as fear or anger is to seek safety by attacking or defending one’s position (Izard, 1977). By contrast, positive emotions evoke a broader range of actions towards more exploratory and affiliative goals (Izard). Fredrickson (1998) postulated that positive emotions broaden an individual’s thought-action tendencies, enabling them to expand their repertoire of habitual responses and consider alternative, creative, and unexpected ways of acting. The experience of interest or curiosity results in a willingness to be open to new experiences, experiment, and discover (broadened attention) rather than the narrower focus evoked by negative emotions (Fredrickson; Izard). Isen (2001) explored the impact of positive affect on

cognitive flexibility (a requirement for creativity), concluding that cognitive flexibility and problem solving were improved by positive affect. However, Rathunde (2000) is critical of what he sees as Fredrickson's dichotomising of positive and negative emotions, especially concerning the creative process. Rathunde argues that a narrowing of focus may complement the broadening function rather than stand in opposition to it. He suggests that divergent thinking must be combined with convergent thinking, or a narrowing of attention, to achieve creative output.

Yet, we know that the relationship between emotions and creativity is more complex and paradoxical, with negative emotions playing an essential role in creativity (Kaufmann & Vosburg, 1997). Madjar et al. (2002) suggest that tension may positively affect problem solving, prompting individuals to reconsider their course of action or consider new possibilities (Higgins et al., 1992). Sowden and Dawson (2011) suggest that positive mood facilitates ideation, whereas negative mood facilitates the evaluation of ideas. The simultaneous presence of both positive and negative emotion, whilst perhaps seemingly contradictory, can enhance creativity with contrasting perspectives, improving the generation of novel ideas (Fong, 2006; James et al., 2004). Some researchers (e.g., Higgins et al., 1992; Madjar et al., 2002) suggest that negative emotions (e.g., tension and dissatisfaction) may foster greater creative problem solving, encouraging the individual to consider alternative strategies and be open to considering new possibilities. George and Zhou (2002) demonstrated that when individuals believed that creativity was valued and rewarded, and they were clear about their feelings, negative mood indicated that more effort might be needed to solve the problem. Those in a negative mood were also more likely to be more critical when evaluating an idea's usefulness than those in a positive frame of mind. Considering creativity from a systemic perspective, Rathunde (1999) argues that the system will selectively deploy expansive and constrictive thought processes to achieve balance over time, suggesting the need to express a full range of emotions at work.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, organisations are seen as replete with repressed emotions, thoughts, and unconscious defences against anxiety and fear, manifesting in dysfunctional organisational practices (e.g., Gabriel, 1999; Jaques, 1995). Gabriel and Griffiths (2002) argue that cultural and social context determines the rules, scripts and language that shape acceptable emotional expression, such as rules about appropriate

emotional expression towards loved ones, at work, or, indeed, oneself. Hochschild (2003) refers to “feeling rules” (p. 56) organisations set that govern the appropriate emotions to be displayed or suppressed. Those rules influence, either consciously or unconsciously, the extent to which it is safe to express one’s emotions (Ulus & Gabriel, 2016). The dissonance between what people feel and what they think they “should” be feeling creates tension, especially when individuals do not feel empowered to express their feelings.

### ***Synergistic External Motivation***

The addition of synergistic external motivation to the DCM model recognised the complex relationship between internal and external motivation and creativity. “Synergistic extrinsic motivators” (Amabile & Pratt, 2016, p. 176; Dacey & Lennon, 1998) are defined as motivators that support individuals to develop their competency or reinforce the value of their work rather than extrinsic motivators designed (or perceived) to control, thereby undermining an individual’s sense of self-determination.

In her earlier research, Amabile argued that people are most creative when intrinsically, rather than extrinsically, motivated (Amabile, 1979; Amabile et al., 1976, 1990). In subsequent research, Amabile and others (e.g., Amabile, 1993; Collins & Amabile, 1999; Eisenberger & Shannock, 2003; Hennessey, 2003; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) concluded that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators could motivate creative effort. In the DCM, Amabile and Pratt (2016) emphasise the importance of intrinsic motivation to creativity, however, they argue that extrinsic motivation plays a role in enhancing creativity in certain circumstances. Amabile and Pratt posited individuals who find their work meaningful are more intrinsically motivated and more likely to persist in their work. They underline the importance of meaning in determining whether individuals perceive external motivators as enabling or controlling.

Eisenberger and colleagues (Eisenberger et al., 1999; Eisenberger & Shanock, 2003) suggested that self-determination may impact whether extrinsic motivators positively or negatively impact creativity. They suggest that external reward may increase the perceived level of competence, resulting in increased intrinsic motivation, depending on the type of task being rewarded. They argue that when linked to high performance, extrinsic rewards enhance intrinsic motivation. Conversely, intrinsic motivation is diminished when workers are rewarded for what they perceive to be trivial tasks or when

performance criteria are not defined clearly (Eisenberger & Cameron, 1996; Eisenberger et al., 1996). Similarly, excessive managerial control over workers' behaviour is considered likely to impact feelings of autonomy negatively. Elliot and Thrash (2010) differentiate between approach and avoidance motivation. Approach motivation is defined as moving towards a positive stimulus, whereas avoidance motivation is the drive to move away from something perceived as a negative stimulus. Evaluation and recognition could be considered either approach or avoidance motivation dependent on the meaning assigned to the event. Similarly, uncertainty could be experienced as an aversive experience to be avoided or perceived as an opportunity to explore.

Whilst there are many debates in the literature about the impact of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation on creativity, the consensus is that intrinsic is preferable to extrinsic motivation (Hennessey, 2019). However, Puccio (2020) advocates viewing intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as polarities that are value-neutral. He argues that intrinsic motivation offers an emotional foundation for activities, encouraging exploration and persistence, whereas extrinsic motivation ensures delivery of outcomes. Puccio cautions that focusing on one polarity over the other can have a detrimental impact. For example, if an organisation emphasises extrinsic rewards or constraints at the expense of intrinsically motivating factors such as enjoyment or interest, motivation (and therefore creativity) will likely suffer.

### ***What motivates people to create?***

Having considered the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, there is a broader question about what drives people to create in the first place. Historically, a Freudian view of creativity as wish fulfilment and driven by psychopathology was used to explain creativity (Runco & McGarva, 2013). However, Gruber (1988) and Gruber and Wallace (2001) emphasise the importance of purpose as a motivator for creative work. Gruber's evolving systems approach considered creativity to be motivated by answering questions that the creator was curious about, whereas humanistic psychologists (e.g., Maslow, 1968; May, 1975; Rogers, 1961) posited that creative motivation was fuelled by a drive towards self-actualisation and fulfilling one's potential.

Self-determination theory (SDT: Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2002) focuses on the social-environmental conditions that facilitate or thwart intrinsic motivation and



healthy psychological development. The basic psychological needs theory (BPNT: Ryan & Deci, 2000), one of five sub-theories of SDT, proposes that individuals have three innate psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness) considered essential elements of self-motivation, human growth, and flourishing. White (1959) defined competence as an individual's ability to interact effectively with their environment, to have a sense of control of an outcome and experience mastery. Deci and Ryan (2010) argue that unexpected positive feedback on a task may contribute to an individual's feelings of competence and is therefore likely to increase intrinsic motivation. A natural step of healthy development is an individual's progression towards greater autonomy, which refers to the extent to which individuals feel able to act with a sense of agency, psychological freedom, and ownership of their actions (Deci et al., 2017; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy does not imply that individuals act entirely alone, simply that individuals choose how to act, even if those actions respond to others' wishes (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). The third element of BPNT, relatedness, captures the need to feel connected to others, love and be loved, and have a sense of attachment and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Whilst BPNT addresses the positive impact of meeting psychological needs, Ryan and Deci (2000, p.318) also address the "undermining, alienating, and pathogenic effects of need thwarting", which, they argue, leads to defensive psychological mechanisms that can adversely impact wellbeing.

Much research into creativity and intrinsic motivation somehow does not appear to capture the "yearning" to create (Worth, 2010, p. 4) or the feeling that one simply has no choice but to be creative (Gilbert, 2015). Waterman (1990, p. 47) uses the term "personal expressiveness" to describe activities characterised by intense involvement, a feeling of being complete when doing the activity and a sense that the activity is what the individual was "meant to do". Personal expressiveness begins to blur the boundaries between motivation, self-actualisation, flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997) and meaning. Waterman posits that self-actualisation is a complete and extensive form of intrinsic motivation. The link between self-actualisation and creativity is emphasised in Maslow's (1971) assertion that creativity and self-actualisation were likely synonymous.

***The Social Side of Creativity: The Importance of Relationships***

Theories of social creativity establish the importance of other people to the creative process. However, broader creativity theory captures the range and types of relationships that support creativity, such as more distant acquaintances (weak ties: Perry-Smith, 2006); supportive relationships with family and friends (Madjar, 2005) and mentor-type relationships (Allen et al., 2020). As Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2016) suggest, creative people need different types of relationships and support at varying stages of the creative process. Weak ties (Baer, 2012; Perry-Smith, 2006; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003) refer to networks of diffuse acquaintances or connections that typically involve a low level of emotional closeness and infrequent interaction and originate from outside the individual's usual social circle. A broad range of connections is considered to help creative people access different perspectives and a wider pool of creative ideas. As such, developing a wide and diverse range of relationships is considered helpful in stimulating idea generation (Perry-Smith, 2006). However, developing such relationships may be challenging in organisational settings where developing networks may not be considered an efficient use of time.

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of building "coalitions" to support the development and implementation of creative ideas (Baer, 2010, 2012; Dutton & Ashford, 1993). Baer argues that such relationships are vital when creative ideas are more radical. Ideas closer to current practice are less likely to be seen as contentious and risky and, therefore, need less advocacy. Within organisations, the importance of developing "sponsors" for creative ideas is critical—especially as Baer suggests—when ideas are disruptive and challenge the status quo. It is possible that many creative ideas do not progress due to there not being a suitable advocate willing to help persuade others of the idea's merit.

Whilst broad and wide networks are important for creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006; Baer, 2012), so are closer, supportive relationships. Madjar et al. (2002) highlight the need for supportive relationships with family and friends during the creative process that encourage persistence and ease the discomfort of uncertainty. They demonstrate a link between support for creativity from friends, family, supervisors, and co-workers and creative performance. Although the findings suggest that support is important, the research does not specifically define the nature of that support or the consequences if

support is lacking. John-Steiner (2000) explored the artistic and intellectual collaboration between partners and small groups in a close relationship, concluding that “an individual learns, creates, and achieves mastery in and through his or her relationships with other individuals” (p.5). In a similar vein, Csíkszentmihályi (1988) emphasised that support from caring adults such as parents, teachers, or mentors is vital for talented children to develop their creative potential. Furthermore, Stillman and Baumeister (2009) postulate that people with strong social and emotional bonds experience more positive emotions, life satisfaction, and wellbeing. However, there are conflicting perspectives on the importance of strong relationships and creativity. For example, Amabile and Pratt (2016) imply that family-like ties may hinder creativity. They argue that close relationships may lead to sharing similar perspectives that can hinder diverse thinking. However, Amabile and Pratt do not consider the importance of strong relationships in creating a work environment where it feels safe enough to take risks necessary for creativity and to cope with the uncertainty associated with being creative. As such, Amabile and Pratt appear to be understating the importance of strong, supportive relationships in the DCM.

The need to feel connected and have meaningful relationships with others has been established within psychological theorising as a basic human need that contributes to optimal human functioning and creativity (Dutton & Ragins, 2017; Maslow, 1954). In his PERMA model, Seligman (2011) positions relationships (the R in PERMA) as an integral component of flourishing. The need to belong or to maintain “interpersonal attachments” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 507) is considered to be a fundamental requirement for psychological wellbeing and motivation (Bowlby, 1975; Maslow, 1968). Conversely, research has found that the psychological pain of exclusion involves the same regions of the brain as physical pain (Dewall et al., 2011; MacDonald & Leary, 2005; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010). As Kaufman (2020 p. 38) states, “when one feels belonging, one feels accepted and seen, and when one is deprived of belonging, one feels rejected and invisible.”

Attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1979; Bowlby, 1969) posits that individuals seek to develop and maintain relationships that were reminiscent of their childhood attachment to caregivers, a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings” (Bowlby, p. 194). Early childhood relationships shape the child’s perceptions of their sense of self – their lovability and social competence – and the child’s perceptions of “others” – the

extent to which others are accessible, supportive and responsive to their needs (Snyder et al., 2010). Whereas Bowlby posits that adult attachments formed within organisations derive from the child's attachment to its mother, Baumeister and Leary argue that the need to belong drives the desire to develop supportive relationships with work colleagues. Wright et al. (2017) demonstrated an association between anxious and avoidant attachment styles as children and intolerance of uncertainty as adults, a type of cognitive bias that influences the extent to which uncertainty is perceived emotionally, cognitively and behaviourally (Dugas et al., 2004). Uncertain situations are perceived negatively, with ambiguous situations being the cause of stress and negative emotion (Buhr & Dugas, 2006). For individuals with a high level of intolerance of uncertainty, situations that are uncertain cause anxiety. It may be inferred that an individual's attachment style as a child may influence their perception of whether it is safe to creatively explore as an adult and their willingness to be uncertain.

### ***Systems Theory in Organisations***

Having considered social and systems models of creativity, systems theory in organisations will be considered to provide broader context of how creativity may be experienced within a complex system, such as an organisation.

The metaphor of the organisation as a living, evolving organism is based on general systems theory developed by von Bertalanffy (1972), which postulates that organisations interact with and are influenced by their environment (G. Morgan, 2006). Meadows (2008, p. 2) defines a system as “a set of things—people, cells, molecules... interconnected in such a way that they produce their pattern of behaviour over time.” In general systems theory, closed systems thinking applied to organisations assumes that behaviour is linear and rational, governed by “laws” reducing things to their constituent parts, inferring equilibrium and stasis as the natural order (Dooley, 1997). A frequently used metaphor is that of clockwork or the organisation as a machine that originates in Newtonian and Cartesian views of the world (Capra, 1996; G. Morgan, 2006). A closed system typically considers the system and environment in which it operates as distinct and separate concepts (Flood, 1999). The principles of equilibrium, determinism and reductionism are prevalent concepts in much of organisational theorising. They reflect a

frequently held view of an organisation and its people as rational, linear, and predictable (Dooley, 1997).

By contrast, the metaphor of an organisation as a living, evolving organism (Morgan, 2006) positions an organisation, like biological organisms, as open systems that must adapt and grow to survive. Similarly, organisations depend on their wider environment to meet their needs. In open systems, components are inter-connected and inter-dependent, exchanging resources with their environment (Anderson, 1999). Equally, individuals interact with multiple other systems such as their organisation, family, and friends, all of which influence and shape their thoughts and actions (Montuori, 2011b). An open system implies that stability, or equilibrium, is temporary and relative. Complex open systems tend to operate far from stability, referred to as the “edge of chaos” (Stacey, 2007, p. 183). Rather than viewing creativity as an exception to the usual ordered, structured world, a systems perspective views creativity as an inevitable response to constant adjustment, seeking balance over time (Montuori, 2011b). However, the rational, ordered world is comforting and is a defence against uncertainty. Defence mechanisms inhibit the willingness of systems to be open, as openness is a source of anxiety (Stacey, 1996).

The willingness of individuals within a system to seek a “wobbly balance” instead of stasis and certainty is a hallmark of the creative system (Stacey, 1996). Moran (2009) highlighted the use of the organism metaphor to describe creativity as a transformation process. Similarly, Barron (1955) describes creativity as an ecology, with three parts, comparable with elements present in biological evolution: the environment; the “organisms” (or individuals) who are affected by the environment; and the complex relationship between the individual and their physical, mental and social environment. Barron considered individuals to be dynamic systems “bounded yet open...in a continual state of disequilibrium” (p. 11). Barron’s ecology of creativity captures the inter-relatedness of creativity, positing that creativity occurs at a global and cellular level as “...interacting, interpenetrating systems” (p.4). From this vantage point, creativity is seen as highly relational and embedded. The creative person, process, product and press are meshed and inseparable (Montuori, 2011a).

Stacey (1996) argues that behaviour is governed by cultural and social “laws” in ways analogous to how natural laws govern the natural world. He suggests that these

behavioural “rules” can be conscious or unconscious and form the basis of organisational culture. In complex systems, control is an illusion (Flood, 1999). Whilst too much control from an organisation will stifle creativity, so will too little control. Stacey (2002, p. 481) refers to “bounded instability” as a dynamic process of self-organisation that does not shy away from tension but requires leaders who cope with a dynamic environment, enabling challenge to social norms and procedures, adjusting as necessary, accepting and working with the tensions that are part of dynamic systems and part of creativity. Dooley (1997) describes complex adaptive systems as having a paradoxical nature: order and randomness, freedom, and control, adapting to and constructing one’s environment. According to Stacey (1992), these inherent tensions should be deliberately surfaced rather than suppressed, which is often the case.

However, the question arises whether paradoxes should always be surfaced or whether, in some instances, the tension of paradox creates a fertile environment for creativity to flourish (Stacey, 2006). For organisms that prefer certainty (Zajonc, 1965), a continual state of disequilibrium may provoke anxiety. Creativity is yet another layer of instability. Montuori (1992) suggested that character traits usually associated with creative people (such as tolerance of ambiguity) are an expression of the individual acting as a dynamic and open system in contrast to people who operate as closed systems and attempt to maintain equilibrium. Montuori appears to be implying that the traits typically associated with creative individuals are also those associated with individuals who thrive within open systems.

### ***Summary***

Hennessey (2019) captures the complex, systemic nature of creativity observing that “creativity arises from a complex web of interrelated forces operating at multiple levels.” In a similar vein, Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) describe internal and external forces that impact creativity in an organisation. A significant contribution of Csíkszentmihályi and Amabile was to consider the social context in which creativity happens, expanding the debate from personal characteristics of creative people and individual creative activity to exploring the impact of the environment and other people on creativity. Systems theory positions organisations as living systems that must continually adapt and develop in order to thrive. There are similarities between the characteristics of open

systems and those of creative personalities, namely, the willingness to remain open to experience, to embrace uncertainty and cope with the tensions that are an integral feature of dynamic systems.

A particular strength of Amabile and Pratt's (2016) updated componential model lies in its recognition of creativity as a confluence of motivation, affect, and progress in meaningful work. Amabile and Kramer's (2011, p. 27) concept of "inner work life" highlighted the dynamic interaction between perceptions, emotions and motivation that influence the subjective experience of work. The inclusion of the dynamic feedback loops takes an important step in highlighting the complex and interconnected nature of creativity. However, there is further scope within the model to consider the dialectic nature of creativity and its inherent tensions.

Csikszentmihályi's (1996) systems model recognises the importance of tension as a source of creativity and tensions inherent in the personality traits of the creative person. And whilst the inclusion of tensions in the model implies emotion, Amabile's updated DCM explicitly references the impact of positive and negative emotions on creativity. Csikszentmihályi's model has mainly been applied to individuals and for understanding domain-changing creativity, whereas the DCM (Amabile & Pratt, 2016) considers the individual in the context of an organisation. Rather than considering the models separately, a review of the strengths of each model provides an opportunity to consider creativity more fully in an organisational context. Questions that neither Csikszentmihályi's or Amabile's models appear to answer include how external and internal forces interact to shape what it feels like to be creative at work or how the psychological forces within an individual, such as needs, emotions, defence mechanisms and perceptions, impact the creative experience. What does it feel like to be creative at work? How are the tensions inherent in creativity experienced and how do leaders shape the experience of being creative at work?

## **Part 2: Second Wave Positive Psychology – Paradox, Polarity and Tension**

Positive psychology (PP) was envisioned as a response to psychology's apparent focus on mental deficit, to focus instead on human strengths, flourishing and what "makes life worth living" (Seligman & Csikszentmihályi, 2000, p. 5). However, PP was criticised for polarising so-called positive experiences such as happiness or optimism as desirable, and

negative phenomena (such as pessimism) as undesirable (Held, 2004; Lazarus, 2003; Lomas, 2016b). Situations are rarely positive or negative in a pure sense (Wong, 2012). Many phenomena comprise both positive and negative aspects and cannot always be neatly categorised into good or bad (Lazarus). As with the yin-yang symbol, positive and negative elements contain the seed of their opposite (Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Engaging with experiences that provoke uncomfortable emotions, thoughts or behaviours holds the potential for personal growth and insight (Ivtzan et al., 2016). Furthermore, the appraisal of a situation as positive or negative is generally contextual (Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003; Lomas & Ivtzan, 2016).

Held (2004, p.11) proposed a “second wave” of PP was necessary, now referred to as both “PP 2.0” (Wong, 2011, 2019) and SWPP (Ivtzan et al., 2016). SWPP represents a re-balancing of PP to encompass both positive and negative, moving away from a binary interpretation of life to the potential integration of the polarities inherent in human existence and recognising the “inevitable dialectics between positive and negative aspects of living” (Ryff & Singer, 2003, p. 272). Lomas (2016a) proposes four principles of SWPP: *appraising* (the extent to which something is assessed as good or bad); *co-valence* (many phenomena comprise both positive and negative aspects); *complementarity* (light and dark are essential partners, different sides of the same coin that define one another); and *evolution* (positive psychology continues to evolve, PP1.0 evolved from traditional psychology, SWPP/PP2.0 (Ivtzan et al., 2016; Wong, 2011, 2019) has evolved from PP1.0. Third wave positive psychology (TWPP: Lomas et al., 2020) is a further evolution, or wave that encompasses and builds on the first and second waves of PP. TWPP broadens the focus of enquiry from individuals to explore the socio-cultural factors that influence wellbeing. Furthermore, Lomas et al. argue epistemological and methodological approaches that expand PP beyond its positivistic roots are important aspects of the nascent third wave. With its emphasis on complexity and systems thinking, TWPP creates the opportunity to consider the context of the social systems in which individuals live and work. Using the metaphor of waves that overlap and build on previous waves, TWPP is intended to develop PP further, encompassing the first and second waves to create a unified basis for understanding human flourishing as complex and dialectic (Lomas et al., 2020).



### ***Positive Psychology and Creativity***

The scientific study of creativity has been acknowledged as a feature of PP theorising (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014; Forgeard & Kaufman, 2016; Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). However, it is evident from a review of the relevant literature that creativity has received little attention or development from a PP perspective. Given that creativity was cited as a pillar of PP (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000), why has creativity not seen the same level of theoretical development within PP as topics such as resilience, gratitude, and happiness (Simonton, 2009)? Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p.433) captured the contribution creativity makes to wellbeing, reflecting that creativity could “make day-to-day experiences more vivid, more enjoyable [and] more rewarding.” Similarly, Sawyer (2012, p.409) described creativity as a “healing, life-affirming activity” and Karpova et al., (2011, p. 53) suggested that creativity is essential when helping individuals cope with uncertainty and adapt to the multitude of professional and personal changes that abound. Even though SWPP has been in existence for over a decade, creativity still has not attracted much interest, despite SWPP’s aim to be more integrative and balanced than PP1.0. TWPP offers a way of understanding the creative process in all its complexity: the light and the dark, the individual and cultural aspects of being creative, and the interaction between them. Exploring the darker experiences of creativity through the lens of TWPP may offer a more balanced and systemic understanding of the creative process.

Where research on creativity and PP does exist, it typically positions creativity as a cognitive process (e.g., Simonton, 2009) or considers ways in which creativity contributes to flourishing (Conner et al., 2016; Forgeard & Eichner, 2014). Considering the evolution of PP, Kaufman (2018) observes that meaning has become more prominent within PP theorising, whereas creativity has become more marginal, being “pushed...to the background” (p. 4). Kaufman argues that humanism emphasises how the creative process may lead to growth and development. In contrast, PP focuses on wellbeing and considers creativity to be a core character strength. He argues that PP has adopted a results-focused, individualistic view of creativity that emphasises positive outcomes and increased wellbeing (Bacon, 2005; Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). For example, Forgeard and Eichner (2014) recognise that creativity is a topic of interest to PP; however, they position the main interest of PP to be the study of human flourishing and defining the individual, contextual and organisational factors that enabled individuals to thrive.

Their chapter, entitled “Creativity as a Target and Tool for Positive Interventions” focuses on how creative interventions, such as taking a creative photograph, can help flourishing. And indeed, research findings (e.g., Pennebaker, 1997; Rogers et al., 2012; Wilkinson & Chilton, 2018) demonstrate the benefits to wellbeing of arts-based therapies. However, Forgeard and Eichner’s perspective exemplifies a fundamental challenge for PP regarding creativity theorising. Creativity is seen as a means of flourishing rather than thinking about ways in which PP can inform the study of creativity.

Kimble (1984, p.833) distinguishes between two cultures in psychology: a “humanistic culture” that is ideographic, holistic, and intuitive, and an objectivist, “scientific” culture that favours reductionism and a nomothetic approach. Bacon (2005) distinguishes between focus strengths and balance strengths. He postulates that focus strengths, such as creativity and leadership, prioritise personal achievement. By contrast, balance strengths (e.g., wisdom, kindness, fairness) emphasise harmony and integration. Kaufman (2018) suggests that a reason for PP’s lack of attention to creativity may be due to the tendency of PP research to prioritise strengths that improve the world more broadly, resulting in a focus on balance strengths rather than focus strengths. However, creativity can fit into a definition of strengths that emphasises fairness and kindness, and that can improve the world. Kaufman’s appears to assume that creativity is individual rather than potentially communal or for a greater good. A more compelling reason why PP has not emphasised creativity research may lie in Kimble’s distinction between humanistic and scientific cultural divides.

Humanistic psychologists argue that creativity is a facet of everyday life associated with healthy psychological development and wellbeing (Maslow, 1971; Richards, 2007; Rogers, 1961). Maslow posits that creativity and self-actualisation are interdependent, speculating they may be synonymous. In viewing creativity as a facet of self-actualisation, Maslow positioned creativity at the top of his hierarchy of needs. As such, before creativity could happen, the basic needs for security, belonging, connection and self-esteem needed to be met (Kaufman, 2020). Runco et al. (1991) confirmed the association between self-actualisation and creativity. In their study, 84 college students were asked to complete three questionnaires measuring personality traits, attitudes and preferences considered to be consistent with self-actualisation theory (the *How Do You Think Test*: Davis & Subkoviak, 1975), the *Adjective Check List* (Gough & Heilbrun, 1980) and the *Short*

*Index of Self-Actualisation* (Jones & Crandall, 1986). More recently, Kaufman (2018) developed the 30-item Characteristics of Self-Actualisation Scale to examine Maslow's theory of human motivation. The findings indicated that self-actualising individuals were motivated by growth, exploration and curiosity (which Maslow (1955) called "growth motivation") rather than deficit needs (deficiency motivation). Furthermore, characteristics of self-actualisation were associated with greater wellbeing, including self-acceptance, positive relationships, mastery, purpose in life and autonomy.

Wellbeing models such as psychological wellbeing (PWB: Ryff & Singer, 2003); subjective wellbeing (SWB: Diener, 1984); or PERMA (Seligman, 2011) capture components of wellbeing which share similarities with conditions necessary for creativity. SWB (Diener, 1984) is based in the hedonic tradition of wellbeing, emphasising the pursuit of happiness and a pleasant life. SWB comprises life satisfaction, positive affect, and absence of negative affect. By contrast, PWB (Ryff, 1989) considers how people thrive in the face of life's challenges and how they find meaning. PWB captures six components of more eudaimonic wellbeing: self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life, and personal growth. As Part 1 of this literature review highlighted, meaningful work and accomplishments, positive and negative emotions, and relationships have been shown to influence creativity.

PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment: Seligman, 2011) is a relatively recent model of wellbeing, first proposed in 2011 based on a decades of prior research on flourishing and wellbeing such as subjective wellbeing (E. Diener, 1984) and psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989). Seligman described PERMA as an update to his Authentic Happiness theory of wellbeing (the pleasant life, the engaged life, the meaningful life: Seligman, 2002) to better incorporate subjective and psychological wellbeing theories (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989). Seligman added relationships to recognise the importance of social support and accomplishment to reflect literature demonstrating the importance of mastery and goal achievement to wellbeing (Vella-Brodrick et al., 2009). Over the last decade there has been a progressive exploration of PERMA and establishment of the model through research and practical application (e.g., Butler & Kern, 2016). PERMA appears to have a face validity and appeal that many people find helpful. There are clear signs that organisations turn to PERMA to understand their own experiences and as a means of addressing the wellbeing of their employees (e.g., UK Civil

Service), suggesting that perhaps, the simplicity of the PERMA mnemonic and its practical applications make it a valuable framework for organisations to consider the wellbeing of their employees.

Seligman (2018) proposes that each of the five measurable elements of PERMA contribute to wellbeing and each component can be defined and measured independently. However, they correlate strongly, pointing to their interconnectedness. Critics of the PERMA model (e.g., Goodman et al., 2018; Wong, 2012a) questioned whether five elements can fully represent flourishing or whether important aspects of wellbeing were missing, for example, health, safety, and autonomy. For example, Wong argued that PERMA's focus on the individual ignored the significant influence of context and environment on the subjective experience of wellbeing. Wong further argued that PERMA paid insufficient attention to the role of meaning in enhancing wellbeing, suggesting that Seligman demonstrated the same positivity bias for which PP had previously been criticised (e.g., Held, 2004; Kashdan & Steger, 2011).

In response to his critics, Seligman (2018) argued that, given his interest in designing interventions that build wellbeing, PERMA represented a theory that enabled interventions aimed at reinforcing those elements of wellbeing to be developed. He suggested that PERMA was not exhaustive and that a parsimonious theory comprising five elements was more practical than a model incorporating many more aspects of wellbeing. And as Wong (2012) acknowledged, PERMA has brought PP to a broader audience. The similarity between some characteristics of wellbeing and creativity suggests that factors influencing wellbeing may also facilitate creativity. In seeking to encourage creativity in the workplace, perhaps focusing on employee wellbeing may be an important first step?

Whilst creativity is largely understood as a positive phenomenon and source of wellbeing (Rasulzada, 2014), creativity has a darker side. Creativity that has negative or unintended outcomes, such as the discovery of micro-organisms subsequently used for germ warfare, is differentiated from malevolent creativity, defined as creativity intended to cause harm or which has unethical or immoral aims (Cropley, 2016; Kapoor et al., 2016; McLaren, 1993). There has been much interest in whether a link exists between creativity and mental illness (e.g., Cropley, 2010; Kaufman, 2014; O'Neal, 2020; Schlesinger, 2009).

However, as with many other aspects of creativity, the answer is complex. Creativity is associated with both mental illness and mental health.

### ***Polarity, Paradox and Tension***

The co-existence and complementarity of dialectic forces is central to SWPP theorising, and as scholars have suggested, creativity is full of paradox and tension (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2017). Dialectics are conceptualised as opposing poles in a “both/and” relationship that are interdependent, dynamic and ever-evolving (Ford & Backoff, 1988; Guilmot & Ehnert, 2015; Lomas & Ivztan, 2016). Tension arises from the co-dependency and interconnectedness of the poles: neither can exist without the other (Lomas, 2016c).

Other terms used to describe the existence of polarity are paradox, duality and dilemma (Janssens & Steyaert, 1999). Paradox is defined by Ford and Backoff (1988, p.89) as “...some 'thing' that is constructed by individuals when oppositional tendencies are brought into recognisable proximity through reflection or interaction.” Two core elements characterise paradox: contradiction and interdependence, which persist over time (Cameron, 1986; Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Lewis, 2000), occurring when reality and our ideas about reality do not match (Koot et al., 1996). Dualities assume the existence of two opposing poles, an “either/or choice” and are not seen as having interdependency; the poles are seen as separate, irreducible and opposing (Guilmot & Ehnert, 2015; Papachroni et al., 2016). A dilemma represents an “either-or” situation, where one of the alternatives must be preferred over the other. The tensions resulting from dilemmas are, in part, due to the requirement to choose between them.

Early 20th century psychoanalysts such as Freud, Rank and Jung recognised the dialectical or paradoxical nature of life and the psyche's creative and destructive motivations (Smith & Berg, 1987). The inescapable paradox of humanity is that as we are living, we are dying. The concept of polarity is fundamental to Jung's psychology. He considered the existence of opposing forces to be at the heart of human functioning and creativity (Jones, 1999). Jung (1989) saw opposites as giving life meaning and considered that psychological wellbeing results from integrating the conscious and unconscious aspects of the self. Jung proposed that meaning could be found, or created, from the paradox brought into being at the point where opposites meet (Smith & Berg, 1987). The

Jungian concept of paradox includes ambiguity, dilemma and tension between opposite poles (Harris, 1996) and the term's polarity and paradox are essentially interchangeable, suggesting that paradox exists whether one is conscious of the paradox or not. The conscious mind is the primary interlocutor with the ego. Its opposite is the unconscious mind which carries all that we are not aware of, such as the repressed, painful or rejected memories along with the strengths and potential that has not been able to push through the murky depths of the unconscious (Abrams & Zweig, 1991).

Richo (1999) suggests that the ego separates or divides "reality" because we seek to resolve the tension of opposites to create something simpler to perceive or relate to. The human tendency to prefer certainty results in individuals putting cognitive boundaries in place to protect themselves from contradiction, choosing to see the world in an "either/or" way as a means of coping with the uncertainty presented by recognising polarity (Tetenbaum, 1998; Tse, 2013). Cixous (as cited in Carr, 2001) sees polarities as being established in a relationship of conflict. One end of the polarity must be repressed or resisted in a struggle for power and dominance. A situation where the polarities are engaged in a battle for supremacy is likely to be a source of internal tension where emphasising one polarity heightens the link with and need for the other. The suppression of the rejected polarity can trigger defence mechanisms that inhibit change and maintain negative reinforcing cycles (Sundaramurthy & Lewis, 2003). The core issue here is not that opposites exist, but that supremacy is given to one pole over the other, that we attempt to suppress or negate the opposite so that it fits with our view of how things are or should be (Tantillo, 2002).

Being able to integrate polarities is described by Schneider (1990) as "optimal living" (p.27). He suggests that integration is a state rather than a trait, with people potentially achieving moments, rather than lifetimes, of synthesis or integration of opposites. The notion of integration is a dynamic, ever-changing concept and is highly contextual. It also requires courage – is one able to acknowledge polarities in each situation, or does one pull back from them? Schneider argues that many people are afraid of contradictions, the constrictive or expansive "terror" (p. 139), suggesting that people who tackle polarities head-on and retain a degree of control over them are healthier, more integrated, and more creative. Importantly, Schneider does not suggest that this means that the polarities are always in balance, rather that people who are living optimally dare to challenge and

confront their constrictive and expansive capacities and find the most helpful blend to meet the relevant demands.

The existential paradox was described by Kierkegaard (as cited in Schneider, 1990) as an ebb and flow between the opposing forces, the "finite" (personal realm and social norms) and the "infinite" (uncertainty and exploration). He argues that the finite realm is emphasised by rationality. Our system of formal logic creates order and structure, which, he believes, protects the conscience from the fear of the unknown, the infinite. There are both expansive, creative possibilities of life and, at the same time, its meaninglessness in the face of death (Ford & Backoff, 1988; Hampden-Turner, 1981). Barron (1995, p. 35) captures the need for paradox graphically and powerfully stating that "the paradoxical must be accepted as part of human design. Without stability, we can have no flexibility; without discipline, no freedom; without knowledge, no creation; without subjectivity, no objectivity."

Researchers (e.g., Cameron & Quinn, 1988; Evans & Doz, 1999; Tse, 2013; Smith & Tracey, 2016) argue that paradox is socially or cognitively constructed. For a paradox to exist, it must be perceived as paradoxical by the individual as being so. As such, it implies a degree of cognitive appraisal of a situation as contrary to cultural or societal expectations of how things should be. Rejecting the polar view, Smith and Lewis (2011) suggest that paradox is both ontological and socially constructed and that whilst paradoxes are an integral feature of social systems, paradox may lay dormant until social conditions such as change, or an individual's cognition, bring the paradox to the fore. It should also be recognised that paradox may be unconscious. The psyche may deploy defence mechanisms to suppress the unwanted paradox. Whilst there is a perception of paradox being negative given its contradictory nature, it can also be helpful. As Eisenhardt and Westcott (1988) describe, paradox has the "power to generate creative insight and change" (p.170). Accepting and tolerating the paradoxical situation can help the individual discover meaning within contradictions by noticing the links between the polarities (Vince & Broussine, 1996).

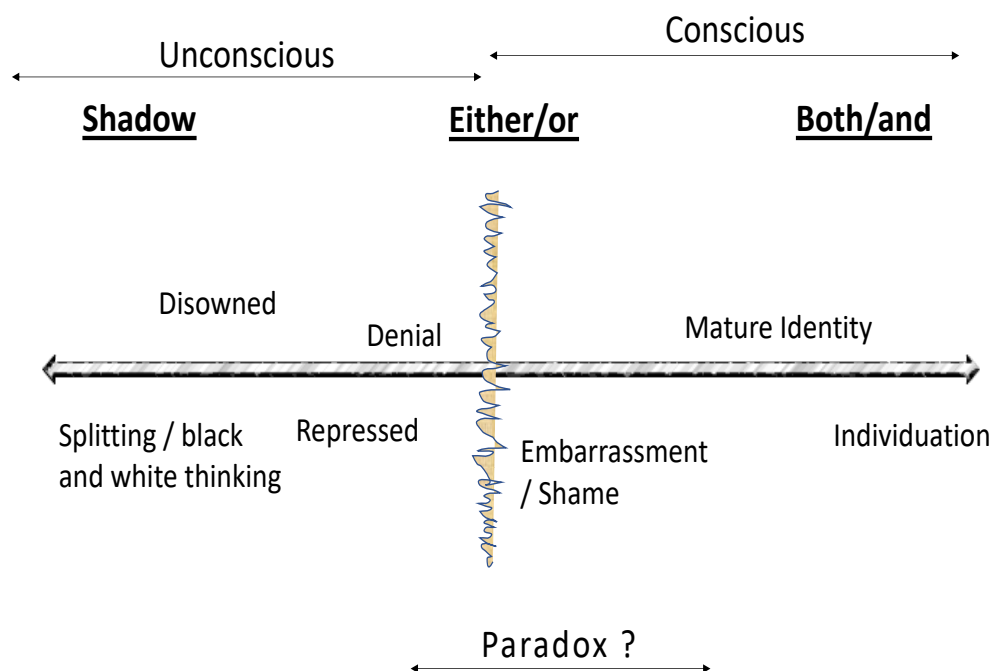
Polarities may become paradoxical when they enter consciousness, and the social actor becomes aware of the contradictions within themselves, that they perceive to be illogical or confusing. Being aware of a polarity may not necessarily mean that the actor experiences contradiction, which may be dependent on personality and context. Instead,

it is proposed that the paradox described in Jungian psychology is, in some cases, the sensation of tension. The potential space where paradox may exist is represented in

Figure 5. The diagram illustrates possible positions along a continuum from unconscious aspects of the self on the left-hand side (where aspects of the self are repressed or denied), to a perspective that views life as a series of binary either/or choices, through to what Jung described as individuation, the process of becoming one's true self (Harris, 1996) and the acceptance of life as a balance over time.

**Figure 5**

*Polarity Continuum (adapted from Bértholo, 2017)*



### ***Paradox and Creativity***

Creativity is described as "[a] bundle of paradoxes" by Cropley (1997), highlighting the extent to which seemingly contradictory facets of creativity appear to exist more or less simultaneously, such as the requirement of creativity to both break the existing rules of social norms, and yet do so in a socially acceptable way. Creativity is both a gift of the talented few, and it is also present in everyone, the paradox being that it is both rare and universal (Cropley).

The theory of bisociation (Koestler, 1964) envisions creativity as a combination of different, opposing concepts and realities, and relies on unconscious processes to synthesise divergent ideas. As Robertson (1991, p. 191) argues, "creative expression is a



direct link into the unconscious of every individual." What marks out creative thought is the ability to hold opposing perspectives at the same time. This collision of the rational and irrational is the hallmark of creativity, which actively searches out new and unexpected combinations to existing problems (Bilton & Leary, 2002; Blasko & Mokwa, 1986; Hampden-Turner, 1981). Koestler maintains that conventional thinking tends to ignore paradox and ambiguity, even though it is an inherent part of human existence. Complex problems are considered dissociated parts rather than a gestalt, and solutions tend to be based on one dominant part of the question rather than the whole. The term "holon" describes how everything is simultaneously a part and a whole (Koestler, 1978, p. 6). Each holon forms part of a larger one, and at the same time, is made up of lower-level systems. Montuori (2011b) captures a similar idea when he calls for a systems approach to creativity as individuals are embedded in an extensive ecology – "every part exists in a larger whole, which in turn is part of a larger whole" (p. 416).

Rothenberg (1971, 2016) observes that highly creative individuals actively seek out interdependent contradictions as a source of inspiration. Their creative ability stems, in part at least, from their willingness and ability to juxtapose conflicting or opposing ideas. He posits that when a creative product embodies these oppositional tendencies, they hold within them a greater ability to surprise with their novelty. The symbol of Janus was used to represent the complexity of the creative process, described as the "natural unity and harmony inherent in apparent opposites" (p. 44). Rothenberg (1982) differentiates his concept of Janusian thinking from the Jungian concept of polarity, describing Janusian thinking as a conscious cognitive process within creativity rather than a product of a psychic structure made up of opposites. He posits that the cognitive ability to accept the potential validity of both polarities and not necessarily seek to reconcile or resolve them is a feature of the psychological functioning of creative people. His theory suggests that creative individuals actively and deliberately conceptualise things simultaneously, despite them appearing illogical and contradictory.

### ***Tension***

There is a consensus amongst researchers that for creativity to occur, some degree of tension is required (Fritz, 1989; Senge, 2010; Tardif & Sternberg, 1988). Smith and Lewis (2011) propose that individuals are more likely to realise their potential by dynamically managing tensions. Furthermore, research suggests that managing tensions created by

paradox facilitates resilience through reducing stress and anxiety (Farjoun, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1999). The source of tension can come from several factors, for example, “de-structuration” (Barron, 1988, p.81), the rejection of the status quo to create the new, or the tension created by the attempt to assimilate seeming polarities. Senge (2010) uses the phrase “creative tension” to describe the gap between current reality and the desired end state, which he sees as a potential source of negative emotions, frustration, and anxiety as it brings into sharp relief the scale of the change required. Creative tension may well be another term for expressing cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962), the gap between how we see the world and how we want it to be.

Similarly, tensions are an inherent part of organisational life (Trethewey & Ashcraft, 2004). Putnam et al. (2016) describe tensions as feeling states that frequently occur due to frustration, uncertainty, blockages and, potentially, paralysis in dealing with paradoxes (Lewis, 2000; Smith & Berg, 1987; Smith & Lewis, 2011; Vince & Broussine, 1996). Miron-Spektor and Paletz (2017) highlight tensions between individuals (such as differing perspectives, ideas, and interests), and organisational processes (such as strategies, goals, and leader demands). The human need, in a Western context at least, for logic and internal consistency means that we drive towards attempting to resolve, or at least ignore, contradiction, to create something familiar and safe (Cialdini et al., 1995; Farson, 1997; Van de Ven, 1983) and to seek resolution to tensions (Davis et al., 1997). However, Graetz and Smith (2008) explain that “an absolute reconciliation [of paradox] is unwarranted and counterproductive” (p.277), a view supported by Quinn and Cameron (1988) who suggest that reconciliation of paradox is unnecessary and doing so may lead to a tensionless state which results in stasis within the system.

However, tension resulting from the co-existence of opposites is considered vital (in all senses of the word) in preventing individual or organisational stasis or what Bateson (2000, p. 64) refers to as schismogenesis or the “creation of division.” Schismogenesis describes a self-reinforcing spiral where an action or characteristic builds upon itself until it reaches an extreme or dysfunctional point (Cameron, 1986; Evans & Doz, 1992). The term typically refers to dysfunction, but does it have to be dysfunctional? Creating a rift or division may help stimulate new perspectives or, as Bateson suggests, prevent organisational stasis.

Moreover, Schneider (1990) refers to the anxiety that can present in the face of contradiction. There is a tension between the old and the new, the comfort of the past, and future uncertainty (Lewis, 2000). However, creative tension can also be a source of energy, a motivation to transcend the gap, to move towards the desired end state. Whilst holding the tension can be helpful, it is not always a comfortable place to be. Fritz (1989) gives the example of stretching an elastic band. As it is stretched, tension is created. The elastic band tends to pull back to its original shape to resolve the tension in the system. Paradoxical tensions challenge the ego and, as such, can result in anxiety and defensiveness. As Barron (1964, p.81) states, “the creative process itself embodies tension, and individuals who distinguish themselves in artistic, scientific, and entrepreneurial creation exemplify vividly in their persons the incessant dialectic between integration and diffusion, convergence and divergence, thesis and antithesis.”

Uncertainty causes tension that needs to be resolved. As such, uncertainty is a state that people typically seek to avoid (Bar-Anan et al., 2009; Burton, 2009). Montuori (2014) suggests that situations that alter one’s worldview may be experienced as a threat, resulting in anxiety and a drive to restore certainty and order to things. The term “Cartesian anxiety” (Bernstein, 1983, p. 16) describes the existential challenge presented by the paradox of certainty and uncertainty. Suppose one succumbs to the “grand and seductive either/or” (Bernstein p.18). In that case, an uncertain situation is wrong and must be resolved as quickly as possible to restore one’s comfortable position at the other end of the polarity.

However, Wilson et al. (2005) suggest that uncertainty can also be a source of pleasure. Minimising uncertainty increases the predictability of the world around us, and thus lessens anxiety. However, it can potentially lessen the excitement and curiosity arising from uncertainty. Therefore, individuals may inadvertently reduce their potential for pleasure by seeking to resolve uncertainty as quickly as possible. Kagan (1972, p. 52) indicated that the drive to resolve uncertainty (which he saw as being synonymous with curiosity) was one of the primary motives for human behaviour and was a motivation to seek “cognitive harmony, consonance, equilibrium, or simply the motive to know.” Loewenstein (1994) suggests that curiosity has a powerful motivational drive that makes people willing to tolerate the discomfort of uncertainty to gain pleasure from satisfying their curiosity and reducing their uncertainty – the “pleasure paradox”. Enduring the

tension of uncertainty is a necessary price for satisfying the creative person's curiosity and seeking clarity. Humanistic psychology (e.g., May, 1975) positions tolerance of uncertainty as occurring when a creative person's capability meets the demands of the situation (interestingly, a criterion of flow: Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). Isen et al. (1987) suggest a link between cognitive flexibility, creativity, and psychological wellbeing. Therefore, is it possible that managing the tensions resulting from paradox may facilitate creativity by reducing negative affect caused by paradoxical tensions? Or indeed, that happier people who think more broadly may be more open to or tolerant of paradoxes?

Whilst most of us seek to resolve dissonance, some people seem prepared to hold the discord and step into dissonance (Slater, 2006). Research suggests that creative people have a high tolerance for the contradictions inherent in creativity. They can also use this tension to their advantage (Bilton & Leary, 2002; Tardif & Sternberg, 1988). What is it about creative individuals that seemingly enables them to hold the tension created by paradox rather than seeking to resolve it quickly? The traits of creative individuals have been identified as including openness, attraction to complexity, tolerance of ambiguity, flexibility, and a strong sense of self (e.g., Amabile, 1988; Barron & Harrington, 1981; McMullan, 1976; Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Shalley, 1995), so in part, the clue may lie in the character traits of the creative person. In writing about the creative personality, Csíkszentmihályi (1996) describes the "antithetical traits" of creative people that exist in "dialectical tension" (pp. 57-58). However, as his writing primarily focuses on the creative individual, he does not expand on how those dialectical tensions are experienced in workplace creativity.

Barron (1995) suggests that creative individuals may demonstrate a greater ability to synthesise or transcend polarity, enabling them to cope with and accept the inevitable tensions associated with creativity. In his foundational study, Barron argued that creative people were open to exploring their inner being, preferred complexity and ambiguity, were able to tolerate a high level of disorder and create order from chaos (Barron, 1969; Montuori, 2003; Richards, 2006). Barron's perspective suggests that creative people may be able to accept the messiness of being creative and not find the creative process to be paradoxical or a source of tension in the Jungian sense, merely accepting the both/and nature of their personality. The maelstrom of antinomies may, at times, be a source of tension for creative people, but having recognised the complexity and the existence of

opposites, they are not necessarily perceived as being either contradictory or problematic. Given that creative people appear to be attracted to complexity, it is possible that they are more accepting and potentially more comfortable with, and maybe even thrive on, the complexity and contradictory nature of existence.

### ***Coping with Polarity, Paradox and Tension***

Individuals typically seek to come to terms with paradox by putting boundaries in place and attempting to make sense of the paradox (Lewis, 2000). However, to transcend polarities, one must first be aware of their existence and how competing tensions impact attitudes and behaviours. Guilmot and Vas (2011, p. 5) defined coping as the “combination of efforts to reconcile, use constructively, or accept paradoxical phenomena and to manage (i.e., master, tolerate, reduce, minimise), or overcome the paradoxical tensions which strain or exceed a person’s resources.” Negatively perceived threats occur not just from external events but also threats to the self, identity, beliefs or worldview (Markus & Herzog, 1991).

Scholars (e.g., Paletz et al., 2018; Peng & Nisbett, 1999) observe that people from Eastern cultures seemingly are more comfortable with paradox than those in the West. Paletz et al. differentiate between Western approaches to dialecticism which emphasise resolving contradiction through thesis-antithesis-synthesis (e.g., Hegelian, and Marxist dialectics), and naïve dialecticism (prevalent in Eastern cultures) that accepts the co-existence of opposites. They argue that the principal difference between the approaches to dialectical thinking is the way people react affectively and cognitively to the experience of contradiction. The Chinese “middle way” (Chen, 2002, p. 179) refers to the acceptance that paradoxical tensions may not need to be resolved, and to the tolerance of co-existing opposites, both within and more broadly. Indeed, a feature of East Asian dialectics is that tensions may never need to be resolved (Paletz et al., 2018). Eastern philosophy considers paradox to be a means of exploring human existence. The yin-yang symbol depicts the opposites of light and dark, masculine and feminine, life and death, which are seen as interdependent opposites to be integrated and balanced (Chen, 2002).

Poole and Van de Ven (1989) proposed four methods of coping with paradox:

- *Opposition* – keeping poles separate and appreciating the contrasts between them.

- *Spatial separation* – positioning polarities at different levels of analysis.
- *Temporal separation* – considering the poles of a paradox one after the other.
- *Synthesis* – reframing the paradox.

More recent theorising about coping with paradox (e.g., Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008) suggests transcendence as a means of recognising the complex interdependency between polarities rather than through passive means such as ignoring the paradox or by trying to resolve it. However, the means of transcendence suggested are primarily cognitive. Andriopoulos and Lewis suggest cognitive processes such as changing mental models and splitting the polarity of possibilities and constraints to focus on one or the other.

Some researchers advocate embracing and learning to live with paradox or acceptance (Clegg et al., 2002; Lewis, 2000; Schneider, 1990). Reflecting the East Asian approach to paradox, acceptance requires letting go of expectations of a linear and rational world, and accepting that paradoxes are omnipresent and unsolvable (M. J. Chen, 2002; Paletz et al., 2018; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Schneider argues that accepting paradox offers a sense of freedom. Murnighan and Conlon (1991) conducted semi-structured interviews with eighty professional string-quartet musicians to explore internal group dynamics in working groups. They noticed that participants were conscious of tensions inherent in the group. Their need for autonomy, coupled with the strong group leadership, created tension. However, by accepting the presence of tensions and being open about them, they avoided unhelpful conflict. Once the tensions have been accepted, confronting, and openly discussing them enabled the quartet members to cope with paradox. However, to openly address and discuss tensions, it is essential to create an environment where it feels safe to discuss them. In so doing, the likelihood of feeling constrained or paralysed by the paradox is decreased (Ford & Ford, 1994; Smith & Berg, 1987; Vince & Broussine, 1996).

Transcending paradox considers that everything exists in relationship to another, be that at a social, environmental, or Empyrean<sup>1</sup> level. The term “balance”, frequently used in conjunction with polarities, does not imply a static situation, nor does it suggest that the alternatives are equally weighted (Pascale, 1990). The concept of holding polarities in balance can be likened to playing a stringed instrument, where the strings must be held at different tensions according to the context. It is an ongoing task, a constant adjustment (Smith & Lewis, 2011) or oscillation (McMullan, 1976) between the poles to maintain balance over time.

Cognitive frames represent a way of making sense of and creating a context for complex situations. They help us interpret the world we live in (Denison, Hooijberg, & Quinn, 1995; Lin & McDonough, 2014; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Walsh, 1995). Several terms have been used to describe cognitive processes that relate to an individual’s willingness or ability to tolerate, and perhaps even thrive within, the tensions created by paradox: cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962); cognitive closure (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2012); and paradoxical frames (Bartunek, 1988; Smith & Tushman, 2005).

Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) is the psychological need to resolve contradictory or conflicting beliefs, values or perceptions, especially when there is an emotional attachment to our ideas or way of viewing the world – i.e., the world is different from how we want it to be, creating a desire to change something to fit our belief system. Festinger proposed that cognitive dissonance is most uncomfortable when a significant element of an individual’s self-concept is questioned.

The motivation to seek cognitive closure (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2012; Kruglanski & Webster, 1996) is defined as the need for a quick and conclusive answer to a question and a dislike of ambiguity and uncertainty. An individual’s motivation for closure is seen as a continuum from a high need for closure to a high desire to avoid closure. The characteristic of openness, considered a trait of creative people (e.g., Barron &

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<sup>1</sup> The highest or most exalted part or sphere of heaven; (in ancient cosmology) the sphere of the pure element of fire (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.-b1). At the end of Dante’s *Paradiso* (Canto XXX), he visits God in the Empyrean.

Harrington, 1981), suggests that tolerance for dissonance and delayed need for closure enables the creative person to remain open to exploring possibilities and only close and converge when necessary for completing a task. A parallel could be drawn between a willingness to stay open and the process of divergent thinking, and between seeking closure and the narrowing-down process of convergent thinking. Time and situational pressures (e.g., deadlines, resolution imposed by hierarchical supervisors) are likely to increase the need for closure, at which point, tolerance of divergent views is less welcomed. From the perspective of organisational creativity, if individuals are at different positions on the continuum and under pressure to seek closure prematurely, their creative ideas may be less readily accepted.

Paradoxical frames (Miron-Spektor et al., 2011; Smith & Tracey, 2016; Smith & Tushman, 2005; Westenholz, 1993) are cognitive mechanisms that facilitate both/and thinking, resulting in new connections and ideas (Lewis, 2000; Luscher & Lewis, 2008; Smith & Tushman, 2005). Miron-Spektor and Paletz (2017) note the commonalities between paradoxical frames and “naïve” dialectical thinking in which contradictions do not need to be resolved. Smith and Tushman identify two cognitive processes necessary for managing contradictory situations: integrating and differentiating. Integrating involves identifying the possible linkages between polarities, whereas differentiating involves identifying and articulating the differences between oppositional tendencies.

Westenholz (1993) equates thinking in paradoxical frames with divergent thinking, where a problem may have many possible, potentially contradictory solutions. In their research, Miron-Spektor et al. (2011) demonstrated a link between thinking in paradoxical frames and creativity, suggesting that paradoxical frames create an implicit or explicit sense of conflict that enhanced participants’ complex thinking. They found that paradoxical frames increased individuals’ ability and willingness to recognise contradiction and to identify potential new linkages. However, it was a controlled experiment using tasks that were not within the natural setting of the employee’s work and tested a single paradox dimension. Whilst the research is exciting and helpful, it again does not explore the multiple contradictions typically present within a creative task in everyday life, nor does it explore how people may adopt paradoxical frames over time.

Just as cognitive frames provide a means of coping with uncertain and paradoxical situations, defence mechanisms are behavioural strategies used to (consciously or



unconsciously) protect the conscious mind from thoughts and feelings that are too difficult or too painful to cope with. Those which individuals find unacceptable are consigned to the realms of the unconscious (Burgo, 2015). However, whilst defence mechanisms protect from fear and anxiety (Carr & Gabriel, 2001), they can inhibit personal growth and wellbeing. Stacey (1996, pp. 124-125) described defence mechanisms as “rigid behaviours that make it unnecessary to hold ambiguity and paradox or feelings of separation or exclusion.” Gabriel (1998) suggests that control acts like a defence mechanism to protect from fear of external and, more critically, internal chaos.

The ability to accept the existence of paradox and polarity is an indication of psychological maturity, suggesting the presence of mature defence mechanisms (Levinson et al., 1978) which Vaillant (1995) describes as a “metaphor for the temporary clouding of reality through thoughts, feelings and behaviours” (p. 11). Vaillant suggests examples of mature defence mechanisms include: sublimation (satisfying a socially unacceptable impulse, such as aggression, with a more acceptable alternative, such as playing a sport); altruism (helping others who are experiencing similar feelings); suppressing a negative feeling until a more appropriate moment (e.g., choosing to express displeasure with someone privately rather than at a public event); distracting oneself from troublesome thoughts by doing something different (such as watching television or going for a walk).

Vaillant (2000) refers to mature defences as those that mitigate and synthesise conflict sources rather than deny or distort them. Mature defences have been shown to contribute to resilience, mental health, and wellbeing. Adaptive coping does not seek to bury the emotional experience of the situation but to seek strategies to defuse the tension. Vaillant described creativity as how individuals “assimilate” life, make sense and meaning out of chaos, and as a means of reducing cognitive dissonance. It may be considered an adaptive coping mechanism whereby individuals create meaning from an aversive situation. Vaillant considered humour to be an adaptive mechanism. Humour involves a cognitive shift and can produce strong affective responses that relieve or diffuse tension (Samson et al., 2014).

Denison et al. (1995) suggest that the ability to reconcile opposites is a characteristic of individuals with a higher level of psychological development. How individuals attempt to interpret and create order and meaning in uncertain and ambiguous circumstances enables individuals to create a cognitive, social and emotional framework around

ambiguity that helps them cope with the paradox (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). It is also rooted in the way they view the world. If individuals strive for consistency and reducing uncertainty, their behaviour and cognitive processes will be geared towards that end (Denison et al., 1995; Lewis, 2000). An epistemological belief in the existence of a “unitary truth” (Smith & Tushman, 2005, p. 525) implies that inconsistencies and contradictions cannot co-exist but need to be solved. It could be argued that such cognitive frames are more likely to result in the perception of tension and greater discomfort in uncertainty and paradox. Suppose an individual's belief system is such that they accept paradox as a natural aspect of life. In that case, they may not be consciously aware of tension as something in need of resolution.

Cameron and Quinn (1988) argue that coping with paradox requires responses that may seem counterintuitive. Rather than avoiding or ignoring paradox, exploring the potential contribution of paradoxes requires a willingness to examine tension, which requires courage. Exploring paradox requires an individual to explore emotions that may have been suppressed or projected. Vince and Broussine (1996) suggest that denial and repression are mechanisms for coping with paradox. Whilst possibly helpful in the short-term, denial and repression may not be effective longer-term solutions for dealing with paradox. Defence mechanisms help people cope with aspects of reality that are difficult or painful and deploying mechanisms (such as suppression or projection) creates inner tension that, if not resolved, is likely to manifest itself in some other way (Bly, 2009). Coping with tensions created by paradox requires individuals to learn to recognise and articulate the tension and find the coping mechanisms that work for them.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This literature review has considered social and systemic creativity in an organisational context, considering literature from creativity research, SWPP, systems theory, and paradox theory. The decision to situate this research within the social and systemic perspective of creativity comes from a belief that an individual's creative process is influenced and shaped by the multiple systems they inhabit: the culture of their organisational system and the individual's fears, defences, and emotions. Whilst creativity research has great depth and breadth, research about the experience of being creative appears to be an under-explored topic. A literature review of this complexity is ambitious

and unusual. Reconciling the diverse bodies of literature and seeing them as inter-related is an original contribution of this thesis.

Research on creativity and paradox is limited, and with a few notable exceptions (e.g., Andriopoulos, 2003; Miron-Spektor & Paletz, 2017), creativity is largely absent from paradox theory. And whilst PP explores facets of creativity that social and systemic models have demonstrated are important, such as meaning, relationships, affect and self-actualisation, current PP research does not bring those constructs together to consider how they may facilitate or inhibit creativity.

The literature review has identified opportunities to expand current thinking:

- There is an opportunity to understand how the lived experience of being creative may help to explain some of the mechanisms underlying the creative process. Systemic and social theories do not adequately consider the emotional experience of being part of a creative system. Whilst Csíkszentmihályi's (1996) and Amabile and Pratt's (2016) models touch upon the existence of tensions between elements of a system, they could be explored in more depth to understand the dialectic tensions inherent in creativity. Similarly, Amabile and Pratt highlight the dynamic interaction between motivation, affect, and progress in meaningful work; however, there is further scope to consider the importance of safe and secure relationships and to consider the interconnected and interdependent nature of these elements.
- PP theorising largely ignores creativity. Given its roots in humanism, dialecticism, dark-side experiences, and the challenges of finding meaning in life, the second and third waves of positive psychology are perfectly positioned to consider how the experience of creativity may be enhanced. SWPP provides insights into how organisations could better navigate the challenges of the creative process, while TWPP, which adopts a systems perspective, examines the complexity and interconnectedness inherent within the creative process, providing an opportunity to consider the holistic experience of creativity within the workplace, how each part of the system affects creativity.

Throughout the exploration of the literature, it has become apparent that an opportunity exists to approach social and systemic creativity differently. A new

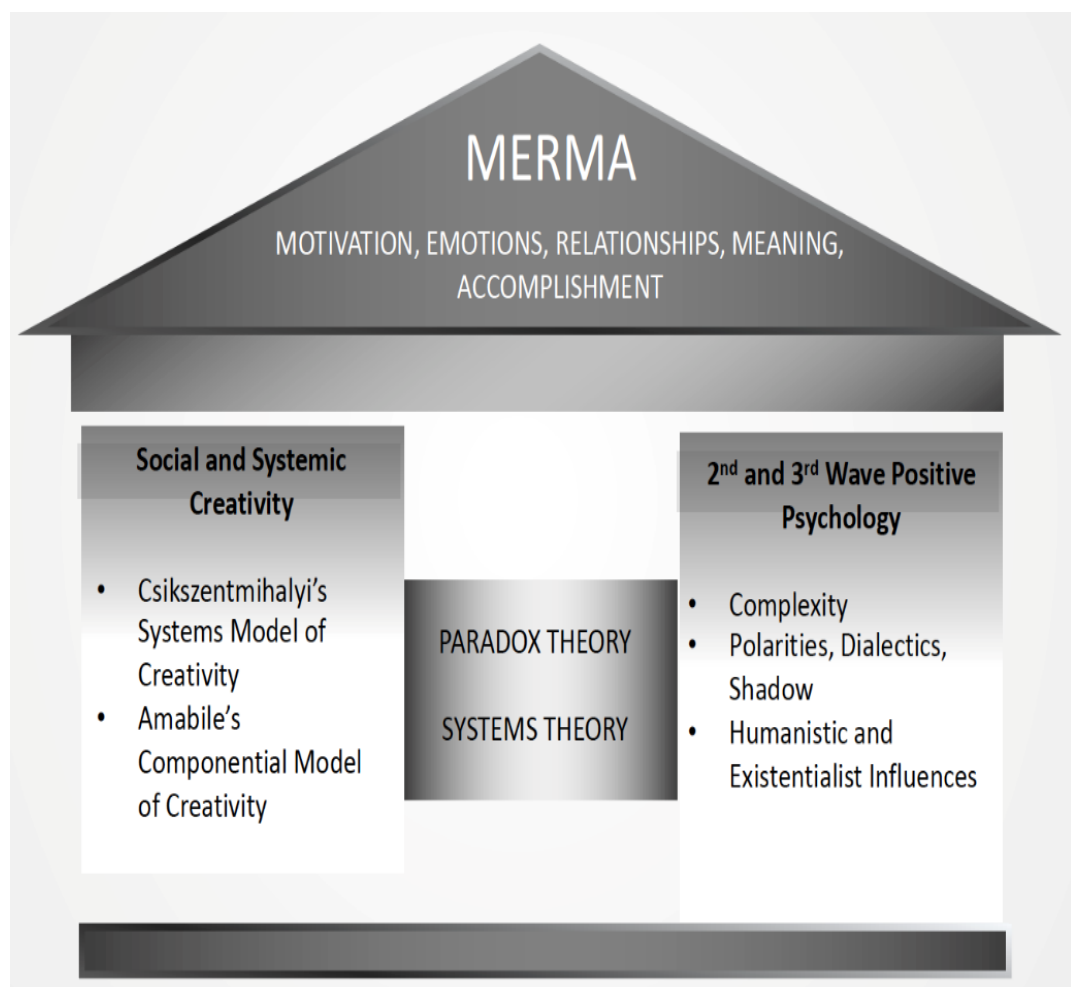
conceptualisation of creativity could explore how emotions, motivation, relationships, meaningful work, and accomplishment are experienced by individuals and how leaders create conditions where creativity is more likely to flourish in their organisations.

Based on this literature review and inspired by the mnemonic PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011), a new model of creativity (and wellbeing-in-creativity) is proposed that incorporates the strengths of Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) models and harnesses the dialectics- and complexity-focus of SWPP and TWPP. The MERMA-ID model (Motivation, Emotions, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment – Interconnected and Dialectic) illustrated in

Figure 6 takes a further step in understanding the phenomenological and systemic experience of creativity, capturing components that influence creativity and its experience individually and in combination.

**Figure 6**

*Theories Supporting the Newly Proposed MERMA Model of Creative Wellbeing*



### Chapter 3: Evolution of the MERMA Model

Some of the broadest and most ambitious theories of creativity take the view that creativity is best conceptualised not as a single entity but as emerging from a complex system with interacting subcomponents – all of which must be taken into account for a rich, meaningful and valid understanding of creativity. (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 38)

MERMA was intended as a framework for exploration during the research, and this chapter will outline how the model evolved and shaped the studies that follow. The chapter describes how MERMA began as a schematic inspired by Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of wellbeing, which emerged as a possibility for future research at the end of my MSc Applied Positive Psychology dissertation (Herbert, 2016). The dissertation explored the intersection of positive psychology and creativity in organisations, considering the extent to which creativity is a cognitive, affective, and relational expression of positive psychology in action. Through deep and prolonged engagement with literature during the MSc dissertation and this research, it appeared that elements contributing to subjective wellbeing might also contribute to creativity within an organisational context. The discussion of whether and how MERMA was manifested in the three qualitative studies and how it developed as a result of the research underlying this dissertation will be addressed in [Chapter 8, General Discussion](#).

As the PhD journey began in 2017, the research aimed, in part, to deductively consider whether MERMA might capture the experience of being creative within an organisation and provide important insight into encouraging creativity to flourish, by more closely examining its relationship to elements of wellbeing. However, this deductive approach was only part of the research. The additional intention was to explore the data inductively, to consider what the data revealed that might contribute to, or indeed, not fit with the model, and explore what the participants said rather than simply testing MERMA. As Braun and Clarke (2020) explain, the distinction between inductive and deductive research is a continuum rather than a dichotomy.

Despite being created over ten years ago, PERMA is still widely used, for example, in coaching (e.g., Green & Palmer, 2019), the UK Civil Service (McNeil, 2018) and the South Australian government (Seligman, 2013). PERMA remains a prominent feature of PP and

has been a commercial success for Seligman. Looking at creativity through the prism of wellbeing seemed important since research (e.g., Fancourt et al., 2019; Richards, 2010; Tang et al., 2021) has demonstrated that “everyday” (Richards, 2007) or “little c” creative activity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) helps build confidence, manage emotions, cope with difficult situations and explore solutions to problems (Pennebaker, 1997; Wright & Pascoe, 2015).

However, there was an opportunity to develop PERMA further to reflect how positive psychology theorising, in general, has developed and specifically how wellbeing and creativity theories have evolved. Second wave PP emphasises the role of both so-called positive and negative experiences in achieving a meaningful life. The nascent third wave (Lomas et al., 2020) highlights wellbeing's systemic and interconnected nature. An update of PERMA to reflect contemporary PP principles would include a more in-depth perspective on meaning, recognition of dialectics, and emphasis on each element's interconnected nature.

### **How MERMA was Used in the Studies**

The data in Study 1 were analysed and coded (deductively) for the MERMA elements and, more broadly (inductively) during 2018 (see [Chapter 4](#) for the analytic process employed). Whilst the data showed each MERMA element was present, a rich assortment of other potential themes were identified. As data analysis progressed, it became clear that the model was supported by both theory and the findings. However, at this stage, it was unclear whether or how MERMA might be helpful in understanding the creative experience or whether it had any practical application. There were so many exciting stories, MERMA was put to one side as I continued the research and analysis. I focused on other aspects of the data, such as the paradox of commerciality and creativity, which related directly to my experience working with creative businesses, how individuals coped with creativity and how leaders impacted the experience of creativity.

Study 2, conducted during 2019, was designed to build upon and potentially extend Study 1 and consider the experience of creativity from an organisational perspective. The focus group guide and interview schedule (see [Appendix D](#)) were not directly based on MERMA. Instead, they reflected questions emerging from Study 1 that I wanted to

explore more deeply, for example, how unclear or uncertain situations were experienced and how organisations defined creative success. However, as the data were analysed, I was struck by the extent to which MERMA elements, such as relationships, emotions and having a sense of accomplishment, were strongly reflected in the data.

As is typical of the creative process, an idea needs time to incubate (Ritter & Dijksterhuis, 2014; Wallas, 1926). During a meeting with supervisors in late 2019, we talked about MERMA. One supervisor joked that it would be fun if the model were called “mermaid” (perhaps their unconscious mind was perceiving something). We laughed about mermaids. Then I moved on with my research. As Wallas (1926, p. 86) stated, “we do not voluntarily or consciously think on a particular problem” during incubation. I felt that the conversation about “mermaids” was somehow meaningful. I just did not know how or why. As a creative exchange, there were many ideas explored in supervision. Some ideas resonated, others did not. What was different about this one?

In late 2019, I commenced Study 3, an autoethnography reflecting on how the research process changed me and my approach to work. I captured ways in which leaders could practically facilitate creativity. The MERMA model was not directly used to guide data collection. However, the insights reflected MERMA elements: the importance of relationships and the integral role of emotions in shaping the creative experience. I also noticed dialectic aspects of the creative process such as self and other, safety and vulnerability and the light and dark aspects of existence.

As I continued to examine the data from all three studies and thought about the MERMA model in relation to the newer waves of positive psychology, I realised that MERMA elements were strongly reflected across the data individually and collectively.

In evaluating the MERMA model's potential usefulness, I considered its contribution to understanding social and systemic creativity. Whilst each element of MERMA addressed separate areas of creativity theorising, the originality and power of the model was evident when looking at it as a system rather than each element in isolation. The interconnection between each element underlined that MERMA is a complex adaptive system (CAS). CAS comprise elements, referred to as *agents*, that learn and adapt in

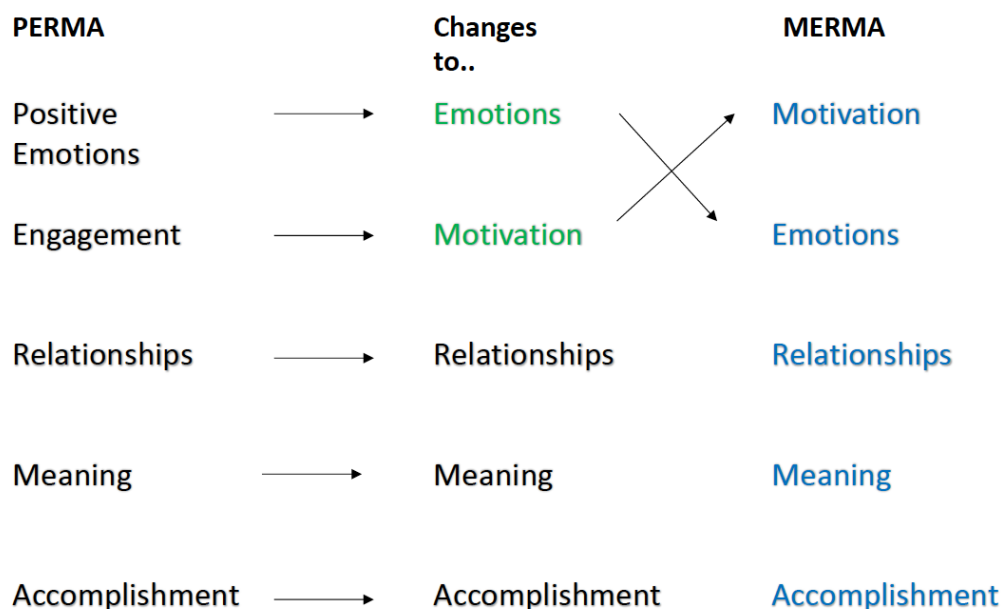
response to interactions with each other (Holland, 2014). The interactions and relationships between parts of the system affect and shape the whole, and vice versa.

### Summary of the MERMA Model

Figure 7 illustrates the changes made to PERMA as it became MERMA. The order of Emotions and Motivation was changed to reflect the essential role of motivation in stimulating creativity and to create a mnemonic.

**Figure 7**

*PERMA to MERMA Diagram*



### **Motivation**

Motivation replaces Engagement from PERMA (Seligman, 2011), which Seligman describes as feeling fully engaged in an intrinsically motivating activity or experiencing flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). Hunter and Csíkszentmihályi (2003) argue that when people are engaged, they are more likely to be curious, passionate and persist in achieving goals. However, motivation is broader than engagement. As shown in [Chapter 2, General Literature Review](#), motivation is an essential but complex facet of creativity. The intrinsic motivation to create is typically driven by passion and curiosity to discover something new and answer questions. Intrinsic motivation is a source of positive affect and flow and has been compared to Aristotle's concept of eudaimonia (Linley & Joseph,



2004). However, in an organisational context, motivation is rarely entirely intrinsic as creative workers must balance their own interests with the needs and tastes of the company or the project brief. Rather than being polarities, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are necessary for creativity, each playing a vital role (Puccio, 2020).

### ***Emotions***

The PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) emphasises the contribution of positive emotions (P) to a meaningful life. Positive emotions reflect an important strand of PP 1.0 theorising as an antithesis to traditional and clinical psychology that had commonly focused on deficit (Seligman & Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). Research suggests that, unsurprisingly, increasing experiences of positive emotions such as joy, pride, or hope positively impacts wellbeing and some aspects of creativity (Fredrickson, 2001; Kern et al., 2015; Seligman, 2011). However, SWPP underlines the importance of so-called “dark-side” experiences in a meaningful life. Emotions such as anger, fear or guilt can be appropriate and helpful in particular contexts, both for creativity and wellbeing more generally. Anger can be a strong motivation to remedy a situation, and guilt can help realign an individual’s moral compass (Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014). Tensions are inherent in creativity in the gap between the current state and future vision (Festinger, 1962; Senge, 2010). Creativity research (e.g., Fong, 2006; George & Zhou, 2002; Isen et al., 1985; Kaufmann & Vosburg, 1997; Madjar et al., 2002) demonstrates the vital role of positive, negative, and ambivalent emotions in the creative process. Creativity is a complex cognitive process, and it is also a complex emotional process. Cognitive and emotional responses are essential in shaping how reality is experienced (Vygotsky, 1978), and all emotions are fundamental to how creativity happens.

### ***Relationships***

Feeling cared for and supported by others and feeling socially integrated is a key indicator of wellbeing (Kern et al., 2015; R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000). Humans have an innate drive throughout their lives to develop affectionate relationships with others, a tendency that begins at an early age as infants form attachments with caregivers (Bowlby, 1969). Seligman (2011, 2018) includes positive relationships with others as a building block of wellbeing. Feeling loved, supported and valued by family, friends or work colleagues

contributes to psychological wellbeing, safety, and belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Siedlecki et al. (2014) demonstrated that strong social networks improved physical health, especially for older adults. Relationships feature in most wellbeing models, including Ryff (1995), Keyes (1998) and Huppert and So (2013), showing just how important relationships are to wellbeing. Indeed, Halpern (2010) further argues that it is human connectedness that makes societies and economies function as well as contributing to individual wellbeing.

Workplace relationships play a vital role in shaping the experience of work. As in life, more generally, relationships can help individuals grow and thrive and also be a source of pain and dysfunction (Dutton & Ragins, 2017). Supportive workplace relationships may provide a basis for organisational attachment and foster engagement and commitment (Ehrhardt & Ragins, 2016). Secure attachment-like relationships with others form the basis for a tendency to explore and be curious about the world, knowing that caregivers provide the scaffolding to safely push boundaries and discover something new (John-Steiner, 2000).

### ***Meaning***

Seligman (2011, p. 17) defines meaning as having a sense of purpose or "belonging to and serving something that you believe is bigger than the self." Steger et al. (2009) argue that meaning is an essential aspect of wellbeing over time which unfolds in connection with other processes such as developing identity, relationships, and goals. The instinctive drive to fulfil one's potential and find meaning in life is central to positive psychology theorising (Wong, 2011). Individuals attempt to interpret and create meaning in uncertain and ambiguous circumstances, enabling them to develop cognitive, social and emotional frameworks around ambiguity that helps them cope with paradox (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). The dynamic componential model (Amabile & Pratt, 2016) emphasises the importance of meaningful work in maintaining an individual's intrinsic motivation to complete the task.

***Accomplishment***

Accomplishment is defined as making progress towards goals, achieving mastery or competence (Kern et al., 2015; Ryff, 1995). Seligman (2011) describes accomplishment as the drive to achieve something for one's own sake, encompassing an attitude of persevering towards accomplishing a task rather than the specific outcome. Amabile and Kramer (2011) demonstrated that meaningful accomplishment contributed to intrinsic task motivation. Furthermore, making progress towards meaningful goals was a source of positive emotion. In the MERMA-ID model, accomplishment includes recognition by relevant peers as contributing to a sense of creative accomplishment and pride.

**Concluding Remarks**

This chapter described the MERMA model and how it was used in the studies that follow. The model reflects theories of creativity, second wave PP (uniting the light/dark, dialectics: Ivztan et al., 2016) and third wave PP (systems/complexity/interdisciplinarity: Lomas et al., 2020), paradox, and systems theories to propose an integrated model that includes the phenomenological aspects of creativity. The following chapter will present the methodological underpinning of this research and describe the methods used for data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 4: General Methodology and Methods

This chapter details how the research paradigm of social constructivism has shaped the research design and methods used in the three qualitative studies. The individual study chapters (Chapters [5](#), [6](#), and [7](#)) detail specific analytical processes pertinent to each study.

The research has been designed to explore the subjective experience of being creative within an organisational context. It aims to increase understanding of how individuals experience the process of being creative at work and how the parts of the organisational system influence and shape the experience of creativity. In summary, this chapter will:

1. Consider the philosophical foundation of social constructivism underpinning the research as a whole
2. Discuss the research design of each study at a more general level, including:
  - a. Methods used to collect and analyse the data
  - b. The participant population
  - c. The ethical implications associated with research of this nature
  - d. Questions of trustworthiness and validity
  - e. Reflexivity (positioning the researcher in the research)

### The Research Paradigm

...Our meta-theoretical assumptions have very practical consequences for the way we research terms of our topic, focus of study, what we see as “data,” how we collect and analyse that data, how we theorise, and how we write up our research accounts. (Cunliffe, 2011, p. 651)

The way one sees the world, the ontological and epistemological assumptions one makes, influence the choice of research questions one asks and how one seeks to answer those questions. Leavy (2014) offers the metaphor of the research paradigm as a pair of sunglasses with different coloured lenses, which colour and influence what one sees. This research is grounded in social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), reflecting my world view that reality is socially constructed in the context of human relationships, cultural and

historical context, mediated by symbol systems and language. I have been fascinated by language, cultural symbols, and how individuals construct meaning from an early age. This fascination led to an undergraduate degree in Romance languages, literature, and linguistics. During my undergraduate years, I discovered existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd. Writers such as Sartre, Pirandello, and Ionesco continue to influence my worldview profoundly. Central to existentialism is the individual's responsibility for their actions and becoming who they are (existence before essence: Sartre, 2007), the individual's pursuit of meaning amidst societal pressures for conformity and superficiality, and the responsibility of freedom (Flynn, 2006). The Theatre of the Absurd focuses on what happens when people lack meaning in their lives or when relationships and communication breakdown (Farson, 1997). Both existentialism and Theatre of the Absurd are anti-realist, emphasising life's absurd, random, and paradoxical nature. However, they also emphasise individual agency and responsibility for making life meaningful.

With a post-positivist worldview that questions the existence of objective reality, I consider qualitative methods to be more appropriate for understanding the phenomenology of human experience. The meta-theoretical assumptions that guide and provide coherence to this research are based on an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism may encompass a range of qualitative approaches such as social constructivism, social constructionism (similarities and differences between social constructivism/constructionism are addressed below), symbolic interactionism, phenomenology and hermeneutics (Collins, 2018). Interpretative methodologies can, and indeed do, overlap (Crotty, 1988; Gephart Jr & Richardson, 2008). For interpretivist researchers, the commitment to *verstehen* or "understanding" (Weber, 1949) is of paramount importance: understanding the meanings that individuals place on their experiences and how they share those socially constructed experiences with others (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Furthermore, the social dimension of understanding reality is an essential facet of research in the interpretative tradition, which recognises that social context (e.g., cognitive schema, language, symbols) influences how individuals make sense of their experiences (Prasad, 2015; Schwandt, 1998).

The terms constructivism and constructionism are often used interchangeably (Cottone, 2007; Maréchal, 2009), with Raskin (2002, p. 2) suggesting that the terms are used "so idiosyncratically and inconsistently that at times they seem to defy definition."

Mahoney (2002) suggests that positive psychology and constructivism share a mutual interest in human potential and possibility. Mahoney traces the history of constructivism from ancient Greek and Asian influences, such as the founder of Taoism, a philosophy that “emphasises the dialectical tensions within opposites and the primacy of the process” (p. 745). Both constructivism and social constructionism share the belief that people construct meaning. The difference between them fundamentally lies in perceptions regarding the source of meaning. Constructivism originates from developmental and cognitive psychology postulating that individuals construct meaning through cognitive processes. Cognitive and radical constructivists (e.g., Kelly, 2003; Maturana, 1988; von Glasersfeld, 1984) theorise that meaning-making occurs within the “closed system” of the individual mind (Raskin, 2011, p. 225). Social constructionism argues that meaning-making takes place collectively, in the context of human relationships, in which knowledge is mediated historically, culturally, and through language: the “processes by which people come to describe, explain, or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live” (Gergen, 1985, p. 266).

Social constructivism recognises the importance of human agency, social context, and language in making meaning. For social constructivists, meaning is derived from “communities of understanding” (Cottone, p. 193) rather than the individual operating as a discreet psychological entity. Social constructivism is often associated with Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory (Plotkin, 2001; Raskin & Bridges, 2004). Vygotsky viewed psychological development as dialectic, highlighting the dynamic interdependence of individual and social processes in which socially shared experiences were transformed into internal cognitive and affective processes (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky argued that language and culture played a critical role in individual cognitive development and meaning-making. Social constructivism was considered the most relevant research paradigm for this study given my interest in understanding the lived experience of creativity, and how participants construct meaning individually, collectively, and through language and symbols. In discussing the challenges of constructivist research, Mahoney (2003, p. 207) states that:

...no other family of modern theories asks its adherents to maintain such a degree of self-examining openness, to so painstakingly tolerate and harvest (rather than eliminate) ambiguity, or to so thoroughly question both the answers and the questions by which they inquire. It is not easy to be a constructivist.

The deep reflection and openness to examining my thoughts and feelings typical of constructivist thinking is manifested most explicitly in Study 3, an autoethnography which considers my lived experience of this research and my own creative process.

### **Research Design Overview**

Historically, much creativity research has been quantitative, as highlighted in Long's (2014) review of research methodologies and methods in creativity studies. Long examined research published in well-regarded creativity journals (e.g., *Creativity Research Journal*; *Journal of Creative Behavior*) between 2003 and 2012, which showed that 83% of the 612 studies examined used quantitative methods. However, there are examples of highly influential studies into the nature of creativity (e.g., Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Roe, 1951a; Wallace & Gruber, 1989) where interviews or case studies are used as a method of data collection. Similarly, as research into the social nature of creativity has matured, a broader range of methodological approaches are being used, including ethnographical studies (Grahle & Hibbert, 2020; Lebuda & Csíkszentmihályi, 2018).

Consistent with an interpretivist paradigm, the research design of the studies in this thesis uses multiple naturalistic methods (interviews, focus groups, observation, and text analysis) for data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). These methods were consciously selected and appropriate given the exploratory nature of the research questions, seeking to generate a complex and rich understanding of the lived experience of a particular type of person and environment. Combining multiple qualitative methods is considered helpful for investigating the complexity and multiplicity of the social world, potentially allowing different aspects of the data to be seen (Mik-Meyer, 2020). Furthermore, the ability to triangulate between data sources may contribute to a better understanding of the research problem and more robust conclusions (Creswell, 2015). Figure 8

### **Methods Within the Research Design**

The primary data collection method across the three studies was through dialogue with participants: interviews and focus groups. The conversational data were supported by observing three meetings and examining documents supplied by the case study organisation in Study 2. For clarity, Table 1 summarises the methods used in each study:

**Table 1***Summary of Methods Used in Each Study*

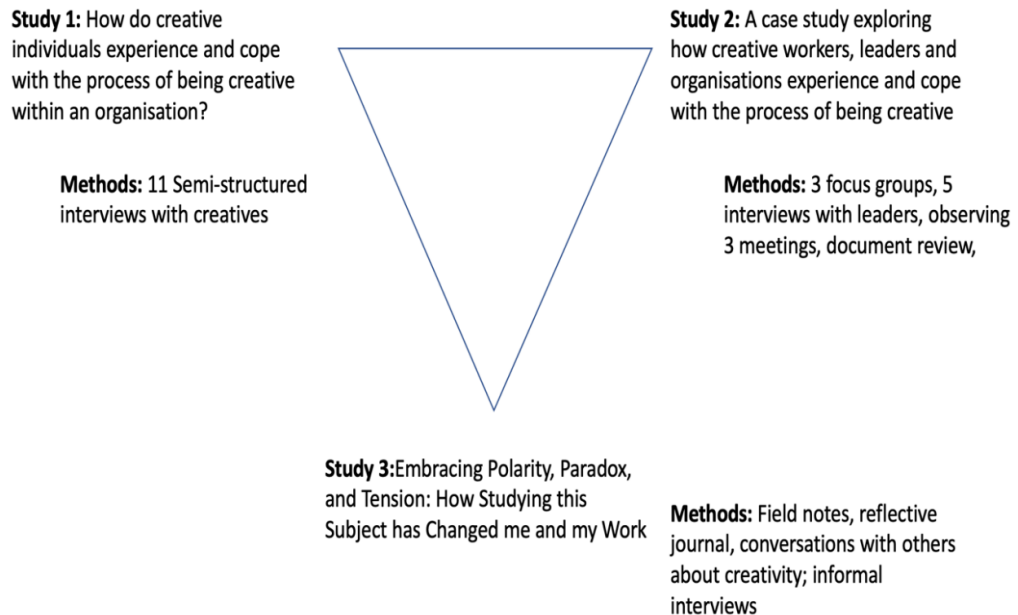
<b>Study</b>	<b>Methods</b>	<b>Data sources</b>
<b>1: The Individual Creative Worker's Perspective</b>	Semi-structured interviews	11 individual interviews with creative workers occupying creative roles in eight organisations
<b>2: A Case Study of a Creative Company Culture</b>	1. Focus groups	3 focus groups with creative workers
	2. Semi-structured interviews	5 individual interviews with organisational leaders
	3. Meeting observation	3 team meetings where creative ideas were being discussed
	4. Review of documents and outcome data	Human Resource (HR) policies, website, culture survey
<b>3: The Creative Journey of Research</b>	Autoethnography	Field notes taken during studies 1 and 2; reflective journal entries each stage of the research, including feelings, reactions, and thoughts about present and past events; analysis of conversations with individuals who influenced my thinking and sensemaking about creativity; informal interviews with friends, colleagues, mutual acquaintances through a supervisor, or chance encounters.

illustrates the research design.



Figure 8

## Summary of Study Design



The decision to choose a sample population of people who were specifically in creative roles and industries was taken for two reasons. Firstly, it is likely that a population that already identifies with and expects to go through the creative process routinely may find it easier to discuss their experiences of creating at work than a population that perhaps does not have the same expectation of being creative or does not have a sense of creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002), especially given common misconceptions about creativity being mainly the remit of the arts and the tendency of education systems to discourage and downplay creativity in students from an early age (Patston et al., 2018; Robinson, 2021). The second reason was to examine exemplars of creativity, to understand how creativity was encouraged and the challenges of being creative amongst people who identified as creative within a company that professed to value creativity. Given my stance that creativity is a fundamental aspect of human nature (Vygotsky, 1991; Weisberg, 2006), understanding how creative individuals experience the paradoxes and tensions of creativity may help understand how to encourage creativity in organisations more broadly.

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***Interviewing***

The purpose of collecting data through semi-structured interviews was to understand how participants experienced being creative at work and the meaning that they gave to that experience. I was interested in the shared meanings across the participants that were shaped and influenced by social context. Smith et al. (2009, p. 57) describe qualitative interviews as “a conversation with a purpose.” However, unlike a naturally-occurring conversation, the interview is constructed to understand how the participant experiences the phenomena in question (Kvale, 2007). As a researcher, I made

assumptions and saw things from certain perspectives that influenced questions asked during the interview. My role in the interview was more than merely a “speaking questionnaire” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 165). I took an active part, probing for answers and following interesting and potentially relevant tangents (J. Holstein & Gubrium, 2019) whilst ensuring that the participant was doing most of the talking. Similarly, participants needed to be active participants in the research rather than merely responding to pre-determined questions. The interview design remained flexible and open to accommodating new or unexpected information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Kvale (2007, p. 14) describes research interviews as “a craft” that one learns by doing. My background as a human resources director and professional coach means that I have honed the craft of active listening, paraphrasing, and prompting over many years. I am skilled at asking clear and concise questions and establishing rapport. As such, I could be relaxed and “present” with each participant, listening to their answers before deciding what to ask them next. The interview questions were developed based on a range of creativity and paradox theory. Different question types were used to explore experiences, opinions, values and feelings about creativity in their workplace (Patton, 2002).

### ***Focus Groups***

Focus groups are defined as an informal group of people selected purposively to discuss their feelings about and experiences of specific topics (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Vaughn et al., 1996). My intention in using focus groups was to elicit a wide range of views, experiences, feelings, and perspectives (Underhill & Olmsted, 2003; Vaughn et al., 1996) about creativity within an organisation's social context. I was interested in observing how participants talked about the experience of being creative, and how they made sense of creativity individually and collectively (Wilkinson, 1998).

### ***Meeting Observation***

The meetings were not audio- or video-recorded to reduce distraction and possible self-consciousness within the team. The purpose of the meeting observation was to:

- Explore how organisation communications consciously or unconsciously expressed support (or otherwise) of creativity in the business, the extent to which the words, metaphors and meanings used within the organisation were enabling or constraining creativity.

- Provide some contextual insights into the behaviours, culture-in-action, language, stories, and beliefs/myths relayed in the group regarding creativity.
- Observe the dynamics and social interactions between participants.

#### ***Analysis of Documentation and Outcome Data***

The documentation used was publicly available, such as the company's website or internal company documentation (e.g., presentations by the CEO of the business, documents or videos on organisational culture, values, and key performance indicators) provided by the Gatekeeper (the HR Director). The Gatekeeper also posted or emailed me internal, proprietary, or confidential documents, such as HR policies or culture presentations. Additionally, when visiting the case study organisation's premises, I photographed (with permission) posters describing the company's values. I signed a non-disclosure agreement that protected the privacy of sensitive company information whilst providing me with the freedom to conduct my research and interpret the data.

The documents were analysed to explore how organisation communications consciously or unconsciously expressed support (or otherwise) for creativity in the business. The purpose of analysing these data sources was to spot potential contradictions and paradoxes between the organisation's espoused "official" values and the experience of creative workers and leaders within the organisation and its official and objective outputs. The organisation's formal and informal practices and communications shape, legitimise and maintain organisational behaviour and culture (Georgaca & Avdi, 2006) and, as such, were considered to be essential to understanding the experience of being creative within an organisation.

#### ***Sampling***

Many researchers have seen theoretical saturation as an important benchmark for qualitative studies (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). However, the notion of saturation originates in grounded theory (Hennink et al., 2017) and has theoretical implications that are not consistent with my epistemological stance or my chosen data analysis method, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). Braun and Clarke urge those using RTA to "dwell with uncertainty and recognise that meaning is *generated* through interpretation...therefore, judgements about 'how many' data items, and when to stop data collection, are inescapably situated and subjective" (Braun & Clarke, 2019,

p.1, emphasis in original). I consider knowledge to be partial and dependent on the researcher and the participants' context. As such, knowledge can never be “complete” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000; Low, 2019). The optimal sample size ultimately depends on the purpose of the research, the amount of valuable data in each interview, what will be credible and, pragmatically, what can be achieved with the available time and resource (Malterud et al., 2016; Morse, 2015; Patton, 1990).

In the first phase of the research (Study 1), eleven in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of creative workers. I remained open on the exact number of interviews to conduct during this phase, evaluating the amount and quality of the data as data collection progressed. The design of Study 2 provided the opportunity to conduct further interviews to explore and potentially extend themes identified in Study 1. The five interview participants for Study 2 were the case study organisation's senior leadership team. Furthermore, three focus groups (totalling 19 participants) were conducted with a purposive sample of creative workers at different hierarchical levels to discuss and potentially extend the data collected in Study 1.

### ***Thematic Analysis***

The data for all three studies were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2021). RTA is described as a method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2019, 2020) that “captures and unifies the nature or basis of the experience into a meaningful whole” (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p.362). However, Braun et al. (2018) differentiate their approach from other forms of TA, such as *coding reliability TA* (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest et al., 2012) – which categorises the data into pre-determined themes, typically with multiple researchers coding the data to achieve consensus on what the data mean – or *codebook TA* (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), which typically uses a framework or template where some themes may be determined in advance of analysis, although coding reliability measures generally are not used. RTA seeks to elicit meanings across the data set, accessing and making sense of shared or collective experiences, highlighting similarities and differences in experience (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I considered RTA an appropriate data analysis method for my research, which seeks to understand the shared experience of creativity, and the aspects of being creative at work that transcend specific organisation and role types.

Braun and Clarke (2006) describe one of the advantages of their approach to RTA as being its flexibility, driven in part by its theoretical independence, which means RTA can be used across a wide range of data types and provides a rich, detailed and complex account of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2013; King, 2004; Nowell et al., 2017). An advantage of this flexibility is that RTA can be used as a method of analysing the different data types in this research, such as discourse (Taylor & Ussher, 2001) and case studies (Cedervall & Åberg, 2010), and to generate themes from across the various studies (Willig & Rogers, 2017). However, not being tied to any particular epistemology does not mean that RTA is atheoretical (Terry et al., 2017). The absence of an inherent theoretical perspective makes it incumbent on the researcher to clarify their theoretical stance (Braun & Clarke, 2012). I am using RTA from a social constructivist theoretical perspective in which the focus is on how reality is constructed (Braun et al., 2014). In taking this position, I am aligning myself with systemic and social theories of creativity (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988; Glăveanu, 2010b; Montuori & Purser, 1996), which theorise that creativity is shaped by social, historical and cultural context (Lebuda & Csíkszentmihályi, 2018).

In choosing RTA as my analytic method, I have chosen not to use other potentially suitable methods. For example, Grounded Theory (GT), Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and discourse analysis (DA) were considered and rejected. One of the fundamental tenets of GT is that data collection and data analysis are a constant, comparative process that takes place before conducting a literature review (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). In my study, the literature review was conducted at the start of the research process to frame and refine the research questions and develop the MERMA-ID conceptual model. Whilst my research does have a phenomenological quality in that it is interested in the participants' "lifeworld" (Willig, 2008, p. 261), IPA typically seeks to bracket prior knowledge (Kvale, 1996). I considered it unrealistic to bracket out my own experience working within creative organisations and my personal experiences of being creative. I considered using DA which studies how the social constructions of meanings are produced through talk and text (Phillips & Oswick, 2012). However, RTA enables me to notice language patterns as constitutive of meaning within a social context without focusing on microanalysis of language use.

Whilst there are clear advantages for the use of RTA, no method is without its disadvantages. Nowell et al. (2017) argue that the relative lack of literature on TA

compared with other methods such as GT or IPA may result in a lack of clarity on how to conduct rigorous analysis. However, an increasing number of sources describe how to conduct RTA and what good RTA looks like (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2021c; Clarke & Braun, 2019). Similarly, whilst TA's flexibility is a distinct advantage, Holloway and Todres (2003) note the potential tension between flexibility on the one hand and incoherence and inconsistency on the other. This pitfall can be avoided by being explicit about epistemological positioning and transparently presenting the analytic process.

### **General Methods Applicable to All Studies**

#### ***Data Familiarisation***

I read and re-read the transcripts to familiarise myself with the data, develop an overall sense of the data, and identify meanings within the text. Writing, even at this early stage of analysis, was an important aspect of familiarisation. I noted things that surprised me or confused me about the data. I used a digital notebook (Evernote™) to capture memos and reflective notes containing thoughts and questions about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

#### ***Data Coding***

Savage (2000, p. 1496) describes the process of coding as being “*primarily* a way of interacting with and thinking about the data” (emphasis in original). The process of coding my data was recursive and iterative. Once I had developed an overall sense of the data corpus, I moved on to coding. I engaged with my data throughout the coding, theme development, and writing of findings and discussion. I coded both for MERMA elements and more broadly to explore the richness of the data. I stayed open to seeing what stories were in the data rather than squeezing the data into a pre-determined framework. Over time I developed a deep relationship and familiarity with the data. Sections of the text were labelled using provisional codes developed at a semantic (coding the specific words or phrases used) and a latent level (coding ideas, assumptions, or underlying patterns: Braun & Clarke, 2006). I gave each code a summary description to later recall what the codes referred to. Some units of text were included in more than one code. The codes were revisited on several occasions to interpret the meaning of the text further.

The data corpus was comprehensively coded (91% of the data were assigned to at least one code) before any analysis commenced, a process referred to by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 206) as “complete coding”.

Table 2 shows the codes used in the three studies to organise the data in preparation for analysis (Saldaña, 2013).

**Table 2**

*Types of Codes Used (adapted from Saldaña, 2013)*

Type of code	Description	Example codes from Study 1	Example codes from Study 2	Example codes from Study 3
Descriptive	Summarises the topic of the section in a short phrase or word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Emotional drain when creativity is absent</li> <li>Routine of creativity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>When the company was young (Nostalgia)</li> <li>Attitudes to failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teams of the right people</li> <li>Mentors</li> </ul>
Process	Uses gerunds to note conceptual action in the data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feeling misunderstood</li> <li>Learning from others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating clarity</li> <li>Feeling valued</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selecting people</li> <li>Balancing different demands</li> </ul>
Emotion	Codes the feelings participants express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fear and anxiety</li> <li>Discomfort with uncertainty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tensions and conflict</li> <li>Too corporate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creativity isn't always glamorous</li> <li>Deviance isn't always appreciated</li> </ul>
Values	Looks at the values, attitudes, and belief systems of participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creativity as a commodity</li> <li>Monetising the average</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commercial-ising the assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trusting people</li> <li>Supportive leaders</li> </ul>

Following the first coding process, I went back to my data and re-listened to the audio recording of the interviews to identify voice inflexions, tone of voice and pauses. Gabriel (2015) gives an example of the many possible meanings of the word ‘no’ depending on how it is said. Simply relying on transcribed text without considering how language was used provides only a partial understanding of the data (Poland, 1995). I



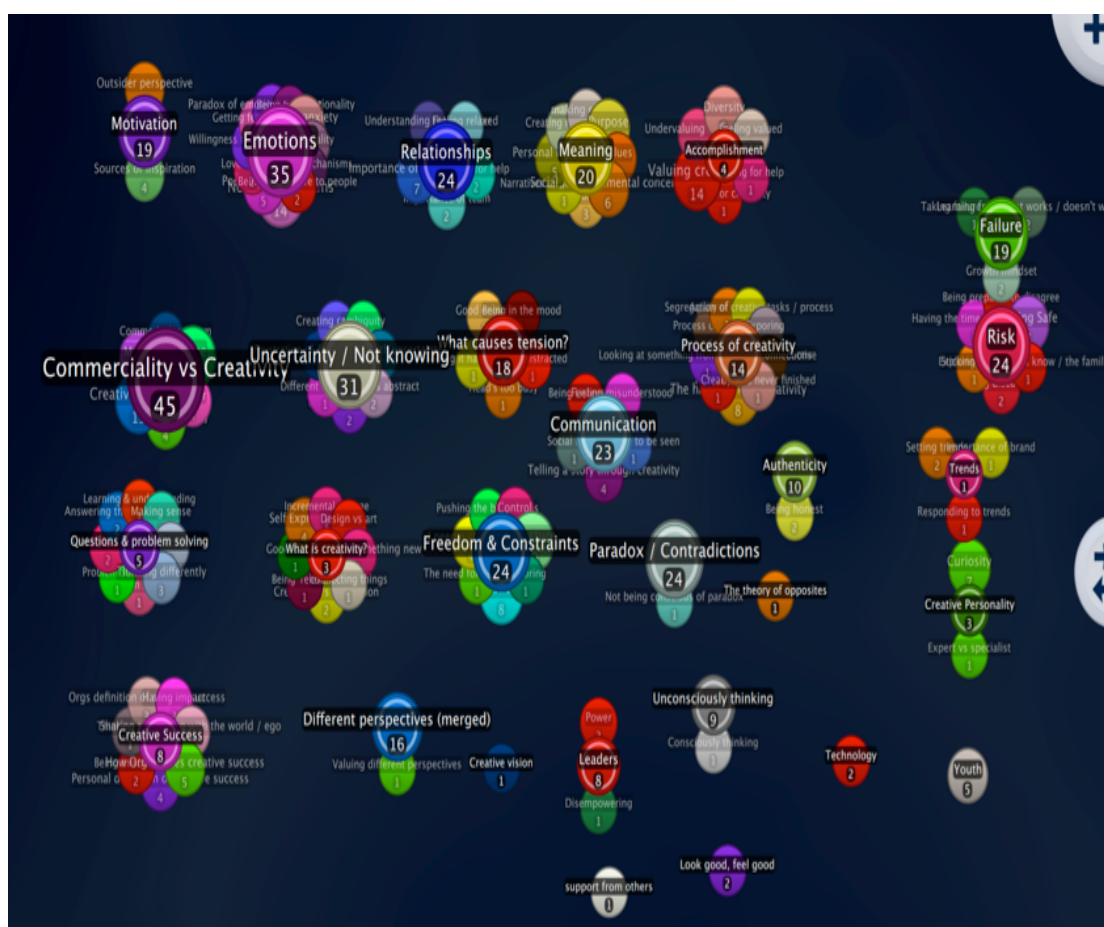
talked through my coding process with a second researcher, experienced in TA, to help me reflect on assumptions that I was making and things that I may have overlooked

### ***Initial Theme Generation***

I used Quirkos™ software ([www.quirkos.com](http://www.quirkos.com)) to help manage the data in Studies 1 (218 transcribed pages) and 2 (213 transcribed pages from interviews and focus groups; 260 pages of organisational documentation). I preferred Quirkos to NVivo™ (the industry standard software for collating and sorting through qualitative data: Woolf & Silver, 2017) because of the visual nature of Quirkos. As the text is coded and added to the “quirks” (or repositories for text assigned to each code), they grow to reflect the amount of data in each, which helped me see how themes were developing and which themes had more or less coded data. The “canvas view” enabled me to interact with the data, moving codes around the canvas as patterns developed. Figure 9 shows an extract of the canvas view of my first coding for Study 1. [Appendices G and H](#) show a larger canvas view for Studies 1 and 2 respectively. The software does not have automated coding functionality, which was intentional, as I preferred to code manually. However, the ability to quickly retrieve and sort coded material was helpful in ordering and managing the data.

Figure 9

*Extract from Quirkos “canvas” view*



In Study 3, I chose not to use Quirkos to code my data, although the same coding and theme development processes were followed as for Studies 1 and 2. As the data corpus in Study 3 was smaller (60 transcribed pages), I decided to print the transcripts and notes and write codes into the page margins.

The coded data for Studies 1 and 2 were exported from Quirkos (v.1.5) into an Excel spreadsheet which enabled me to sort and cut the data by potential theme and alphabetically. I printed all the transcripts and quotes, sorted by possible themes into three ring-bound volumes, interacting with my data on a more physical level, drawing, making notes, and making connections. I reviewed the codes to spot incidences where codes were repeated, two codes appeared to have similar meanings, or codes might more naturally sit with a different potential theme. Furthermore, I looked for possible connections and relationships across the data set. I created reports showing all pieces of

coded text for each potential theme to ensure sufficient data existed to support each potential theme (an example is provided in [Appendix A](#)).

I created a series of thematic maps to visually explore relationships and potential connections between the codes and the potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The mind-maps were revisited, reflected upon, and refined. I continued to go back to the source data to check that the coding and potential themes reflected the data. Fourteen versions of the thematic map were produced, each one further exploring and developing the data. [Appendix B](#) shows the development of the themes over time, from early-stage coding to theme development.

I identified what Braun et al. (2015, p. 102) refer to as a central organising concept: “a clear core idea or concept that underpins a theme and helps determine what the theme is about.” I wrote notes capturing what I thought was the essence of each theme, which helped clarify the story in each theme. For example, the central concept for an early-stage candidate theme *Creativity as a Commodity* was how participants felt that creativity was valued only to the extent that it made money. The exercise of writing down the essence of each theme enabled me to see where themes were overlapping or unclear and to let go of themes that were not central in answering the research questions. For example, the potential theme *Technology and Creativity* captured how creative individuals used digital tools to express creativity and the role of social media in communicating creativity. Rather than becoming a separate theme, elements were included when they reflected the experience of creativity.

### ***Developing and Reviewing Themes***

As I started synthesising the data and seeing a sequence and story, I took a step back and returned to the data corpus to check what may have been overlooked or missed. Given my increasing familiarity with the data and my growing awareness of the stories told by the data, I wanted to check what data might now be relevant that had perhaps been disregarded or not noticed at an earlier stage. I wanted to ensure that I had not inadvertently strayed from the data by layering my interpretations too heavily rather than reflecting the data. I highlighted excerpts of text that supported, challenged, and developed my thinking. For example, the process of defining themes involved creating

multiple iterations of the thematic maps over time, which Bazeley (2013, p. 6) refers to as “wandering and pondering”.

### ***Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes***

This stage aimed to refine the scope and focus of the themes and develop the story the data analysis was telling (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I continued to refer to the data to check that my interpretation was substantiated. Deciding which themes were most relevant included selecting compelling data extracts relevant to the central organising concept (Willig & Rogers, 2017). As I developed the themes, it became apparent how they fitted together and helped answer my research questions. The process of refining helped me decide which data to put to one side. I continued to develop the theme names at this stage, and as I was writing up the findings.

### ***Producing the Report***

The final phase of the analytic process was to produce the study report, which is a further opportunity for analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In my enthusiasm and passion for the stories contained in the data, early versions attempted to include as many themes as possible. However, writing is an opportunity for thematic development. In early versions of the report, I made sure to include several data extracts for each point to check that it was reflective of the data rather than an interesting “sound bite”. As I reflected in a journal entry, the discussion was written with the data analysis software open.

### ***Trustworthiness***

What constitutes rigorous qualitative research is a frequently debated topic (Creswell, 2007; Tracy, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 290) asked how a researcher can persuade the reader that their results are “worth paying attention to” and suggested criteria for demonstrating the trustworthiness of research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I have drawn on Lincoln and Guba’s criteria. However, I have modified their approach to incorporate more recent theorising on qualitative research (e.g., Smith, 2018; Tracy, 2013).

**Credibility** concerns the “fit” between participants' views and my perception of those views or the extent to which readers can recognise themselves within the story (Tobin & Begley, 2004). A similar concept is ecological validity (Holleman et al., 2020) which

considers the extent to which research resembles real world experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.301) suggest several strategies for demonstrating credibility, and I list those used in this research:

**Prolonged engagement and persistent observation:** I invested significant time to build trust with participants and understand their organisational cultures in Study 1, spending three months interviewing participants. In Study 2, I engaged with the case study organisation for 18 months. In Study 3, I continued making field notes and talking to people about creativity for over three years. Furthermore, I have continually engaged with peer-reviewed literature and communities of creativity researchers and practitioners via conferences and social media throughout the research process.

**Triangulation** is considered problematic for some researchers because of its realist connotations (e.g., Ellingson, 2014; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005; Tracy, 2010). Lincoln and Guba (2007) describe triangulation as a method of cross-checking data using multiple sources. Similarly, Tracy (2013) argues that gathering data through various methods at multiple points in time strengthens the findings and provides a more credible picture. I use triangulation in a constructivist sense of capturing the richness of different perspectives, rather than from a post-positivist sense of pinpointing a specific “truth” (Varpio et al., 2017). Data were obtained from multiple sources in this research: individuals working within a creative business, creative leaders, and organisational culture, and over two years of fieldwork.

**Peer debriefing** is described as communicating the research to independent third parties (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I presented my research at academic conferences and symposia. My continuing conversations with creative people (for Study 3) enabled me to sense check my themes. A “peer debriefer” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202), a friend who had recently completed a qualitative PhD, reviewed my coding and asked questions about the study and the research decisions made. I considered supervision another peer debriefing method, where I described and justified my choices and interpretations to my supervisors.

**Member reflections** (Tracy, 2013, p. 238) were used to gauge the extent to which my findings were recognisable and meaningful. I asked a participant in Study 1 to read an early version of my findings chapter. She confirmed that many of the experiences and

feelings were ones she identified with, even when those experiences or feelings came from other participants. In Study 2, I wrote an executive summary of my findings to feed back to the host organisation. I presented an overview of my findings to organisational directors, checking the extent to which the findings were recognisable and meaningful. The organisational leaders commented that the overview accurately reflected their culture, and they found it insightful and helpful. They asked me to present the summary findings at two senior management meetings. The findings were further used as the basis for a culture change workshop that the HR Director initiated.

**Transferability** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is the extent to which findings are potentially transferable to other settings. A means of ensuring transferability is to provide thick descriptions of the research context so that future researchers can transfer the findings to their context (Nowell et al., 2017). Viewed from a statistical-probabilistic perspective, generalisability is not an appropriate concept in constructivist research (Smith, 2018). However, Gioia et al. (2013) suggest that it is possible to generalise from smaller sample sizes if the findings are relevant to other populations or domains. Stake and Trumbull (1982) used the term “naturalistic generalisation” to reflect the extent to which research resonates with the reader’s personal experience and could, potentially, apply it to their situation (Tracy, 2013). I argue that findings may be naturalistically generalisable across different organisation types, given the research is about how people experience creativity, a universal ability that underlies human capability for problem solving (Runco, 2003). However, this would be a matter for future research.

To address the **dependability** of the research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest maintaining detailed records or an “audit trail” of the research process. I kept both research and reflexive journals, where I captured my research decisions and choices throughout the research, including reasons for rejecting approaches and personal reflections. I have captured the progression from coding to theme development through a series of mind-maps ([Appendix B](#)) and have been clear about theoretical, methodological and analytic choices made to help the reader navigate those choices (Koch, 1994).

### ***Ethics***

The research was conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics* (BPS, 2014) and with approval from the University's ethics panel. Participants in each study were given full details of the research through an information sheet and verbally before obtaining the participants' signed consent. Details regarding standard aspects of the ethics procedure such as confirmation of ethical approval, participant debrief, right to withdraw, information sheets, and signed consent can be found in Appendices [C](#), [D](#) and [E](#) (Study Ethics Packs). Each study chapter (Chapters [5](#), [6](#), and [7](#)) addresses ethical considerations pertinent to that study.

All participants were reminded that:

- Interviews would be audio-recorded, and the focus groups would be video-recorded. However, the meeting observations would not be recorded.
- Their data would be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention and UK laws on data security.
- Participants and the organisation in which they worked would remain anonymous. Any identifiable data would be censored, and pseudonyms used if needed.
- The purpose of the interviews or focus groups was for participants to reflect on their experience of creativity on a personal level and within their teams or organisation.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the interviews and focus groups may be used in the PhD thesis, reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations.

### ***Reflexivity***

A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions. (Malterud, 2001, pp. 483-484)

My role as a researcher is not neutral (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003; Silverman, 2017). At the start of this chapter, I described how my social constructivist epistemology shaped

this research. My data were co-created with the participants—through the choice of questions I asked, how the data have been interpreted, which aspects of the data have been prioritised, and what conclusions have been drawn. Furthermore, who I am, and my life experiences influence what I pay attention to and my decisions. My interest in how creativity is experienced began when I was the human resources director for a media company. I observed and became curious about how commercial organisations encouraged and discouraged creativity, often unconsciously, through their culture, leadership practices and language. I noticed how the ever-present tensions between being creative and maintaining commercial return played out in the organisation's culture and the experiences of its employees. I began to explore creativity at work when completing the dissertation for my MSc in Applied Positive Psychology. I became “hooked” by the research process and the need to answer questions about how creativity might be optimised in organisations.

Malterud (2001b) suggests that reflexivity begins with being explicit about a researcher's preconceptions on their work. I approached my research with views about how creativity might be experienced in organisations and with the kernel of an idea about whether MERMA (as it was at the start of the research) might be a more helpful model for considering creativity and employee wellbeing together, based on, but deviating from Seligman's (2011) PERMA model of wellbeing. However, I remained curious to see what I might still discover if explored more deeply. I welcomed the possibility of being surprised by the participants' stories. The preconceptions I am aware that I brought to this research are listed below. However, as Ahern (1999, p. 408) stated: “it is not always possible for researchers to set aside things about which they are not aware.”

My initial assumptions were that:

- The potential to be creative is a fundamental aspect of our humanity and sets us apart from other species (Montuori & Donnelly, 2013; Sawyer, 2012). However, not everyone has the same degree of creative talent. Furthermore, individual, social and environmental conditions influence whether creative talent is developed and expressed (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996).
- Creativity is socially constructed, and whilst the opinion of external gatekeepers is important to change a domain (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014), “everyday” or “little c” creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009; Richards, 2007) does not require validation



by external gatekeepers. However, it is nonetheless important to people's wellbeing.

- I am interested in how people experience creativity as a process. As such, I make no assessment or judgement as to whether participants' output might be considered creative or not.

A hallmark of good qualitative research is transparency regarding the "twists and turns" in the research process (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). As such, I have captured some of the challenges during the research process. At the beginning of the research process, I was unrealistic about the time it would take to schedule and conduct the interviews for the first study. I had allocated and secured ethical approval for a three-month data collection window in the lead-up to Christmas 2017. Although the interviews were completed, I learned a valuable lesson, to not underestimate data collection time and energy requirements. Whilst most of the interviews went smoothly, two stood out. Interview ten was conducted via Skype. However, the video connection stopped working part-way through, and whilst I could see the participant, he could not see me. I felt the absence of physical and visual presence, and it was harder to nudge the interview forward, especially given his loquacious nature. Towards the end of the interview schedule in Study 1, I asked a question about the extent to which participants felt their work was meaningful. When I asked this question of participant 11, I noticed a significant shift in her voice tone, pitch, and speed. She became subdued when she voiced that she did not find her work meaningful. I was mindful of her potential distress and my duty to ensure she was not harmed. She was happy to continue the interview, and once the recording had been stopped, we talked for some time. She reassured me that she had enjoyed thinking about and discussing creativity and was reflective rather than distressed.

Finding an organisation willing to participate in the case study (Study 2) was difficult, time-consuming and frustrating. Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) describe the complexity of gaining access to research sites, encouraging researchers to be open and reflexive about the "courtship rituals" (Tracy, 2013, p. 12) and the time it takes to both gain access and to obtain the required data. Once the host organisation agreed to participate, there was a delay of several months in getting started with data collection. I was requesting time from already busy people who had to fit me into their schedule. A further delay was caused by the need to ensure that the non-disclosure agreement I was asked to sign did not inhibit

my research in any way. During the data collection process, meetings I was due to observe were delayed, and I had to follow up and chase the documentation for analysis on several occasions. I had to balance my frustration with the grateful realisation that the organisation was enabling me to do my research and were interested in the outcomes.

The focus groups were time-consuming, and it proved difficult to recruit participants and organise meetings. I relied on an already busy administrator's generous assistance to send out invitations to participate on my behalf and book rooms at the organisation's premises. Focus groups are demanding to facilitate and transcribe. I had planned for a research assistant to help with note taking and administration. However, it proved impossible to co-ordinate their availability with the dates offered by the case study organisation. Furthermore, transcription cannot capture the fullness of the discussion. A frequent challenge of group discussion is the dynamics of participation, with some participants more reticent to speak and others more dominant. I made a point of gently encouraging people to participate whilst not making them feel "obliged" to say something. Similarly, I used my professional experience to move the discussion forward appropriately if I thought one person dominated.

With hindsight, I wish I had requested permission to record the meetings I observed. As my understanding of the data developed during the analytic process, it would have been helpful to listen to meeting recordings rather than rely on written notes. Furthermore, it is difficult to actively listen and take comprehensive notes at the same time. For example, the written notes did not enable me to reflect on the tone of voice used or side conversations that were taking place.

As a social constructivist researcher, I believe that data are co-constructed between myself and the participant; however, sitting across a table from someone where I am choosing the questions and directing the meeting flow implies a power dynamic that is not balanced. As someone familiar with the creative industries, I had a dual role as an informed insider but, equally, someone who was an outsider to their world. This position can have advantages and disadvantages. Potential benefits were that I perhaps had easier access to participants and perceived credibility with them. However, I questioned whether there was a dynamic at play that meant participants assumed I had specific knowledge and filtered what they told me or whether I was making assumptions based on my prior knowledge of the industry rather than what the participant was saying.

Challenging potential assumptions required deep reflection, questioning my assumptions, and going back to the data to look for examples to support my thinking. Furthermore, I found it helpful explaining to my supervisors how I was interpreting the data and the basis of those interpretations.

Gabriel (2015) proposes that a reflexive researcher should question their own emotions as well as their assumptions. Writing about paradox, polarity, and tension was not always comfortable. I explored my own “shadow” (the Jungian archetype, which represents the unconscious parts of our psyche that we choose to ignore, deny or repress: Harris, 1996) and confronted some uncomfortable feelings about myself, relationships, and my professional practice. For example, I reflected on why I moved away from studying music and rejected my creativity. I remembered being bullied at school, feeling physically and emotionally different from everyone else, and not fitting in. I dumbed down my intelligence and rejected music because it was not “cool”, and I wanted to belong.

In the process of making sense of my research data, I started to model the very thing I was trying to make sense of: I was exploring paradox and polarities, deciding between a dichotomous or both/and view. I experienced the tensions of being uncertain of not being clear about where I was heading and needing to learn to trust that the process of being creative would bring me somewhere. I explored the mechanisms I used to cope with the uncertainty of the creative process. As a part-time PhD student, balancing my work, study and home life was challenging, and I did not always get the balance right. During the PhD journey, I was sustained by relationships (friends, family, colleagues); however, some relationships changed or ended during that time. Some people did not seem to understand what I was going through, and we lost common ground. Simple pleasures such as running helped me process my thoughts and feelings. By the end of a run, I often found that things made better sense. I kept a reflective journal to capture thoughts, feelings, poems and images which resonated with me. Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio (2009)

use the evocative image of the “Pensieve”<sup>2</sup> as a metaphor for the reflective journal as a place to store memories and reflections of how my understanding of creativity, research, and indeed, myself changed throughout the research process. As a fan of the *Harry Potter* films, the metaphor was appealing.

### Concluding Remarks

This chapter has detailed the social constructivist and personal assumptions underpinning this research and the choice of interpretative, qualitative methods used for data collection in each of the three studies. In the context of the research aim, which is to understand the experience of creativity within the social setting of an organisation, social constructivism is an appropriate metatheory to analyse the role of language, learning and symbolic systems in how participants construct the meaning of their experience. It is hoped that a greater understanding of how creative workers experience the creative process will inform future research into practical and theoretical ways to encourage creativity within the workplace. Having detailed how the research was designed and giving an overview and justification for the general methods applying across all studies, the thesis next describes the three studies at the core of the research. [Chapter 5](#) presents the first study chapter, exploring how individuals experience and cope with being creative within their organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> The Pensieve is a fictional instrument from the Harry Potter books (Rowling, 2000) which functions as a place to store detailed memories that can be shared with others (as cited in Gerstl-Pepin & Patrizio, 2009). “I use the Pensieve. One simply siphons the excess thoughts from one’s mind, pours them into the basin, and examines them at one’s leisure. It becomes easier to spot patterns and links, you understand, when they are in this form” —the character Albus Dumbledore explaining what a Pensieve is (Rowling, 2000 p. 503).

## **Chapter 5: Study 1 – How do Creative Individuals Experience and Cope with the Process of Being Creative Within an Organisation?**

What makes life worth living? For most people, the answer is relationships: friendships, family and loved ones. Too often, work relationships are not included in this list. (Ragins & Dutton, 2007, p. 23)

This first study aimed to explore how individuals working within a creative organisation experienced the process of being creative, to what extent they perceived it to be a source of uncertainty and tension and how they coped with the process of being creative at work. This study considers the lived experience of individuals working as creatives and leading creative people within an organisational context and ways in which understanding the experience of creativity may help organisations facilitate creativity. Furthermore, the study aims to explore how dialectic tensions inherent in creativity impact the experience of being creative at work. The Study examines the experience of creativity from the perspective of individuals within a system and tensions arising from paradoxical and competing needs to have both autonomy and a sense of belonging to a broader group (Denhardt, 1989). As [Chapter 2, General Literature Review](#) identified, there is an opportunity to understand the lived experience of being creative within an organisation and consider the emotional experience of being part of a creative system. This research brings together individual and social dimensions of creativity to consider the individual within an organisational system.

The need to balance individual, relational and collective identities amid competing demands from the social and organisational context (Brewer & Gardner, 1996; Kreiner et al., 2006a) is a question that is central to the discussion of creativity as a social phenomenon (Haslam et al., 2013). Denhardt (p. 36) describes the tension created by the dualistic need for individuality and connectedness as being the source of great difficulty as “...our solitary self seeks autonomy, growth, and creativity...our social self seeks stability, confirmation, and order. Yet neither can fully exist without the other.” However, viewing self and other as dichotomous locks them into a conflictual relationship where one polarity exerts power and supremacy over the other (Carr & Zanetti, 1999). An alternative perspective is to view self and other as dialectical: the self is necessarily part of the other whether that be through an individual’s relationships with other people, the

organisation in which they work or as part of their broader social context (Carr & Zanetti, 2000; Perlman, 1992).

Individuals seek groups where they feel they belong (e.g., family members, sports teams, or creative communities) since belonging to a like-minded group helps validate an individual's worldview and is a source of self-esteem, status and social valence that shapes their responses, attitudes, and behaviours (Hogg, 2006). Brewer (1991) argues that individuals' need for inclusion and belonging within social groups operates in competition with their need to differentiate themselves from others. "Optimal distinctiveness" (p.475) is achieved when the two opposing needs for inclusion and differentiation are held in balance. However, tensions occur when there is a conflict or imbalance between personal and social identities (Kreiner et al., 2006b; Tajfel, 1982). Diamond (1993) argues that typical identity theories from management and organisation literature do not adequately capture the emotions, inherent tensions and paradoxes associated with identity at work. To perform to their best, groups must balance the need for group cohesion with valuing differences between the members, enabling individuals to safely express their identity without fear of rejection (Lewis, 2000; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991). Too much focus on the collective identity risks "group think" and sameness which is likely to inhibit creativity and, by implication, too little group cohesion risks alienation and disengagement (Kreiner et al., 2006b).

Another pervasive polarity and source of tension within organisations is emotionality and rationality. Fineman (2003) argues that there is a tendency in Western organisations to attempt to rationalise decisions and try to make them appear unemotional. However, emotions are an inseparable part of work life, decision making and creativity. Organisations tend to view emotions as something to be discouraged, and in line with Weberian views on bureaucracy, emotions are neglected in the pursuit of rational behaviour (Denhardt, 1981). However, emotionality and rationality are interrelated and co-dependent rather than a dichotomy (Carr, 2001). Emotions are polarised and seen as something to be controlled to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity. The drive to reduce emotions associated with uncertainty is a core aspect of being human (Anderson et al., 2019). However, Fineman (2003, p.97) argues that "an intricate mental and emotional dance" is required to deal with complex and uncertain situations. This dance becomes more difficult if emotions are denied and suppressed.

## Method

### *Design and Participants*

Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants who described themselves as working within a creative role in an organisation, where creativity was critical to their business success. Whilst the participants were a homogenous group in that they shared the experience of being creative within an organisational setting, they were a heterogeneous sample as they worked in different roles in eight different organisations. Participants were recruited from various organisational levels to explore how they experienced and coped with the creative process at different points in a hierarchy. All participants were over 18 years of age. **Error! Reference source not found.** s hows the occupational and demographic information of participants.

The organisations in which the participants worked belonged to the creative industries as defined by the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS, 2015)<sup>3</sup>.

Two methods of participant recruitment were used:

- Through a key contact (or “Gatekeeper”) within the organisation, typically the HR Director or the Chief Executive Officer. The Gatekeeper was formally approached to request permission to interview several of their employees ([Appendix C](#)). Recognising that participants might have preferred the interview to occur at the workplace and during the working day, the Gatekeeper was explicitly asked to confirm that they were happy for this to happen. The Gatekeeper was asked to send out an email on my behalf ([Appendix C](#)) requesting participants to volunteer for the study and contact me directly via my university email address if they were interested in participating so that the Gatekeeper would be unaware of who participated (thus safeguarding anonymity of participants).

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<sup>3</sup> The DCMS definition of the ‘Creative Industries’ includes advertising and marketing; architecture; crafts; design: product, graphic and fashion design; film, TV, video, radio and photography; IT software and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries and libraries.

- Through a key contact within the “creative industries”, who was provided with information about the study and my university email address which they forwarded to individuals they felt might be interested in participating ([Appendix C](#)). It was then up to the potential participant to contact me directly for further information. They were sent the *Email to Prospective Participants* ([Appendix C](#)) providing details of the study. I requested details of their role and the organisation where they worked to confirm their suitability for the research.

**Table 3***Participant Demographics*

Participant	Job Title	Participant	Job Title
1	Design Manager/artist	7	Project manager
2	Digital designer	8	Creative Director
3	Research co-ordinator / artist	9	Commissioning editor
4	Creative Director	10	Designer
5	Stylist	11	Talent director
6	Writer		
<b>Gender</b>	4 Males 7 Females		
<b>Age</b>	Range	28-63	
	<i>M</i>	43	
	<i>SD</i>	10.53	

***Materials & Procedures***

The interviews were conducted over three months and totalled 15.7 hours of recorded data. The interviews were up to 120 minutes (average 86 minutes, shortest 63 minutes) and conducted in a mutually agreed location, typically in a private meeting room at the participants’ workplace. One interview was conducted via Skype, and one interview was conducted in a quiet space within a hotel lobby.

Interview questions ([Appendix C](#)) were developed based on a range of creativity and paradox theory, designed to explore the research questions. Amabile and Pratt's (2016)



DCM and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model were used as a basis for the questions, combined with concepts of SWPP and paradox theories such as polarities, ambiguity, and uncertainty. For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1999, p. 329) posed questions concerning how society might affect the incidence of creativity, such as "Is there surplus energy available? Does society value and encourage creativity? I adapted these questions to apply more directly to a contemporary organisational context, and from that, developed interview questions (for example, to what extent do you feel you have time to be creative? How does the organisation respond to failures, both emotionally and procedurally?). Furthermore, aspects of Amabile's work (Amabile, 1997; Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Amabile & Pratt, 2016) were used to develop questions regarding environmental factors that may affect creativity in organisations, such as relationships with colleagues and leaders, organisational support, progress in meaningful goals and the availability of sufficient resources. The interview questions for Study 1 were organised around MERMA. However, the semi-structured interviews allowed sufficient scope to explore the participants' responses rather than adhering rigidly to the interview schedule. Participants were asked to reflect on their experience of creativity, both personally and within an organisational setting. They were asked to reflect on their feelings about and attitude towards contradiction, risk, and uncertainty within the creative process.

The description of the data analysis process has been structured to follow Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of TA ([Appendix F](#)). Rather than a linear process, the phases are iterative and reflective, requiring detailed and prolonged engagement with the data. The TA process followed is provided in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#).

### ***Ethical Considerations***

It was not anticipated that the nature of the interviews would cause any psychological distress. However, given that the interviews were exploring the conscious or unconscious existence of paradox, polarity, and tensions within creativity, I was sensitive to the possibility that participants might become emotional during the interview. I was prepared to pause, and if needed, terminate the interview were that necessary, or if the participant chose. In the end, this issue did not arise. Once the recorder was stopped at the end of the interview, the participants were given space to reflect and discuss the interview. I considered what to do if a participant said something

at this stage that I wished to quote or use in the analysis. In that case, I would have asked for permission to note what was said and whether they were happy for me to potentially include the comment in the analysis. In practice, the final, non-recorded section was general conversation. The final interview question (Is there anything else you would like to say?) enabled participants to reflect more generally on the topic. Participants were fully debriefed and offered possible sources of support they could access if necessary.

## Findings and Discussion

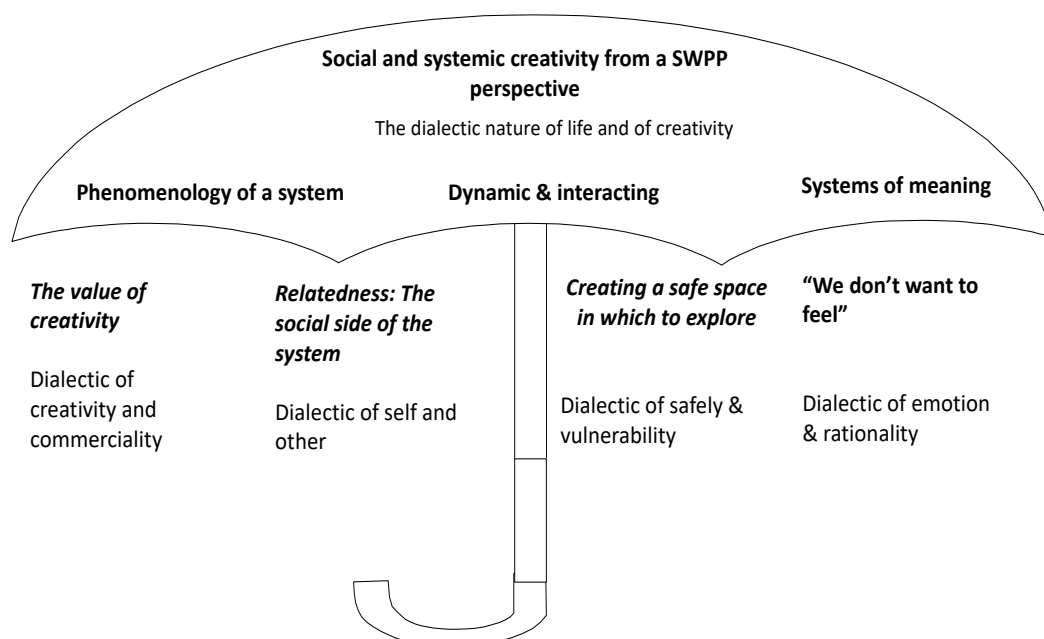
...if there aren't contradictions between theory and experience, then why does anybody bother? Why's anybody curious? If the theory completely fits your experience, why do you need to bother thinking about it? (Participant 6)

### Overview of Themes and Subthemes

Four themes were identified and defined following a detailed and recursive deductive and inductive process of analysing the data and noticing the stories that participants recounted. The themes were chosen to make sense of the data and contribute a new perspective on creativity and SWPP research. As I was analysing the data it became evident that each theme was interconnected and dialectic. The themes have been presented as a diagram in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

*Diagram of Study 1 Themes and Sub-themes*



Wong (2019) described SWPP as an umbrella term for an approach to positive psychology that is more balanced in representing the light and dark of life. It seemed fitting to present the themes under the “umbrella” of second and third wave PP and systemic creativity, providing the context for the themes.

The themes are as follows:

- Theme 1: *The Value of Creativity* captures participants’ perceptions of what constituted creative accomplishment and how creativity was valued within their organisation.
- Theme 2: *Relatedness: The Social Side of the System* considers the role of other people in the creative process as an enabler of creativity or as a source of tension.
- Theme 3: *Certainty in Uncertainty* addresses the paradoxical experience of uncertainty in the creative process
- Theme 4: *“We don’t want to feel”* examined the emotional experience of being creative at work and how participants coped with the emotions arising from the tensions and uncertainty inherent in the creative process.

It was apparent that factors which helped people be creative at work were fundamental human needs that we all share. Participants needed close and supportive relationships and to feel valued for the work that they did. It was vital for them to feel connected with and belong to something meaningful. They needed to express their emotions authentically and feel supported through the challenging aspects of life. Most importantly, they needed to feel safe to explore the boundaries of the self and the social context in which they lived and worked (Kaufman, 2020; Maslow, 1968). The findings suggest that the creative process is experienced as a source of meaning, purpose, positive affect and, at times, negative tension. The tensions observed in the research were dynamic and inter-related, existing on multiple levels. At a macro level, tension existed due to the constant struggle between polarities such as self and other: belonging to a group and having a clear sense of individual identity. Tensions originated from the organisation’s culture and behaviours: perceptions of how creativity was valued (or not) and attitudes to uncertainty, risk, and failure. The tension between the need to balance commercial imperatives with creative output was, at times, experienced by participants

as a dissonance between the espoused values of the organisation and their experience of organisational reality.

### ***Theme 1: The Value of Creativity***

This theme centres on the dialectic of an organisation's commercial purpose versus creativity, which appears to be experienced by the creative workers as polarities that need to be balanced. The findings indicated a profound dissonance between what the participants considered a creative accomplishment and what they perceived their organisation valued and recognised as a creative success. Participants saw creative success as being something personally meaningful to them, such as bringing an idea into reality or having an impact on other people:

To be successful creatively doesn't mean for me, in any way, financial reward...of course, financial reward is a nice goal to have... I think it's about that feeling of inner, I sound like a wanker, don't I? But that feeling of inner peace and like, my God! It's really beautiful in every way. (Participant 4)

However, the participants perceived the organisation's attitude to creativity as a means to an end, with creativity being valued only as a commodity and an instrument for making money. Participants tended to feel that the value or recognition of the creative effort was primarily attributed to the product's commercial success. Participants appeared to have different definitions from their leaders of what was valuable about the creative output (e.g., beauty or novelty versus commercial appeal). The valuing of money over the creative process was experienced as tension and deep frustration:

Creative success here is a bit of an 'also-and.' It's not important. I can't explain it. It's only important if there's money [attached] to it, so if it's a winner it's great, and if there's not money [attached] to it then it's not good enough, and that's not, that's not respecting creativity. (Participant 2)

An example noted was when management offered to give the creative output away for free to secure a particular contract. Participant 8 felt that everything she and her team stood for was being de-valued and assessed as worthless. This example highlights a complex relationship between money and creativity. It appears that the company thought the work valuable and enticing enough that giving it to a client was seen as a means of securing a contract. However, paradoxically, in this example, the participant experienced it as indicating that her work was simply an "add-on" to a contract, with no monetary

value, which she experienced as demotivating. However, it is clear from this example that perceptions of value are subjective. Furthermore, the extent to which creative workers perceive their work as valued (or not) appears to affect intrinsic motivation.

Participant 3 commented that the language is all about “winning” and “losing” contracts in her organisation, with the creative content feeling irrelevant. The “wins” were discussed at board level. The losses were never referred to or learned from. Participants experienced a dichotomy between commerciality and their perception of what creativity “should be”. Participants wanted the innate creative quality of their work to be recognised. One participant used the metaphor of marriage to convey the perception of irreconcilable differences between the two:

I’ve always seen this juxtaposition between wanting amazing creativity and high profitability as one that is a little bit like a marriage that can never work. (Participant 11)

There was a sense that colleagues thought they could develop good ideas “on-demand” (Participant 2) which was experienced as a lack of understanding and respect for the creative process. Feeling unable to communicate their ideas to others and for those others to understand their perspective contributed to feeling disconnected and misunderstood:

I feel very, very alien a lot of the time, most of the time. (Participant 1)

### ***Discussion theme 1: The Value of Creativity***

Social and systemic models of creativity (e.g., Csíkszentmihályi, 1988; Wallace & Gruber, 1989) emphasise the importance of external validation for moving the ‘domain’ forward and distinguishing between something creative rather than original. Whilst originality is required for creativity, it is not synonymous. Definitions of creativity typically include the need for the outcome of the creative process to be “of value” or “useful” or appropriate for the task at hand (Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Weisberg, 2015). These definitions appear to primarily relate to the value of the creative product and its ability to be financially successful: the value *of* creativity.

This theme adds a more nuanced understanding of the need to validate creativity within an organisation. In literature, the emphasis is on external shareholder value (e.g., George, 2007; Heiberg Johansen, 2019) over the personal value derived from creative

activity. Specifically, this research confirms that the need for creativity to be validated does not merely lie with external judges of creative merit. The need to be recognised by peers and leaders for making a qualitatively creative contribution is essential in motivating creative endeavour from contributing individuals and goes to the heart of the creative person's identity and sense of belonging to the organisation. It is evident from this research that participants derived significant value *from* creativity: from the process of being creative and the sense of purpose and meaning that being creative provided. For managers who did not do the creative work themselves, value derives from achieving profit for the company, and by extension, value for themselves and their teams. For those who put a part of themselves into the work, the concept of value seems more personal: enjoyment of the creative process and achieving something personally meaningful. Both are valuable outcomes of the creative process, although with a slightly different emphasis. Individuals appeared to view creativity as part of their ego identity (Erikson, 1963) and as such, when they perceived that creativity was not valued, or at least not valued in a way personally meaningful to them, it felt demotivating and upsetting.

In contrast, the organisations' definitions of success were perceived as being primarily quantitative and rational in nature (mass appeal, popularity, money or "likes"). In this case, the "field" (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988) judges creativity by different criteria from the creatives themselves. It may be the case that organisations have different definitions of creative output, to minimise risk. When an organisation opts for "safe bets" and refuses to take risks on outputs that the creators feel to be qualitatively superior work, creatives may feel that their organisation does not trust their opinions or judgements. The participants' descriptions of success were more experiential and qualitative. I refer to the disconnect between definitions of success as the *paradox of commerciality and creativity*, which are polarities that need to be balanced over time. It could be argued that a more balanced approach to valuing both creative accomplishment and financial returns may result in creative workers feeling more engaged and motivated.

The apparent disconnect between the creative workers in this study and their organisational leaders regarding definitions of creative success had a negative impact on the workers' engagement and how valued they felt. Research on employee engagement (e.g., Claxton, 2014) suggests that feeling valued at work contributes to higher intrinsic motivation and wellbeing. Similarly, positive psychology research (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998;

Isen & Reeve, 2005) demonstrates that intrinsic motivation and positive affect increase the cognitive flexibility required for creativity. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if a creative worker feels valued, they are likely to be more intrinsically motivated to be creative at work. The basic human needs to feel seen and heard, valued and accepted for who we are and what we bring to our work are vitally important to creativity and wellbeing (Rogers, 1961).

Participants were critical of their organisations for being reluctant to take creative risks, submitting what they considered sub-optimal work due to lack of time or a desire to “play it safe” (Participant 1) which impacted the pride participants felt for their organisation's output. Similarly, a perceived failure by leaders to understand how creativity happens and how challenging it can be seemed to contribute to participants' feelings of alienation which impacted their sense of belonging to the organisation. It is somewhat ironic that whilst creative people are seemingly more open to experiences and more willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty, participants appeared less tolerant of an organisational culture that did not overtly value the same things that they did. Might this suggest that tolerance of ambiguity may be domain-specific: a tolerance of that which enables their creative endeavour, rather than a tendency to be tolerant in general?

An important question arising from this research is how to define creative success in organisations. This research highlights that a creative worker's evaluation of whether their output is creative, their “internal frame” (Stein, 1953, p.312), is essential, regardless of whether or not the output is considered creative in a “Big C” or domain-changing way (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). We must recognise the importance of peers and leaders validating a creative idea, even when it does not have obvious commercial value, because doing so nurtures creative employees and motivates them to continue to create. Furthermore, research also suggests that achievements recognised and appreciated by other people are more meaningful, motivating, and contribute to a sense of social belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). A clear implication from this research is that we should broaden the definition of creativity to encompass the value of the creative process to the individual and emphasise personal value (“little c” creativity: Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009) for the creator. For organisations wishing to maximise the creativity of their workers, recognising creative achievement over and above its ability to make money would contribute to helping creative workers feel valued for who they are

and what they can contribute to the organisation. It is a false dichotomy to suggest that creativity in organisations is either about making money or about the personal meaning and enjoyment of creativity: it needs to be about both. When creativity is seen as a commodity, when only the output is valued and not the value derived from the process, it may negatively impact the creative person's core identity, sense of belonging to the organisation, and motivation.

### ***Theme 2: Relatedness - The Social Side of the System***

Social creativity theories emphasise the importance of environment and interactions between people to the creative process (Glăveanu, 2010b; Montuori & Purser, 2000). This theme focuses on the role of relationships in the creative process, both as an enabler of creativity and a source of tension. Relationships—categorised into those at home (family, friends) and work—were perceived as vital for creativity. A distinction was made between productive relationships that enabled creativity and those that got in the way. Some participants clearly distinguished between relationships at home being critical and relationships at work outside of the immediate team not being seen as important. When asked how important relationships were to creativity, one participant responded:

My personal relationships, very. My work relationships, not very, except for my team and ONLY because I've yet to figure out how to bridge the gap between creative teams and other teams. (Participant 1)

However, whilst relationships and interactions with other people were considered vital for creativity, other people were also a source of tension. One way that tension is expressed is in the need to get other people on board with helping to deliver one's vision:

The dark part of the process is actually the craft part...you can't realise the thing...without a load of other people... First of all, you've got to persuade everybody else that this moment of illumination isn't just the 'drugs' [laughing], or you know, something monumentally stupid, or some kind of vanity. (Participant 6)

Tension is also expressed in the way that people 'interfere' with the creative process or feel as though they have a right to change something or know better:

...everyone wants to sit behind you and go 'move it left, make it bigger', and you always want to go, 'Oh my God! Learn to do it! If you want to do it, just do it...I don't sit behind you and answer emails!' (Participant 1)



The social perspective of creativity was evident, in terms of individuals seeing the need for setting their creativity in context and relationships with others, and indeed, their relationship with creativity:

So, I think creativity, in its purest form, I have a great relationship with and if I, and I do like the idea of being a romantic artist in a, like in a studio somewhere, but I also really like communication and talking to people. (Participant 3)

The participants valued getting different perspectives from other people within their team and more broadly. Different views were a source of motivation and enabled them to get input, see things differently, or as a sense check:

...if you don't get out of the office and you aren't inspired by new things and if you don't go and challenge yourself and your brain, everyone ends up playing in the same kind of pool of ideas. (Participant 8)

...I think it's all about sharing, so it's all, it's about bringing people in, so I like having people around because I think that creates energy, it creates creativity. (Participant 5)

The importance of different perspectives, different types of people as important stimuli for creativity was clearly articulated:

The team I've got are polar opposites to me, so together we all...bring out each other's differences and address the fact that, actually, my opinion counts for very little, which is fine because they're right, because it's all about how we work as one unit. (Participant 11)

Those participants who perceived that their organisations lacked diversity were clear on its impact on their creativity:

If you don't foster it [creativity], it's like any other muscle, if you don't nurture [creativity] then you don't get it and, actually, because of the uniformity of this place and because we all have to think a certain way and fit in, there is very little creativity. (Participant 9)

It was felt that conversations with other people helped individuals' motivation to create and the creative process itself. It was not necessary for the conversations always to be specifically about the creative problem that the individual was working on; sometimes, unrelated conversations or meetings with other people created insight:

That, that sparks amazing conversations, amazing ideas, makes you feel so interested and alive, I think, and it doesn't, doesn't matter in what capacity, that I think, is the best thing. (Participant 9)

The tensions between participants' personal values and beliefs and those of their organisations were highlighted in the prior theme, and this issue features again in this theme. Creative workers often felt alienated by their leaders who did not appear to value what they valued, and as such, they felt a lack of acceptance and belonging:

We're never, ever included. Ever. I've never been to any organisation anywhere. I've been in everything from a printing company to beauty, banks, everything. The creative teams are never included with anyone else. I mean in big meetings or whatever, with anyone else. We're not included. (Participant 1)

Relationships that were supportive and promoted a safe working environment were seen as essential for creativity to flourish:

I don't think you can necessarily have an idea without at least having conversations or being challenged by someone else...the other thing that is really important is the feeling of safety to allow you to get to good ideas. If you feel threatened or if you feel that relationships aren't good or if you're doing something and it doesn't come out the right way and you're going to be punished or judged, then you're never going to have those good ideas. (Participant 7)

### ***Discussion Theme 2: Relatedness: The Social Side of the System***

A central premise of social and systemic theories of creativity is the importance of other people as gatekeepers and as part of the broader social and cultural context in which creativity happens (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988; Glăveanu, 2011b). However, these theories do not elaborate on how relationships within the system shape and influence the experience of creativity. Broader theorising on relationships from positive psychology (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003) and beyond (e.g., systems theory) shed light on the influence of relationships on creativity. The need to belong and have trusting and supportive relationships are primary human drivers (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Kaufman, 2020; Lawrence et al., 2002). There is a rich history of research within positive psychology concerning the centrality of relationships to optimal human functioning and meaning in life (e.g., Keyes, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). However, the literature review revealed that the emotional impact and experience of strong and

positive relationships to creativity at work had not been adequately researched, and this study presented an opportunity to explore these issues.

Relationships strengthen the upward spiral of positive emotions leading to cognitive flexibility (Fredrickson, 1998; Isen et al., 1987). However, relationships can also reinforce a negative spiral of fear, anxiety and doubt. Feeling supported and cared for in a relationship creates the conditions where it feels safe to push boundaries and explore. However, it is important to note that negative emotions can inspire creativity. The findings did demonstrate that anger and dissatisfaction could also be catalysts for creativity. Theme 4, “We don’t want to feel”, will explore the dynamics of negative emotion and creativity in more depth.

Creativity research typically emphasises the importance of or “weak ties” (Perry-Smith, 2006) in enhancing creativity as they enable creative workers to access socially distant information that may stimulate different combinations of ideas. The findings of this study support the need for weak ties to provide a wider pool of creative inspiration. However, I argue that weak ties may enhance the creative person’s sense of belonging to a broader creative community or “tribe”, which is important for the creative person’s ego- and social-identity (Erikson, 1963; Tajfel, 1982).

Research suggests that strong relationships may hinder creativity since people with stronger ties typically share similarities in approach and perspective, limiting exposure to views and practices significantly different from their own (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Baer, 2010). However, the findings suggest that relationships that emphasise attachment, belonging, and unconditional positive regard (Bowlby, 1969; Rogers, 1959) provide security and safety to push boundaries and explore: a “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, participant 7 described how a stable and secure environment inspired her willingness to experiment more and take more creative risks. Similarly, participant 9 felt that relationships that provided a feeling of safety facilitated her creativity. It was important for her that when something did not turn out as expected, she would not be punished or judged. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) describes how a younger person develops with the accompanying support of an older person, typically a child and their caregiver. By applying our understanding of human relationship needs to systemic and social theories of creativity, one can envisage how caring and

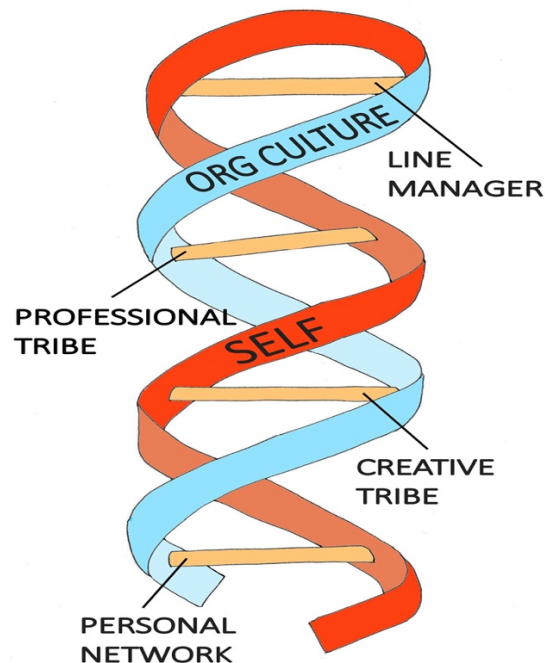
supportive relationships from leaders towards their team members may create conditions likely to encourage creativity within organisations.

It was evident from the findings that different kinds and strengths of work relationships impact creativity on multiple levels.

Figure 11 illustrates the different “strands” of relationships in a dynamic system, impacting what it feels like to be creative at work.

**Figure 11**

*Proposed Strands of Relationships*



The individual’s self-concept, confidence, coping strategies, and defence mechanisms are shaped by others and, in turn, influence their relationships with those in their workgroup and beyond. Internally driven tensions arising from self-doubt, frustration, and the discomfort of uncertainty co-exist with externally driven tension from relating to others. Relationships amongst the tribe of other creative people inside the organisation provided participants with a sense of belonging to a broader community and potentially offered solidarity in the face of perceived opposition to creative ideas from their organisation. For example, Participant 4 commented that he found working with other creative people inspired his own creativity. And as Participant 10 stated, “there’s a reason you talk about design teams.” The sense of belonging to a creative team and be able to

bounce ideas around with others were primary reasons for him moving from freelance design work to being part of a creative team within an organisation.

Beyond their creative tribe, there were other co-workers that creatives interacted with (such as those in finance, technology, marketing) who were not part of their creative tribe but were not management either. When participants felt those colleagues restricted their ability to create, they were experienced as a source of irritation and perceived as indicative of a culture that did not value creativity. Moreover, supportive personal relationships outside work, such as partners, families, friends, or other creative groups, constitute overlapping strands of relationships. Marris (1993) suggests that the hallmarks of positive social relationships share the same essential qualities as positive attachment experiences: predictability, responsiveness, intelligibility, supportiveness, and reciprocity of commitment. As the equivalent of organisational “primary caregivers”, relationships with line managers were critical in creating the conditions of safety, trust, and belonging necessary for creative accomplishment.

The data showed that relationships were important for creativity in different ways. More distant connections provided different perspectives, and learning from others was considered a source of inspiration and motivation, helping participants expand their ideas (Perry-Smith, 2006) whereas stronger relationships with colleagues who reinforced their identity as a creative person helped individuals to feel “understood” and provided a sense of belonging and safety (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1968; Montuori & Purser, 1995). Relationships shape the lived experience of being at work, and those relationships exist in tension between safety and vulnerability: to what extent do relationships at work create a safe scaffold within which the creative person can explore and be vulnerable?

### ***Theme 3: Certainty in Uncertainty***

A significant motivator for participants was to find answers to questions and to “bring order to experience” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996, p. 38). Clarity could be a question the participants wanted to answer, clarity over what the creative idea wanted to become or bringing the creative work to a conclusion. There was a sense that participants wanted to know the purpose of the project but were quite happy that the process of getting there was unclear and uncertain. They were also comfortable with the fact that they might end up somewhere other than they had initially intended:

I think there's something really amazing about the way that art or creative projects are produced, and you never know what's going to happen, and that's quite... because you never know what the end product is going to be, and that's the amazing part of it. You're kind of, you just, you have a gut instinct or a feeling and you kind of roll with it, and so I think what drives me, it's like the energy and seeing what's going to be produced in the end. (Participant 3)

The desire to ease the tension of uncertainty by seeking clarity was a source of intrinsic motivation. Uncertainty was considered to be an essential component of the creative process:

...uncertainty is a, it's part of the process of creativity, I think it's fundamental, it has to be there. (Participant 3)

The participants sought to resolve uncertainty but could suspend their need for closure to potentially find the "best" answer. They demonstrated optimism, an expectation that things would work out, coupled with the willingness to be uncertain. The sense of uncertainty over the "final" destination of the creative process was exciting and potentially anxiety-provoking at the same time. Participants seemed to be able to tolerate the discomfort provoked by uncertain situations and not to seek closure too soon (Kruglanski & Orehek, 2012), trusting that they would find a solution:

...have you seen the film *Martian* or read the book? It's got Matt Damon in, he's a scientist, there's a storm, he gets left behind, he's faced with the uncertainty that he's going to be on this planet for several years...and he just uses the thing that he's good at...to overcome these hurdles and survive...it's kind of, I might not have the answer now, but one thing I have got is my mind and that's...got me to where I am. (Participant 2)

The participants appeared to have a complex and paradoxical relationship with uncertainty. It was experienced as uncomfortable and a state which they wished to ameliorate, yet at the same time, it appeared to be motivational and, paradoxically, sometimes pleasurable (Wilson et al., 2005). There seemed to be a dynamic balance of uncertainty and certainty. Participants appeared to need sufficient clarity on where they were heading and enough uncertainty to motivate exploration and discovery (Cseh, 2014):

Again, that's where myself and creative struggle...I love the certainty, even in uncertainty. (Participant 11)

In answer to the question: “How do you cope with uncertain situations?” typical responses referenced planning or putting structure in place to contain the uncertainty. Participants qualified the types of uncertainty that they find most uncomfortable:

...if there is a big uncertainty in your job, for example, or if it touches on the basic fundamental things in your life...it's impossible to do any sort of work. (Participant 3)

However, uncertainty was also seen as inspiring and enjoyable:

...I quite like being messy with everything, so I'm, I'm really happy when things are unclear, and you can explore different connections and find your own way. I enjoy that. (Participant 8)

I like uncertainty and I kind of like the thrill and the exhilaration of not knowing what's going to happen next. (Participant 3)

The lack of clear direction from the organisation caused tension for participants, increasing their sense of uncertainty. However, some degree of constraint was still seen as necessary for the creative process:

...sometimes, people think by giving you little or no direction, they're allowing you to be creative when they're doing exactly the opposite...it's about having a framework. (Participant 10)

At other times, participants perceived that their organisation did not appear to cope well with uncertainty and sought to resolve the tension of uncertainty by deploying a “command and control” leadership style:

...most organisations are victims of quite weak leadership, and weak leadership believes in command-and-control... they find it really quite hard to embrace paradox... almost impossible to embrace uncertainty. (Participant 6)

The parent, adult, child thing. I think business has been built on this hierarchical ‘I'm boss, I'm in control.’ (Participant 11)

Similarly, it was felt that organisations cope by, unconsciously, discouraging creativity through attempting to minimise risk:

I think that the natural default position of most organisations is actually to slightly discourage creativity because the organisation always asks you to limit vision to match deliverability. (Participant 6)

The exception to this was the participant who is co-founder of a creative business. She seemed more willing to take risks at the organisational level and identified that there is someone in the company whose role is to highlight and manage risk, act as a sounding board, and provide a supportive “reality check”. She recognised the value of this role within the creative team as a counterpoint that offers a different perspective and challenges her thinking.

Most participants felt that their organisations frequently sought to apportion blame when things went wrong. The fear of being blamed affected participants’ willingness to take creative risks:

I think organisations like here...are built on the premise of people celebrating the glory days, but when things hit the fan, it’s about finding a scapegoat, and the scapegoat’s the same people that are there for the great ideas. It’s just two sides of the same coin, and they don’t accept that. There’s always the blame. (Participant 11)

Participants typically felt comfortable with risk-taking on an individual level as an essential part of the creative process:

I feel very comfortable generally taking risks in the creative process because I just think, in the creative process, why wouldn’t you? Because how do you know what you’re going to find if you don’t take a few risks or if you don’t put yourself out there? (Participant 3)

Risk-taking within the organisation and their perception of its willingness to take and support risks was another matter. The discomfort of risk-taking within their organisation was apparent as participants felt less able to take creative risks at work than at home. The consequences of making a mistake at home did not have the same potential impact as making a mistake at work, where they could be blamed or adversely judged. A significant influence in participants’ attitude to risk and failure was how psychologically safe (Edmondson, 1999) they felt in the organisation, i.e., how their direct manager, and the organisation more broadly, responded to failure. The fear of failure, being criticised or even fired, resulted in participants restricting the extent of their creative risk-taking:

The fear, being scared, kills [creativity] dead. So, the fear of speaking out, the fear of communicating something, the fear of, of letting, you know, your real thoughts come out, all of that stuff, kills creativity dead. And unfortunately, that is one of the issues here, too scared to say the thing that you want to say, or too scared to speak out or



too scared to not tow the party line or too scared to break out of the uniformity.  
(Participant 9)

### ***Discussion Theme 3: Certainty in Uncertainty***

The literature suggests that creative people have personality traits associated with creativity, such as tolerance for ambiguity and openness to experience (e.g. Csíkszentmihályi, 1997). Indeed, Sternberg (2003) posited that uncertainty tolerance is required to realise creative potential. Although uncertainty may include ambiguity, uncertainty is a broader concept (Carleton, 2012; Grenier et al., 2005). Weick (2015) concludes that ambiguity arises when something can be seen or interpreted more than one way. He points out that uncertainty is a situation in which there is doubt. Furthermore, he cautions that something ambiguous is uncertain, however, uncertain situations are not necessarily ambiguous. Uncertainty is a subjective state that can range from trivial – for example, uncertainty about the weather – to existentialist uncertainty about the meaning of life (Hogg, 2007; van den Bos, 2000). Experience of uncertainty is typically considered an aversive state that negatively impacts psychological and physical wellbeing (Carleton, 2016; Klein et al., 1976). The extent to which the source or implications of the uncertainty is meaningful (or not) would seem likely to impact an individual's affective response.

Individual responses to or tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity differ between people and context (Kagan, 2009). Within creativity literature, tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty avoidance appear to be synonymous (e.g., Zenasni et al., 2008; Zhang & Zhou, 2014), capturing the extent to which individuals perceive and cope with ambiguous or unclear situations. Several constructs capture responses to uncertainty, e.g., uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1984), tolerance of uncertainty (Dugas et al., 1997), and risk-taking propensity (McLain, 2009). Furnham and Marks (2013) provide a helpful summary of the subtle differences and applications. Hofstede (1984) defines uncertainty avoidance as the extent to which people feel threatened by uncertainty and ambiguous situations.

Sorrentino and Roney's (2013) uncertainty orientation theory describes individual differences in how uncertainty is experienced. People who tolerate ambiguous situations see them as desirable and challenging and tend to score highly on openness to experience tests (Furnham & Marks, 2013). Conversely, people intolerant of ambiguity typically see the world in black and white terms and find ambiguous situations distressing (Frenkel-

Brunswik, 1949). Seeing it as a continuum, Sorrentino and Roney posit that uncertainty-oriented people actively engage with uncertainty, seeking out information that may resolve the uncertain situation. At the opposite end of the continuum, certainty-oriented individuals seek to maintain clarity and avoid situations that create uncertainty. Creativity researchers normally associate tolerance of ambiguity with creativity given the inherent uncertainty of creativity and the need to remain open to exploring novel solutions (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Runco, 2007; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995).

However, if we assume that creative people are more tolerant of uncertainty and ambiguity because they tend to be more open to experience (e.g., Barron & Harrington, 1981), the question arises as to what type of uncertainty they are more tolerant of than the average person? All uncertainty and ambiguity in all contexts? Or only particular kinds, in specific contexts? As the findings demonstrate, the experience of uncertainty in the creative process is paradoxical. Uncertainty is experienced as an essential part of creativity, at times uncomfortable and exciting. The findings point to differing responses to uncertainty depending on the context that elicited different responses. Participants distinguished between “big” uncertainty, such as uncertainty over money, jobs or housing that provoked anxiety and discomfort, and “little” uncertainties like exploring an exciting idea (Hogg, 2007; van den Bos, 2000). Participant 3 used the examples of job security, moving house or money, “the fundamental things”, as the kind of big uncertainty that she found uncomfortable.

Uncertainty about the safety of important relationships, such as those with leaders, appeared to be experienced as worrying and more challenging to cope with than uncertainty about the direction of a project. Zhang and Zhou (2014) found that empowering leadership had a positive relationship to creativity in situations where uncertainty avoidance and trust were both high, pointing to the importance of leaders developing trusting relationships with their employees, especially those employees who are less comfortable with uncertainty.

Secure and trusting relationships seem to be an essential aspect of how uncertainty is experienced. As the findings showed, a “command and control” (Participant 6) leadership style appeared to negatively impact levels of comfort with risk-taking and uncertainty. To be uncertain involves vulnerability, and trust requires vulnerability in relationship with others (Mayer et al., 1995). When the predictability and reliability of

relationships with others felt unsafe for participants, coping with “little” uncertainty was reported by them to be harder because of the potential risks of being vulnerable to blame and possible repercussions (“big” uncertainty). The findings suggest that the uncertainty of creating requires secure scaffolding. An organisation culture that blames and seeks to control does not create a solid foundation for risk and experimentation.

Taking risks was experienced as a motivation to create, a source of both positive and negative emotions, and as a source of meaning. Participants typically experienced failure as a way of learning and growing from their experience. Failure could result in “happy accidents” (Participant 1), which took their creativity in different directions. The organisation’s attitude to risk was, at times, seen as stifling creativity. Participants found their various organisations’ reticence to take “intelligent risks” as deeply frustrating and a source of tension. Research demonstrates that when participants felt uncertain, they displayed a negative bias towards creativity (Mueller et al., 2012). An unconscious bias against creativity may be a defensive response to feelings of vulnerability, that it is not safe for leaders or creative workers to be vulnerable, or that failure may be career-limiting. This pattern is seen in participants’ views of their leaders’ attitudes toward failure and risk and aligns with Mueller et al.’s findings.

However, more variables likely affect a willingness to embrace creativity. For example, a bias against creativity may also stem from prevailing myths and misconceptions about how work should be done and what working practices should be. For example, there was an expectation from organisations that creative workers would be present at work between set hours and would sit behind a computer rather than taking a more flexible approach to where and when work happens. The exception to this was the participant who was a director in their own business, who recognised (as a creative person herself) that, sometimes, people worked better in a café or at different times and entrusted her employees to do their job in their way. It was not felt necessary to control where and when they worked as it was the quality of work that mattered.

A negative spiral of risk aversion results in the creative person potentially “watering down” their creativity to feel safe and please failure-fearful leaders. The spiral continues downwards (Fredrickson, 1998) as the creative person knows that they have not achieved what they might have, potentially resulting in feelings of frustration and a lack of pride in their work. The organisational machine that says “do it quickly, do it cheaply and don’t

fail” is juxtaposed with creative teams who experience the tension of being creative in that context: the polarity of commerciality and creativity in action.

***Theme 4: “We Don’t Want to Feel.”***

Consistent with literature (e.g., Akinola & Mendes, 2008; Amabile et al., 2005), affect was recognised as being an integral part of the creative process. Participants seemed to be comfortable talking about a whole range of emotions, both “positive” and “negative” (e.g., joy, frustration, self-doubt, anxiety, fear), that they felt within the creative process:

I think emotions are important because if you were to create stuff based on one emotion, say, happiness, I think you would probably end up [running] out of ideas almost...I think sadness can help you realise creative thoughts based on insights...I don’t think you should shut yourself off from those emotions. (Participant 2)

The process of being creative was both exhilarating and frustrating. Participants seemed to enjoy being creative and were accepting of its downsides:

The process is enjoyable most of the time, and the product is what gives you satisfaction, that nice, happy, success feelings that you get, and the brain rush of chemicals – you can feel them, ooh, I’ve done something! You know, but if you don’t get that, it feels really deflating. (Participant 1)

Creativity was seen as a source of happiness, fun, joy, pride, excitement, and wonder. Participants talked about “feeling alive”, which was frequently associated with coming up with unusual connections:

There are all those great quotes on the internet like you know, ‘do something you really love, and you’ll never do a day’s work in your life’, but it is true! It’s a naff old boring saying, but it’s true. (Participant 4)

There was also a sense of powerfulness, release of tension, and positive energy:

I’m like, Oh My God, but it just fell into place. It was just divine. So, when you get those moments, it doesn’t matter if the whole world says, ‘what the fuck was that?’ It’s just that moment that you’ve had. It just felt like a beautiful moment. (Participant 4)

The role of negative emotions in creativity was experienced as complex and paradoxical. Negative emotions were an integral part of the creative process, with the most common negative emotion being frustration. Frustration was caused by many

things, such as relating to other people, not having a clear brief, not switching off after work, or not getting the creative output they were looking for. Although, at times, the frustration came from the personal uncertainty of starting a project:

[Being] faced with a blank sheet of paper. Where do I begin? What's that first line that I put down, or what's that first sentence of that book? It's trying to find that, and you can't get it, and you're frustrated and arrhgg! I'm going around in circles.  
(Participant 2)

Alternatively, when the "creative juices" were just not flowing:

When you get stuck, when you come to a moment where you can't get past, maybe, a lack of creativity or when you feel like you're being very samey or too safe.  
(Participant 7)

Sometimes a creative project simply did not work out, which was experienced as a tension:

I do a lot of things for a purpose. They are not just art. It's not just fun. There's a purpose. You do all the planning and the work, and at the end of it, actually, it didn't do what it was designed to do. It fails, and that hurts. And you know, you can't always just create, sometimes. (Participant 1)

However, negative emotions could also inspire creativity. Anger, dissatisfaction, and frustration were, at times, catalysts for creativity:

The negative emotions...make me sort of 'zipper' in my head actually than the positive emotions. If...my back's against the wall...I can think on my feet in an amazing way, and...there's adrenaline that...quickens everything in your head, and you can suddenly see things really clearly and brilliantly...so actually, the negative is as interesting as the positive. (Participant 9)

The participants showed an ability to regulate their negative emotions in the pursuit of their creative goal:

I think being creative and going through that process...it's about exploring and going to the point where you maybe do feel uncomfortable and asking yourself why does that make you feel uncomfortable...what evokes those emotions and question what those emotions are and where they come from, and I...feel like that's an important part of the process. (Participant 10)

Whilst the literature describes negative activating emotions such as anger and fear as catalysts for creativity (Baas et al., 2011), the findings demonstrate how negative

activating emotions could also inhibit creativity, depending on the context and personal meaning associated with the negative emotion:

The fear, being scared, kills it dead. So, the fear of speaking out, the fear of communicating something, the fear of, of letting you know, your real thoughts come out, all of that stuff, umm, kills creativity dead. (Participant 9)

Whilst emotions were considered an integral part of the creative process, participants did not tend to feel that their organisations were comfortable with emotional expression. The participants recounted incidences where co-workers found it hard to understand why their creative colleagues were “being emotional” and, at times, co-workers took the expression of negative emotion personally rather than being able to recognise it as part of the creative process, which resulted in tension and conflict:

Our society isn't in the mind frame to care about feelings, and I think creativity is about evoking feelings and we don't want to feel, which is why there is probably more substance abuse now than there's ever been. (Participant 11)

You don't see the emotions, which I actually find really weird, and it is quite emotionless, but sometimes you want someone to be, to see a kind of rawness or energy from someone, but they hide it. We never understand what kind of emotions are happening because we don't. We're not invited into that part of the organisation. (Participant 3)

#### ***Discussion Theme 4: “We Don't Want to Feel.”***

The relationship between emotions and creativity is complex and, at times, contradictory (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Research on creativity and emotion in the extant literature has tended to focus on how positive, negative and ambivalent emotional states impact creative idea generation (e.g., Akinola & Mendes, 2008; Amabile et al., 2005; Fong, 2006; Isen et al., 1987). The focus for the current research is different because there is interest in the individual's emotional experience of creativity: what it feels like to be creative at work. It is essential to understand the fullness of the emotional experience of creativity to support creative workers appropriately. This section discusses the emotional experience of being creative within an organisational system with reference to:

- Appraisal, co-valence, and complementarity of positive and negative affect.
- Emotional tension and creativity originating from the organisation's culture and leaders.

- Coping with the emotional tensions of creativity.

The dialectical principles of co-valence and complementarity are central to SWPP (Lomas & Ivztan, 2016). Applied to emotions and creativity, the principle of co-valence presented by those scholars highlights the extent to which creativity is a complex blend of polarities such as light and dark, calm, and energised, joyful and frustrating. Being creative at work was described as a “love/hate” relationship (Participant 3). The principle of complementarity argues that phenomena are typically made up of co-dependent polarities. The participants' experience in this research exemplified the principles of co-valence and complementarity in action. It was striking how accepting the participants appeared in all aspects of the creative process. However, it is important to note that accepting both does not necessarily mean that the negative emotions were pleasant to experience.

A parallel between creativity research and PP 1.0 research is a tendency to valorise the positive over negative. PP has been criticised for propagating a binary perspective of positive emotions as good and negative as bad (e.g., Held, 2004). Similarly, an apparent overemphasis on the positive aspects of creativity at the expense of understanding some of the emotional challenges does not take into account the context and complexity of emotions involved in being creative at work. The challenging parts of the creative process are essential; creative people know that. Indeed, flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990) is a state of tension between skill and challenge on the verge of overwhelm. Flow is a deep form of intrinsic motivation that enables the creator to be fully present in the moment and approach a creative task with an open mind, minimal self-awareness, and self-judgement (Keller & Landhäußer, 2014). Furthermore, being in flow, or peak experience (Maslow, 1968), is a positive subjective experience that contributes to a sense of meaning and self-actualised happiness. However, to achieve flow creators need clear goals, immediate and unambiguous feedback and an appropriate balance of task demands and skills (Nakamura & Csíkszentmihályi, 2009).

The findings indicate that there is an opportunity for leaders to recognise the emotional experience of being creative and providing the necessary conditions of safety and support that could potentially minimise the discomfort. This research suggests feelings such as fear, blame, or lack of safety could be detrimental to creativity. In their experimental research, Baas et al. (2008) posited that negative activating moods (for

example, anger and fear) should enhance creativity by encouraging perseverance. Similarly, research demonstrates that negative emotions may facilitate solving insight problem tasks, or evaluating the usefulness of an idea (e.g., Martin & Stoner, 1996; Sowden & Dawson, 2011). However, the context in which mood or emotion occurs is important (e.g., Isen & Baron, 1991; Martin & Stoner, 1996) as emotions create cues for the appropriate behaviours to adopt. The inference from this research is that negative emotions resulting from a creative task (i.e., frustration or anger about difficulties with a creative problem) may promote perseverance when the task is meaningful, or is part of their job (i.e., the task may not be meaningful, but they have to do it). But when negative emotions relate to self-concept, perceptions of safety or attachment, negative emotions appear to narrow thought-action tendencies and reduce creativity (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005).

Participants considered emotions an essential facet of their creative process. However, their perception was that the organisation set emotional boundaries, consciously or unconsciously. There appeared to be cultural rules (Hochschild, 2003; Ulus & Gabriel, 2016) within organisations about the acceptable range and quantum of emotions. The participants did not tend to fit into the narrow range of emotional expression that appears to be typical within organisations. Expression of emotions such as love, hate or fear is not typically considered appropriate at work (Gabriel, 1998a; Putnam & Mumby, 1993). The Weberian principle of rational bureaucracy emphasises efficiency and rational activity. Weber (1978, p. 975) argues that “the more [bureaucracy] is ‘dehumanised’, the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation.” This “myth of rationality” (Putnam & Mumby, p.36) where rationality is seen as positive and emotional expression as negative and discouraged is pervasive in organisations still constructed in machine-like ways (Elfenbein, 2007; G. Morgan, 2006). Putnam and Mumby suggest that rationality and order are considered masculine and positive descriptors, whereas affect and chaos are perceived as feminine and negative, reflecting the male-dominated culture of many workplaces. Against this backdrop, strong emotions make us feel vulnerable to being hurt, shamed or rejected by others (Fineman, 2003).



Emotions are an inseparable part of work life (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Fineman, 2003). Although social interaction is seen as the most common source of emotional experience, environmental factors such as noise or physical artefacts can also provoke an emotional response (Elfenbein, 2007). Emotions may be triggered by the success or failure of a task, colleagues' actions, organisational change, feedback or perceptions of fairness (Brief & Weiss, 2002). Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) argue that such affective events influence the emotional state of employees and, therefore, their behaviour. Work involves interacting with and relating to others (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006; Dutton & Ragins, 2017). Furthermore, it requires individuals to constantly balance the boundaries between themselves and others (Boudens, 2005). The concept of emotional contagion or emotions as social information in a work context (Barsade et al., 2018; Van Kleef et al., 2012), points to how individual emotional expression, particularly that of leaders, impacts others' feelings, cognitions, or behaviours (Gaddis et al., 2004). Furthermore, Barsade and Gibson (2007) argue that affect impacts most aspects of organisational life, including decision-making, performance, and group dynamics.

### ***Creativity and Tension***

That creativity requires tension is not in question (e.g., Bilton & Leary, 2002; Csíkszentmihályi & Getzels, 1971; Runco, 2004). In many respects, tension is the source of creativity – an unresolved problem to be answered or a creative tension between system elements. The tensions discussed in this section are emotional tensions, defined as feelings resulting from situations perceived as threatening, frustrating or that cause a loss of self-esteem (American Psychological Association, n.d.). According to the participants, tensions were experienced on multiple levels. Tensions originated from the participants' challenges with the creative process, being faced with “a blank sheet of paper” (Participant 2) and tensions originated from their relationships with co-workers and leaders.

The findings of this current research mirror previous studies (e.g., Beghetto, 2016; Rosso, 2014; Stokes, 2006), showing that constraints can be helpful, with creative people purposefully putting constraints in place to provide structure and as a “framework” (Participants 8, 9 & 10) to create within or challenge existing assumptions. Participants experienced their leaders' lack of a clear brief as a significant source of tension. Tension was experienced when the intended outcome of the creativity was unclear. There

appeared to be an assumption by leaders that, to be motivated, a creative person needed as few restrictions and boundaries as possible, which is a common misconception about creativity (Amabile, 1996). However, participants needed clarity about what was expected to protect themselves from potential criticism, misunderstanding and disappointment. The example of being told to “do what you like” (Participant 4) backfired when the creative output was not what the commissioner wanted, a source of great tension and frustration. Although, paradoxically, there were also positives to uncertainty in goals as it provided freedom for participants to explore. Participant 3 expressed the positive emotions she experienced from the uncertainty of not knowing what was going to happen in a creative project. She felt that uncertainty in a work project could generate lots of ideas and conversations. Similarly, Participant 4 described the freedom to explore a creative project without constraints as “a beautiful thing.”

A conclusion from the findings is that the polarity of safety and vulnerability is an important tension at the heart of the emotional experience of being creative at work. The findings demonstrate that creativity is likely to be impacted when creative workers do not feel psychologically safe enough to take the necessary risks involved in being creative and trust that they will not be blamed or ridiculed if the risk does not pay off (Edmondson, 1999). The perception of an absence of trust from organisational leaders caused tension for participants in this study. Participant 1 expressed her frustration that leaders did not always understand or respect her work process and at times saw her as “cutting up bits of construction paper” rather than working towards the organisational goal that had been set. Participants’ perceptions were that their organisations tended to cope with creativity by minimising risk-taking (and therefore, creativity) altogether and putting in control mechanisms to respond to uncertainty (Gabriel, 1998b). Defensive responses such as blame and finding a scapegoat were also prevalent.

The findings suggest that a climate of fear within the organisational system drives leader and creative workers’ behaviour, and the rigid boundaries in which the creative person is allowed to work may eventually backfire. The inference to be drawn from the interviews in the current study was that leaders in the organisations represented were not consciously creating climates of blame and fear. However, if the climate does not purposefully accommodate risk and failure, the creative worker is more likely to “play it safe” (Participant 7), which is likely, over time, to impact innovation as ideas become

stale, increase creative workers' frustrations, and lower their wellbeing. Leaders are part of a dynamic system and are likely to bring their vulnerability to leading others. The uncertainty involved in creating requires leaders to provide a caring, compassionate, and safe environment. If one considers leaders as forms of organisational "caregivers", an essential aspect of their role is to provide the support they hopefully learned from previous leaders, just like in a family.

Furthermore, tensions between participants and their organisations arose from distinctions between in-groups and out-groups (Tajfel, 1982; Turner, 1982). Creative workers identified with other creatives, feeling misunderstood and different from the out-group of managers and non-creative workers. However, the systemic complexity is underlined by the fact that organisational leaders are themselves an in-group who may perceive the creatives as the out-group: a spiral of disconnection and alienation that contributed to creative workers' feelings of being weird or an outsider.

### ***Coping with Creativity***

Acknowledging the tensions and emotions involved in creativity implies a need to understand how creative workers cope with the experience of being creative at work. Storr (1972, p. 238-239) states that "the ability to tolerate tension and anxiety is characteristic of the creative. However, the need to seek relief from tension is natural enough." So how do creative people relieve the tension of being creative? Participants' coping mechanisms were not remarkable in many ways – going for a walk, cooking, connecting with other people, friends, family. However, they recognised a need to put strategies in place to cope with the vicissitudes of the creative process and to create space for their unconscious mind to work. Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 354) describes activities that help creative thinking as processes [such as] "walking, showering, swimming, driving, gardening, weaving, and carpentry." He argues that being constantly busy is not conducive to creative thinking as there needs to be time to reflect and let creative insight arise. Indeed, research (e.g., Amabile et al., 2005; Ashby et al., 1999; Subramaniam et al., 2009) demonstrates that insight is more likely to occur when people are in a positive mood, relaxed, and not actively working on the problem.

The findings from this research demonstrates that constraints, boundaries, and clarity were needed as coping mechanisms, or "containers" (Bion, 1984) for anxieties associated with the challenging aspects of uncertainty. The desire to create clarity and

stability when things felt too uncertain or out of control was simultaneously a motivation that drove participants to create and a mechanism for coping with the creative process. Relationships helped participants cope, whether by going home and interacting with their family or having trusted colleagues with whom they could talk through a particular challenge or issue. Vocalising concerns was considered helpful, even when the individual tended to internalise problems. And trust appeared to be an important feature of participants' ability to cope with uncertainty: trust in close relationships and in themselves. Participants trusted that they had the skills and capability to find a solution. Because they were experienced in their creative process, they trusted that the process would enable them to "get somewhere" (Participant 7) even if it was not what they initially intended. Miliora (1987) describes trust as the ability to be open to what emerges, be receptive to change, loosen control when needed and not be afraid of the unknown.

Rogers (1959) described openness to experience as accommodating conflicting information without needing to close down the situation and as the opposite of psychological defensiveness. The willingness to remain open to possibility and to hold in balance multiple frames of mind is a characteristic that enables creative people to cope with uncertainty, and the participants in this study were no different. Planning and boundary-setting were typical responses to uncertainty amongst participants. Psychological maturity and wisdom (Vaillant, 1993) were observed as coping mechanisms in that participants learned to be "comfortable in not being comfortable" (Participant 11). Some of the participants' ability to cope with uncertainty and failure was inherent in character traits typically associated with creative people, such as tenacity, resilience, curiosity and openness (Barron & Harrington, 1981). For example, participants described their appetite for discovering new things about the world in general not just their particular creative specialism. The tenacity and resilience required for creativity was captured by Participant 1 who described creativity as "hours of mood boards, hours of thinking" and by Participant 2 who recounted the numerous times he had ended up with a bin full of wastepaper after drawing something again and again in an attempt to get it just right.

At times, participants used creativity to explore and make sense of difficult emotions. Previous research (e.g., Rogers, 2016; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010) has demonstrated the

potential of arts-based therapies to help people cope with a range of health conditions and as a means to express deeply held emotions. For example, Gross and Swartz (1982) found that music therapy helped reduce state and trait anxiety in chronically ill patients. Expressive writing, through poetry (Carroll, 2005), writing about emotional or traumatic experiences (Pennebaker, 1997) or journaling (Cameron, 2016; Rainer, 1997), have been shown to have a positive effect on health and wellbeing. For example, Participant 1 described an intense, three-day-long experience of painting Ophelia to help her cope with moving to a new country to live with her new husband.

Individuals use various strategies to tolerate and cope with uncertainty, and emotional self-regulation is one mechanism (Anderson et al., 2019; Gross, 1999; Hillen et al., 2017). Emotion regulation strategies are deployed to respond to and control emotions and regulate affective response to a situation (Gross, 2014). Gross (1998) defines emotion regulation as the process of influencing which emotion is had, when, and how those emotions are expressed. Gross argues that these processes may be controlled or automatic, conscious, or unconscious. When a particular emotional response is not helpful (such as losing one's temper at work), emotional regulation mechanisms help individuals choose a more appropriate response. A range of activities help regulate emotions, such as going for a run at the end of a difficult day, playing relaxing music, talking to a friend. Participant 8 gave the example of taking a long, luxurious bath to regulate her emotions following the failure of a creative project. For Participant 11, reading represented a creative space to escape her family's demands and work. And whilst most participants appeared to have positive coping mechanisms, some coped with uncertainty by getting angry and frustrated, and in one case, substance abuse. These participants were aware of the extent to which their passion for their creativity expressed itself as anger with their organisation, with other people and sometimes their anger with the world, which was, at times, channelled back into their creativity and at times, manifested as maladaptive coping mechanisms (Vaillant, 2000).

### **Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this chapter was to consider the experience of individual creative workers within their organisational system. Throughout this study, it has been apparent that there are dialectic and interconnected tensions inherent throughout the creative

process. Tensions arise from organisations' culture and leadership behaviours, and internal tensions emanating from the need for belonging and individuality: a clear expression of the paradox of self and other.

The findings highlighted the extent to which **uncertainty** was experienced as both a source of inspiration and motivation and a source of anxiety. The excitement of solving a problem was juxtaposed with the discomfort of not knowing. And whilst creative people are typically portrayed as being more open to experience and more willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty than most people, the findings pointed to tolerance of ambiguity being domain specific rather than a general trait of creative people. Uncertainty, whilst not always a pleasant experience, appeared more tolerable when individuals were motivated to achieve a creative task. However, participants appeared intolerant of organisational cultures and leaders that did not value the same things as they did and found the lack of clear direction from the organisation to be a source of tension. The research suggests the need for a dynamic balance of certainty and uncertainty: the "Goldilocks principle" (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2007) – just the right amount of both certainty and uncertainty. The challenge is that the "right" balance of certainty and uncertainty is subjective and contextual.

The findings demonstrated the importance of **relationships** to the experience of creativity. Relationships are a core aspect optimal human functioning and meaning in life (e.g. Keyes, 1998; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011). It was evident that participants shared a need for close and supportive relationships, feel supported through the more challenging aspects of the creative process and feel valued for their work. Additionally, different perspectives from other outside their team were a source of motivation and an important stimulus for creativity. Those more distant acquaintances, or weak-ties (Perry Smith, 2006), may enhance the creative person's sense of belonging to a broader creative community or "tribe", strengthening their creative identity (Tierney & Farmer, 2002). However, it was felt that leaders did not place the same importance on different perspectives, as such, there was seldom sufficient time or resource for getting different points of view.

Similarly, differing perceptions of what constituted creative success seemed to negatively impact the extent to which participants felt valued by their leaders. A key finding of this study was the importance of considering the **value** of the creative process

to the individual in addition to the value placed on the creative output. It was clear that participants derived significant value from the process of being creative, not just the value of the product. A recommendation of this study is that the concept of value in definitions of creativity is broadened to explicitly encompass the value of the creative process as well as the value or usefulness of the creative product.

The study contributes a new perspective to Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity (1988) and Amabile and Pratt's (2016) dynamic componential model by highlighting ways in which the experience of being creative at work is impacted by individual and organisational attitudes and behaviours. This research brings the individual and the social system together, to consider the individual within the system, a perspective lacking from current systems and social models of creativity.

[Chapter 6](#) presents the second study, which looks at the creative process from an organisational perspective and considers the experiences of those leading creativity and those being led. As I moved into the next research stage, I wondered whether this study's findings of individual experiences might be replicated in a collective setting (and if so, how?). The aim of Study 2 was to examine the experience of creativity at different levels of an organisation's hierarchy and consider ways in which organisational culture and leadership behaviour shaped how it felt to be creative at work.

## Chapter 6: Study 2 – A Case Study Exploring How Creative Workers and Organisational Leaders Experience and Cope with Being Creative at Work

Study 2 explores the creative process from an organisational perspective and considers ways in which organisational culture shapes the experience of being creative at work. There is a significant body of extant literature that discusses individual creativity *or* systemic and social creativity. However, a contribution of this research is to bring the individual and the social system together to consider the individual within the wider system. The findings of Study 1 expanded on Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model of creativity and Amabile and Pratt's (2016) Dynamic Componential Model by highlighting the influences on and of the phenomenological experience of being creative. In Study 2, I further expand social and systemic theories of creativity by examining ways in which leaders shape how the whole organisational culture is experienced by employees and the tensions that arise from any dissonance between leaders' and employees' actions and perceptions. As highlighted in [Chapter 2, General Literature Review](#), there is an opportunity to add to the limited literature on how Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model may help understand creativity in organisations and consider the interconnectedness and mutual influence of elements within organisational systems.

An organisation's culture comprises a shared pattern of beliefs that operates at an unconscious level, strongly influencing an organisation's values and behaviours (Campion & Palmer, 1996; Schein, 2004). Schein likens the influence of culture on organisational behaviour to the way in which individuals' personalities and character traits enable and constrain their behaviour and attitudes. The socialisation process is the way employees learn the organisation's values and acceptable behaviours. However, this socialisation process sits within a broader context of adapting to societal norms such as hierarchy, emotional regulation, and conformity, which, it could be argued, impede personal expressiveness and, therefore also, creativity.

Culture may be a means of coping with the experience of being part of an organisation, a method of sensemaking arising from the meaning that individuals place on experiences within their social milieu that provides boundaries for interpreting what is happening around them (Krefting & Frost, 1985; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). Krefting and Frost suggest that culture reduces ambiguity as it provides a collective framework for



coping with the experience of being within an organisation. However, culture can also increase ambiguity when the underlying (or unconscious) culture is at odds with the espoused culture, creating a dissonance between what an organisation says it values and how it behaves, such as stating that creativity is valued whilst putting conscious or unconscious barriers in the way (Mueller et al., 2012). Van Maanen and Barley view culture as a living, evolving product of how groups historically solved problems. If culture is seen as a means of problem solving, a group's perspective on uncertainty and risk will shape how the culture deals with ambiguity. A culture with high uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 1983, 1984) is, perhaps, more likely to seek to control and minimise risk than a culture that has historically welcomed and learned from uncertainty and risk.

Literature (e.g. Auger & Arneberg, 1992; Denhardt, 1981; Krefting & Frost, 1985; Marshak, 2006; Morgan, 2006) suggests that, like individuals, organisations have an unconscious or shadow side: a “system of meaning which operates below the surface of the objective structure of the organisation” (Lepper, 1992, p.80). The organisation's shadow is cast by those that hold power and is evident in aspects of organisational activity and culture that remain undiscussable (Bowles, 1991; Egan, 1994). Through its leaders, an organisation deploys defence mechanisms (such as projection, repression, and denial) to protect it from difficult truths or beliefs that do not match its espoused values (Bain, 1998; Bridges, 2000; Jaques, 1953). Brown and Starkey (2000) suggest that organisations use defence mechanisms much in the same way as individuals when faced with information contrary to the organisation's sense of self to defend and maintain their self-concept. Indeed, Bowles (1990) argues that making business decisions based on a rational, economic basis alone is a form of defence mechanism that enables leaders to distance themselves from their decision's human dimension. Organisation defences may be represented by a focus on efficiency at the expense of time to experiment and explore, leaving no time for people to create.

Furthermore, organisations tend to repress the feeling dimension of their activities. Values and emotions may be disregarded if they do not directly link to increased profits, leaving them to accumulate as part of the organisation's shadow. Understanding organisational behaviour requires recognising that both irrational and rational forces are at play. To ignore irrational forces by focusing exclusively on a logical process is to misunderstand a fundamental aspect of the organisation's psyche (Bowles, 1991). Smith

and Lewis (2011) argue that a crucial role of leaders within a dynamic environment is to support oppositional tendencies and embrace the ever-present tensions that enable the organisation to thrive. The requirement to balance the production of new output with the project management that brings it into reality led DeFillippi et al. (2007, p. 152) to describe managing creativity as “rife with paradoxes and tension.”

## Methods

### *Case Study as a Research Strategy*

There is a rich history of qualitative case studies in a range of creativity research (e.g., Gardner, 2011; Goertzel et al., 2004; Gruber, 1981; Stokes, 2006). Hanchett Hanson and Glăveanu (2020) suggest case studies address questions of how creativity happens within a specific context and how people develop in relation to their creative work. Gruber’s foundational case study on Darwin concluded that creativity was systemic, complex, and purposeful work, an influential perspective in viewing creativity as a developmental and evolving process. Furthermore, case studies are considered helpful for considering creativity’s social and contextual aspects (Clapp, 2016; Glăveanu, 2014a; Hanchett Hanson, 2015). Case studies have focused on individuals (e.g., Wallace & Gruber’s (1989) case studies of 12 eminent creatives) or collectives (e.g., Glăveanu’s (2010) study of the evaluation of creativity amongst Romanian folk artists). Cropley and Cropley (2008) used a case study approach to search for universal dimensions of creativity. Wallace (1989) argued that in focusing on distinct aspects of individual creativity, the integrated whole is lost, whereas a case study aims to understand how parts work together.

Merriam (1998) suggests four essential criteria of the case study, i.e., that it: i) focuses on one event, process or situation; ii) is descriptive, providing rich detail regarding the topic; iii) is heuristic, with the first two criteria promoting further understanding of the phenomenon, and iv) is inductive, remaining open to what the research discovers. Yin (2017) argues that case study research is best suited to descriptive or explanatory questions such as the present research, which explores how creative workers experience creativity in an organisation. Furthermore, the case study method aims to understand human beings in their social context by interpreting the actions of an individual, a group (such as an organisation or a family) or a community (such as a profession or an industry: Gillman, 2000). Yin (2015; Yin & Davis, 2007) describes the case

study as an empirical method that considers a contemporary phenomenon within a real-world setting, particularly when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context may be blurred.

A case study was chosen for this second study as it provides an opportunity to examine the process of creativity from multiple perspectives (such as leaders, creative workers, and the interaction between the two, and the wider organisational culture). Case study research typically comprises multiple data sources to provide “thick narrative descriptions” of the studied topic (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 26). Multiple qualitative data collection techniques were used in the research design (presented as study “phases”), including interviews, focus groups, meeting observation and document analysis. Using multiple qualitative methods contributes to the trustworthiness and credibility of the whole by capturing the richness of different perspectives and data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

As with other qualitative methods, critics of the case study method cite the apparent inability to generalise from a case study. However, as stated in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#), judging qualitative methods by quantitative standards is inappropriate for interpretivist research, which aims to understand human behaviour rather than predicting and generalising cause and effect (Carminati, 2018). Yin (2011, p.72) argues that the goal of a case study is to expand and generalise theories (“analytic generalisation”) rather than make statistical generalisations. Furthermore, the positivistic criticism that case study data is open to different interpretations and potential researcher bias is again not appropriate for interpretative, “Big Q” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 2) qualitative research that openly discusses the integral role of the researcher in shaping and interpreting the data.

### ***The Organisation***

The organisation chosen for this case study creates, produces, and distributes video content for children. As a new North American media business subsidiary, the organisation has grown rapidly since its inception. The headquarters business expected that the pace of growth would continue. However, as market conditions changed, maintaining the pace of growth was becoming more challenging. The organisation was selected purposively, based on appropriateness to the research questions (Miles et al.,

1994; Patton, 1999) and pragmatically based on its willingness to participate and location (i.e., UK-based, reasonable travel distance). The organisation describes creativity as essential to its business and a source of competitive advantage. To maintain the organisation's anonymity, they are referred to throughout as [Company name].

### **Phase 1: Focus Groups with Creative Workers**

#### ***Design & Participants***

The first phase of the case study sought to examine overlaps and points of departure with this company's workers compared to the creative workers who were interviewed in Study 1 and gain the perspectives of those at the "coal-face" of the creative industry. As leaders of the company would be interviewed in Phase 2, it was important to gain the views of their supervisees at various levels in order to compare their opinions to those of leadership within the case study organisation. Focus groups were used in this first phase of data collection to facilitate a range of views and draw out similarities and differences in perspective. Furthermore, given that this study aimed to explore the organisation's culture, it is important to consider the interactions between people as indicators of culture. Focus groups have been described as planned discussions to obtain perceptions about a particular topic of interest (Krueger, 2010). As Wilkinson (1998) states, focus groups are not group interviews. The moderator does not ask each participant a question in turn but fosters group conversation by encouraging participants to interact with one another and generate data on collective views (Gill et al., 2008).

In this study, three focus groups (FGs) were held with creative workers at junior and middle levels in the hierarchy. Anticipating that participants would drop out, I initially requested 10 participants for each focus group. The three FGs comprised purposive samples of six, seven, and six participants, respectively. The participant demographics are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4**

*Participant Demographic Information (Study 2, Phase 1- Focus Groups with Creative Workers)*

<b>Gender</b>	3 Males	
	2 Females	
<hr/>		
<b>Age</b>	Range	32-45
	<i>M</i>	38
	<i>SD</i>	4.64

The participants were individuals working within a creative role in the organisation. My original intention was to conduct each focus group with different hierarchical levels of employees (e.g., junior, mid-level, senior/creative management) to notice any differences between the experience of creativity by level. However, it proved difficult to organise the groups in this way due to people's availability to participate and the host organisation's relatively flat hierarchical structure. Therefore, the focus groups were arranged so that the participants' line manager did not attend at the same time. In the end, it transpired that the focus groups tended to be more junior staff and the more senior staff participated in the Phase 2 one-to-one leadership interviews. As such, I was still able to observe differences in experience and perception of creativity between employees and their senior leaders.

### **Materials & Procedure**

As the focus group moderator, my role was to guide the discussion, use prepared questions and probes, and encourage group members' participation (Krueger & Casey, 2008). A discussion guide ([Appendix D](#)) captured key topics of interest. However, the discussion did not follow the discussion guide rigidly, allowing interaction between group participants and the conversation to flow from one topic to the next.

The focus group discussion guide was developed from a range of creativity and paradox theories and questions from Study 1. The three key areas discussed were:

- How participants felt about being creative

- Their perceptions of what leaders did that encouraged or inhibited creativity
- Their perspectives on topics arising from Study 1 including how FG participants felt about uncertainty, recognition, and the emotions involved in creativity.

The focus groups were each 90 minutes in duration. I was mindful of keeping to time, respecting participants' other commitments. I video-recorded two groups to facilitate the process of transcription. Due to technical difficulties, the second group was not videoed but was audio-recorded.

The data for all case study phases were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) six-phase process of reflexive thematic analysis ([Appendix F](#)). Detail regarding the RTA process followed is provided in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#). The data were coded using Quirkos™ software to help manage the volume of data.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The question of participant confidentiality is particularly important in group settings. The participants were reminded of the importance of respecting their colleagues' confidentiality and were asked to sign, as part of the consent form ([Appendix D](#)), an agreement to keep details of the focus group (participants and content) confidential. I was mindful that whilst I requested that participants keep the focus discussion confidential, I could not guarantee that would happen (Tolich, 2009). I considered the possibility that individuals may not feel comfortable speaking freely within the focus group. However, in practice, participants appeared open and communicative.

### ***Findings from Focus Groups***

Interaction is a key advantage of focus groups over other methods such as interviews. Focus groups can explore group consensus (or lack thereof) on topics in a way that one-to-one interviews cannot (Kitzinger, 1994). All three focus groups appeared to have open, free-flowing conversations, with participants mainly agreeing with each other (verbally and non-verbally) while, at times, offering different perspectives. The FG participants were respectful and listened to each other's views. Sometimes they finished each other's sentences. The video recordings showed participants laughing, focusing attention on their colleagues, nodding their heads in agreement at certain points and building on points made by other participants. A couple of instances have been captured in the extracts below, where participants had different experiences, such as feeling safe enough to take

risks and deviate from expected outcomes, which appeared to be possibly related to power/hierarchy structure.

A potential disadvantage of FGs is that participants may decide not to contribute to the discussion, or some participants may dominate (Michell, 1999; Morgan, 1996). However, participants did not appear to deliberately withdraw from the conversation in the present research. Some participants were quieter than others, and I made a point of gently asking the more reserved individuals for their views to ensure they were included and mitigate against anyone dominating. Similarly, as the moderator, I sometimes gently nudged the discussion or followed up on participants' comments to help the conversation flow. Four themes were identified from the data:

- *The Dialectic of Emotions* captured the complex and paradoxical experience of emotions within the creative process.
- *Freedom/Constraint* reflected a key polarity within the data of the need for sufficient space and trust to create, balanced with boundaries that provided clarity and containment but were also a source of tension.
- *Feeling Connected* concerned perceptions of change as the organisation grew, with participants feeling less connected to the organisation's purpose and colleagues.
- *Safety* captured participants' differing perceptions of feeling secure and supported (or not) within their working environment.

#### *The Dialectic of Emotions*

Emotions were considered to be an integral part of the creative process. For some participants, negative emotions such as sadness helped them create:

I've not once created something when I was happy, it's always when I'm sad. (FG1, P1)

In contrast, another participant had a different perspective, reflecting that negative emotions inhibited their creativity:

For me, so if I was depressed, not necessarily depressed, but the lower my mood, it massively inhibits my ideas, my thought process. But the happier I am, or the right

level of stress, increases my creativity and output, makes me more creative, I think (FG2, P4)

Participant 6 from FG3 captured the complex and dialectic role of emotions and creativity, commenting that:

They [emotions] can help and absolutely destroy what you're trying to do at the same time. (FG3, P6)

FG3 described the role of emotions in the creative process in similar terms to FG1 and FG2. Furthermore, participants commented on the positive emotions associated with being creative. This excerpt captures a discussion between FG3 participants who shared similar views and built on each other's points:

P4: I think the times when I've been happiest at work is when there's potentially been less of a rigid structure and more freedom to just experiment, more time to try something new, and if it fails, fine, but if it works, great.

P3: Here, for me, it was first to understand the market and the users, what they want, they need, trying to understand the behaviour. Yeah, you said energy [*talking to P1*]. I liked it.

P1: It fills the mind.

P3: Yeah.

P1: With positivity, I think.

P5: I always feel happier at the end of the day when I've been more creative that day, you feel... like, creativity, it happens, it just... if it works, it works. But at least you made an attempt to try it. And, just the fact that you tried it and maybe you think about, oh, I did that. I don't know what's gonna come with it, but you had an idea, and you did it. (Extract from FG3)

### *Freedom & Constraint*

Participants discussed experiencing different types of creativity (e.g., creativity at home or work, problem-solving versus artistic creativity), and constraints played an important role in how creativity was experienced, both in helpful and unhelpful ways. Participant 3 (FG1) described creativity at home as primarily a form of self-expression. In contrast, creativity at work was required to meet profit or revenue targets. Participant 1 (FG1) built on that comment, exploring how to find creativity within given boundaries:



Sometimes, actually, you have to use, like you said, a different kind of creativity to work around these numbers. It's like...just because they've given some guidelines doesn't mean that you're going to be a robot and do the same every time. Because you have guidelines, it's why you have to be creative sometimes [*group agreeing*]. (FG1, P1)

Participant 4 (FG3) described being happiest at work when there were less rigid structures and more freedom to “just experiment”. Freedom was used as a term for describing trust from their managers, the “freedom to just get on with it [their job]” (FG3, P5). The discussions in FG2 reflected similar feelings regarding the role of freedom and constraint in the creative process. I asked Participant 6 (FG2), a quieter group member, for their thoughts. They commented that restrictions imposed by clients were problematic, a thread that the group picked up:

P6: I think, yeah, working very strict parameters, and not being able to sort of, you know, just, just, turn slightly out of it. I think that's, yeah, because it sort of shuts down your creativity, because then sometimes I think of something that I think, oh, that would be great. I think maybe it's not quite, so I don't explore it.

P1: I've worked as a freelance graphic designer. And I remember, like, the thing you said which was, I remember one time I was designing the logo for a client, and it was their colour palette was bluish tones, but they wanted to change it, and he said, could you make it more red, so I made it red, just blatantly, like a bit of a burgundy red, because they didn't want it like bright red. And they were like, no, not red, just make the blue more red. So, I said, so purple, and they were like, no, not purple, just make the blue more red. And I was like, I was sitting there, like, wondering what, what do they mean, what do they want from me. And they really thought I could invent a new colour. (Extract from FG2)

Participants commented on the challenges presented by the organisation's pace. Participant 4 (FG2) described the constraint of being “spread thin [so] you're having to deliver things quickly”, commenting that “you need a bit of freedom, you need a bit of flexibility”. The group continued discussions on what inhibited their creativity, firstly concurring with feelings of being spread too thinly and then broadening out into other factors that constrained their creativity, such as time, resources, and organisational politics:

P4: Politics...I think that's bigger here. There are politics in every place and every environment. I think it's quite big here. And there's lots of competing interests that don't necessarily even need to be competing...And headspace to really make sure everyone's working collaboratively and independently. So, collaboration, I think it's a

good activity because it just exposes more ideas and, umm, I feel like sometimes there are certain teams that maybe don't collaborate that should be completely collaborating and people trying to take credit for other people's work and, and as an element of that, but if actually, everyone felt comfortable in kind of getting their mandate, I feel like we would work together more and see some of the benefits from that. (Extract from FG2)

FG3 participants recognised that within a work environment, deadlines were inevitable. However, as P4 (FG3) reflected, there is a tension between the time allocated to get a task done and the quality of the product that is produced, finding the “sweet spot” (FG3, P1) between the two. Similar views were expressed in FG1 and FG2. In FG1, Participant 1 reflected that “if I had more time, I would be so much more creative. I just don't have the time to be creative”.

### *Feeling Connected*

Participants in FG1 commented that the collaborative nature of the work environment helped their creativity:

P2: Working in a team, I think, yeah, it feels even better if you work in a team and you achieve something greater than if you do it by yourself.

P4: It's the shared, I don't want to just say shared experience, but the shared joy of something clicking, I guess, again, that like, connection. Because if you're working with someone, you're not connecting, well, you are connecting ideas, but you're connecting ideas with another person. So, you get that joy of connecting the idea, but also the feedback of, like, the social aspect. (Extract from FG2)

FG3 discussed how the growth of the organisation had impacted collaboration between people:

P4: When I first joined, I think there were maybe 20 or 30 people max. And you know, I knew every person in the office and would feel okay about going across the road and having a drink with every person in the office, and that would be cool. These days I don't actually know everyone's name in the office. And so that's, that's one thing that's like starting to creep in that I think is, possibly, going in the other direction [group agreeing]. A lot of time these days, when somebody new joins, they're not even brought around to our side of the office, like, that's the faraway land you don't need to worry about that.

P2: Where do you sit?

P4: Oh, where do I sit? Like, right on the back wall, on the other side. I'm like sitting, like in the dark zone [*group laughing*]. They just sort of forgot about us.

I: You were nodding as well [*directed at P3*]; do you feel the same way?

P3: Yeah, yeah. I think so. I'm here for a long time. It's true. Yeah. More people now for, for a few months, probably less communication between creators. (Extract from FG3)

Participants were asked what one thing they would change about their organisation's culture. The following extract from FG2 captured a commonly held view that the removal of a ping-pong table that had previously been in the office was a potent symbol of how the organisation was changing:

I: If there was one thing you could change about the company's culture...what would it be?

P5: Table tennis table

P6: I actually agree, because it was so important...it was just, it was a great place, everyone in the company kind of spoke to people that weren't in their team, even though you have to do work, you got to know people outside of work so that when it did come to work, you could approach that person, freely.

P5: It kind of sets the tone...So, if anyone came in, it would basically be the first thing that they saw coming in. Now that we don't have that, it's just desks, desks, desks, and people sat there. Now, in complete silence.

[Group agreeing]

P3: I feel like it's, sometimes I feel like it's a YouTube sweatshop

[group laughing]

P4: Ooh, controversial [*group laughing*]

P3: The feeling of it, because everyone's like [*gestures head down*] and in quiet in white space. (Extract from FG2)

### *Safety*

An area of discussion that sparked lively debate and differences of opinion was perceptions of safety. Participant 1 (FG1) commented that they did not feel that, in an

ambiguous situation, it was likely they would be fired for taking a chance, feeling that they had “wiggle room” and could try new things. Participant 3 picked up on the comment:

P3: You just said something very interesting, that we are not afraid of losing our position or job.

P1: To a certain extent [*laughing*].

P3: Honestly, I think this is very important for creativity. So, people who are afraid of losing their job probably, they’re gonna censor themselves more.

P5: Definitely [*group agreeing, laughing*].

P3: And I think this is something, but I'm not sure hundred per cent, but I think most of the people in this company are not afraid of being fired.

P6: Oh, I don't know about that!  
[*Group talks over each other. Lively debate*]

I: Tell me about your experience

P6: Okay, so, um, up until December, I wasn't actually a permanent member of staff [*group sharp intake of breath*]. After being here 18 months...they were doing a whole big, you know, department re-shift of people, and I was like, I might actually lose my job, there is a very big chance that I could. And yeah, so I was sort of pushing for it about every day. And I think you know, in that position, you feel a lot like you're sort of walking on eggshells all the time. So, you kind of have to be, you know, you have to follow the guidelines, you have to do this right because you can, they could very easily say, oh, we're not going to extend your contract at the end of this.

P4: When I started, because I was on the trial period and because my role was SO ambiguous, like, there was no one else that does my job in this company. So, I was like, what do I need to do? But no one knew what they wanted me to do, so, I was checking out, checking, and checking, and checking, and checking. I was like, Is this right? Is this right? Is this right? because I had no guidance. (Extract from FG1)

Participant 3 (FG1) emphasised the importance of a safe environment in being able to express emotions inherent in creativity:

I think, in terms of emotions, you need to feel safe enough, in a safe environment. I think the manager creates in the group, in the team, that safe environment. And this one important thing, and is transparent with you, you feel comfortable to share your

emotions, so you're going to work in a more emotional way. It has to be transparent. (FG1, P3)

There were discussions in FG2 and FG3 about feeling safe enough to approach senior managers with ideas or questions:

P1: I don't really feel confident going up to the senior management, and I should. If I'm doing a task for them, I shouldn't have to always [use] email. They're literally three metres from my desk. We could have a conversation about it too.

P4: For me, it's literally a matter of space as well. There was a certain point where ...the head of this department [would] sit with that department. And now senior management is sitting right in the front all on this enclosed table, and it's like, if you're coming over there, you better have something to say [group laughing]. (Extract from FG3).

In FG2, there were different perceptions of safety. Participant 3 described the experience of senior managers, resulting in them being more reticent to give feedback:

If I've done something where I've given feedback even to members of the SMT, I've like almost been blacklisted where they wouldn't even talk to me for months. So, it's quite passive-aggressive, I would say, or can be. (FG2, P3)

Participant 7's (FG2) personal experience was different. However, they reflected a fear expressed by the group more broadly that anyone who makes a mistake is fired:

My feeling is that there is, thankfully, at least on my team, I think the general feeling is that if you make a mistake, you can learn from it. And there's no, I've never felt scared of anything. But there is a feeling among some of the teams, especially the more junior members, that yeah, if you make a mistake, you're gonna get fired. That's a big issue. (FG2, P7)

### ***Summary of Phase 1 (Creative Worker Focus Groups)***

The focus groups provided an opportunity to hear creative workers' thoughts and feelings about being creative at work. Dialectics such as positive/negative emotions, freedom/constraint were evident in the findings. The theme of safety was prevalent in the discussions, reflecting the need for a climate that felt secure enough to take risks and experiment, with some contradictory opinions of how safe it was to take risks or fail – possibly dependent on power and hierarchy. Perceptions about job security appeared to influence the extent to which participants were willing to take risks or propose unusual ideas. The focus group discussions about ambiguity and uncertainty reflected Study 1's

findings, with participants describing ambiguity as an opportunity to be creative and exciting and, at the same time, the need for clarity, trust and support to create safe boundaries to work within.

### **Phase 2: Interviews with Organisational Leaders**

Qualitative interviews are considered a foundational method of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are defined as conversations intended to encourage a participant to talk about their experiences and perspectives on a specified topic in their own words, and the meaning they give to those experiences (Nathan et al., 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Qualitative interviews allow for flexibility in which the interviewer can explore novel areas, producing rich data (Smith et al. (2009). Participants are seen as experts in their own story, actively shaping the course of the interview rather than passively responding to pre-set questions (Symon & Cassell, 2012). A further advantage of face-to-face interviews is that social cues such as body language or intonation can provide additional information to the spoken answer (Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). Interviews were chosen for this second phase of data collection so I could explore perceptions of leadership behaviours that were potentially helpful or unhelpful to creativity at the same level of individual depth with leaders as I had in Study 1 with creative workers.

### ***Design & Participants***

Five semi-structured one-to-one interviews were conducted with leaders who were members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Leaders were asked for their perspectives on how important creativity was to their work and the organisation, perceptions about aspects of the culture that impacted creativity, and how their leadership helped or hindered creativity. The participant demographics are summarised in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Participant Demographic Information (Study 2, Phase 2 – Senior Leadership Team)*

*Interviews)*

<b>Gender</b>	3 Males	<b>Age</b>	Range	<b>32-45</b>
			<i>M</i>	<b>38</b>
	2 Females		<i>SD</i>	<b>4.64</b>

***Materials & Procedure***

All interviews took place in a private meeting room within the organisation's premises. The questions were designed to build on Study 1 data and explore leaders' experiences of leading creative workers. As with the prior phase, the questions were developed from a range of creativity and paradox theories ([Appendix D](#)). The interviews lasted between 50 and 71 minutes (an average of 63 minutes). The participants were asked:

- To give their thoughts about the importance (or otherwise) of creativity to their work and the organisation.
- Their beliefs about how creativity happens within their organisation and where those beliefs have come from.
- What they consider they do as leaders that helps creativity happen, or that gets in the way, and how they have decided on these strategies (e.g., learning, personality variables, personal experience).

***Ethical Considerations***

The ethical considerations for interview participants were as detailed in the ethics section of [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#). The SLT of [Company name] comprises five people. As a further step in maintaining the anonymity of interview participants, gender-neutral pronouns have been used, and details of job functions have not been provided.

***Interview Findings***

Two themes were identified from the data:

- *Managing polarities* captures leaders' role in balancing competing priorities such as freedom and constraint, managing the tensions inherent in polarities and providing clarity for their teams in an uncertain business environment;

- *All Change* related to leaders' role in managing the scale and pace of change and how the culture was changing as the organisation grew, with a sub-theme of:
  - *The language of change* highlights aspects of the changing culture through metaphors used by leaders.

### *Managing Polarities*

The interviews with leaders highlighted their role in managing polarities such as freedom/constraint, control/trust, creativity/realism, connection/disconnection, and past/present. Inherent in balancing polarities is the tension of opposites. In describing cultures that foster creativity, Leader 1 commented on the need to embrace tension:

Culture is about, it's hard to define...I think there have been tensions which is great. Without that, you wouldn't exist. (Leader 1)

Leader 1 continued that tensions were an essential part of creativity, and, particularly, constructive conflict was considered an enabler of creativity:

Managed conflict is actually more conducive to creative output than placid conversation. So, I think although you feel good when everyone is, you know, happy with each other. Usually, you don't get much out of that. (Leader 1)

Leaders' consistent view was that the polarity of risk versus safety presented a challenge to creativity. Leader 2 expressed a concern that:

You risk people doing what's comfortable as opposed to pushing the boundaries of the business reinforces steady, risk-averse behaviour. (Leader 2)

The paradox of the organisation's recent success was that they were attracting more attention from the HQ and thus there was increasingly more to lose if things failed. Consequently, there seemed to be more control creeping in and, ultimately, the perception of a decreasing appetite for risk. Leaders perceived that there was a greater desire for stability and predictability from the headquarters as the business grew. As the potential impact of a risk not paying off increased, the tolerance for uncertainty and risk was felt to be subtly shifting:

I think, in the past, they used to be a little bit more risk-tolerant because there wasn't that much to lose, there wasn't a lot at stake on our specific part of the business...whereas now that the business is more mature...we have to deliver certain



things at certain times. I think an element of that risk tolerance has gone down [because of] the importance of stability in our business. (Leader 2)

It was interesting that whilst leaders felt that risk appetite was perhaps declining, there was a clear message from the CEO encouraging risk-taking and experimentation:

He [the corporate CEO] says, 'I don't want anything to be prohibited, you know, go try anything. (Leader 3)

The challenge of finding the “right balance” (Leader 1) was a vital feature of the interviews with leaders. For example, the balance between competing priorities such as time and pressure:

You need an environment where people feel confident, feel they can express themselves, feel that there's the right balance between...time and headspace, and at the same time when you put people under pressure, they usually give their best as well. So, it's finding the balance. (Leader 1)

and freedom and constraint:

So, it's all about balance, but not going to either, not complete freedom but don't try and hem them in either. I think conversation is really important. I think just being open with expectations as well. And making sure that they feel that they can voice what they need to, you know, it shouldn't all come from the management team. Because otherwise, you've lost the balance. (Leader 4)

The leaders each discussed the uncertainty facing the business and the operating environment and their role in providing clarity for their people:

There is more uncertainty, and I don't think we know all the answers yet...we're probing how to diversify the business, which is the right thing to do. From a business standpoint, most people would want that certainty and stability. (Leader 3)

Leader 5 captured the challenge of balancing the desire to get the “best” creative outcome with the reality of having to deliver to deadlines and within cost constraints:

You have to balance wanting to create the best thing, the best quality product, with some of the deadlines that need to be met...So that's when you have to make compromises. (Leader 5)

*All Change*

The culture was evolving as the business developed and market conditions changed. There was acceptance by the leaders that it would require continuous effort to maintain the culture over time as the organisation evolved. Leader 2 commented on how the culture was subtly shifting as the organisation had grown, recognising that as the organisation evolved, they would need to consider how the culture developed:

Our culture has changed quite a bit, not from amazing to horrible, but there's an intangible shift in culture as the company's grown...lots of things have changed...there's a focus and interest on culture, but we'll need to look at the culture we had in the past and make sure they're not trying to just replicate that culture moving forward, because that culture may not be able to exist in the new kind of business that we have now. (Leader 2)

Furthermore, Leader 2 reflected a fundamental paradox between organisations and creativity:

I think any organisation probably creates barriers to creativity just by following the standard kind of ways that businesses work since you have to be somewhere at a certain time doing a certain thing. And sometimes good ideas strike you when you're not at work, or you might want to be working on something else. (Leader 2)

Leader 4 commented on the need to not “lose sight of the family feel”, reflecting that the organisation's culture was central to its creative identity:

It's the culture that drives the business...we affect how people feel about their confidence, their abilities, openness to learn more. If you get that bit wrong, you've got a factory one, and then the company's dead, it's over. (Leader 4)

As the business moved towards maturity, one of the dialectics that leaders needed to address was the balance between structure and freedom. For a creative, entrepreneurial organisation, the introduction of process was a delicate balance to manage. Putting some structure in place was recognised as helping free people up to focus on their creative work and provide clarity and focus:

I don't want to use the word process, but maybe some components, some milestones that we don't have, or the time or headspace...or some objectives. (Leader 1)

Leader 2 reflected that the changes that were being experienced as the organisation grew led to individuals feeling less connected with their colleagues and less connected with the purpose of the organisation:

I have seen a bit of a disconnect between individual employees and their sense of accomplishment to wider business goals. So back in the day when the company was smaller, a win for the business was a win for everyone, that feeling of a direct connection because everyone participates in the things that the business is trying to achieve. But as it grows, and things become more structured, teams become siloed...people lose connection to those wins, that feeling of accomplishment. (Leader 2)

*The Language of Change.*

The pace and impact of change were evident in the data, and the language used by leaders reflected aspects of the changing culture. Individuals and cultural systems interpret events through beliefs and assumptions that are often expressed through the choice of language (Marshak, 1993). The language used by leaders pointed to their role as providing “permission” (Leader 5) to their team members, providing safety, and encouraging employees to move beyond their comfort zone:

What I'm noticing is that people ask for permission for things, and I'm going that's up to you. You're grown-up, if it's important...if it's something that you feel like I should be making the decision on, great, but all these sorts of things, then no, you can make that call. (Leader 5)

The term “grown-up” was also used to denote trust, that people were trusted to manage their workday in a way that suited them rather than being overly prescriptive as to when and where work was done:

We treat people like grown-ups when it comes to time management. Some people like getting in early, leaving early. I think that that makes people feel like they're respected, and respect is really important. (Leader 4)

Leaders used nautical and militaristic metaphors such as “uncharted” and “pivot point” to capture the uncertainty of the business environment.

A lot of things we're working on are new, so I think everyone's kind of learning...it is literally uncharted waters. (Leader 2)

It's very hard to course correct all the time when you, when you're in the middle of it.  
(Leader 5)

### ***Summary of Phase 2 (Leader Interviews)***

The interviews with leaders revealed their role in balancing multiple, competing polarities inherent in leading creativity. The nature of [Company name]'s business was uncertain, and a key leadership role was to provide their teams with sufficient clarity whilst retaining enough uncertainty to give enough space for creativity. At the same time, leaders needed to balance the polarity of risk and safety, navigating different expectations between the headquarters' risk appetite and ensuring it felt safe enough for employees to take risks and experiment. The language used by leaders pointed to aspects of the culture that were changing as the organisation moved towards maturity and as they navigated the uncertain future.

### **Phase 3: Observations of Weekly Company Meetings**

#### ***Design & Participants***

Three team meetings were observed (overt non-participation), in which creative projects were due to be discussed. The intention of analysing these data sources was to spot possible contradictions and paradoxes between the organisation's espoused values and the experience and behaviours of creative workers and leaders to understand further how the culture and interaction styles may help or hinder creativity in the company. Observation provided an opportunity to potentially notice how the espoused culture was evidenced in practice by observing interactions between teams of workers from a range of roles and hierarchical levels. The observations supported, extended, and triangulated the findings from the focus groups (Phase 1), which examined the interaction of creative workers at a similar hierarchical level and individual leadership interviews (Phase 2). The meetings observed were a senior leadership team meeting, a departmental meeting, and an all-staff meeting.

#### ***Materials & Procedure***

The meetings took place at the organisation's premises. Two meetings were held in a private meeting room. The third meeting was an all-staff meeting held in the open-plan office. A meeting observation form ([Appendix D](#)) was completed during the meeting. The form was adapted from Creswell (2014) and captured details regarding time, location,

date of the meeting, descriptive notes including seating plans, the people involved, their hierarchical level, any feelings that were expressed by participants, their body language and the goal of the meeting (Spradley, 2016). After the meeting, detailed reflective notes were taken, capturing my initial thoughts on themes and interpretations (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Guest et al. (2013) recommend writing up detailed field notes following the meeting observation, transferring them to electronic format, and spending time reflecting on the observations to ensure they are as complete as possible, which was the process I followed. The field notes were typed into a Word document after each meeting, and I spent time reflecting on the meeting and compiling more detailed field notes.

The textual data produced (meeting observation forms and field notes) were coded and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). The procedure for thematic analysis is detailed in [Chapter 4](#). I noted similarities or differences between the three meetings observed, language and metaphors that were frequently used, my perceptions of how culture was expressed, and observation of group dynamics.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

When designing the study, the decision was taken not to record the meetings because of ethical and practical concerns regarding the need to seek individual informed consent from each attendee. Even though individuals would have been asked for informed consent to be recorded, at the time, in discussions with my supervisors, we considered that it might put indirect pressure on participants to agree to participate and felt potentially coercive. There were concerns that knowing that the meetings were being recorded may have made attendees less willing to participate and speak candidly. Furthermore, by not agreeing to be recorded and absenting themselves from the meetings, individuals' absence could lead to questions from leaders and/or peers and could impact normal operations of the company. Additionally, practical concerns arose from observing an all-staff meeting, as it would have required obtaining informed consent from all employees. The method adopted instead was for the Gatekeeper (the Human Resources Director) to email meeting attendees, informing them I would be attending, the reason for my attendance, and giving them the option not to attend the meeting if they did not feel comfortable.

With hindsight and learning, I have realised that video-recording the meetings would have been helpful. In retrospect, it occurred to me that the mere presence of an external

researcher making notes is perhaps as likely to influence what participants say, how they say it, and whether they speak at all (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015; Roach, 2014). Research suggests that video recording may, in fact, make participants less self-conscious than the presence of a researcher (Asan & Montague, 2014). This is an aspect of the research that I would do differently if I were to repeat it in the future.

However, copious handwritten field notes were taken using a proforma ([Appendix D](#)). As Liu and Maitlis (2010) note, a key to good nonparticipant observation is taking detailed field notes to record what has been observed. Field notes are typical in observational research (e.g., Handley et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2017; Walker & Hutton, 2006), although some studies reviewed failed to mention the method of note-taking adopted (e.g., Ismail & Yunus, 2021; Luke Wood & Essien-Wood, 2012). A disadvantage of field notes is that they rely on the researcher's ability to write quickly and notice as much as possible during the meeting (Ciesielska et al., 2018), which would be assisted by recording the meeting so that it could be reviewed later for any missed information in the moment.

### ***The Meetings***

#### ***Senior Leadership Meeting***

All members of the leadership team were present at their weekly SLT meeting. The meeting's purpose was to discuss matters arising and to share ideas and was held in the organisation's principal meeting room. The managing director (MD) sat at the front of the room. The other five participants sat around a table, facing the front. At the front of the meeting room, there was a large television screen on which the MD was showing a PowerPoint presentation. The meeting room décor was typical of a corporate meeting room (white walls, white table, black chairs). However, toys in the room and bright artwork reflected their product. The discussions focused on budgets, targets, revenue expectations and 3-year plans that would shape priorities for the rest of the financial year. The meeting was structured (in that there was a PowerPoint presentation) but not overly so, in that there was no formal agenda or expected outcomes.

#### ***Departmental Meeting***

The meeting took place in the principal meeting room (the SLT meeting was held in the same room). The presenter, the most senior manager present, sat at the front and led the discussion. It was a breakfast meeting. Food appears to be an important part of things

(there are frequently pizza meetings within the organisation). The purpose of the meeting was to update teams on activity in a particular department (another update meeting). In this meeting, the room was full, with standing room only (there were approximately 20 attendees), and there were side conversations at the end of the room.

#### *All-Staff Meeting*

The “all staff” or “town hall” meeting was held in the open-plan office. The MD and SLT stood at one end of the office, and people stood around desks across the floor. The purpose of the meeting was to provide updates on business performance and for departments to discuss key achievements. There was no microphone, and it was hard to hear, especially at the back of the room. Presenters came to the front of the room and went through their PowerPoint slides. There were few questions and little interaction between the presenters and the audience.

#### ***Findings from Phase 3: Meeting Observations***

Two themes were identified from field notes taken during and after the meeting observations:

- *Top Down* which captured the tendency in the meetings observed for a senior manager to present information to employees, leaving little space for exploration.
- *Uncertainty* reflected the extent to which the future business direction was uncertain, with leaders trying to navigate a rapidly changing business environment.

#### *Top Down*

The interviews and focus groups highlighted a family-like dynamic between leaders and more junior workers. However, a different kind of parent/child relationship was on display in the meeting observations. During all three meetings, the most senior person was at the front giving information to other attendees. In the SLT meeting, when the leaders were together, the dynamic seemed more democratic, adult to adult. The discussions between SLT members were free-flowing, punctuated with questions from participants, and with a lot of humour and laughter. It felt like a relaxed and open environment.

In contrast, there was less social interaction in the departmental meeting observed, except for people chatting amongst themselves at the back of the room, something that was either not noticed or addressed. The most senior person led the meeting and did most of the talking. There was little discussion or interaction among other participants. A few people asked questions, in contrast to the SLT meeting, where many questions were asked. However, the SLT meeting had fewer (six) attendees, and the MD openly invited questions. At the end of the departmental meeting, a forthcoming social event was discussed with precise instructions: “we’re leaving the office at 4 pm, please come in earlier to get stuff done” (Meeting Leader), which was indicative of a parent/child dialectic. The meeting seemed to provide “top-down” information sharing with little social interaction.

During the all-staff meeting, the senior leader presenting stood at the front and presented to the rest of the organisation. The MD’s presentation was very detailed and provided information about business performance, targets, and metrics. During the meeting, specific employees were recognised for achieving targets. People were invited to present achievements during the meeting, allowing the SLT to say “well done”. The text on the PowerPoint was small, making it difficult for people at the back of the room to see. Similarly, some attendees could not hear the presentation as microphones were not used. Regarding its function as a community event, the all-staff meeting failed because it did not take some basics into account. The meeting did not appear to be inclusive or participative, but reminiscent of a parent informing their children.

The time taken during the SLT meeting to provide updates seemed to leave little opportunity to discuss ideas and possibilities thoroughly. Participants discussed booking time to think about “how this team [the SLT] is going to work” (Leader 5). The SLT wanted to consider how best to work together as a reasonably new leadership team. However, such a meeting had been postponed several times due to work pressures. Similarly, the departmental meeting focused on information download with no time for exploring possibilities or discussing creative ideas.

### *Uncertainty*

The uncertainty surrounding the business was evident in all three meetings. In the SLT meeting, there seemed to be a challenge between the requirements of the



headquarters for structure and the fluid nature of the exploration the SLT was going through. Comments such as “as soon as we know the story we want to tell, we can write the board paper” (MD) or “the exam question is...” (Leader 1) suggested that they were still trying to figure out the best direction in which to take the business. Whilst the intended outcome seemed clear, as the MD stated “the ambition is doubling the size of the business in 3 years from business we don’t currently have”, the challenges of finding income from a business that was yet to be created were apparent. SLT meeting participants commented on how hard it was to develop a business plan when everything was uncertain. There seemed to be a willingness to take risks, try something and change direction if it did not work out. Given the extent of the uncertainty, one participant asked, “how do we incentivise teams accordingly?” However, no discussion followed on how to motivate or lead teams through the uncertainty. The conversation moved on to discussing business metrics. The discussion pointed towards a culture (between the SLT members at least) that was open, willing to be uncertain, to recognise they were grappling with “thorny” issues and throwing ideas around. As the MD commented, “I don’t think this is the answer, but we’re closer to the answer and asking the right questions” (MD).

The second meeting was with the department responsible for monetising the creative products. The meeting leader talked about changes to the way the primary distribution channel was charging its clients. Those changes meant that future revenue was less certain. The meeting leader considered how [Company name] might respond, and what new approaches could be taken. A further question was how data generated from viewing statistics might drive creative decisions and deliver content that responded to what viewers typically watched most often. However, as with the SLT, the question posed was not explored, and no conclusions or outcomes were reached. The time taken for the meeting leader to update attendees did not leave sufficient time to explore possible solutions to the business challenges.

As part of the business update at the all-staff meeting, the MD shared information about how the business strategy was changing because of the changing commercial environment. The MD’s style was open and informal, and he freely shared the uncertainty regarding the possibilities for the business and the different directions the organisation could take. Whilst the openness demonstrated a trusting approach, sharing sensitive

information with all employees, it is possible that the extent of the uncertainty might be unsettling for some who were left with more questions than answers.

### ***Summary of Phase 3 (Meeting Observations)***

In the meetings, there was no direct discussion about creativity. The meetings were primarily about transmitting information. There was a pattern of the senior team presenting to more junior staff. The language used by leaders reflected the uncertainty of the business environment. However, at least more discussion about the impact of the uncertainty on employees might have been expected in the SLT meeting. There were common themes identified from the meeting observations: uncertainty, the rapidly changing business environment, the importance of taking risks, the desire for speed versus perceptions of constraint from the HQ, and no time to reflect or fully consider the impact of the rapidly changing environment on teams.

### **Phase 4: Analysis of Organisational Documents/Outcome Data**

As with the present research, document analysis is often used in combination with other qualitative methods to triangulate, supplement or corroborate other data sources (Bowen, 2009; Connell et al., 2001). Bowen (2009) suggests document analysis can be an efficient data collection method in that it requires selecting documents rather than generating new data. Furthermore, as Merriam (1998) argues, the researcher's presence does not alter the documents being studied, as might the researcher's presence in interviews, focus groups, or live observation studies. Documents can provide supplementary or background data, which may help contextualise the research and point to convergence or divergence between other data sources (Bowen, 2009). However, disadvantages of document analysis include a potential bias of selectivity on the part of the document provider or the researcher who decides which documents to select and what to pay attention to (Yin, 2017). In the present research, documents were chosen based on availability (e.g., publicly available documents such as annual reports and the company's website) and documents requested from the host organisation that they were willing to provide that may provide insight into the company's culture (e.g., documents and presentations on organisational culture, values, and key performance indicators, human resource policies). It was hoped that organisational documents might provide information regarding the organisational context in which the participants were operating

(Mills et al., 2006) and explore whether the formal “persona” of the organisation, the values it was espousing, matched the experiences expressed by participants in the interviews and focus groups. The documents reviewed included:

- results from the recently conducted staff survey, including verbatim comments. The purpose of the staff survey was to get a snap-shot of employees’ perceptions about the organisational culture, what was working and what needed more attention.
- meeting minutes from six culture workshops conducted by the HR Director (with 6-11 participants in each). The culture workshops were conducted to discuss the recent staff survey results with groups of employees at various hierarchical levels in the organisation and to provide qualitative data on employees’ perceptions.
- internal company presentations, such as PowerPoint slides used for the townhall (all-staff) meeting. These documents provided an indication of communication styles between leaders and employees in formal meetings and provided an insight into the types of information shared with employees.
- HR policies which provide clarity on expected standards of conduct, how complaints or grievances are handled, and how employees’ needs are addressed and respected.
- the division’s and headquarters’ websites, which provide brand information about the organisation, details of their financial results, annual reports and investor relations.

### ***Data Analysis***

Fifteen documents (260 pages) were coded and analysed using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Different methods can be used to analyse documents – for example, content analysis focuses on describing the contents of a data set, or thematic analysis, which identifies and interprets patterns of meaning across the data (Coffey, 2014; Staller, 2015). In the initial research design, I had planned to use organisational discourse analysis (ODA: Grant et al., 2001) to analyse the documents and meeting observations. ODA is described as a broad range of approaches to examine the effects of language, how text is produced and distributed and how discourse is used in a socially constructed reality (Grant et al., 2001). However, as the data collection progressed, I recognised that I

wanted to focus on patterns of meaning across the data sources rather than analysing the structure or performative nature of language (Fairhurst & Cooren, 2004). Furthermore, as my familiarity with thematic analysis developed, I discovered studies (e.g., Mackieson et al., 2019; Taylor & Ussher, 2001) that used thematic analysis to identify patterns of meaning in documents and discourse. Using thematic analysis, I was able to look at some aspects of language, such as frequently used metaphors, without going into linguistic intricacies that were not part of my research questions.

Applying RTA to document analysis follows the same procedure as with other data sources (detailed in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#)). The documents were read and re-read to familiarise myself with the data. They were then coded and interpreted to identify themes across the documents. The analytic process for thematic analysis is described in [Chapter 4](#). Document analysis was completed after interviews, FGs and meeting observations had been conducted to triangulate the data from the earlier phases of data collection. I noted similarities or differences between the wording of the documents. I considered how culture was expressed within the organisation and presented outwardly and compared these to the meetings observed and observations of group dynamics and individual employees' and leaders' views.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The case study organisation gave their informed consent for me to review internal documentation, including confidential documents. They requested that I sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) to protect the confidentiality of the private or commercially sensitive data I received. I took time to ensure the wording of the NDA provided the protection sought by the case study organisation but did not constrain my ability to report on or discuss my findings.

### ***Findings from Phase 4: Document Analysis***

Four themes were identified from the documents:

- *Busy Being Busy* captured feelings expressed in the culture survey regarding the pace and scale of change occurring within the organisation.
- *Leadership* which considered how leadership styles and approaches were experienced and reflected in the documents.

- *Capturing the Culture* reflected perceptions from the culture workshops about what made the organisation's culture special, as well as some of the cultural challenges.
- *Where are we Going?* reflected perceptions regarding clarity on the organisation's direction and goals, reflecting views expressed in the culture survey and the clarity of organisational documentation and differences between outwardly espoused values and those reflected in the documentation.

### *Busy Being Busy*

"Busy being busy" was one of the most frequently used descriptive phrases from the culture workshops and reflected the business' pace and scale of change. The verbatim survey comments reflected respondents' desire to have time to develop their skills and be creative, something they felt was not possible due to the pace at which they were working. However, survey respondents commented that the organisation's growth meant opportunities to get involved in new projects, which was perceived as a benefit. Comments were made about the expected pace of work and implicit demand to work additional hours as part of the day job, which, at times, caused stress and contributed to the feeling of having insufficient time to think. Respondents commented that projects were frequently too rushed, and there were insufficient collaborative discussions to promote creativity.

### *Leadership*

As Amabile et al. (1996) stated, organisations can encourage or discourage creativity through symbols, such as their policies and formal documentation. The organisation's website, a symbol of their identity (Diamond, 1993), was a juxtaposition of colourful images of their product, together with corporate information aimed at potential business partners and investors. The page on careers and culture showed a range of images of diverse staff members, smiling and having fun. The webpage detailed the organisation's values, which included statements regarding the importance of creativity, embracing difference, helping individuals to thrive and the importance of belonging. The webpage gave the impression of an organisation that valued diversity of background and thought, and used language such as "our DNA" and an "internal compass" for building its identity as a creative organisation.

The HR policies supplied by the host organisation provided a framework for expected behaviour and decision making. They were applicable across multiple divisions and were transparent and factual. However, they did not reflect the organisation's creative culture. Examples of policy documents that may be reflective of a creative culture include Netflix, which shaped its policies around trust and adult-adult behaviour rather than being overly prescriptive (McCord, 2014) or online retailer Zappos whose policies reflect their creative and unconventional culture that is firmly values-based (Hsieh, 2010). In these instances, the starting point for the policies is trusting that employees will do the right thing most of the time, and when things do go wrong, the policies are there to support individuals and the organisation to make things right again.

There were many positive reflections on the leadership in the verbatim culture survey comments. Some respondents highlighted the trust and responsibility their leaders gave them. They described the culture as open and supportive and thought that leaders were willing to take risks. Challenges mentioned in the verbatim comments included a sense of distance between the SMT and more junior workers. The time needed to gain approval for actions appeared to be getting slower and more cumbersome, and more control, structure, and hierarchy had been introduced. Survey respondents commented on the need for improved communication between departments to avoid wasted effort and duplication and articulated a sense of not feeling listened to by the SMT. Most survey respondents did not feel up to speed with what was happening in the business and thought that the all-staff meetings were often too detailed and inaccessible. Some respondents commented on the need to be mindful of non-native English speakers when presenting to the organisation. The documents used to present to all staff did not seem to strongly reflect the culture, using PowerPoint slides that were overly detailed for the audience in question.

### *Capturing the Culture*

I wish we could bottle up what you have and share it around the wider company.  
(Group CEO)

The above quote, attributed to the parent company chief executive officer, was shared at the beginning of workshops held with staff and leaders following the staff survey. It emphasised that the wider company recognised the division's culture as

exceptional. The culture workshops aimed to build on what was unique about the organisation, how to describe the essence of the culture, and maintain that as the organisation grew. Responses to the staff survey reflected perceptions of the culture as valuing creativity, appearing to support failure as a normal and inevitable part of creativity. Furthermore, the culture was described as open and accepting of different perspectives. However, the culture was also criticised for becoming “cliquey” (verbatim response from culture survey), with little opportunity to explore what happened outside their immediate work group. The majority of survey respondents felt they did not have sufficient time to do their work as well as they would like, and the lack of time meant they could not develop their skills further. And whilst the culture was considered friendly, the downside was that, at times, respondents felt that issues and conflicts were not addressed.

#### *Where are we Going?*

A recurrent theme across the culture survey responses and culture workshops was a lack of clarity on the organisation’s direction and the company’s goals. Respondents felt that, at times, their work was not appreciated because it was not explicitly tied to specific, shared objectives. Furthermore, it was felt that objectives were often not clear enough or there were too many priorities, resulting in a lack of focus. The rapidly changing and uncertain nature of [Company name]’s business meant that some employees felt that leaders were “working things out as we go” (verbatim response from culture survey), which could be exciting. Still, the absence of standard processes and workflows was, at times, experienced as “exhausting.” Whilst some survey respondents expressed a wish for more straightforward communication and “transparency”, others wanted leaders to stop saying, “we are not sure now, but will figure it out in the future”, possibly because it contributed to the sense of uncertainty (verbatim comments from culture survey).

#### ***Summary of Phase 4 (Document Analysis)***

The documents examined pointed to a culture that was, at times, at odds with the organisation’s espoused values. The formality of the presentations and policies reflected a corporate approach that did not seem to represent the creative nature of the business. The verbatim comments from the staff survey and culture capture sessions pointed to

aspects of the culture and leadership behaviours that helped creativity (e.g., trust and risk-taking) and aspects that hindered creativity (such as less connection between people and a lack of clarity on future business direction).

### **Integrated Analysis: Findings and Discussion Across All Four Phase Datasets**

You have to be able to talk multiple human languages, you understand a behaviour and work with that, sometimes a bit more childish, sometimes a bit more grown-up, sometimes it gets a bit messy...I guess leading a creative is being able to translate different languages, different ways of working, different ways of thinking and different needs and requirements – to make sense of that. (Leader 1, Phase 2 - Interviews)

Moran-Ellis et al. (2006) describe integration as a process of bringing together multiple methods used in data collection to look at the data set as a whole, with the aim of “knowing more” (p.45) and looking at the relationship between data sources. This integrated analysis considers the four data collection phases as a whole, identifying patterns across the data.

### ***Procedure***

Each phase’s data set was analysed separately using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). Once the analysis of each data set was completed, the triangulation matrix based on Farmer et al. (2006) was used to compare the findings from each data source (an example is provided in [Appendix B](#)). I looked for similarities and differences between each data source and followed the “thread” (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006, p.54) of each potential theme to see whether and how the finding was evidenced in each data set. An example in this research is the theme of parent/child present in each data collection phase. The triangulation matrix helped me consider similarities and differences between how the themes manifested in each phase. Furthermore, in bringing together the data set as a whole, I ensured that each candidate theme was representative of the data corpus and looked at the “bigger picture” of what the data were telling me.

### ***Overview of Themes and Subthemes***

Two meta-themes were developed, each with sub-themes representing important interconnected polarities featured in the data (Illustrated in Figure 12), these were:

- ***The paradox of organisational growth and creativity*** with sub-themes of:



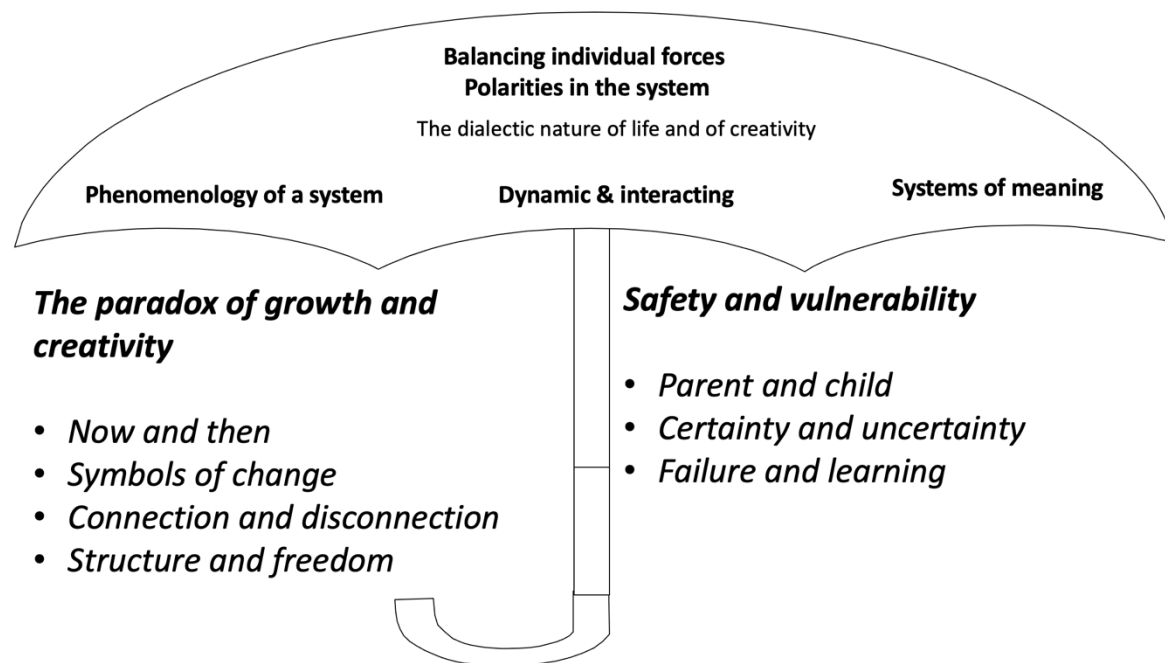
- *Now and then*, which was expressed as nostalgia for “how things were”, how the organisation was changing and fear about what the organisation might become.
- *Symbols of change*, illustrating the symbolism of change that was impacting participants’ experience of being creative.
- *Connection and disconnection*, which reflected the changing nature of relationships amongst organisational workers and the extent to which they felt connected to the purpose of the organisation;

and

- ***Safety and vulnerability*** with sub-themes of:
  - *Parent and child*, illustrating how the language of parent and child in communication between leaders and employees, a powerful dynamic of the data, shaped the experience of being creative at work.
  - *Certainty and uncertainty*, which examined uncertainty from two perspectives: first, responses to organisational uncertainties and, second, how participants’ perspectives on risk, uncertainty and feelings of safety influenced how they cope with uncertainty.
  - *Failure and learning*, exploring the attitudes of leaders and more junior employees towards failure, highlighting the leaders’ expectation that failure was an inevitable part of being creative.

**Figure 12**

*Diagram of Themes & Sub-themes from the Integrated Phase Data from Study 2  
(Organisational Case Study)*



### ***Theme 1: The Paradox of Organisational Growth and Creativity***

This theme is about polarities and tensions resulting from organisational growth and creativity. The literature (e.g., Bennis & Biederman, 1997) suggests that it is harder for larger, more mature organisations to maintain their creativity since they tend to have more levels of bureaucracy and typically view profit as the primary measure of success, which, although vital, is not necessarily experienced as meaningful for creative workers. A conclusion from Study 1 was that creative workers derive significant value from the creative process, not just the creative outcome. The organisation that was the focus of this case study had grown significantly in the four years prior to this study. Leaders and focus group (FG) participants frequently used a phrase that the organisation was at a “pivot point” in its evolution. The data revealed that there were choices to be made concerning the future direction of the business, and those choices had implications for the business and the people within it.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Now and Then***

It was evident from the data that the competing tensions of organisational growth and maintaining creativity were challenging for leaders and creative workers, highlighting

a dialectic central to the experience of creativity at work. The creativity of products and processes that had made [Company name] successful enabled the organisation to deliver “double-digit growth” (Leader 1) consistently. As the organisation grew, there was a need to put in place more structure and process to organise activities. These new processes resulted in re-defined boundaries that caused tensions. Focus Group (FG) participants gave an example regarding the new requirement for forms to be completed, which they found frustrating and limiting:

You need to fill out a form whenever you get an idea, that form needs to be sent and reviewed every quarter...there’s this whole structure in place. (FG1, P5)

Leaders and FG participants expressed nostalgia for how the organisation used to be. Longer-serving employees felt that the organisation used to be more spontaneous and playful, and there had been a greater sense of connection between people:

[The culture] used to be better when it was smaller. Only because you felt more connected and closer to the people that you were working with. (Leader 2)

Having been here from when we were just 20 people to now, where we’re too big for this office: when we moved here, we all sat in the back corner of this room...we just had the table tennis table in the middle of the room and nothing else. So, things have changed quite a bit. (FG2, P5)

The narrative of ‘now and then’ extended to employees who had been with the company a much shorter time and had not experienced how things used to be:

I only joined [a few] months ago...but I’ve heard a lot about [Company name] before. (FG3, P1)

Whilst the organisation was undoubtedly changing, the past was, perhaps, being viewed through “rose-coloured spectacles”. Some participants recognised past cultural challenges such as “ridiculous politics” (FG2, P4) at the top of the organisation or policies being changed (for example, the working-from-home arrangements) without appropriate communication. As one FG participant commented:

I feel like the period that we’re in right now is recovering from the six-month period before [Managing Director’s name] joined. (FG2, P3)

It was clear that the pace and volume of change had an impact that, for some, was very difficult:

The [business] landscape is forever changing, and lots of things are changing...things are uncertain...and I think when people are unsettled and uncertain, they start clutching at straws...but I feel like now there will be more mapping out to try and deal with those uncertainties. (FG2, P3)

As part of the data collection, three meetings were observed to explore the dynamics of group activity. The number and frequency of meetings had been steadily increasing over the previous six months, which some FG participants perceived as further evidence of the organisation changing and becoming more corporate. The SLT regularly held all-staff meetings designed to update the organisation on key events from the prior month. Data from a recent culture survey conducted by the human resources team reflected that, for some, the information given in the meetings was not readily understandable or was “dealing in vagaries” (anonymous verbatim comment from staff survey). Some wished their leaders would be more transparent, especially in uncertain times. FG participants were critical of the culture that they perceived was becoming more “meeting-y” and that “everybody’s just sick of them [meetings] anyway” (FG2, P2). Employees felt that leaders could be overly directive in meetings and could be too quick to provide an answer. They felt that meetings were overly structured and formulaic, with the most senior person present automatically taking charge and directing the discussion, which effectively shut down opportunities for exploratory thinking:

I oftentimes think, whoever the most senior person is in whatever team will lead every discussion. And they’ll be the person asking the questions, and it limits what the responses can be. (FG3, P4)

The quote below comes from FG3 but accurately reflected my observation of all of the meetings:

A lot of times, I go into a meeting, and I know exactly what’s gonna happen in this meeting. So-and-so’s going to speak for 20 minutes, then they’re going to open it up, everyone’s going to respond to the 20-minute monologue, and that’s what it’s going to be. (FG3, P3)

A further impact of the pace of growth was tension arising from a perceived lack of time to be creative. Employees at all levels were so busy developing the business that it

was felt that their creativity suffered. Leaders felt that they did not have time to consider the long-term implications of their decisions. Participants in all three focus groups felt they did not have sufficient time to produce the quality of creativity they wished, which caused them to feel stressed. They felt that the opportunity to explore, discover or build alliances and collaborations was compromised.

FG participants were concerned that the organisation was becoming “too corporate” (FG1, P4 & FG2, P4). I explored with FG participants what made the organisation feel too corporate, what was changing. There was a range of feelings about what “too corporate” represented for people. For some, it meant more bureaucracy and meetings that were labelled as “bad corporate stuff” (FG2, P5). The metaphor of the organisation as a machine, a prevalent metaphor in organisational theorising (G. Morgan, 2006), was used in [Company name] to represent the fear of what the organisation might become:

You know, it's becoming a machine, and for me, that's their biggest mistake. What's happening here, what's happening here now...you need at least a certain amount of freedom to be creative. Otherwise, you're just a machine, you're a robot, you're doing what you're told, like, yes sir, and that's it. (FG1, P3)

Similarly, FG participants were fearful of becoming too “polished” (FG2, P7) and losing the organisation’s creative edge:

If you look at the people that we’ve hired into the company, I think before you would have a lot more diversity of individuals from different backgrounds. I think...we’ll have more polished people coming from more traditional organisations and becoming more traditional in the sense of the negative aspects. (FG2, P1)

Attempts by the organisation’s headquarters (HQ) to introduce corporate values were considered a symbol of becoming “too corporate”. FG participants felt strongly that the values had been imposed and were not reflective of their values and culture:

I mean, I want to rip down that horrible [parent company] cultural DNA poster. It’s just like the most generic crap I’ve seen in my life. Literally, we’ve got it on the cups, oh God! (FG2, P5)

Although participants also recognised that there were positive things that came from being more corporate:

If becoming more corporate means people get paid what they deserve to get paid, people don't have to work in the evenings or on the weekends because we've hired enough staff...that's great. (FG2, 3)

One leader described their acceptance that the company's size inevitably led to “real-world scenarios” (Leader 3) where more government compliance was required. As such, requirements for controls such as policies, internal audits or legal review meant that the organisation had to change:

...you know, when you scale up these entrepreneurial activities, a lot of them will hit these barriers that are very difficult to move through or usually impossible to dismantle because of those realities. (Leader 3)

For [Company name], a crisis of leadership (Greiner, 1998) was evidenced by the changes in the SLT, with a new managing director (MD) being brought in to replace the start-up leaders. The MD was, in turn, putting in place a more formalised leadership team structure. The organisation could not merely rely on its creativity to grow. More processes and structures were introduced to respond to and cope with the pace of growth. The changes were experienced by employees as unsettling and reduced their creativity. The transition between the organisation's stages of development highlights significant tensions evident in the data, such as moving from start-up towards organisational maturity, from “child” towards “adulthood”, from freedom and spontaneity towards more structure and control.

### ***Subtheme 2: Symbols of Change***

Symbolism is a significant aspect of culture and is manifested by overt symbols such as policies and procedures, office layout, rituals and unconscious symbols such as the stories and myths that are pervasive in the organisation (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Zott & Huy, 2007). Organisational symbolism is a mechanism by which employees make sense of underlying assumptions and feelings that guide behaviour (Dandridge et al., 1980; Schein, 1984).

Within [Company name], the symbolism pointed to contradictions and tensions within the culture. For FG participants, a potent symbol of how the organisation was changing was the SLT's decision to remove the ping-pong table that had been a prominent feature in the entrance hall of the organisation's office. As a symbol of change, removing the ping-pong table was deeply unsettling. In the minds of the FG participants,

the ping-pong table represented the organisation's identity as a "cool" creative place where employees were free to go and play as they wished. They perceived its removal as reflecting the cultural changes that were happening as the organisation became more mature. Furthermore, the ping-pong table was seen as a means by which employees could get to know others outside of their immediate workgroup:

Framing it as a metaphor, the ping-pong table is a good way to break the ice with people and engage...and allows you to be more friendly with people and more willing to open up and talk about work or non-work stuff and find some common ground. (Leader 3)

However, the ping-pong table was not without critics; some female employees felt it was a highly gendered symbol, which created tensions between those who perceived it as overly competitive. Those who preferred not to or could not play expressed feelings of being excluded.

The physical environment was a potent symbol of change. Indeed, Csíkszentmihályi (1996) recognises the "spatiotemporal" context in which creativity happens as having significant but frequently unnoticed consequences. As the organisation had grown, more people were working in a limited space that was not always suitable for the tasks at hand. An example was given of a composer who was working in an open-plan environment wearing headphones all day so that they could concentrate on their work. Similarly, FG participants felt that the physical environment did not facilitate making connections with others outside of their workgroup.

You've got a bunch of people in the corner editing, and they're trying to do colour matching, and they've got neon lights above and noise in the background. (Leader 4)

For a company that, at the end of the day, has a lot of quite bonkers projects...and a lot of creativity, we sit in an empty white space in silence. (FG2, P5)

Formal organisational documentation represents a symbolic manifestation of organisational culture. The documentation reviewed as part of the research seemed at odds with the organisation's persona in that policies and procedures were plain and written in "corporate-speak", giving no hint as to the creative nature of the organisation. However, the external-facing website portrayed an identity that appeared much more in keeping with the core values of the organisation and its identity as a fun and creative

place. Formal organisation meetings are significant cultural symbols that point to latent beliefs and assumptions underpinning the culture. The meetings observed were highly structured, driven by the most senior person in attendance, and appeared to be “top-down” information sharing rather than a creative exchange of views.

### ***Subtheme 3: Connection and Disconnection***

Leaders noted an increasing disconnect between the organisation's goals and employees' sense of their contributions to the organisation. The gap appeared to be partly caused by a lack of clarity around future business purpose and a sense that there were more silos and people were becoming less knowledgeable about what was happening in other business areas. A participant in FG3 articulated how the culture had changed:

When I first joined...I knew every person in the office and would feel OK about...having a drink with every person in the office...These days, I don't actually know everyone's name in the office...A lot of times, when somebody new joins, they're not even brought around to our side of the office, like it's a faraway land and [they] don't need to worry about that. (FG3, P4)

The changes experienced as the organisation grew led to individuals feeling less connected with their colleagues and less connected with the organisation's purpose. The need for connection was more readily met by immediate work colleagues, leading to a division between departments. Participants felt that the organisation was becoming more structured and less family-like. They reflected that they used to know everyone's name and would feel comfortable approaching other people to ask their opinion. However, the volume of new employees joining, together with the introduction of more hierarchical levels than before, meant that individuals did not interact with as many people outside their departmental structure as previously. One leader expressed a potential implication of not knowing people:

You don't know how you could work better with someone if you've never met them. (Leader 2)

Participants were clear about the importance of connection for the creative process:

...creativity is finding that link between those different things, that connection, that creative connection between things...and I think it's a connection between something you know and something that no-one thought before. (FG1, P4)



But also, the importance of connecting with other people during the creative process was noted:

It's the shared experience...that connection because if you're working with someone, you're connecting ideas with another person...you get that joy of connecting the idea but also the feedback, the social aspect. (FG1, P2)

#### ***Subtheme 4: Structure and Freedom***

As the business moved towards “maturity”, one of the dialectics that leaders needed to address was the balance between structure and freedom. The organisation's financial situation had become more challenging due to changes in market and economic circumstances. As a result, the HQ was becoming more involved in decision-making within the organisation. There was a concern about having less freedom than previously to make autonomous decisions. Leaders discussed how the North American CEO was starting to get involved in micro detail (such as décor decisions), and they recognised the challenge of achieving an optimal balance. Leader 5 commented on the challenges for an organisation transitioning from start-up stage to being a more mature organisation:

There are times when you do need that structure, you do need people where you need them to be because you're working on a joint project...They're finding their feet in that transition between start-up and 'oh, right! We're an actual business now.' I think that transition is a little bit tricky. (Leader 5)

Leader 3 expressed their frustration about the layers of bureaucracy that were felt, at times, to stifle creativity. On the one hand, the CEO was saying that people should go and try things, but on the other hand, the corporate “machinery” was such that it was becoming increasingly difficult to do in practice:

It just really gets bogged down in the bureaucracy, and the mechanisms, which...are geared towards [avoiding] risk to the business...It feels frustrating...because you wanna do something, and then there's lots of people saying you can't do it. How does it feel? In a nutshell, frustrating, and it seems like an unnecessary challenge, and it seems like sometimes the risk is overblown and perhaps stifling in terms of the innovation, what you can do... And sometimes, it gets to the point where those barriers are so high, and it means that my solution is going to take more work than it's supposed to save. (Leader 3)

However, putting some structure in place was also recognised as being helpful, freeing people up to focus on their creative work and to provide clarity and focus:

I don't want to use the word process, but maybe some components, some milestones that we don't have, or the time or headspace...or some objectives. (Leader 1)

FG participants felt that structures introduced because of the organisation's growth had resulted in more hierarchical levels. Rather than having direct conversations with the appropriate person, protocols had to be followed. However, participants accepted the need to balance structure and freedom, to be able to "dance between the two" (FG2, P4). As the organisation grew, participants recognised that constraints were both necessary and frustrating:

We are so big that we need certain guidelines and certain rules. If everyone is given freedom, you don't know what anyone is doing. It's utter chaos...As we get more organised to enable us to function, we lose a bit of that freedom and creativity, which can be frustrating. (FG1, P3)

As we've got bigger, inevitably, you have to start putting processes in. Before, it was more of a 'try this idea, run fast and break things' mentality. I feel that's gone...Even though it's inevitable that you need some structure and processes, I feel like we've very quickly got rid of some of those elements, and it feels like we're a more mature organisation, but I don't think that's entirely a good thing. (FG2, P1)

The concept of freedom was complex. FG participants talked about needing the freedom to explore ideas, but too much freedom, too many options, was experienced as a "burden" and "overwhelming." (FGs 1 & 2) The word "freedom" was used as a metaphor by FG participants to denote the need for trust from leaders to enable them to explore ideas. Similarly, "space" was used as a metaphor to denote the presence or absence of freedom and trust between leaders and creative workers, and between leaders in the subsidiary and headquarters.

[I would like] space to breathe or somewhere to go to try and get a different perspective. (FG2, P.2)

I think in my role, more important than creativity is giving people space, to get their... to do the thinking, to, to go off-site, what is this character...what are the worlds, and make it, and allow the team to take time to do that rather than go create episodes now! Go! (Leader 4)

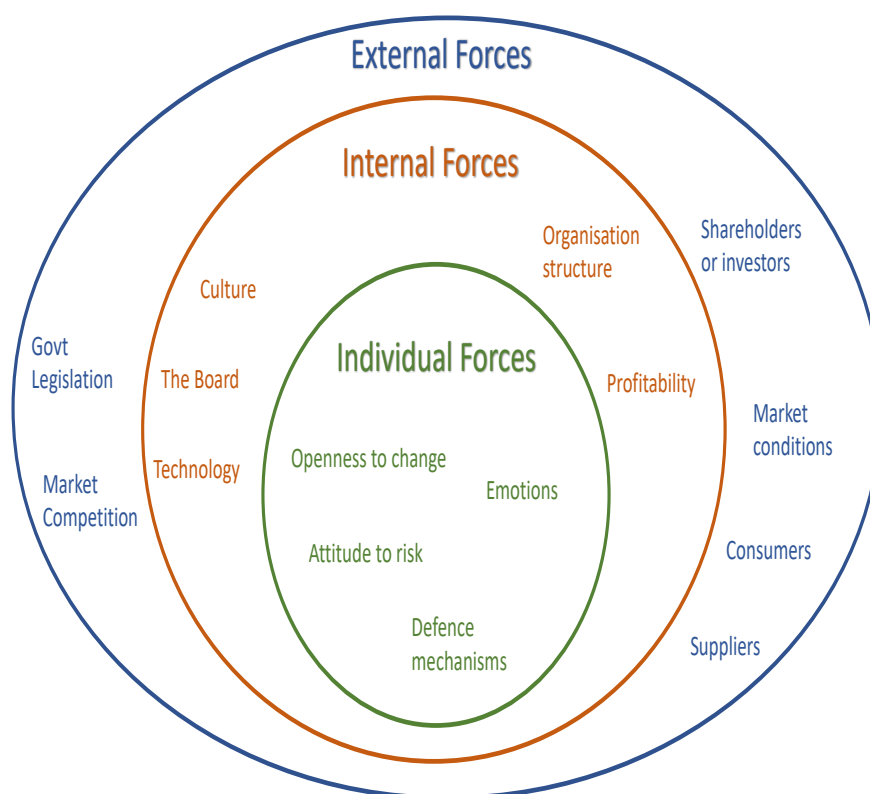
### ***Discussion Theme 1: The Paradox of Organisational Growth and Creativity***

Csikszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) argue that rather than being an individual trait alone, creativity within organisations results from social and group processes. They posit

that the challenge with creativity in organisations is not the absence of good ideas but a system that enables those ideas to come to market underlining the complex, interconnecting systems that exist within organisations. Multiple groups represent the “field” (or gatekeepers) who decide whether a novel idea should be progressed, the domain (the rules and practices that apply), and multiple individuals who are themselves systems within systems (Figure 13). Leaders acting as the field may decide that a creative idea is not suitable for the business domain. Similarly, gatekeepers may be industry bodies or consumers who judge a new product or service as creative and desirable.

**Figure 13**

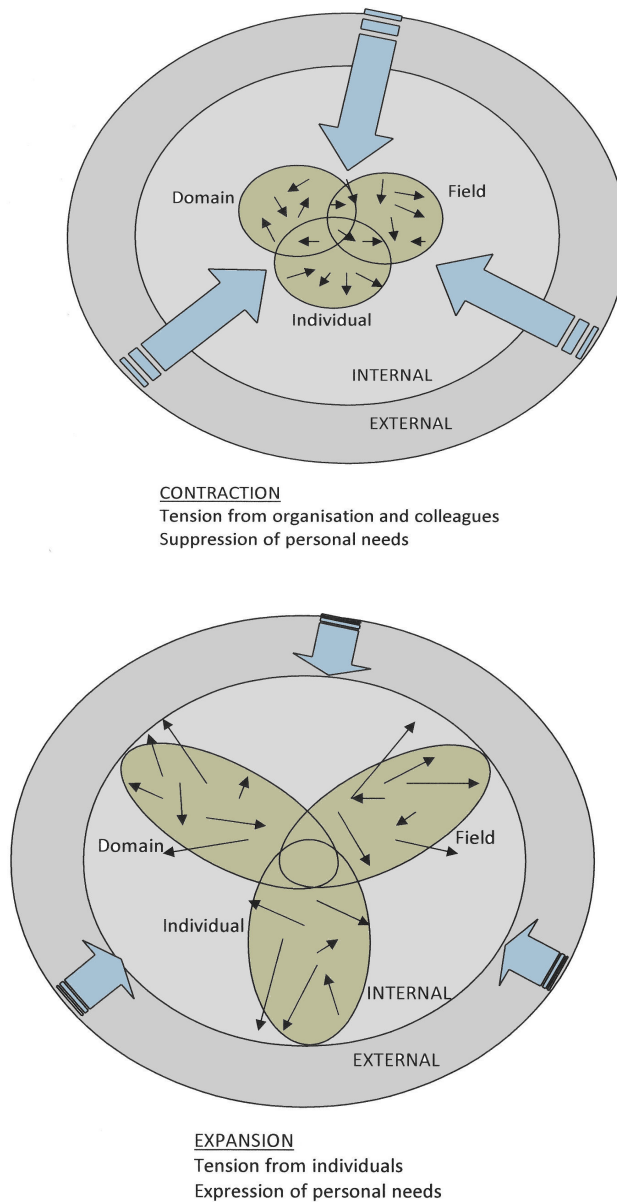
*Model of External, Internal and Individual Forces on Organisational Creativity (adapted from Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer, 2014)*



The “domain” is similarly complex in organisations, represented by the organisation’s “symbolic system” (Csíkszentmihályi & Sawyer, 2014, p. 68). The symbolic system is the culture, policies and procedures that establish the boundaries for how things get done, an individual’s position in the hierarchy and key stakeholders (such as headquarter leadership). At the centre of an organisation’s symbolic system are individuals (creative

workers and leaders) who influence how the system is experienced, who write the policies and procedures and whose behaviour determines the organisational culture. To add further complexity, the social context in which organisations operate have their own fields and domains such as legislative frameworks, market competition or consumer demand. Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer refer to these domains and fields as “external forces” (p. 69), which can significantly impact creativity. They point out that it does not matter how creative a product or service might be. If external forces do not accept it as such, it is unlikely to succeed.

In addition to external forces impacting creativity, Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) describe internal forces that play an important role in shaping the experience of creativity. Examples they give of internal forces are corporate culture, the board (and by inference, leadership) and individual attitudes, such as openness to novelty and risk. Whilst Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer (2014) include individual attitudes as an internal force that impacts creativity, I propose an additional category of “individual forces” that recognises how individuals’ characteristics, emotions and defences shape the experience of being creative at work which is not currently captured by Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer’s articulation of the systems model in organisations. Individual behaviours are motivated by needs such as achieving profit targets to get rewarded or to avoid being fired or the need to belong and form strong attachment relationships. The findings demonstrated that the motivation to fulfil personal needs was potentially in tension with the broader needs of colleagues and their organisation. For example, the need to reduce the fear of vulnerability influenced the extent to which some creative workers self-censored ideas, preventing them from putting an idea forward for fear of being shamed. The complex forces within an organisational system are perhaps best represented as an interconnected system (Figure 14). The first diagram illustrates potential tensions between internal and external forces. Tensions from the organisation and colleagues may lead to individuals suppressing their personal needs to achieve harmony. The second diagram illustrates potential tensions occurring when individuals prioritise their personal needs over those of colleagues or the organisation.

**Figure 14***Proposed Interconnected Creative System*

The competing demands of growing the organisation whilst maintaining creativity were crucial internal forces evident in the data. From the findings it seemed that the transition between the organisation's earlier start-up phase and its evolution towards a more mature organisation was a source of tension for employees at all levels. Amabile and Conti's (1999) research into changes to the work environment for creativity during downsizing found that organisational events can alter employees' perception about their culture from encouraging to hindering creativity. Whilst the situation with [Company name] was not one of downsizing, the principles that Amabile and Conti discussed – such

as psychological climate, values, norms, and relationships, worsening of communication practices, decreasing trust, increasing fear and high levels of uncertainty – were relevant to [Company name] as it changed.

As the findings demonstrated, as the organisation grew, employees felt less connected, less empowered, and increasingly concerned as change happened rapidly around them without necessarily understanding the context. FG participants felt that leaders who did not have sufficient time tended to enforce rather than enable. A mentoring or developmental approach takes time. In my leadership experience, it is quicker (in the short-term at least) to instruct rather than enable. However, instruction potentially disengages people and does not help to develop autonomous behaviour (Bennis & Biederman, 2007). Similarly, once a task was completed, people moved on to the next task without having sufficient time to learn from what worked or did not work. Research has demonstrated the importance of multiple, diffuse relationships in fostering creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006), and, as Study 1 highlighted, secure attachment relationships are a key factor in encouraging creativity. However, relationship-building takes time. The findings demonstrated that it became harder to get to know colleagues from different departments as the organisation grew, resulting in perceptions of a “silo” mentality where information was not naturally shared across departments or functions. Similarly, the fast-paced work environment meant that neither employees nor leaders felt they had sufficient time to build meaningful relationships. Most wellbeing models (Huppert & So, 2013; Keyes, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Seligman, 2011) evidence the importance of relationships to psychological wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, relationships are also central to positive organisational life (Dutton & Ragins, 2017; Fletcher & Ragins, 2008).

As the organisation became more successful from its inception to the time the study took place, attitudes to risk appeared to have changed. The findings indicated that leaders and employees felt less able and willing to take innovative risks as there was more to lose both financially and personally. However, organisational growth and creativity are not mutually exclusive. The challenge is to balance the organisation's development with a continual focus on the creativity that has brought the organisation to this point. Within organisational development theory, an analogy is often made between the growth stages of an organisation and life span development (e.g., Cameron & Whetten, 1984; Greiner, 1998; Quinn & Cameron, 1983). Life cycle theories of organisations posit that

organisations follow a typical developmental path of “birth” to “death” or reinvention. In parallel to Erikson's (1959) model of lifespan development, organisational life cycle models propose a series of stages culminating with crises and transitions that must be successfully navigated in order for the organisation to develop. For example, Colman (1992) posits that organisations go through stages of identity formation, crises and challenges which move them towards potential wholeness and integration. The corollary is that organisational stagnation may occur if the challenges are not successfully navigated. Similarly, the organisation's shadow side must be acknowledged and confronted for it to be transcended. Creativity, Colman suggests, lies within the excluded parts of the organisation's psyche.

Perhaps the most commonly used life cycle model in organisations is Greiner's (1998) model that proposes five phases of organisational development <sup>4</sup>, with each stage culminating in a crisis that needs to be resolved. Within this study, the first and second stages were evident. The crisis between Stage 1 (creativity) and Stage 2 (direction) is described as the crisis of leadership, where managers become more efficiency-minded, establishing greater control and more formalised systems. The direction stage culminates in a crisis of autonomy where, as the organisation becomes more complex, more junior employees may experience a tension between structure and freedom, spontaneity, and control. [Company name] seemed to be experiencing both the crises of leadership and autonomy as they moved from early development towards maturity, as evidenced by the perception from more junior employees that the organisation was becoming “too corporate” (FG1, P4 & FG2, P4) and overly bureaucratic.

Lifespan development theory implies that in transitioning between the stages, individuals develop the capabilities needed to grow into the subsequent stage and highlights the polarities and tensions that must be resolved to move forward successfully (Erikson, 1963). In exploring life cycle models of organisation development, it should be

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<sup>4</sup> Greiner's 5 phases of organisational growth: 1) creativity (crisis: leadership); 2) direction (crisis: autonomy); 3) delegation (crisis: control); 4) coordination (crisis: red tape); 5) collaboration.

recognised that organisational development theory does not have sufficient grounding and clarity yet to address the nuances of human development. Indeed, Tichy (1980) argues that the biological analogy of predictable stages of development does not apply to complex organisational systems. However, the contribution of lifespan theory is to illustrate how each stage maintains and builds upon prior learning. Lifespan theory highlights the tensions and polarities that arise during an individual's psychosocial development (Erikson, 1959; Levinson, 1986), but drawing a parallel between life span development and organisational development can highlight tensions, polarities and paradoxes that occur during organisational change and development. An awareness of the challenges inherent in stage transition may point to how organisations can successfully approach and navigate those transitions and provide appropriate support for their employees. For example, understanding the dialectic nature of change and organisation development may stimulate a deeper conversation concerning the tensions being experienced and how to balance the need for structure, efficiency, and process with the need for playfulness and spontaneity. Whilst a typical response to organisational maturation is to introduce classical structures and formalities, there is a risk that the organisation moves closer to a controlling parent/child relationship. Perhaps organisations need a different sort of maturity – trusting and enabling more and seeking to control less.

### ***Theme 2: Safety and Vulnerability***

This theme explores the need for a safe and supportive working environment that enables people to navigate the uncertainty of creativity. Within the theme, three aspects of safety and vulnerability are explored: the metaphor of parent/child and the importance of safe and secure relationships; how leaders and more junior creative workers experienced uncertainty; and the attitudes of leaders and creative workers towards failure within the creative process. The language used by leaders and more junior creative workers is examined as it may point to the conscious and unconscious aspects of the organisation's culture.

#### ***Subtheme 1: Parent and Child***

The language of parent/child was a striking feature in the interviews with leaders, the FGs with more junior staff, and in documentation from the culture survey, representing



an important and complex dialectic within the data. The parent/child language captured the supportive and caring nature of relationships between leaders and creative workers, the positive aspects of secure parenting and parent/child relationships. However, it also pointed to possible patterns of unhelpful behaviours from leaders (such as controlling behaviours) and co-workers (dependency and not taking responsibility), which represented the different ways in which those terms might be expressed and displayed.

Leaders and employees referred to the North American HQ as “the Mothership”. As well as parental connotations, the term is also an aeronautical expression by implication, which may point towards where processes are initiated and controlled. At the start of the research, the Mothership was considered to be supportive, providing “permission” for the division to be creative and take risks:

He [the corporate CEO] says, ‘I don't want anything to be prohibited, you know, go try anything.’ (Leader 3)

As the market situation became increasingly challenging, the attitude of the Mothership began to change. They moved from being supportive to wanting to be aware of and influence details and decisions, becoming more heavily involved with day-to-day operations. Leader 2 reflected that as the cost and impact of failure increased, there was potentially more to lose. As such, the Mothership became less risk tolerant. Leaders perceived that there was a greater desire for stability and predictability as the business grew. As the potential impact of a risk not paying off increased, the tolerance for uncertainty and risk was felt to be subtly shifting:

I think in the past, they used to be a little bit more risk-tolerant because there wasn't that much to lose, there wasn't a lot at stake on our specific part of the business...whereas now that the business is more mature...we have to deliver certain things at certain times. I think an element of that tolerance for risk has gone down [because of] the importance of stability in our business. (Leader 2)

FG participants mirrored the parent/child language, with one person describing themselves as being “a bit like a nagging mother” towards their co-workers (FG1). More junior staff used the term “grown-up” as the antithesis of the “creative” activity, whilst leaders used the term grown-up to denote trust and autonomy. FG2 participants used the child metaphor to describe the playful, child-like qualities of being creative (such as lack of inhibition or self-censoring) and the frustrations of having to be more grown-up. The

implication was that child-like qualities or being grown-up were an either/or state, rather than potentially co-existing. FG participants used the term grown-up as a metaphor for more structure, less freedom, some of the seemingly less positive aspects of organisational maturity, differentiating between grown-up things that had to be done versus creative activities that were perceived as distinct:

...if an organisation can get the balance of doing the things that you're responsible for and doing grown-up, kind of, parent role, then you've got to carve out time in an organisation to have the creative pursuits part. (FG2, P3)

FG1 discussed the difference between a child's creativity and the creativity of grown-ups who, it was felt, must adhere to systemic rules of what defines something as creative. The freedom of the child to create without reference to domain rules and structure was something that they recognised was not possible within a work context:

...most kids are very, very creative. Most kids don't care, because kids don't know the rules of art, they don't know the rules of anything, they would bang on the piano and think they're making something beautiful...and you can't just be like a child. (FG1, P1)

The above quote highlights an important debate in creativity theorising. Some scholars (e.g., Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Runco, 2003) argue that children show creative potential rather than creative performance since the outcome must be domain-changing or useful in some way to be considered truly “creative”. However, in their 4-C model, Kaufman and Beghetto (2009, p. 1) differentiated between “Big C” creativity, which they described as eminent accomplishments (akin to Csíkszentmihályi's domain-changing creativity), “Pro-C” creativity which captures professional creators who are successful but not eminent in their field (potentially the most apposite category for the creative workers in this research), “little c” creativity that focuses on everyday activities, positioning creative potential as being widely distributed, and “mini-c”, creativity that refers to interpretations or insights that are new and meaningful for the individual in question. Using the 4-C model, a child can be creative in a mini-c way. Indeed, Helfand et al. (2016) suggest that mini-c creativity is often seen in educational settings as students learn and make meaningful progress. Rather than being constrained by narrow, self-imposed definitions of creativity, perhaps a greater awareness of the range of activity that could be considered creative might help diffuse tension between the playful, child-like qualities

of creativity and the more rational, outcome-oriented aspects of delivering a creative product.

The FG participants appeared to be discussing creativity as a less constraining process for children than for grown-ups, highlighting the extent to which preconceptions can constrain creativity (Dumas & Dunbar, 2016). Continuing to describe the process of creativity in child-like terms, the FG participants sometimes chose to “rebel”. In deciding to pursue creative ideas without seeking approval from their line managers, they were attempting to circumvent the perception of restrictive control. They considered that taking a risk and circumventing structures was necessary to achieve their desired creative outcome:

Ratatouille, the film, he's a chef and...if he wants to become head chef...you could get there by doing something consistently well over a long period of time, but it's where you take a meal and put your own personal twist on it, and then you send it out anyway, even if it hasn't been approved, and then you get great feedback. (FG1, P5)

Leaders used the term grown-up to denote trust, that people were trusted to manage their workday in a way that suited them rather than being overly prescriptive as to when and where work was done:

We treat people like grown-ups when it comes to time management, some people like getting in early, leaving early. I think that that makes people feel like they're respected, and respect is really important. (Leader 5)

The demographic split of the employee base was, broadly, leaders who were older and employees who were much younger, many of whom were early in their career trajectory. Leader 4 describes part of their role as providing “permission” and safety to team members and encouraging them to move beyond their comfort zone:

What I'm noticing is that people ask for permission for things, and I'm going 'that's up to you. You're grown-up. If it's important...if it's something that you feel like I should be making the decision on, great, but all these sorts of things, then no, you can make that call.' (Leader 4)

Leaders were clear about their role in creating a safe environment in which their teams could explore and create:

What I hope they know about me is that they can come to me with anything, and we'll work on it together and figure it out, and there's not going to ever be anger or

ego, selfishness, anything that would make someone feel bad about what they've done or tried to do and maybe even been unsuccessful on. (Leader 2)

A symbol of the parent/child attitudes of leaders was manifested in a reward mechanism that was used to recognise exceptional contributions during the prior month. The recognised employee would be given guardianship of a named soft toy for the month as a reward. It was a symbol that FG participants experienced as “childish” and unwelcome. This example illustrates the paradoxes and tensions at the heart of the parent/child metaphor. More junior employees propagated the use of parent/child language but, at a certain point, rejected or rebelled against the attempts of “the parents” to motivate or control them.

### ***Subtheme 2: Certainty and Uncertainty***

Study 1 highlighted the paradoxical nature of certainty and uncertainty in the creative process. The findings demonstrated that uncertainty is an essential feature of creativity that is both unsettling and exciting. This subtheme explores i) leaders’ attitudes towards uncertainty and their descriptions of leading teams through uncertain times, and ii) FG participants’ feelings about uncertainty.

The nature of [Company name]’s business was inherently uncertain. For example, how specific countries approached data security, how content was distributed or monetised most effectively, was frequently changing. The comparison of uncertainty to water and nautical metaphors such as “uncharted territories” or “steering a course” was recurrent within the data. Leader 1 (whose role was to consider future business opportunities) used an analogy of the African Bullfrog as an “adaptive system” to describe the types of people that were important to the business:

African bullfrogs are quite extraordinary because they can live in a water environment, and they can also live on earth...they are true amphibians, they can live in both systems...this is what I’m looking for, amphibians, people who can live in comfortable, recognised environments, and also go into uncharted territory, and can move from one to the other seamlessly... people who can confidently go into uncharted territories because they have some tools or at least some elements that will help them tackle the unknown. (Leader 1)

Whilst leaders considered themselves to be comfortable with uncertainty, they recognised that some people within their organisation needed greater clarity and certainty:

On a personal level, I am absolutely cool with a lack of certainty...but I know some people aren't, and some people feel a lot more comfortable with a very clear direction, or they've drawn a chalk mark around themselves, and that's where their comfort zone is. I personally like to go into the great unknown because I think coming to work, for me, needs to be an adventure rather than a chore. (Leader 4)

One leader reflected on how, in the face of uncertainty, employees perceived that their leaders were withholding information:

They have this vision that management is sort of "cloak and dagger", and we're just not telling them. (Leader 5)

Providing clarity was considered to be an essential part of the leaders' role in order to establish boundaries and to ease uncertainty:

My job is bringing clarity, bringing a frame to the unframed, bringing understanding to uncharted and making complex sound simple. So, I think that's what my job and my input is – ambiguity and weird, and my output is clarity and direction of travel. (Leader 1)

Similarly, leaders felt that providing clarity on the direction of the business was essential for setting the context in which people worked and for helping to establish meaning and connection between the individual and the goals of the organisation:

I think people want to be informed and engaged and feel like they're part of something. But if you're not really sure how your little piece fits into the big piece, you might not have that same sense of pride and engagement with what the business goals are. (Leader 2)

Given the nature of [Company name]'s business, leaders considered taking risks as being essential to making progress:

In terms of this business, I feel we have to take risks... because that's where the big wins are. Otherwise, you'll get overtaken by everyone else. I think you can take risks that are well measured, calculated risks...we can analyse until the cows come home, or we can just do it. (Leader 4)

FG participants' experience of uncertainty mirrored the participants' experience in Study 1. Participants felt that the uncertainty of where a creative project might end up was exciting and stressful. In this second study, the experience of uncertainty was described in similar terms:

...when there's some ambiguity and uncertainty, it's like, OK, this is my chance to do my thing and propose something new, something different. (FG1, P2)

Most participants felt that a significant facet of their role was dealing with uncertainty and had learned to manage it well. FG3 participant 2 described uncertainty as a “creative engine” that arises from the tension between clarity and uncertainty. FG2 participant 2 described the opportunity provided by unclear directions to try more creative solutions, being able to try creative ideas and “whatever sticks, sticks. And then if you do get shut down, you're like, well, I had no information, so that was what happened.”

### ***Subtheme 3: Failure and Learning***

Leaders in [Company name] expected that in being creative, things would fail, especially given the experimental nature of much of what the business was doing:

You have to have the right things in place. So, processes, management, etc., to be able to fail or at least to not succeed. When we're trying to solve a problem, we don't always know if the solution will work or work the way we intend. But we operate in an environment that allows us to try things, and if it doesn't go the way we intend, we can either try again or bring someone in to help us. (Leader 2)

Failure was seen as an essential learning opportunity. However, it is possible that, if conducted openly and compassionately, the “post-mortems” (referred to below) may be where learning would happen:

If something goes wrong, pardon my French, but shit happens, we deal with it. Hopefully, we've flagged it before it really goes up the creek, but you know, we will course correct. So, I think, you know, making mistakes, it happens. We just move on, get on with it, I don't believe in post-mortems. (Leader 4)

When asked about how leaders addressed things that were not working with their teams, there was a consistent response that the failure was about the project or initiative, not about the person. The leaders' responses to failure typified a growth mindset (Dweck, 2008), where failure was considered to be a springboard for learning and growth:

I think it's important to frame any discussion around something that's not working. And it's not, it's not on an individual's or a team's shoulders. It was simply the format didn't take off...you learn from it, but not in a personal type of way where you're pointing a finger. (Leader 4)

Moreover, whilst the leaders accepted things not working, they also recognised that failing was potentially difficult and emotional. They recognised that at times, people might need to be supported through failure:

It's very difficult for people to put their heart and soul into something and see it ultimately fail. (Leader 3)

Whilst leaders believed they were tolerant of failure, employees did not always share the same perceptions. There was a belief that people had been fired for making a mistake which resulted in some individuals feeling fearful that the same might happen to them:

I think that fear plays a massive part in this organisation around how people behave because whether or not this is the truth of the matter, the interpretation has been that someone has made a bad mistake, and so they're out the door. (FG2, P3)

And whilst leaders recognised the importance of creating a safe environment, some junior employees felt that their leaders were not always approachable and could, at times, appear distant and aloof. The physical co-location of the SLT's workstations made it feel "like an ivory tower that no-one can approach" (FG2, P3). There was recognition amongst FG participants that it was perhaps their sense of vulnerability preventing them from approaching the SLT:

People get too scared to say something that makes them look stupid or something that could, that they think is stupid. (FG3, P6)

Personal feelings of vulnerability potentially contributed to their fear of being adversely judged or rejected:

I sometimes think when you pitch an idea and bring it to the group, I guess the worry is that, if it's not a great idea or if it's shut down for x, y, or z reason, next time you bring up an idea people will be like, the last one was terrible. They sort of have that bias in their mind that this one's going to be the same. (FG3, P4)

However, the way feedback was delivered was important and sometimes experienced as demotivating. Whilst the rejection of a creative idea was seen as part of the creative process, it was felt that how that feedback was delivered could affect how it was experienced or received:

I don't always mind when somebody shoots down an idea, that's just the nature of it. But I think it's the way that it is delivered to you because sometimes it would show either a lack of understanding or lack of caring on the part of the person that you're pitching this idea to. (FG3, P3)

The importance of seeing the SLT as people who are willing and able to show their vulnerability and humanity was a crucial factor in making the SLT more approachable to employees:

They [senior managers] just need to be a bit more human so that we then feel safe to go and have direct conversations with them. (FG2, P3.)

### ***Discussion Theme 2: Safety and Vulnerability***

As discussed in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#), a central tenet of social constructivism is language as a means by which people make sense of their world (McMahon, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Extant research on creativity and language primarily focuses on metaphors used to describe creativity (e.g., McKerracher, 2016; Moran, 2009); the creative use of language such as literary works, advertising copy or metaphor as a linguistic device (Jones, 2010). This research examines language as a “window into culture” (Goldberg & Srivastava, 2017, p. 56): a means of pointing to the explicit and implicit values, beliefs and feelings about being creative at [Company name]. Srivastava and Barrett (1988) argue that metaphor can point to hidden and “barely conscious” feelings, giving voice to thoughts and feelings that may be hard to articulate more consciously. Indeed, in a session I conducted with the SLT to feedback key themes from the research, [Company name] reflected that they were not conscious of using the metaphors in common parlance, nor the potential implications of doing so, discussed later in this chapter.

Berne's (1968) construct of transactional analysis proposes ego states of parent, child, and adult as a means of inquiring into the interactions between people to encourage change. Based on psychoanalytic theory, transactional analysis considers how people relate, their words, feelings, and behaviours, whether consciously expressed or not (Lapworth & Sills, 2011). The parent state represents thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that mimic those of parents' (or parent-like figures) actual or perceived behaviours; in the adult ego-state, individuals can more objectively appraise reality; and in the child state, individuals think, feel, and behave in similar ways to when they were



children. The child ego-state is considered the source of emotions, creativity, spontaneity, and intimacy (Lapworth & Sills). As [Company name] matured, the introduction of classical structures and formalities appeared to emphasise a parent-child dialectic between leaders and creative workers. To manage increasing demand and competing priorities, leaders tended to exert increasing control over their people's activities. However, rather than conflating maturity with control, the organisation may have benefited from an adult-to-adult relationship with the maturity to trust and enable their people rather than control.

In Study 1, it was argued that relationships emphasising attachment and providing a safe environment in which to explore were important for encouraging creativity within organisations. I suggested that creativity may be enhanced when leaders create a "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). A ZPD implies a safe space where the less knowledgeable person can experiment and learn within an environment of trust and mutual caring (Jordan et al., 1991). However, a tension inherent in the ZPD is that it implies a hierarchy of power that positions the older, more senior leader as more knowledgeable. Leaders may be more knowledgeable about some things; however, creative workers are not necessarily less knowledgeable than their leaders regarding their creativity. As such, the concept of the ZPD as it relates to leaders and employees must reflect a culture of mutual learning, respect for different skills and capabilities, where a person learns from someone more knowledgeable about a particular topic, irrespective of hierarchy. John-Steiner (2000, p. 128) uses the term "emotional scaffolding" to describe a safe environment that provides support and constructive feedback. Whilst John-Steiner was referring to the mutual support offered by creative partners, the findings suggest that the concept of emotional scaffolding is equally relevant when applied to relationships between organisational co-workers and their leaders. It is important to note that providing a safety zone does not avoid criticism but does so in a compassionate way that encourages learning rather than causing shame. As the FG participants described, their fear of being judged as "doing something stupid" meant that they would, at times, self-censor ideas. As the metaphor implies, scaffolding provides stable and robust support in which creative workers can push boundaries.

In Study 2, the role of leaders as caregivers and attachment figures was evidenced through the language of parent and child throughout the data. In some instances, the role

played by leaders in [Company name] was “supportive parent”, caring about the wellbeing of their teams and, at times, a more “controlling parent” who sought to direct the activities of their colleagues. Baumrind (1971) developed an influential model of parenting styles categorising four approaches to parenting as permissive (child-driven, overindulgent); authoritative (joint problem solving, clear rules and expectations); neglectful (uninvolved, with little nurturance or guidance); or authoritarian (strict rules and punishments, little consideration of socio-emotional needs). Transferring that concept into leadership, Popper and Mayseless (2003) compared “good” parents’ qualities with transformational leaders, indicating that both develop trust, self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-realisation. A fundamental requirement of good parenting is to provide secure attachment (Bowlby, 1988) and a secure base from which to explore and take risks. Similarly, the findings suggest that a critical leadership role is to provide the safety to explore and make mistakes.

However, the supportive and nurturing aspects of leader/follower relationships that the metaphor represented also caused tensions between leaders and their teams. Leaders expressed frustration that their teams were not taking responsibility for their work and looked to the leaders to make decisions and act. Within the FGs, participants expressed resistance to the leaders’ role as a parent, with the more junior employees wanting “not to be treated like a child”. The weaknesses inherent in the parent/child metaphor (e.g., lack of responsibility, “grown-up” as a euphemism for bureaucratic and restrictive) were as powerful as its strength when signalling a caring and supportive environment.

It is evident from exploring the parent/child dialectic that there is a similar tension between the two halves of typical definitions of creativity (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Something is creative if it is both novel (child-like, unusual, playful) and functional (adult, safe, rational). To be creative, an individual needs to have child-like qualities that must be balanced with safely functioning within an organisational context. The parent/child relationship requires a balance between these two polarities. Rather than a controlling or smothering relationship, a democratic parent/child relationship that is trusting, respectful, and supportive is needed for creativity to thrive.

I pointed out the parent/child metaphor during a feedback session with the SLT<sup>5</sup>. Once aware of the strengths and potential limitations of the types of relationships reflected by the parent/child metaphor, the leaders were able to consider ways in which the parent/child language was helping creativity (e.g., signalling a safe environment) and ways in which it might be hindering (e.g., when supportive parent moved into authoritative “tiger mum”<sup>6</sup>), and how they might move towards a more adult-adult relationship. A conclusion based on the findings of this research is that [Company name] could better address the tensions and frustrations of their people by discussing how the metaphor shaped the culture and individuals’ responses. Focusing on the language-in-use within an organisation points to ways leaders can spot the unconscious or semi-conscious elements of the culture that may inhibit creativity.

Literature on creative individuals typically describes creative people as being more tolerant of ambiguity (e.g., Amabile, 2012; Sternberg, 2019), and, to a certain extent, that is what the data showed. As in Study 1, participants in Study 2 demonstrated a willingness to remain open to the uncertainties of a creative project. Creative individuals tend to be more tolerant of ambiguity in a creative task since situations requiring creative thinking are frequently ambiguous (Barron & Harrington, 1981; Robert J. Sternberg & Lubart, 1995; Zenasni et al., 2008). However, most creative people in Study 2 said they disliked uncertainty and sought to minimise or avoid it, a finding also reflected in Study 1 data. An important finding in Study 1 was that rather than being absolute, tolerance of uncertainty appears to be domain and context specific. This finding was reflected in Study 2. However, this latter study provides further nuance. Uncertainty appeared to be better tolerated when the context was experienced as safe and supportive. Focus group participants described that when their managers created a safe environment, they felt better able to navigate the uncertainty inherent within a creative project. To understand the individual forces that affect creativity, a broader perspective needs to be taken on

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<sup>5</sup> A feedback session was offered as a thank you for participating in the research during which I provided an executive summary of relevant findings, including my observation of the language in use.

<sup>6</sup> A tiger mum is described as a strict parenting style which demands success and very hard work (dictionary.cambridge.org)

uncertainty and the contextual factors (external, internal, and individual) that impact it (Figure 13).

Study 1 suggested that tolerance of uncertainty is paradoxical and subjective. Certain types of uncertainty, such as basic security needs (e.g., housing) or personal uncertainty (van den Bos, 2009), were less easily tolerated than uncertainty about the outcome of a creative project. Personal uncertainty is defined by Van den Bos as the subjective experience of doubt or instability in an individual's self-concept, how they understand the world, or dissonance between worldview and self-concept. Therefore, given that everyone within an organisation is likely to have a different perception and experience of uncertainty, it is essential to understand how an organisation helps people who are less comfortable with uncertainty become more tolerant of risk to facilitate creativity.

Similarly, an essential question for leaders is how their organisational culture learns to embrace risk. A pertinent example for [Company name] was the different future directions the business could take. There was uncertainty around which direction to pursue and risk associated with each option. The findings suggest that the experience of that uncertainty was deeply unsettling for many people because the broader context of their purpose, as individuals and as an organisation, was uncertain. Whilst the leaders were excited by the choices available, more junior employees found it hard to understand how their contribution fitted into the organisational whole. The headquarters were less tolerant of uncertainty regarding revenue generation and income. In response to revenue uncertainty, the headquarters put in place more controls, becoming less tolerant of risks that might affect revenue and, paradoxically, less tolerant of risks that may positively impact future revenue.

Whilst leaders believed that they worked hard to create a safe and supportive environment, at times, individual employees' insecurities meant that they could perceive their leaders as unapproachable and the environment as not as safe as intended. It is also possible that leaders were not as good at conveying their intent as they believed. Similarly, if employees believed that people had lost their jobs because of failures in the past, their perception of safety would likely be undermined. When dealing with an underperforming employee, leaders faced a dilemma. To maintain the confidentiality of employees exiting the business, the reasons behind the departure or the process

followed could not be openly communicated. However, the sudden and “unexplained” departure of a colleague seemed to undermine perceptions of safety.

Employees’ feelings of vulnerability or fear of being wrong sometimes prevented them from contributing to a meeting or taking a risk. The dissonance between the leaders’ intended behaviour and its impact led to tension between leaders and their teams. The leaders believed they empowered people and gave them “permission” to make decisions and take risks. They were frustrated that team members were not taking decisions and being accountable for them. The leaders believed they were approachable. However, they did not seem aware of the long “shadow” cast by their role, which impacted team members’ responses. The example given points to the complexity and interconnected nature of the organisational system. Whilst the more junior employees recognised that it was often their vulnerability and lack of confidence or experience that shaped responses to their leaders, it was a difficult barrier to transcend. The findings suggest that even when a leader perceives that they have created a safe environment, the individual’s defence mechanisms have an important role in determining their willingness to take risks and their perception of leaders’ attitudes and behaviours. The need for safety and uncertainty avoidance are powerful individual forces that motivate adaptive and maladaptive behaviour. By introducing a shared language or communication strategy, leaders can ensure that their intentions are “heard” more effectively by employees and see their employees’ vulnerabilities more clearly.

Certainty and uncertainty are polarities that must be balanced over time. There needs to be enough clarity to provide direction and context, but not so much that it becomes overly controlling and restrictive. Leaders must manage their people’s discomfort with uncertainty whilst enabling enough uncertainty to facilitate exploration, bringing us back to the importance of the safety and vulnerability paradox. Leaders create a zone of safety for others. Their willingness to do so, in part, depends on their willingness and ability to be uncertain themselves. A typical response is to defend. Defensive routines stem from fear and uncertainty. When leaders demonstrate their own ability to be uncertain and vulnerable, they make it possible for their people to explore the boundaries of their minds, to push those boundaries and reassure them that there will be someone to catch them when they fall. Because by creating, it is inevitable that, at some stage,

they will fall. The creative person needs to trust that it is safe for them to do so and that leaders will catch them.

The findings indicate that trust is a vital component of vulnerability. And indeed, vulnerability is a vital component of trust. Bunker (1997) argues that vulnerability is vital for leaders to understand and respond to other people's needs. He argues that vulnerability is a leadership tool that connects people at a basic level of humanity. Brown (2012) argues that vulnerability and authenticity sit at the heart of human connection, something that Seppälä (2014) suggests is frequently missing from the workplace. Showing vulnerability is considered a vital element of creating a climate of psychological safety amongst team members (Nienaber et al., 2015). Leaders who show vulnerability demonstrate that it is acceptable to not always have the answer, make mistakes and receive input from others (Ancona et al., 2009; Hu et al., 2017). The fear of being vulnerable and showing weakness hampers risk-taking as individuals are afraid to be perceived as a failure. To protect themselves from the potential shame, they become reluctant to develop novel ideas (Brown, 2010). By asking for feedback, encouraging different perspectives and admitting mistakes, being authentic, open, and compassionate, leaders can signal that it is safe to be vulnerable and creative (Couris, 2020).

### Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this chapter was to explore how the creative workers and leaders of one organisation experienced and coped with the creative process. The chapter has provided a deeper insight into individual and organisational factors that influence the experience of being creative within an organisation. A consistent theme throughout the study was the **surfacing of polarities** (such as organisational growth/creativity, safety/vulnerability, parent/child) and the tensions between them.

The findings demonstrated that as the case study organisation grew in size and revenue, creative workers felt increasingly less connected to the organisation's purpose or co-workers and felt they had less opportunity to be creative. The findings highlighted a challenge for the organisation as they transitioned between start-up and maturity: balancing **organisational growth** with prioritising the creativity that had been a hallmark of earlier stages of their development. And whilst organisational development theory does not yet have sufficient grounding to capture the nuances of human development,

lifespan development theory (e.g., Erikson, 1963) highlights polarities and tensions to be navigated to progress successfully through developmental stages.

The findings highlighted the importance of a psychologically secure environment to explore and take risks. To bring something new into existence may provoke feelings of **vulnerability** at an individual identity level. Individuals need support and “emotional scaffolding” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 128) that provides the means, freedom and safety to create. However, providing a zone of safety is complex. Challenges that organisations face in enabling creativity to happen are rooted in human experience and vulnerabilities. The experience of being creative at work is shaped by our responses to uncertainty, risk, and failure, and to what extent the environment (the organisation) supports its people in coping with uncertain situations and their inherent emotions.

The **parent/child** dialectic highlighted tensions at the heart of organisational creativity: the need for both playful, child-like curiosity balanced with the functional, rational nature of delivering a creative outcome that is fit for purpose. The study further highlighted the importance of the language used by leaders that may point to conscious and unconscious aspects of culture. As the data demonstrated, encouraging creativity at work requires an **enlightened form of leadership** that encourages deep self-awareness and psychological health. Leaders must put themselves in their employees’ shoes and consider how best to provide caring, supportive leadership without infantilising or controlling their people. Leaders must be willing to be vulnerable and show their “human” side so that employees feel safe to take risks and learn from the failure of creative projects.

Study 2 makes an original contribution to theory in the following ways:

- Expanding Csíkszentmihályi and Sawyer's (2014) perspective on the organisational implications of systems creativity by examining individual forces that shape the experience of creativity within that system and ways in which individual and organisational context contribute to this.
- Exploring how the metaphor of “parent/child” shapes the experience of being creative within a system, pointing to ways in which conscious and unconscious use of language and symbolism influences the creative culture. Building on Study 1, this second study provides further evidence for the critical role of leaders as

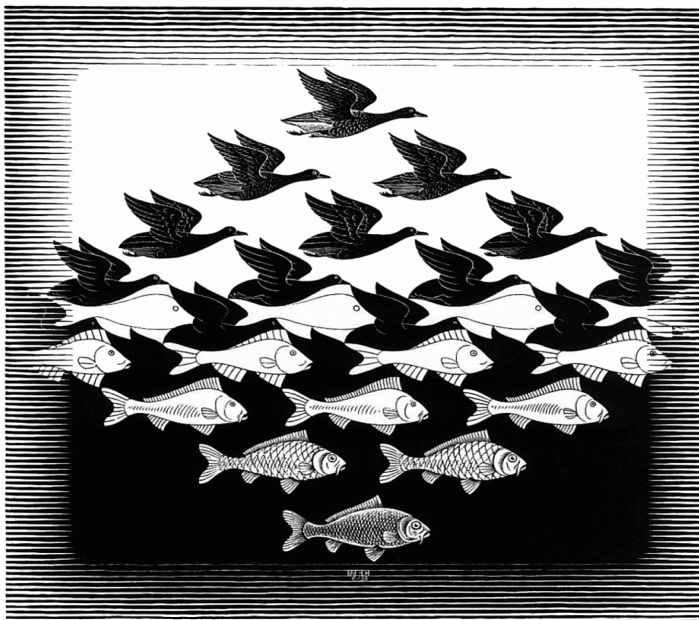
caregivers and attachment figures who shape the experience of being creative through their language and behaviours.

- Highlighting the tensions inherent in the different layers of field and domain within an organisation arising from contradictions between what leaders said, their actions and how those words and actions were perceived.
- Surfacing and bringing into awareness a range of polarities inherent in being creative at work (such as safety/vulnerability, parent/child, certainty/uncertainty, failure/learning). By making these polarities conscious, leaders can put strategies in place to manage them better, such as openly discussing the polarities and tensions involved in creativity.

In considering the role of leaders in encouraging a culture in which creativity may flourish, Chapter 7 considers the creative process through the personal lens of autoethnography. The chapter will explore how I have experienced the creative process of research, how the research has altered my approach to my work as a leader and coach, and how the research findings might be practically applied.



## Chapter 7: Study 3 – Embracing Polarity, Paradox, and Tension: How Studying This Subject has Changed Me and My Work



Sky and Water. M.C. Escher <sup>7</sup>

We must have the courage to live with paradox, the strength to hold the tension of not knowing answers, and the willingness to listen to our inner wisdom. (Murdock, 2013, p. 11)

The purpose of this chapter is to explore systemic creativity in action through a personal lens of autoethnography. As Wall (2008, p. 39) states: “Autoethnography begins with a personal story.” The story in question is my journey to understand what the research means for me and my work. A key contribution of the thesis is to bring together the theoretical perspectives of individual and systemic creativity to look at the individual within the system. The first two studies of this thesis have explored how creative people experience the creative process individually and in their organisations. The findings pointed to individual forces that operate within the system: how an individual’s values,

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beliefs and defence mechanisms shape the experience of being creative. However, from my research I realised that a creative system is bigger than an organisation and its workers. The context in which this research has been conducted, including my beliefs, values, defences, and the multiple systems I am part of, have all affected how the research has unfolded. In turn, I have changed the research. I view the PhD as a creative process, bringing something new and of value into being and making an original contribution to creativity research. In so doing, I am exploring the creative process in action. In this autoethnography, I consider ways in which:

- I have changed because of this research
- I will take the personal learnings about myself and creativity forward
- I might practically apply my knowledge to help organisations better understand how to flourish creatively.

### **What is Autoethnography, and is it Research?**

Social life is messy, uncertain, and emotional. If our desire is to research social life, then we must embrace a research method that, to the best of its/our ability, acknowledges and accommodates mess and chaos, uncertainty and emotion (Adams et al., 2015, p.9).

Autoethnography has been defined in several ways, and its precise nature is open to some debate (Reed-Danahay, 1997). Ellis and Bochner (2000, p.739) define autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural.” Starr (2010) describes autoethnography as a cyclical process of awareness, reflection, and action related to culture and social context: the self in relation to the other. Autoethnography's primary objective is to understand social and cultural processes that have contributed to the researcher's identity as it is constructed at this moment in time (Hickey & Austin, 2007). I chose autoethnography for this third study as it seeks to connect self-narrative with the social and cultural context, analysing and interpreting broader social and cultural questions from the first-person perspective (Chang, 2008).

### **Method**

Dewey (1997) considered reflection to be how individuals resolved uncertainty and identified solutions to their problems. Considering reflection in professional practice,

Schön (2017) differentiated between reflection-*on*-action (post-hoc reflection) and reflection-*in*-action (contemporaneous reflection). He recognised the messy, complex, and value-laden nature of professional practice (Kinsella, 2010). Schön used the metaphor of a swamp to describe the challenges frequently encountered as part of professional practice. The importance of self-awareness for personal growth is considered essential for individuals to identify and reflect upon their development needs (Rogers, 1961).

Methods used in this study to reflect included: i) a written journal, using a note-taking app (Evernote™) which allowed me to capture thoughts, photographs and web content of interest; ii) creative imagery, such as mind-maps and diagrams; iii) reflective discussion (face-to-face and via video conferencing) with friends, mentors and a coach; iv) running, which provided the headspace to organise my thoughts; vi) informal interviews with individuals who influenced my thinking and sensemaking about creativity (subject to ethical requirements). Unlike formal interviews, the informal interviews were conversations that occurred as part of my everyday professional and personal life. Given my stance that creativity is a relational process, it felt natural to include thoughts and observations on how others have influenced my thinking and sensemaking about organisations' creative processes. Furthermore, Chang (2008) suggests that considering external sources' perspectives may provide context to the autoethnographic data, enhancing its trustworthiness. To access some of the unconscious changes that may have occurred, I talked to individuals who know me well personally or professionally to ask what changes they had noticed in me since I began this project.

I used Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle as a framework for considering my experiences. Whilst often used in education and healthcare, it is a reflective method I have used in my professional practice before. Gibbs' reflective cycle comprises six stages: i) description of the experience; ii) feelings about the experience; iii) evaluating the positive and negative aspects of the experience; iv) analysis, making sense of the experience; v) conclusion, what was learned, what could have been done differently; vi) action plan for how similar situations could be dealt with in the future, and changes that may be made.

As shown in [Appendix E](#), I collated the data for this study using a "data log" (Chang, 2008, p.119). The data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (RTA: Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2019). [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#), details the RTA process followed and the differences between RTA and other approaches to thematic analysis. An

important aspect of a more analytical autoethnographical style is balancing personal narrative with broader ethnographic interpretations of the data. Most of the data were textual (e.g., transcriptions of conversations, reflective diary, hand-written notes), which enabled me to capture codes that were subsequently built into themes (see Figure 15). Unlike the previous studies, where data were coded using computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (Quirkos™ v1.5), I coded the data for this study manually. I took that decision partly because the data set was smaller than the previous two studies and because the data were personal. I enjoyed the physical process of interacting with the printed pages, making notes, and beginning the interpretation as a more embodied process. A supervisor asked me whether my analysis of the data from Studies 1 and 2 might have been different had I manually coded them. In response, I pointed out that the coding had been done in the same time-consuming and painstaking way using both Quirkos for Studies 1 and 2 and with pen and paper for this study. However, for Studies 1 and 2, I looked from the “outside in”, analysing stories told to me by the participants, the researcher considering the data. In this study's data analysis, I was “inside” the data, with even less separation between my identities as a researcher and participant.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

...writing is never neutral or innocent because it is a social and a political activity with consequences...as such, writing about and thereby representing lives carries a heavy ethical burden. (Sikes, 2010, p. 11)

There is little that we do in complete isolation, and, as such, other people are implicated when writing about the self (Sikes, 2010). Those people deserve the same ethical consideration afforded to participants in the previous studies. In one of the few detailed discussions on the ethics of autoethnography, Tolich (2004) argues that researchers' assurances of confidentiality can only be partial and that ethics procedures generally do not distinguish between “internal” and “external confidentiality” (p.101). Tolich describes external confidentiality as the traditional approach, where the researcher acknowledges that they know what participants have said and undertakes not to disclose the participants' identity in the final report. Internal confidentiality considers those connected with the research identifiable to anyone associated with the research setting despite their identity not being overtly disclosed. However, the word confidentiality is, perhaps, misleading. During a discussion at the University's ethics panel, it was pointed

out that I was ensuring anonymity rather than confidentiality. In using extracts from conversations, I could not promise participants that I would keep their information confidential as I disclosed elements of our discussion in this study. However, I could promise anonymity, that their identity and the organisation they worked for would be anonymous.

In the context of this study, those familiar with my supervision team would likely be able to identify them. It is not typical to consider supervisors as participants and, therefore, consider their ethical rights. However, they were an integral part of my research, and our discussions profoundly influenced me. I discussed my concerns with both supervisors and requested informed consent to include any reflections in which they were included. Whilst I had no intention of discussing matters of a sensitive nature, I informed my supervisors that, as with any other participant, they had the right to limit what was included in this study and that I would respect their wishes. I decided to use gender-neutral pronouns as a further step in considering anonymity. I have chosen not to cite any participants directly in this study. Instead, I will discuss the data patterns and themes as an additional step in considering anonymity.

Alongside my ethical commitment to others included in this research, ethical considerations apply to me as the primary participant in this study. Some scholars (e.g., Boyle & Parry, 2007; Kleinman & Copp, 1993) have pointed out the potential dangers of writing about oneself, pointing out that the writer may expose their vulnerability and put themselves at personal or professional risk by writing. Mindful of these cautions, I considered my wellbeing when accessing my memories and perceptions. I sought appropriate support including regular supervision meetings, conversations with friends, peers and regular one-one coaching sessions. Tolich (2010) suggested ten guidelines for autoethnographers to protect themselves and those included in their story ([Appendix E](#)). I used the guidelines as principles to follow in my research. For example, I included only personal data that I was comfortable sharing publicly. Additionally, I have paid attention to any future vulnerability that may arise from what I have written.

### Insights

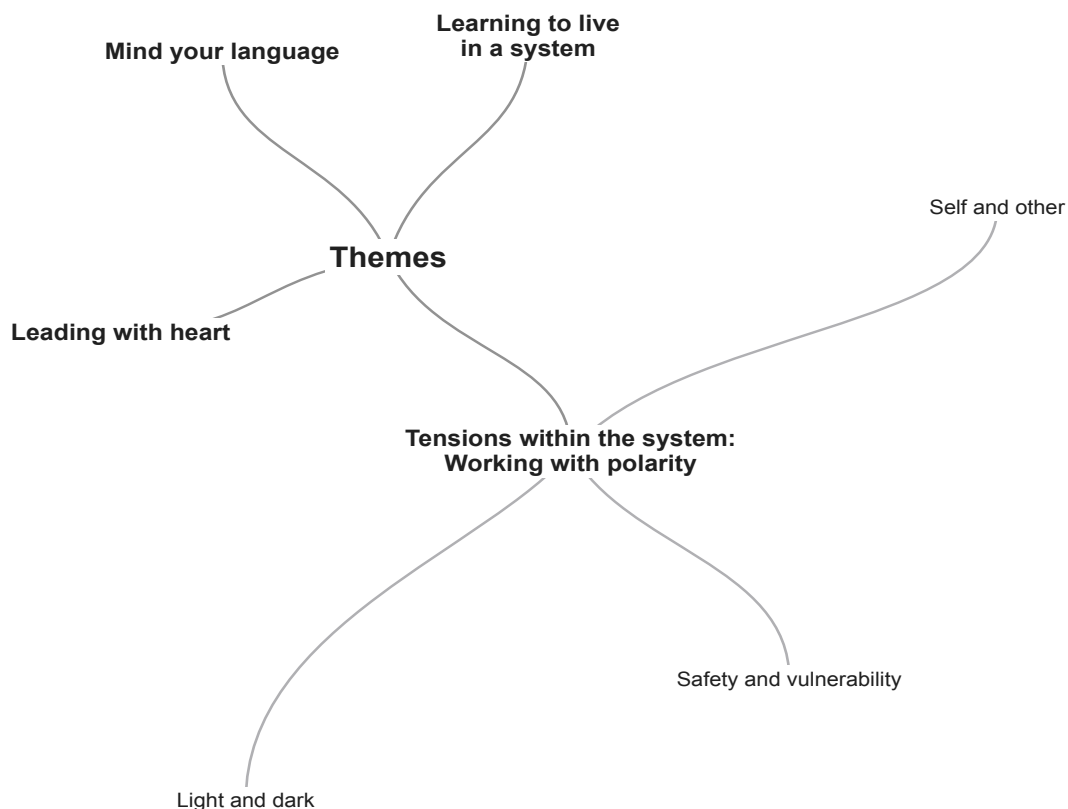
A key argument within this thesis is that systems theories of creativity do not go far enough in seeking to understand the human context in which creativity happens. To

understand how creativity happens, one must consider the individual forces that shape how it feels to be creative at work. We are all part of multiple systems that influence how we see the world. Individuals are systems nested within other systems (for example, the human body is a system that belongs to other systems such as family, social context, or organisations). When looking at creativity in organisations, we cannot separate the individual from the other systems in which they reside. The insights described in this section reflect my sensemaking about creativity through recognition and understanding of the present-day and historical concentric systems in which I live and work and the lived experience of the creative process of completing a PhD. The purpose of writing about how I have changed is to capture how an increased awareness and acceptance of paradox, polarity and tension has impacted my personal and professional life. The aim was that by understanding my learning, I would be able to apply this knowledge to help organisations flourish creatively so that others could learn from what I have learned.

This section will look at my experiences through several lenses representing the multiple systems in which I live and work (researcher, leader, individual). For each insight (shown in Figure 15), I will examine my personal experience and learning before considering messages I would give to leaders and those being led about thriving creatively.

Figure 15

*Diagram of Personal Insights (Study 3)*



### ***Learning to Live in a System***

Living successfully in a world of systems...requires our full humanity—our rationality, our ability to sort out truth from falsehood, our intuition, our compassion, our vision, and our morality. (Meadows, 2008, p.170)

One of the most profound learnings for me has been the interconnected nature of systems. Rather than considering each realm of my life as a separate system, I recognise the interconnectedness and blurred boundaries. For example, I have realised how much research and research writing are creative processes within a scientific research system, located within an academic system. Systemic thinking locates individual actions in the context of the “whole” as integral and connected to other people’s actions rather than being purely isolated and individualistic (Flood, 1999). It requires us to confront the uncomfortable truth that the root cause of a problem, and therefore its solution, is not “out there” alone but also within us (Meadows, 2008, p.4). I reflected that the prevalence of linear thinking in Western society teaches us that either some external other is the

issue, or the individual is to blame. The reality is that the “fault” lies both within and without and in the interaction between the two. The problem is the cause of our malaise. Seeking to blame an external source is more comfortable than taking a cold, hard look at what is happening inside us. I reflected on an example of this in my own experience, seeking to blame a struggle to write about my ideas as a problem with the academic system requiring me to write differently. When the issue was about the other, it was easier to cope with than question what was causing me to struggle with my writing. Thinking systemically requires considering my responsibilities, agency, and broader social context. It can be profoundly uncomfortable and requires wisdom and courage to change.

I have captured below my learning about how I live in a system. The reflections are about how I have changed. However, the French philosopher and playwright Hélène Cixous (1994, p.xv) eloquently states, “I and the world are never separate. The one is the double or the metaphor of the other.” As I change, the way I relate to the world and my work changes.

- I am practising letting go of the need to control and letting go requires courage. I have learned that systems are unpredictable and uncertain. I have used the metaphor of drift diving to capture the need to balance letting go with maintaining direction. Drift diving is a form of scuba diving where you allow yourself to be transported by the ocean current and movements of the tides. Instead of swimming against the current, you allow the current to take you in a general direction. It is not aimless drifting. It is purposeful, paying close attention to what is happening around you. As a manager of yourself, you must let go of control but steer towards an endpoint to arrive at the right point in the ocean to be picked up by the dive boat. But drift diving requires you to surrender some control, trust your training, instincts, and enjoy the ride (Senger, 2020). Developing my ability to differentiate between what I can or cannot influence is a much more peaceful place to be. I recognised that seeking control (for example, controlling what I ate, controlling my emotional expression) was a defence mechanism to protect me from an unpredictable and chaotic world. There are too many systems and sub-systems, too many interconnections to make the future knowable in any meaningful way. And that makes it both exciting and frightening. I



am learning how to deal with fear and focus on the excitement of possibility instead.

- My reflections led me to believe that creativity comes from making connections between the unexpected. It requires us to remain open to possibilities, to see connections, opportunities, and questions. An unwritten quid pro quo of being willing to stay open is living with the tensions of not knowing, and perhaps never knowing, to trust oneself to make choices and learn. During my corporate career, I felt that I needed to answer any questions my colleagues might have. Success, in part, was knowing the answer. “Trusting the process”,<sup>8</sup> a phrase often used throughout my time spent earning my MSc in Applied Positive Psychology programme, offers the possibility that, instead of seeking to master the sheer volume of content that is available, one learns a new method of dealing with uncertainty, to accept that, sometimes, we do not have (or indeed, need) the answer. Tension does not always need to be resolved (Paletz et al., 2018).
- I further learned that, whilst uncertainty can be painful, it can also be fun. It can make us feel powerless because of the human need to minimise tension, make sense of experience, and impose order on a chaotic world. But it can be exciting as it can take us to places we never imagined possible. And it is a prerequisite for creativity. Whilst creative people are typically depicted as more tolerant of ambiguity (e.g., Runco, 2007), uncertainty is individually and contextually situated, as I discovered in Studies 1 and 2. There are different degrees and types of uncertainty (e.g., uncertainty about the desired outcome, uncertainty about one’s safety). It was apparent from Studies 1 and 2 that it is easier to be uncertain about creating when it feels safe.

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<sup>8</sup> “Trust the process” is a phrase that, over time, has become what is referred to as a “MAPPism”. It was frequently used by the course leader at the time on the MSc Applied Positive Psychology at BNU while I was studying for my masters, whenever a student expressed uncertainty.

- Recognising that uncertainty can be painful has helped me recognise the discomfort and cope with it when it happens. Trusting that the tension will pass is a helpful coping mechanism. Putting boundaries around my uncertainty, asking myself what exactly it is that I am uncertain about has been another method of containing the anxiety of not knowing and one that I have taken forward into my coaching practice.
- I have learned to notice my defensive reactions and to question their cause. I can better see what is happening in my body and mind to ask myself, 'What is happening here? What needs adjusting?' Argyris (1991) calls this "double-loop learning", changing the mental model, taking the context into account, and changing assumptions.

### ***Tensions Within a System***

As evidenced in the findings from Studies 1 and 2, creativity comes from making meaningful connections between system elements. However, the tensions that exist in a system are not so well understood. Tensions occur when polarities oppose each other, such as the tension between self and others. However, the word "tension" also refers to a feeling of anxiety, fear, or lack of trust between people (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.-b). Scholars of paradox theory (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Quinn & Cameron, 1988) propose that a typical response to a paradoxical situation is to ignore the paradox or try to resolve it. Thriving within paradox requires us to recognise, accept and explore tensions without necessarily needing to resolve them.

In this section, using excerpts from my reflective diary, I deliberately surface tensions I have experienced during this research to examine and, hopefully, accept them. The tensions I consider are:

- Self and other
- Safety and vulnerability
- Light and dark

### ***Self and Other***

All those seeking to probe the truth...will inevitably have to accept that they are themselves amongst the objects they want to describe (Poerksen, 2004, p.vii).

Fine (1994, p.72) describes the boundaries between self and other as being “knottily entangled”, as residing on “opposite sides of the same door.” Within autoethnography, those boundaries are blurred even more. As a reflexive, qualitative researcher, I am aware that I bring experiences and perspectives that shape my research rather than being a dispassionate observer. I had not appreciated, however, the extent to which researching others’ experiences of creativity would shape my own. At the beginning of this research, I assumed that I was a curious bystander, looking outside into a creative world to understand how people experienced being creative at work. Other people were creative. I was not expecting to realise that I was amongst the community I was researching or that researching was a creative process. Seeing myself as creative was a profound shift in my self-understanding, an “epiphany” (Manning & Adams, 2015, p. 190) that helped me understand conflicting and confusing aspects of my personality. Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 57) describes the creative character as comprising “contradictory extremes”. He remarks that these contradictory qualities are present in everyone. However, we are generally taught at an early age to recognise one end of a polarity rather than learning to accommodate the full spectrum of our personality. Recognising multiple aspects of my personality helped my self-understanding and self-acceptance, as this journal entry captured:

The data analysis has impacted me. Some things about myself started to make more sense due to analysing the data and hearing the participants’ voices (e.g., feeling weird and different), seeing myself as a creative person, and accepting dichotomies within my personality that had confused me (and others).

A crucial theoretical perspective of my research is the social nature of creativity and the importance of other people to the creative process. I reflected on how conducting the research has impacted some relationships. I became closer to some people and more distant from others. I noticed that some people did not appear interested in my research and tended not to ask me questions about it. I became aware that I distanced myself from those I perceived were not accepting me for who I was becoming. Research is a meaningful part of my life, and I experienced an apparent lack of interest as hurtful. One person mused that they might “get their friend back” when I finished my research. I wanted to reply that I had not gone anywhere. But I recognise that I have gone somewhere. I have changed, and I cannot be the person I was then. I have experienced a

sense of loss and isolation as friendships have ebbed away, but equally, accept that I, too, have chosen to let those relationships reach their denouement. Just as some relationships have suffered, others have flourished. Some of those relationships are with others who have travelled their own PhD journey and have been a source of reassurance, inspiration, and shared meaning. Other friendships have been outside of the academic sphere. The differentiating factor in how I value those relationships has been based on accepting who I am and what matters to me, just as I unconditionally accept them and what is meaningful in their lives.

I experienced tensions arising from the collision of my multiple identities: a part-time PhD researcher, a non-executive director and coach, a wife, daughter, sister, and friend. It was challenging to manage the boundaries between different systems, manage energy and enthusiasm, or change my mindset from one domain to another. For example, I tried hard to delineate specific days for my research. Friday was a PhD day, although, on some Fridays, I did not feel inspired. I wanted to be creative, but it just was not happening that day, which was deeply frustrating. When I was utterly absorbed with the creative task, I found it challenging to switch my mind to more quotidian requirements such as preparing dinner. Sometimes my mind remained occupied with thinking about creativity so that I was not emotionally present at home, a challenge of the creative process reflected in literature (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; John-Steiner, 2000). My non-research work often encroached on the days set aside for research. I often felt annoyed and resentful when work “interfered” with my research time and conflicted between my commitment to the research and my commitment to the organisation with which I was working.

I reflected on the loneliness I experienced during the research and the value of networks of people who have provided much-appreciated support. I wondered whether there was some learning I could take forward to my work with leaders and creative people. An important message to convey to leaders is that having the time and space to make meaningful connections at work and valuing that process is vital to work and creativity. Having trusted others who listen, hold the space, and act as a mirror has facilitated my sensemaking. Often in organisations, conversations are transactional to instruct or relay information. The type of conversations I refer to facilitate meaning-making in collaboration with others. Talking with someone, being heard changes the thought and helps it make sense. We must make time for meaningful connections at work

because the creative person needs to reach out when they feel insecure, shift their perspective, or share the experience of creativity.

### ***Safety and Vulnerability***

A significant polarity throughout the research has been safety and vulnerability. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 recognised the importance of uncertainty in their creative process. In large part, the need to ease uncertainty was a primary motivator for commencing a creative endeavour. However, I was struck by the ambivalent feelings participants had towards uncertainty. It was paradoxically a driving force for creativity and an inhibitor, depending on the type of uncertainty and their sense of safety. My experience was similar to participants who expressed their vulnerability when sharing their creative product. In this instance, the vulnerability stems from uncertainty as to whether it is safe to share one's work:

In Studies 1 and 2, I noticed that people enjoyed generating creative ideas, but their fear stemmed from putting them out there for examination. There appeared to be few people who were not concerned about how their creative idea would be received, and I suspect they probably worried far more than they would publicly admit. People talk about 'fragile egos in the creative industries,' but I wonder whose ego wouldn't feel fragile if we expose our vulnerability to the world. Even the 'big personalities' feel crushed if something they've invested time, energy and love into is not a big success. In her TED talk, Liz Gilbert described how the pressure from others to replicate her success was far more of a creative inhibitor than she'd imagined. Perhaps this is an insight into what many people writing PhDs may feel inside and have no words to say; this is a creative process, and it comes with all the highs and lows of creating.

Much creativity literature (e.g., Barron & Harrington, 1981; Feist, 1998; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) suggests that self-confidence is a trait of creative people. However, some participants in Studies 1 and 2 demonstrated a more nuanced balance of confidence and self-doubt in their creative ability. Study 2 FG participants described self-censoring ideas because they feared being shamed or being "found out" as creative imposters (Clance & Imes, 1978). Beghetto (2016, p.266) uses the term "creative mortification" to describe the suppression of creative ideas either because of internal self-doubts or feedback perceived as harsh or dismissive.

The act of writing this autoethnography provoked feelings of vulnerability. I was aware of tensions arising from deciding what information I was willing to share and fighting my preference not to be visible in my writing. I reflected on the paradoxical mix

of choosing a method that set me centre stage of the study and my desire not to be seen. I noticed tensions between what Goffman (1990) refers to as “front-” and “back-stage” presentation of the self, my ideal self-expression, and what I wanted others to know about me versus what was beneath the surface. In Studies 1 and 2, I noticed a paradox within the experiences of many participants: they wanted their product to be seen by others—reflecting the importance of external validation of something as creative (Csíkszentmihályi, 1988)—but, at the same time, putting their creative product “out there” provoked feelings of vulnerability. I had not appreciated just how vulnerable it could feel to send one’s creative product into the world. The need for external validation of something as creative is a powerful force affecting individuals’ sense of feeling valued and achievement. Furthermore, the need for external validation was a potential source of anxiety, both in anticipating the reaction and when the product was not received as the creative person might have wished. The following excerpt from my reflective diary captured my feelings of insecurity and exposure when sending writing to supervisors:

I feel a tremendous sense of vulnerability when something I write is sent off to my supervisors, like I am sending a little piece of me by email to be judged.

In thinking about where courage is needed for creativity, I wondered whether being creative requires courage or whether exposing one’s creativity outwards to others is the part that takes courage? If I were simply writing for myself something that would never be seen, would I require the same amount of courage as it takes to write for others?

I have a much better appreciation now for the difficulty faced by creatives who put their “product” out there, which is, in part at least, an expression of themselves, for the wider world to critique and potentially criticise. For example, with TV or advertising, it is easy for us to say, “that’s rubbish!” but that is someone’s idea that they have nurtured and developed over time. How would I feel if a stranger came along and told me what I do was rubbish?

As the research progressed, my confidence grew, as did the acceptance of my vulnerability. I began to notice and question my responses and feelings and to relate those perceptions to my research and what my participants might be experiencing:

I’m right at the heart of what I’m researching. I’m not writing because of my fear of feeling vulnerable. Essentially that’s what my PhD is about: having created

something, there comes the point where I need to share it beyond the “cave door”.<sup>9</sup> The vulnerability is because I’m stepping into the unknown, it’s uncertain, and I might be emotionally exposed. Is that what it feels like to be creative at work—is it safe? We’re most vulnerable when we’re creative. It’s revealing, and we’ve learned early on that it’s not safe, or we’re not good enough. That’s where courage is needed! May (1975) talks about the courage to create. I think it’s the courage to be unsafe and uncertain that enables creativity.

In recognising my vulnerability, I have become more able to recognise it in others. When it feels safe, one can push past self-imposed barriers to make unusual connections. A later diary entry captured how my experience of vulnerability was changing, and I was becoming more willing to trust those around me. My supervisors did an outstanding job in creating an environment in which I felt safe to explore, experiment and make mistakes:

I’ve noticed a greater willingness to trust and be vulnerable—doing the autoethnography would have been unthinkable before. It would have made me feel too vulnerable and ‘out there’.

Brown (2012, p. 43) describes vulnerability as “uncertainty, risk and emotional exposure,” often perceived as a weakness. However, creativity requires the courage to be vulnerable. The research has led me to some uncomfortable places, something I have felt at a visceral level. However, I have benefited from understanding the creative process and having compassionate and supportive relationships. I have recognised that at a certain point of my creative process comes the “drama queen moment” (affectionately known as the DQM) where nothing makes sense, where everything is “awful”, and I cannot see a way through. With understanding has come the trust that, for me, the DQM is an essential step in my creative process as an outlet for releasing tension and fear. And I know that it will pass. I can smile at those behaviours as an integral stage in my meaning-making process and acknowledge their role in my creativity. Understanding my creative process enables me to look at the process from a distance, question where the fear is coming from, and bring the fear into the light to lessen its power over me.

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<sup>9</sup> The cave is a reference to Plato's (2007) allegory of the cave which considers the nature of belief versus knowledge and explores the nature of what is real.

In discussions with my coach, we explored my feelings of disorientation and frustration at working through what I described as a “fog”, which Bridges (2009) refers to as a symptom of transition. My coach pointed me towards Obeng's (1994) thinking on project management. Amongst the four types of projects<sup>10</sup> Obeng describes, walking in the fog seemed an appropriate analogy for my feelings at the time. The fog acted as a block in the system, preventing me from seeing clearly. In exploring the analogy further, I realised two important things. Firstly, at some point, the fog clears, and secondly, when walking in fog, it is helpful to have a support team to help you navigate. My support team of supervisors, coach, family, and friends all played different roles in helping to illuminate my path through the fog. I received a helpful challenge from supervisors who questioned whether my initial approach to my autoethnography favoured the rational versus the emotional polarity. My coach gently pointed out when I presented a binary choice, encouraging me to find a middle way. It struck me just how ingrained thinking at one end of a polarity can be. Balancing polarities is a life-long endeavour. Despite my knowledge and understanding, my thinking became polarised at times. The difference now is that I can better recognise, accept, and adjust the imbalance.

Thinking about how I might take this learning into my work, I reflected on how I might coach someone going through the more challenging parts of the creative process and how they might use that stage somehow. One method I might adopt is to use the neuro-linguistic programming technique of Perceptual Positions<sup>11</sup>, enabling clients to take a step back and observe themselves from different perspectives: their own, another person, and a neutral observer. Libby et al.'s (2005) experimental research examined individual assessments of how much personal change had occurred when considered from a first and third-person perspective. Their research sought to evaluate whether people's autobiographical memory of how much they had changed was influenced by

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<sup>10</sup> Obeng describes four project types: i) walking in the fog – not knowing *what* you want or *how* to achieve it; ii) making a movie – knowing *how* but not *what* needs to be done; going on a quest – knowing *what* should be done, but not *how*; painting by numbers – knowing both *what* needs to be done and *how* to do it

<sup>11</sup> The Perceptual Positions technique encourages clients to view their world from three different perspectives: i) through their own lens; ii) from another person's perspective; iii) from the position of neutral observer. The intention is that by changing one's mental model, a client can step back from an emotionally charged situation to bring different perspectives and insights (Carroll, 2008).



seeing the change through their own eyes or looking at it as if they were a third-party observer. The findings suggest that participants perceive more differences between their past and present selves when visualising a situation from a third-person perspective. As such, looking at a problem from an intersubjective third position may offer an opportunity to get a different perspective on challenging situations and recognise how much change has occurred. Alternatively, if a client were experiencing something similar to my “drama queen” moment, I might ask them the questions I asked myself. I have included my answers beneath each item:

- **Is the DQM a regular part of your creative process?**
  - Yes, the DQM is a normal part of my process.
- **What comes before and after the DQM?**
  - What comes beforehand is confusion and a lack of clarity of where the project is heading. I would compare this experience to the ‘creative tension’ that Senge (2010) describes: the gap between my vision for the creative outcome and current reality.
  - After the DQM generally comes more clarity, a sense of hope and possibility that I can begin to see a pathway through, whilst I may not have reached the destination yet.
- **How does the DQM help you?**
  - I’m not sure! It certainly does not feel like an enjoyable experience. I think it enables me to express and release some of the tension of not knowing. It makes me work harder to get through the anxiety.
- **When you were last in this state, what helped you move through it without losing the value of this stage of the process?**
  - Recognising that it was a natural part of my creativity, talking it through with my supervisors and my coach, accepting that it was a stage that would pass and that it feels lovely to get the clarity afterwards.
- **What do you need to help you through this stage?**
  - Time, sometimes walking away from the project to get some perspective and distance. Going for a long run to clear my head. Trusting that my unconscious is

still processing even if I am not actively working on the problem. Clarity usually arrives when I'm least expecting it.

- **How do you feel about your DQM now?**

- Kinder. I can laugh at it and see its role in my creative process.

I recognise that self-doubt and frustration seem to be necessary phases of creativity, and I know how that feels. Leaders have an important role in modelling how to cope with vulnerability to demonstrate to their people that it is, indeed, safe to be vulnerable. And that requires courage. I would encourage leaders and creative people to learn about their own and each other's creative process to recognise the challenges and find language to describe their experiences.

Leaders need to understand that being creative has ups and downs, and they need to support their people during the more challenging parts of the process. Facilitating creativity requires more than transactional leadership. A vital role of leaders is to create a safe space to be in a fog and realise that when people are in that position, the leader is part of the system that helps the fog clear. I would stress the importance of having a team with different strengths and capabilities to support the creative individual to navigate the foggy. The team members must have a sufficiently strong and supportive relationship to point out when an individual is going in the wrong direction. When the relationships are built on trust and love, it is more likely that the message will be heard and accepted.

### ***Light and Dark***

This sub-theme examines my experiences of positive and negative emotions during the research process. An argument throughout this thesis has been that looking at creativity as a paradoxical and dialectical process may help creative individuals and their leaders to appreciate the more challenging aspects of the creative process, and in so doing, to accept and transcend those challenges. Literature on emotions and creativity highlight the complex role emotions play in the creative process. Research (e.g., Zenasni & Lubart, 2008) demonstrates the complex relationship between emotions and creativity. Positive and negative emotions have distinct roles in stimulating and inhibiting creativity. Positive emotions are considered to increase the cognitive flexibility required for creative thinking (Isen et al., 1987). Under certain circumstances, fear or anxiety may also boost creativity as they signal that a task requires further effort (De Dreu et al., 2008). However, as I argued in Study 1, the context of the negative emotion is of utmost importance.

When participants' negative emotions related to their self-concept or circumstances that felt unsafe, negative emotions appeared to inhibit creativity.

Research (e.g., Kashdan et al., 2015) shows the adaptive benefits of putting complex feelings into words. They argue that people who can describe their emotions in detail are less likely to find stressful situations overwhelming. I wonder whether it also increases the ability to deal with the ups and downs of the creative process. In Study 1, participants talked about how they used their creativity to help them cope with the challenges of being creative at work, describing activities such as painting, reading, or gardening that helped them cope. The reflective diary I maintained throughout the research acted as a repository for thoughts and feelings I experienced. I found the process of keeping a research diary to be cathartic. Writing about my emotions became a method of externalising them and making sense of my experiences. As Kacewicz et al. (2006) suggest, there are benefits to physical and mental health of transforming one's thoughts and feelings into language.

Many positive emotions were associated with conducting research, such as gratitude for spending time doing something I loved, pride in my work, and a sense of meaning and purpose. I reflected on the words and phrases used by participants in Studies 1 and 2 to describe the positive emotions of being creative. One participant described it as the space between being awake and asleep when one is at peace, the amazing feeling when a creative idea comes together, moments when all the hard work and frustration melts away to be replaced by joy. I noticed that participants described emotions of being in flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). As Csíkszentmihályi describes, flow is a transient feeling. Juxtaposed with the positive experiences of being creative were the inevitable darker moments. The extent to which we can recognise, accept, and potentially grow from darker moments is a key feature of more recent positive psychology theorising (e.g., SWPP: Ivztan et al., 2016) or Existential Positive Psychology (Wong, 2020; Worth, 2022). The following excerpt from my reflexive journal captures a particularly emotionally challenging time in the research process:

I have lost my voice (metaphorically and physically). I'm not sure whether my cold makes me feel lost or the research (or both). I feel like there's a block between my brain and writing ability. I think I know what I want to say, and I just don't seem able to get it down on paper. I don't really like my PhD at the moment. I know this feeling

will pass but right now, my heart sinks when I look at the papers on my desk. I'm bored of thinking about it.

Seeing those words on the page made me realise that I needed to take a step back, take some time and space to recover physically and reignite my passion for my research.

Developing my ability to talk about my emotions was a significant change. As a personality type, I prefer to keep my feelings under wraps. I am the archetypal swan: calm above the water line and paddling furiously underneath the surface. During my corporate career, I learned that emotional expression was not welcomed. Being "emotional" had engendered connotations, with the phrase "you're being emotional" typically directed towards women and never intended as a compliment. Whereas the masculine archetype is generally associated with logic and reason, feminine qualities generally are considered lacking or less critical (Herbert, 2022). However, gender stereotypes are equally unhelpful for men who are expected not to show vulnerability or sensitivity (Neff, 2021). I learned to suppress my emotions, considering my ability to conceal my emotions as a strength. I have since become somewhat of an evangelist for the importance of talking about emotions at work. From my research, it was evident that creating an environment where people can talk about their emotions contributes to a sense of belonging and feeling valued. As character types, many participants in Studies 1 and 2 appeared to be comfortable recognising and talking about a full range of emotional experiences and articulating their importance to their creative process. However, within their organisational culture which appeared to have a lower tolerance of emotional expression, the creative individuals' sense of marginalisation was higher. The ability to express oneself authentically and show empathy helps build trust between leaders and colleagues (Brown, 2012; Misztal, 2011). Those stronger, attachment-like relationships, in turn, facilitate risk-taking and coping with uncertainty. However, as ever, there is a balance to be struck between complete freedom to express emotion at work and the potential impact on colleagues of emotional outbursts. In discussing the topic with the case study organisation (Study 2), FG participants and leaders made an important distinction between the freedom to express frustration, disappointment, anger, or joy with the need to consider their colleagues and avoid emotional expression that might be hurtful.

Many of the ways in which I have changed feel positive; however, not all were. I became frustrated when working with organisations that I perceived were unwilling to change. Having spent significant amounts of time thinking about creativity, I became impatient with people that I felt could not see what was evident to me, such as the need to value relationships at work or to value creativity for more than just revenue generation:

I feel like I'm speaking Chinese, and organisations don't understand. I have a desire and passion for sharing my insights on creativity and, at the same time, a reluctance to work on stuff I'm not interested in doing. It's causing me to re-examine the work that I do.

I wondered how I could translate the "Chinese" into a language leaders might understand. However, breaking down these kinds of barriers is hard. They are driven by individuals' motivation to avoid fear, vulnerability, and uncertainty (Campion & Palmer, 1996; Schein, 2004). And since an organisation is a collection of human beings, the resulting system has the characteristics and complexities of its constituents (Stamps & Lipnack, 2004).

As a leader, I have become more aware of my emotions, and that has helped me develop more profound, more meaningful connections with others through a willingness to share my feelings and welcoming emotional expressions from others. As a coach, talking about emotions directly rather than avoiding them helped me get to the heart of the issue and facilitate change. I can spot defence mechanisms in use because I can spot many of my own and question them with compassion and kindness. My awareness and acceptance of polarities and their tensions have enabled me to relate to people differently. As a coach, I notice when clients present black and white thinking, allowing me to work with people more deeply, seeing and responding to defence mechanisms and hints of unconscious thought. As an example, I captured my reflections on a coaching conversation:

I had an unexpected conversation with someone. They talked about wanting to work on their self-understanding. I felt they were talking about 'shadow' work without using the words. My depth of understanding academically and personally opened up a completely different type of conversation with both of us, showing vulnerability and a willingness to explore 'beneath the surface.'

I reflected on how I might teach others who have not benefited from my transformative experience. I began to develop a training programme for leaders of creative people focusing on those aspects of the creative process that are usually overlooked, such as safety, compassion, and emotional expression. I also became braver in stimulating conversations with work colleagues about emotions and was more willing to share my feelings more authentically.

### ***Leading with Heart***

In this theme, I explore my learning as an organisational leader, considering how the research has changed my approach to leadership. The first two studies highlighted leaders' critical role in creating conditions for creativity to thrive. I have reflected on ways in which my leadership approach has changed and what I wish to teach clients and colleagues about leading creativity.

One of my principal learnings from this research is that leading creativity requires the courage to lead in a way that engenders trust, embraces uncertainty, and demonstrates compassion for the challenges associated with being creative. We talked about love and leadership during supervision—two words that usually do not go in the same sentence. The reflective journal entry below captures my reflections on the conversation:

Can one bring love to the process? Love for others, self, the work? Love means you persist over time, accept the challenges and are intrinsically motivated. Care, compassion, respect, unconditional positive regard aren't words we use in organisations.

I decided to talk to some colleagues and clients about love in the context of leadership. I felt some trepidation about broaching the subject as the reflective journal entry notes. Despite my initial misgivings, I had some insightful conversations that moved my thinking forward:

I took a deep breath and asked a few people about 'leading with love.' A few raised eyebrows. It seemed more possible when we got into the topic of what love in this context might mean (respect, unconditional positive regard, love for oneself).

In one conversation, we discussed what happens when love breaks down, how quickly love can move towards feelings of hate and bitterness, and how anger can permeate the working relationship and organisation culture. We are in relationship with

work and the colleagues we work with, whether that is a positive or a negative relationship. Those relationships are potent forces shaping how safe it feels to take risks and be creative. For some reason, “professional” relationships are meant to be free of emotion or intimacy, which are suppressed as a result. Barsade and O’Neill (2014, p. 551) use the term “companionate love” to capture feelings of compassion, caring and warmth for others. Their longitudinal study within a healthcare company found that organisations with a strong culture of companionate love had stronger employee engagement and teamwork and lower levels of emotional exhaustion. Furthermore, positive work-based relationships have been shown to have a psychological and physiological impact on employee engagement and wellbeing (Heaphy & Dutton, 2008). Dutton and Heaphy (2003, p. 266) define high-quality connections (HQCs) as comprising positive regard, mutuality, and vitality. HQCs typically reflect a broader range of emotional expression, both positive and negative (“emotional carrying capacity”), a greater ability to withstand challenges and tensions (“tensility”) and a greater level of openness to new ideas and perspectives (“connectivity”). When we acknowledge that work-based relationships are like any other human relationship, where emotion and vulnerability are part of the equation, there is space for love, support, and compassion. Life and the world can be scary and uncertain and being creative generally requires navigating uncharted territory. As such, the “emotional scaffolding” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 128) of caring leaders who create a safe space to explore and push boundaries will help people take those uncertain steps towards creating something new and exciting.

The role of uncertainty in creativity has been a recurrent theme within this research. All three studies have shown that uncertainty is necessary for creativity but is frequently experienced as uncomfortable and troubling. Organisations typically seek to reduce uncertainty and risk (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Plowman et al., 2007; Rock, 2009). An important finding of Studies 1 and 2 is that the type of uncertainty influences how it is experienced. Personal or existential uncertainty (van den Bos, 2009) is potentially more challenging than uncertainty about a creative outcome. In this context, I reflected that a leaders' role is to help their people put boundaries around uncertainty, be clear where risk-taking is acceptable, and provide a zone of safety where the boundaries and risks can be explored so that the risk of personal or existential uncertainty is at least limited.

The insights from this research have equipped me with a language and an understanding of uncertainty, caused me to consider how to balance risk and creativity and to ask questions that enable people to consider the cause of their uncertainty. Facilitating an open conversation about the emotions evoked by uncertainty and providing techniques for articulating what they feel uncertain about (i.e., asking: What are we uncertain about? What are we more certain about?) has proven to be a helpful tool for my work with organisations. Furthermore, it is an approach that leaders might use to guide their people through the challenges associated with uncertainty.

From my informal interviews with some leaders of creativity that I admired, I noticed similarities between how they talked about their roles. They discussed the need to nurture people, create space to fail safely, the importance of trusted mentors, and their role in helping their people cope with the fear of uncertainty. They emphasised the importance of balancing support with accountability. All stressed the importance of mentoring to their development, something they have carried forward to their own leadership style. The concept of the “more experienced other” is central to theories on psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963; Levinson et al., 1978; Vygotsky, 1978). The mentor acts as a source of “scaffolding” for the person to explore the boundaries of their creativity (Worth, 2010). The leaders I spoke to describe their mentors as being, at times, very demanding but supportive, helping them to see different perspectives and acting as a sounding board for them to work things through. These leaders articulated how they coached their people, allowing them to make mistakes without punishing them. However, there was a low tolerance for individuals who failed to learn from their mistakes. Some leaders described their role as leader and mentor to provide “tough love”, to challenge, stretch and hold their protégés to account, and provide space for the ideas to breathe.

One leader remarked on the extent to which some people self-censor their ideas, choosing not to put them forward, perhaps because they perceived them as too simple or believed that the concept would not be well received. I wondered how many great ideas never see the light of day because of a fear that the idea is not “enough”. This leader's observation made me realise how important it is to encourage people to share their ideas even when they are not fully formed. Scharmer (2009) advocates prototyping, sharing ideas before they are fully developed to promote a collaborative creative process. However, it needs to feel safe to do so. To counterbalance the vulnerability that may be



experienced when sharing ideas, the way that leaders and colleagues deliver feedback becomes critical. I reflected on experiences encountered during the research as well as experiences from my corporate roles:

When something is critiqued with care and compassion, it feels like a gift and an opportunity to help the idea become its best self. It's an act of co-creation where the third party helps expand thinking and provoke new connections and thoughts. Thinking back to my workplace experience, I observed that the way leaders delivered feedback when things were going well and when they failed had a significant impact on the individual's motivation. I remember one chronically stressed individual when something didn't go well. Their line manager would send a one-word text such as 'disappointing'. It had such a negative impact on that person. They learned to dread the creative product going out into the world for fear of a late-night text and their boss' subsequent 'disappointment' the following day.

Compassion is an essential facet of helping people cope with the risk and vulnerability of being creative. Worline and Dutton (2017) describe compassion as being explicitly linked to the shadow or darker side of life because of its link with suffering. However, compassion may also be considered a facet of love. As Worline and Dutton suggest, suffering is not a word typically associated with the workplace. However, existential (Wong, 2020; Worth, 2022) or second wave (Ivtzan et al., 2016) PP teaches us that suffering is a facet of human life and, therefore, organisational life. As I have discussed in the previous two studies, there is a darker side to creativity alongside the joy of being creative. As this study has shown, for leaders to create a zone of safety around their people, compassion is vital. To encourage creativity, leaders must recognise their own and their employees' vulnerability, treat that vulnerability gently and hold the creative person securely in a non-judgemental space.

There is extensive research demonstrating the psychological and physiological benefits of self-compassion (e.g., Neff et al., 2007, 2018; Wilson et al., 2019). Neff's (2021) three principles of self-compassion (mindfulness, common humanity, and kindness) can benefit organisations and individuals. Neff proposes that mindfulness helps individuals turn towards difficult emotions, acknowledge, and accept them rather than suppressing them or getting lost in a negative spiral. Common humanity recognises the need for connectedness, that we are all imperfect and struggle from time to time. Kindness to ourselves and others makes coping with difficulty that much easier. The organisational benefits of compassion at work include increased profitability and financial

resilience (Cameron et al., 2004, 2011). A compassionate organisation enhances innovation by creating psychological safety and increasing employee motivation and engagement (Crowley, 2011; Leonard & Rayport, 1997; Worline & Dutton, 2017).

I have learned that whilst compassion is important, it is not enough on its own. To lead with love also requires trust and responsibility. The concepts of power and love (Kahane, 2010) and agency and communion (Bakan, 1966; McAdams et al., 1996) describe two fundamental drivers in human behaviour. These scholars have concluded that agency is related to individual achievements and mastery (self-focus), whereas communion emphasises relationships and connection, being part of a larger whole (other-focus). Kahane emphasises the requirement for a system to balance purposefulness and agency (referred to as power) with compassion (referred to as love). He argues that leadership that emphasises power without love may become reckless and counterproductive, creating an environment of fear. Similarly, love without generative power may become weak and sentimental. By integrating generative power and love, Kahane (2010) suggests that leaders may accomplish great things.

The findings of Studies 1 and 2 illustrate the importance of love/communion abilities in fostering creativity. The importance of social connection, an environment where it feels safe to be vulnerable, feeling valued, were shown to be situated in the love/communion sphere. A large complex organisation I work with has managed to balance its values—including kindness, respect, and compassion—and corporate obligations by having clearly articulated values that permeate organisational processes and structures, holding each other accountable for living the values and seeking to learn rather than blame when things do go wrong. Furthermore, it is an exemplar in its field. I realise from observing this organisation that it is possible to combine the needs of organisation stakeholders with the requirements of their people.

An essential part of leading with heart is recognising and acknowledging the emotional dimension of creativity and any work. The prevalent “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 2003, p. 18) within an organisation’s culture dictate which emotions are repressed and which emotions it is acceptable to express and in what circumstances (Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014). Leadership qualities typically associated with the archetypal feminine include nurturing, caring, compassion, and vulnerability, which are generally not encouraged in the Western concept of professional leadership, which accentuates

androcentric values (Sisodia, 2017). However, research (e.g., Daft, 2014; Patterson, 2006) suggests that leading with love contributes to greater willingness to take risks and higher staff wellbeing and engagement, essential in encouraging organisational creativity.

I am grappling with how to encourage leaders to see “feminine” values as strengths rather than weaknesses and become less squeamish talking about love in an organisational context. In constructing my arguments, I, too, need to balance discussions on love with power to demonstrate the economic benefits and advantages of achieving the optimal balance. As Kahane (2010, p.9) eloquently states, “power and love constitute a permanent dilemma that must be reconciled continuously and creatively.”

Within organisations, people development is typically associated with skills and performance improvement, and a conversation about development tends to focus on how these can be incrementally improved. I am not convinced that most leaders know how to have a meaningful “developmental” conversation, by which I mean a conversation that addresses how each individual develops and changes through time. I know that I did not. My perspective on developing people and organisations has changed dramatically due to this research. Suppose one were to take a developmental perspective on people development? In that case, questions about how to improve an individual’s skill and performance of a particular task give way to questions about how to support an individual’s cognitive and social-emotional development, how to create conditions for safety and authenticity, working with individual fears and desires to help an individual, and the organisation, to become their best self.

### ***Mind Your Language***

The research has helped me understand the power of language to shape culture and the power of culture to shape language. Culture is symbolic and reflects learned interpretations about shared beliefs, values and social practices within the organisation (Lustig et al., 2009). The precise meaning of these symbols is determined by how they are interpreted by organisational members (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). I was struck by how little attention is paid to language-in-use or the consistency between words and actions. The research has taught me the importance of paying attention to cultural symbols such as language, behaviours and corporate documentation when seeking profound cultural change.

I have been fascinated by language from an early age. I started learning French in primary school and have learned five foreign languages. My undergraduate degree in Romance language, literature and linguistics has played a formative role in how I make sense of the world. In one organisation I worked in, a phrase used to talk about creativity was “the creatives on the first floor”. As leaders, we never reflected on what that phrase meant to those who did not work on the first floor. I worked on the third floor, which was metaphorically, and symbolically, as far away from “the creatives” as I could be, and it subtly reinforced my belief that I was not creative. It came as no surprise that when seeking to redesign the office layout, no-one wanted to move away from the first floor—because the language signalled that was where the creativity happened.

In my current work with organisations, I have intentionally begun to alter my language to use words that are, perhaps, not typical in organisational contexts, such as “emotion”, “vulnerability”, “safety” and even “love”. I notice leaders’ reactions to my language and whether any of my words are reflected in their speech. We discuss how their language may help or hinder their employees’ experience of organisational culture and creativity. The first challenge is to bring the role of language in culture to awareness. I ask people to explore whether some words or metaphors underpin the culture, either consciously or unconsciously? What does the language used say about the culture? For example, in a feedback session offered to the case study organisation in Study 2, we talked about how their language of “parent” and “child” might be influencing the experience of creativity both in positive and negative ways. I asked how the organisation might steer itself towards a mentoring approach rather than a parental approach, retaining the care and nurturing aspects of the parental metaphor whilst encouraging more independence of decision-making and responsibility to resolve tensions experienced by leaders and employees. Goldberg and Srivastava (2017, p. 4) argue that “language is a core medium for cultivating relationships and sending explicit and implicit signals about one’s values and behaviour to other organisational members.” As such, language matters.

Lindquist et al. (2015) postulate that language is a crucial element of emotional experience and perceptions, shaping how emotion is felt. Individuals who can describe their feelings in detail are less likely to be overwhelmed in stressful situations (Kashdan et al., 2015). Creating an environment where people can openly discuss their feelings may

be a helpful mechanism for coping with the challenges of creativity. Similarly, using arts-based therapies may be a creative way to help individuals express difficult emotions, tensions, or challenges without necessarily having to put them into words. Arts-based therapies have been shown to help individuals express their inner thoughts and feelings and make sense of their emotions in clinical settings and in organisations to facilitate change (Slayton et al., 2011; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010; Taylor & Ladkin, 2009).

A conclusion I have drawn from this research is that leaders need to pay attention to their words and actions and ensure consistency between words used and desired outcomes. It is also important for leaders to be authentic and demonstrate their commitment to their personal values and the organisation's. I have found it interesting to consider what language is *not* used within an organisation. For example, in the strategic plan of one organisation with which I worked, I noticed that they did not explicitly mention their employees. Their purpose appeared to be primarily externally-facing, and their values were quite "task-focused". In this example, what was not written led me to question their commitment to creating an environment that enables their people and creativity to thrive.

### **Practical Applications of the Research**

It is important to me that this research has practical and theoretical value. As such, I considered how the learning from this research might be used to support managers to understand the emotional complexity of creativity and how they might lead creativity more effectively. In this third study, I have considered practical ways of using the MERMA-ID model in my work. The model was intended to provide a framework for developing an organisational culture that encourages creativity to thrive and, at the same time, enhances employee wellbeing.

I developed a leadership development programme and coaching model outline, using MERMA-ID as the framework. The purpose of the development programme is to teach leaders about the complexity of creativity, recognise the tensions inherent in being creative and part of a social system, and emphasise the importance of caring and compassionate leadership that creates a psychologically safe space to cope with uncertainty. The programme modules address each element of the MERMA model and refer to each element's theoretical underpinning.

- The first module considers intrinsic and extrinsic motivation - what drives people to create and how leaders can enhance or thwart motivation.
- The second module, *The Secret Life of Emotions*, addresses the role of emotions in the workplace and the emotional nature of creating. Leaders are encouraged to develop an awareness of their own emotions and how those emotions influence behaviour. Being creative involves vulnerability and uncertainty. The module considers why vulnerability and uncertainty are often uncomfortable and how to develop psychological safety at work.
- Module three, entitled *Relationships Matter*, considers the importance of a strong relationship with leaders and their employees. The module explores the role of trust in building positive relationships and a mentoring/coaching style of leadership. It covers aspects of transactional analysis (Berne, 1968), including building adult to adult relationships and avoiding getting caught in a “drama cycle” (Karpman, 1968). The module considers how and where work gets done and the importance of different perspectives to creative work.
- The fourth module looks at what makes work *meaningful* and the importance of meaning to creativity and wellbeing. The module works with individuals to understand their values and bridge gaps between those of the individual and those of the organisation, creating a line of sight between them.
- Module five builds on the meaning section asking: What does success mean for you? and encouraging people to celebrate their accomplishments. It considers the importance of feeling recognised and valued and invites leaders to consider how best to incentivise their people, look beyond monetary rewards to consider rewarding intelligent risk-taking and learning from failure, and signal that creative accomplishment is valued and recognised for more than just profit.
- The sixth module looks at systems theory in organisations discussing the *Fuzzy Boundaries* between personal and work-based systems. The boundaries between spheres of our lives are permeable, and there may be tensions at the borders between domains (Goffman, 1990). Therefore, leaders need to relate to the whole person. The module considers how leaders shape organisational culture and highlights how language and behaviours reflect what we pay attention to,

whether inside or outside awareness. Finally, the module challenges “black and white” or polarised thinking and takes a very gentle step towards considering individual and organisational shadow and unexamined or suppressed thoughts and feelings as sources of untapped potential (Abrams & Zweig, 1991).

Whereas the development programme is designed to address organisational culture and collective leadership behaviour, the coaching model invites individual leaders to consider any changes they may wish to make to lead creativity more effectively. Furthermore, the development programme and coaching model could be used with creative workers to reflect on how they might thrive creatively within their organisation

### **Concluding Remarks**

This autoethnography has captured how I have developed personally and professionally through the creative process of conducting PhD research. A valuable aspect of the research is that it informed my work from an early stage, changing how I related to and interacted with leaders. In exploring the creative process in action, I have reflected on how my approach to leadership, and life more generally, has changed. As a part-time student, research and work were concurrent activities – a kind of action learning in practice (Garratt, 2012). The autoethnography has helped me understand that logic and reason must be balanced with compassion and emotion in leadership. Creativity and leadership are both heart- and head-based. There is room for both power and love in leadership. Leading creativity requires courage, and leaders must build trusting relationships, embrace uncertainty, and demonstrate compassion for the challenges of being creative.

This research contributes to positive organisation scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) by articulating the individual and systemic (managerial) experiences of creativity and describing systemic tensions and how managers might behave to lead creativity more effectively. Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) argue that POS originated, in part, to counterbalance organisational theory that primarily focused on profitability, efficiency and competitive advantage rather than considering the generative, human aspects of organisational functioning. A systemic, third wave approach to PP in organisations brings an integrated perspective on coping with the challenges of being creative. When organisations are viewed as purely rational entities, where the emotions

and “messiness” of being human are not accepted, or where there is little understanding of the broader systems in which people live and work, the opportunity to enable people to thrive creatively and personally is potentially missed. In adopting a holistic and systemic perspective, one can move beyond the metaphor of an organisation as a machine, where emotion and reason are separate abstractions, to consider a more interconnected and integrated perspective on organisational life (Montuori & Purser, 1995).

I have considered ways to practically apply my learning to helping organisations flourish creatively. As Gilbert (2002, p.229) stated, “writing...a story about oneself can be an experience of healing and growth.” The healing was about learning to integrate polarities, accept, and be more compassionate towards myself and others. The growth stemmed from learning how I cope and thrive within the experience of polarities and how the insights from this research will be applied in my work.

In [Chapter 8, the General Discussion](#), I consider the collective findings of the three studies in the context of the MERMA model outlined in [Chapter 3](#) and the extent to which MERMA may be a helpful model for understanding and explaining creativity in a dialectic system. Furthermore, recognising the complexity and multifaceted nature of creativity, I will consider findings that may not naturally fit within the model but contribute to understanding the experience of social and systemic creativity.



## Chapter 8: General Discussion

Situated within social and systems models of creativity (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Csíkszentmihályi, 2013) and the increasingly systemic approach to positive psychology (Lomas et al., 2020), this research comprised three studies that aimed to understand how being creative was experienced by creative workers and how the parts of the organisational system influenced and shaped the emotional experience of being creative. I argue in this thesis that understanding how employees experience creativity is crucial in thinking about how to encourage creativity in the workplace.

Across the three studies, the findings surprised me with their simplicity and elegance. In essence, we need to recognise the humanity behind the creative worker and their needs to feel valued for their creative skills, to belong and contribute to the organisation's greater purpose, and for the creative process to be understood and supported. Individuals need to be cared for and feel safe enough to take risks necessary for creativity. Furthermore, the findings suggested that participants experienced creativity at work as a paradoxical source of tension emanating from conflict between their identity as creative people and their perception that creativity was primarily valued for making money within their organisation. Whilst important, making money was not always personally meaningful or a primary source of creative motivation and sometimes actively dampened motivation.

This general discussion chapter considers

- How the findings of this research build and develop understanding of creativity, positive psychology, and positive organisational scholarship
- How MERMA developed as a conceptual model as a result of the study results to become MERMA-ID, a new model for understanding the creative experience and wellbeing at work.
- Other themes arising from the data to further inform understanding of the experience of creativity within organisations.

Until now, positive psychology theorising largely ignored creativity, and with PP1.0's emphasis on positive emotions, that is perhaps understandable. This dissertation argues that creativity deserves to be re-established and discussed more frequently within the

maturing field of positive psychology as it encompasses all three waves of PP. Creativity undoubtedly encompasses the positive emotions and peak states (e.g., flow: Csíkszentmihályi, 1997b) that come with meaningful work and accomplishment. And though creativity is central to positive human functioning (PP 1.0), it achieves that by blending the dark and the light, the full spectrum of human experience (second wave PP). The first and second waves of PP have traditionally focused only on individual flourishing, but the experience and outcomes of creativity go beyond the individual to encompass a whole integrated system, positioning creativity within the newly burgeoning third wave of PP that seeks to examine the individual within a wider context (Lomas et al., 2020).

A related area of research — Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS: Cameron et al., 2003) — could be considered one such third wave area of research, focusing attention on the organisational processes, and underlying motivations that help the organisations and the people within them thrive (Cameron, 2021). PP and POS tend to be considered separate but complementary strands of theorising, with Cameron and Spreitzer (2012) justifying the need for POS due to PP's emphasis mainly on the individual until recently. However, organisations — greater than merely the sum of their parts — provide a fertile field for third wave creativity and PP research.

Interestingly, as with PP theorising, POS research makes passing reference to creativity as a potential outcome of a positive organisation (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012), but creativity is not to date a core topic within either PP or POS. However, the concept of positive deviance, central to POS (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004), is a fundamental aspect of creativity. Positive deviance occurs when organisational members break free of usual constraints or expectations to achieve excellence. A creative outcome deviates from the status quo and generates ways of doing things differently and typically (but not always) better (Zhou & Ren, 2012). As the findings of this thesis have demonstrated, the extent to which an organisation's culture is experienced as safe enough to take risks associated with deviating from the norm, and how leaders support their employees through the inevitable uncertainty of deviating from tried and tested ways of doing things, is likely to influence the willingness of workers to be creative. And this is vital — creativity is exceptional performance (another core POS construct) because it represents unusual and one-of-a-kind contributions (Zhou & Ren, 2012). This exceptional performance can drive positive progress, significantly contributing to business success, satisfied employees,

economic prosperity, and social development (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). Therefore, creativity should be the heartland of POS.

As the studies in this thesis have demonstrated, leadership behaviours and organisational practices associated with POS (supportive, compassionate, relational, meaning-focused) contribute to organisational climates that feel safe enough to deviate from the norm positively. The umbrella construct of positive leadership (Cameron, 2012) incorporates a range of theories, models, and frameworks to foster employee wellbeing and organisational excellence (Stander & Coxen, 2017). In parallel, creativity research (e.g., Ahearne et al., 2005; Oldham & Cummings, 1996) demonstrates a link between transformational (Avey et al., 2008) and empowering (Hill & Bartol, 2016; Konczak et al., 2000) leadership in enhancing workplace creativity. Interestingly, the discussion on climates conducive to creativity (Amabile et al., 1996; Isaksen & Isaksen, 2010) mirrors discussions within POS on organisational thriving, emphasising the importance of trust, support and empowerment in environments that foster creativity and enhance wellbeing. And if the ethos of POS is about taking an alternative, positively-oriented perspective on existing phenomena, such as positive deviance (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012), perhaps MERMA-ID might offer an integrative model for leading in a way that brings out the best in people and enables them to bring possibilities out into the open that no one else sees, without fear or vulnerability.

### Conceptual Development of the MERMA-ID Model

At the start of the PhD research, MERMA was a basic schematic model that evolved into a more theoretically- and empirically-informed model (MERMA-ID) as a result of the three studies in this dissertation. To recap, as discussed in [Chapter 3](#), MERMA developed as a theoretical mnemonic for working with individuals and leaders to enhance creative culture and wellbeing. The purpose of the model was to:

- provide a memorable model for encouraging leaders to think about how to develop a culture that encourages creativity to thrive by supporting their creative workers' wellbeing;
- help creative individuals understand their creative process and be better equipped to consider relevant interventions when necessary;

- update the PERMA model of wellbeing (Seligman, 2011) to reflect more current PP theorising.

The model incorporates theories of creativity, second wave PP (uniting the light/dark dialectics: Ivztan et al., 2016), and third-wave PP (systems/complexity, paradox: Lomas et al., 2020) and systems theories to offer a model that extends Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) work to include the phenomenological aspects of social and systems models and the subjective experience creativity within an organisational system. MERMA emphasises the link between employee wellbeing and creativity and provides a theoretical framework for understanding the lived experience of the creative process in organisations. This section will discuss how the findings reflected and supported each of the MERMA elements and how, through data analysis and interpretation, the model developed into MERMA-ID to reflect the interconnected and dialectic nature of creativity reflected in the findings.

### **Motivation**

The complex relationship between motivation and creativity has been established in literature (e.g., Eisenberger & Shannock, 2003). Intrinsic motivation is typically associated with personally meaningful and authentic goals that provide the impetus to sustain effort over time (Hennessey, 2019). The research findings raised an important question for organisations to consider when thinking about encouraging creativity: how leaders maximise their people's intrinsic motivation, or at the very least, how they avoid diminishing it. Intrinsic motivation is, by its nature, personal and context-dependent (Deci & Ryan, 2010), and the findings of this research concur with Hennessey's (2019, p. 388) description of motivation as a "complex web" of interconnected individual and cultural factors. The present research contributes to understanding some personal and environmental factors that impact intrinsic motivation in an organisational context.

Puccio (2020) presents intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as a polarity. The findings evidence three dialectic categories of internalised motivation that influence behaviour:

- *Safety* motivation: the extent to which individuals experience their leaders and culture as psychologically safe to take risks and make mistakes versus the motivation to protect themselves from fear of blame or censure.

- *Belonging* motivation: the extent to which individuals feel valued and recognised for their creative contribution versus feeling alienated and marginalised for being different.
- *Certainty* motivation: the extent to which individuals feel able to navigate the degree and type of uncertainty surrounding them versus motivation to reduce or avoid uncertainty.

There are theoretical and practical reasons why distinguishing aspects of intrinsic motivation is important. This research provides a more detailed understanding of some individual and cultural factors impacting intrinsic motivation. For example, from a practical perspective, once organisational leaders know how to create conditions that positively affect intrinsic motivation, they can take the necessary measures to help people feel safe and to belong. The findings also show that creating order from uncertainty is intrinsically motivating. Leaders can help people find order amidst uncertainty. It is evident from the research that leaders can help their employees navigate anxieties associated with uncertainty, contribute to a happier and healthier work environment, and increase the likelihood of facilitating creativity.

Furthermore, research (e.g., Gong et al., 2009; Shin & Zhou, 2003) has demonstrated that transformational leadership positively impacts workplace creativity. Shin and Zhou (2003) combined transformational leadership theory (Avey et al., 2008) with Amabile's (1996) intrinsic motivation principle, finding that transformational leadership was positively related to employee creativity, partially mediated by intrinsic motivation. They concluded that stimulating employees' intrinsic motivation was how transformational leaders contributed to organisational creativity. Furthermore, transformational leaders facilitate creative problem-solving by fostering a psychologically safe work environment that encourages risk-taking and allows employees to express themselves (Carmeli et al., 2014). Similarly, Zhang and Bartol (2010) found that empowering leadership (Hill & Bartol, 2016; Konczak et al., 2000) increased employee creativity through psychological empowerment, which was related to creative process engagement and intrinsic motivation.

The importance of safety was evident across all three studies. It was clear that the safety need presented itself in multiple ways. Participants needed to feel safe to take risks and experiment without fear. Trusting relationships provided a secure attachment base

from which to explore. Participants reflected the importance of feeling part of a community and feeling that their contribution was valued. However, they reported that relationships could also be a source of tension as individuals sought to negotiate the boundaries between self and other. Notably, for most, the absence of safety and belonging appeared to negatively impact motivation, task enjoyment, and the sense of meaning derived from the task. However, not belonging or fearing failure had a positive dimension for some participants. For example, some participants relished being somewhat of an outsider, priding themselves on being outside the mainstream, seeing it as part of their identity as a creative individual. Similarly, participants varied in their risk appetite. Some participants in the Study 2 focus groups found that fear of failure provided a frisson of excitement and a sense of accomplishment in overcoming a challenge. In contrast, for others, fear appeared to limit their willingness to express their full creativity.

Deci and Ryan (2010) argue that a dialectical relationship exists between individuals and the social environment, which can help or hinder intrinsic motivation. Basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness can be satisfied or thwarted by environmental conditions. This research points to how individual perceptions of safety, belonging and uncertainty impacted feelings of competence and autonomy. For example, Deci and Ryan suggest that positive feedback contributes to feelings of competence. In Study 3, my reflections on the research experience demonstrated how caring and supportive feedback contributed to intrinsic motivation and a willingness to take risks. The opposite was also apparent. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 commented on the demotivating impact of thoughtless feedback on a creative idea. Furthermore, Deci and Ryan argue that perceptions of controlling behaviour impact feelings of autonomy negatively, which, again, influences intrinsic motivation. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 provide examples of the motivating impact of feeling trusted and empowered by their leaders, which contributed to their feelings of autonomy and relatedness and, in turn, their intrinsic motivation.

The motivation to minimise uncertainty, seek clarity and navigate feelings of anxiety associated with uncertainty was an important feature of the data across all three studies. Earlier studies (e.g., Barron & Harrington, 1981) suggest that a trait of creative people is that they are more tolerant of ambiguity. Notably, this research contributes to

understanding the relationship between ambiguity and creativity by suggesting that tolerance of ambiguity may be a contextually dependent state rather than necessarily an enduring trait of creative people. Participants appeared to be tolerant of certain types of uncertainty in certain situations. I have captured the categories of uncertainty evident in the research as follows:

- *Existential* uncertainty (concerning the meaning of life and one's purpose)
- *Individual* uncertainty (the experience of doubt or instability in self-concept)
- *Task* uncertainty (concerning the desired outcome of a task)

The findings suggest that existential and individual uncertainty appear more difficult to tolerate than task uncertainty. For example, participants experienced uncertainty associated with fundamental needs for safety or belonging or uncertainty regarding something personally meaningful as more unsettling than uncertainty about the outcome of a less meaningful task. Similarly, the fear of being blamed or fired when something went wrong, or an idea did not work resulted in participants putting forward ideas they perceived to be less risky. By contrast, the uncertainty of playing around with a creative idea without knowing where it would end up was experienced by participants as exhilarating and a vital aspect of creativity.

## Emotions

Creativity is a highly affective process. This research concurred with literature that captures the complex and dialectic relationship between emotions and creativity (e.g., Bledow et al., 2013). PP research has contributed to understanding the psychological impact of positive emotions on wellbeing (e.g., Fredrickson, 1998; Seligman, 2011). SWPP (Ivtzan et al., 2016) built on that foundation and considered the vital role of both positive and negative emotions in a meaningful life. Furthermore, George and Zhou (2007) discovered that positive and negative mood influenced employee creativity within a supportive environment. However, the emotional experience of creativity and the tensions that creativity provokes are an under-researched topic and a core contribution of the MERMA-ID model and this thesis.

The theme *We Don't Want to Feel* (Study 1) captured how creativity was experienced as a source of tension between the individual and their organisational leaders.

Participants' apparent willingness to explore and express a wide range of emotional experiences was, at times, at odds with organisational cultures that appeared to put boundaries around the narrow range of – mainly positive – emotions that were considered acceptable to express. The unintended impact of those boundaries was to create tensions between what participants were feeling and the perceived safety of expressing those feelings. In contrast, leaders in the case study organisation (Study 2) claimed to be more accepting and comfortable with the range of emotions experienced during the creative process. Leaders in Study 2 were all from a creative background, suggesting that they understood the emotional experience of being creative and were compassionate about the emotional challenges involved, which underlines the importance of teaching leaders from all backgrounds to show empathy for the emotional experience of the creative process. The research findings suggest that leaders who do not have a creative background themselves might benefit from being taught that they have the potential to be creative in what they do. In turn, making leaders aware of their own creative process and the feelings associated with their experiences of creativity may increase their empathy for their employee's needs. It is important to emphasise that participants distinguished between expressing negative emotion at work and emotional expression that was disrespectful or unkind to co-workers, which was universally considered inappropriate. Whilst it was clear that boundaries around emotional expression needed to exist to thrive within a collective, most participants in Study 1 felt that the balance favoured emotional suppression rather than emotional freedom.

The present research demonstrates the subjective and contextual nature of emotion in the creative process. Baas et al. (2008) posit that fear can be an activating or deactivating emotion that can enhance and hinder creativity, depending on whether the emotion is associated with an approach or avoidance motivation. The differentiating factor is the nature of the fear being experienced. The findings indicate that the context in which negative emotions occur may determine the extent to which they are experienced as helpful or not. When negative emotions related to individuals' self-concept or perceptions of safety, the findings suggest that negative emotions resulted in participants' narrowing their thought-action tendencies (Fredrickson, 2004) and reducing their willingness to suggest a novel or unusual idea. As this research has demonstrated, the motivation to avoid exposing vulnerability, feeling shame or fear of losing one's job



appeared to have a deactivating effect on creative cognition. Some participants opted to “play it safe” rather than take the risk of personal exposure. Scheff (2000, p. 84) described shame as a “premier social emotion” that goes to the heart of the individual’s self-concept and is associated with the need to belong and be recognised and accepted in a collective (Bagozzi et al., 2003; Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Emotions such as shame and embarrassment impact an organisation’s affective climate, consciously or unconsciously influencing employee actions (Fineman, 2003; Parke & Seo, 2014). As FG3 participant 4 commented, the fear of “doing something stupid” at times prevented them from pursuing a creative idea.

However, rather than being dichotomous, positive or negative emotions can sometimes be both helpful and sometimes unhelpful, both pleasant and unpleasant, activating as well as deactivating (An et al., 2017; Biswas-Diener et al., 2011). The findings demonstrated the role of negative emotions in stimulating creative cognition. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 described occasions where anger or frustration provided the motivation, focus and determination to solve a problem or complete a creative task. Similarly, participants described creativity as a helpful way to express, cope with, or process negative emotions and experiences occurring in their lives.

From a practical standpoint, evidenced by the findings of this research, there is an opportunity for leaders to recognise that being creative can be emotionally challenging and provide support to their people to counterbalance those challenges. As Study 3 suggested, a helpful starting point might be for leaders to develop an awareness of their own and their employees’ emotions and how those emotions influence behaviour. The findings suggest that leading with compassion and vulnerability and providing supportive “emotional scaffolding” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 128) creates a climate where it feels safe to take creative risks.

### **Relationships**

The importance of relationships to psychological wellbeing is emphasised in the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) and more broadly in positive psychology and POS theorising (e.g., Dutton & Ragins, 2017). Most models of wellbeing, such as psychological wellbeing (Ryff, 1989) and flourishing (Keyes, 1998), emphasise the importance of warm, trusting relationships. Positive relationships are a core pillar of positive organisational

scholarship and positive leadership (Cameron, 2012; Ragins & Dutton, 2007). The findings suggest that relationships that provide a secure base, such as relationships with leaders and co-workers, may ease anxieties associated with uncertainty and emotionally challenging situations as they may provide a space for reflection, caregiving and compassion (Frost, 2007; Kahn, 2001).

An important reason why in the MERMA-ID model relationships are not constrained merely to positive relationships (as they are in the PERMA and most other PP models) is that the findings demonstrated how relationships with others, and indeed with the self, can be a source of negative emotion and tension as well as a source of support and wellbeing. As Meusbarger (2009) noted, working with other people can be both inspiring and distracting, and that was consistent with participants' experiences. For example, Study 1 participants described tensions arising from the need to persuade others about the merits of a creative idea. Similarly, tensions arose when participants perceived that other people were "interfering" (Participant 1) with their creative process. But as with negative emotions, the experience of tensions within relationships, at times, fuelled creativity. The dialectic nature of the relationship between self and others was evident in the findings of this research and played an essential role in shaping the experience of being creative at work. Furthermore, adverse experiences were, at times, reported to be a source of creative inspiration.

The findings from the three studies underline the vital role of relationships in encouraging creativity and the importance of strong, secure attachment relationships with leaders that contributed to the creative worker's sense of belonging. Relationships were central to driving and shaping motivation amongst the participants. The recurring parent/child metaphor highlighted how strong attachment relationships with leaders influenced perceptions of power structures and how safe it was to take risks necessary for creativity. Amabile and Kramer (2011, p. 131) describe four "nourishers" of creativity and positive inner work life —respect/recognition, encouragement, emotional support, and affiliation/camaraderie—all of which are relationship-based. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that relationships are essential nourishers of creativity within organisations. Rather than thinking purely about creative output, if one thinks about the creative process, it is clear from the findings that attention must be paid to the human need to be in

relationship with others—to be trusted, valued, and cared for—given the uncertainty, tension, and paradoxes of creativity.

This research supports the argument that multiple, diffuse relationships help foster creativity through exposure to different opinions (Perry-Smith, 2006). Participants valued the opportunity to connect with others outside of their organisation, finding it a source of creative inspiration. Their organisations did not always appreciate the extent to which different perspectives encouraged creative thinking. Most Study 1 and 2 participants reflected on the lack of available time and leader support to explore more widely or mix with other departments. Study 2 participants gave the example of the ping-pong table that used to be in their office as a helpful means of building relationships outside of their immediate workgroup and sharing different perspectives and lamented not knowing people's names in other departments as the organisation grew. Participants from the focus groups and interviews with leaders in Study 2 felt that opportunities to be creative were potentially missed as people were mixing less with others outside of their immediate work group.

Research (e.g., Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Baer, 2010; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003) suggests that strong relationships may hinder creativity because people with strong relationships tend to share similarities. However, based on the findings from this research, it appears that strong relationships are being conflated with similarity, which may, indeed, weaken creativity. However, strong, secure relationships are essential facilitators of creativity in other, equally vital ways. Distant relationships or weak ties (Perry-Smith, 2006) are crucial for creativity, but they fulfil different needs in the creative process. The findings demonstrated that “strong bonds” provided a secure base to push boundaries and take risks. For example, in Study 3, I reflected on the role strong relationships played in assisting my creativity. Trusting relationships provided the opportunity for a more honest appraisal and feedback than a more distant relationship might. Furthermore, I recognised the need for different types of relationships that fulfil different requirements at various stages of the creative process. This research suggests that secure and trusting relationships that allow freedom and independence are likely to enhance creativity rather than diminish it. Different points of view can be helpful in creativity, and weak ties of the kind described by Perry-Smith can provide different

perspectives and fuel novel ideas. But they are not sufficient on their own—to be creative and enable the act of creativity, strong bonds are also needed.

The findings demonstrated that strong, supportive bonds between leaders and their people played a significant role in enhancing creativity by creating a zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978) that encouraged risk-taking, enabled individuals to be authentic at work and motivated them to persist with challenging tasks. Csíkszentmihályi and Robinson (1988) argue that talented children become talented adults with support from significant people in their lives, such as parents, teachers, and mentors. The findings evidenced the critical role leaders play in providing support and development as antecedents to creativity (Madjar, 2005; Zhang & Bartol, 2010; Zhang & Zhou, 2014). Leaders are instrumental in shaping the experience of creativity at work. As Amabile et al. (1996) state, leaders influence creativity through the structures and policies set and the values they communicate. How leaders behave influences how creativity is experienced. Research has demonstrated that organisations in various industries that implemented and improved positive practices over time also enhanced their profitability, productivity, and employee retention. Providing compassionate support for employees, forgiving mistakes, avoiding blame, fostering the meaningfulness of work, and being kind and caring to colleagues leads to higher levels of organisational performance (Cameron et al., 2004, 2011).

However, creativity research typically focuses on task performance rather than social and emotional support. Amabile et al. (2004) highlighted the importance of leaders paying attention to their people's feelings and needs for recognition. This present research further explains how leaders may encourage creativity by investing time to lead with love and compassion. Considering the relationship between a leader and their employee as one of a caregiver or attachment figure, the leader becomes a critical factor in the employee's sense of safety and security (Davidovitz et al., 2007; Richards & Schat, 2011) and their willingness to explore and take risks (Ainsworth, 1991). Applying attachment theory to management studies, Yip et al. (2018) posit that the feelings of security from supportive relationships can foster autonomous motivation and creative problem solving. At the same time, anxious and avoidant attachment styles have been associated with intolerance of uncertainty (Wright et al., 2017). The type of secure relationship envisaged here is represented by Rogers' (1961) concept of unconditional

positive regard or the unconditional love generally shown within families. Regardless of whether an individual fails or makes a mistake, they will be accepted and supported. Their leaders will acknowledge their potential and strengths even when the creative worker does not.

### Meaning

The instinctive drive to fulfil one's potential and find meaning in life sits at the heart of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011). Meaning in life has been positively related to wellbeing across the lifespan (Hudson et al., 2019; King et al., 2006). Whilst all aspects of the MERMA-ID model are interconnected, the findings indicated that meaning was at the model's heart. Meaning is a complex phenomenon, and within the data, I observed different levels of meaning in participants' experiences. Participants discussed what creativity meant to their identity, the meaning of being creative within an organisation and how that differed from creativity at home. They reflected on what their organisation stood for, its purpose, and the extent to which it aligned with their sense of purpose. As such, I have categorised two types of meaning that were present in the data:

- *Micro-moments* of meaning—meaning as fleeting, momentary and negotiated over time
- *Macro-moments* of meaning—existential meaning

The findings showed that participants found ways of discovering or constructing meaning in their creativity even when their organisation's product was not perceived as meaningful. They made the product as good as possible, so they felt their creativity contributed to society or "rationalised" to minimise any cognitive dissonance between their values and the organisation's purpose. For example, one participant in Study 1 who worked in the advertising industry rationalised that their sector was helping society. She described the role of advertising as assisting companies in selling products so that independent journalism could continue to thrive, especially important in the era of "fake news".

Positive meaning (Cameron, 2012) connects what is meaningful for individuals and organisational outcomes, helping people recognise what is being accomplished and be recognised for their accomplishments. The research demonstrated the differences between conceptualisations of meaning and accomplishment for participants and leaders.

Grant (2014, p. 22) describes meaningful work as a "cornerstone of motivation". As the research demonstrated, the importance of finding moments of meaning contributed to intrinsic motivation and pride in what was achieved. Participants who did not find their work meaningful tended to "craft" their roles to create meaning (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001, p. 179). For example, a Study 1 participant described how, whilst she did not feel that her job was particularly meaningful, she could create opportunities to do things that she did find meaningful. Similarly, another participant felt that having moments where he felt that his work was meaningful gave him the strength to deal with the more mundane aspects.

Rather than necessarily finding their work consistently meaningful, participants in Studies 1 and 2 appeared to find "micro-moments" of meaning and, where possible, tried to create more opportunities for work that they did find meaningful (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Meaning appeared to be continually "negotiated" between the participants as employees and their organisation over time (Mitra & Buzzanell, 2017) and seen as "episodic" (Bailey & Madden, 2016, p.4). Ryff and Singer (1998, p. 8) argue that meaningfulness is "an ongoing, day-by-day, constantly unfolding phenomenon, not an end state that is once-and-for-all resolved." Nor is meaningfulness one-directional; individuals instead sought to create consonance between their sense of self and work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003).

The extent to which participants felt recognised and valued for their work appeared to impact the meaningfulness of their work. Not feeling valued (which was the feeling expressed by most participants) diminished the meaning they found in their work, and, as a result, they found it harder to feel motivated. Meaningful work was a source of positive emotions and thus linked to greater cognitive flexibility and creativity (Fredrickson, 2001; Isen et al., 1987). Meaning at work appeared to happen when there was a congruence between personal and organisation values, participants' identity as a creative person, the sense that their creativity was valued, and perception that their work had a "higher" social purpose.

Juxtaposed with micro-moments of meaning is a longer term, more existentialist aspect of meaning, which I refer to as macro-meaning, such as the individual's purpose in life. For example, two individuals in Study 1 who ran their own businesses had different concepts of meaning compared to other participants. They spoke about finding their work

meaningful because they were directing and shaping it. However, there was a power dialectic at play. The business-owner participants commented that they could shape their organisation's purpose and had the authority and hierarchical position to influence their work. Not everything they did was meaningful. They talked about aspects of their jobs that were mundane or frustrating, but they considered personal meaning to be interwoven with their organisational purpose.

Higher levels of meaning appeared to exist when participants experienced an integrative pattern of meaning: the meaning that being creative gave them; when they felt valued and recognised and were able to perceive the self-transcendent value of their role; meaning derived from activities that extended beyond the self (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Reker & Wong, 2014; Seligman, 2002). Maslow (1954) suggested that self-transcendence sits above self-actualisation in the motivational hierarchy. As such, work perceived as being self-transcendent is likely to be highly motivational.

Similarly, with meaning came emotion. As Gabriel (1998, p. 311) stated, “everything meaningful is also emotionally charged.” A dialectic evident in the data gathered in this current study originated in different perceptions of meaning between participants and their organisations (i.e., quality or process versus profitability) which provoked frustration. Conversely, the ability to work on something personally meaningful (whether that was because the task itself was meaningful or the project's purpose had a broader meaningful impact beyond themselves or the company) resulted in positive emotions.

What participants found meaningful was also a source of intrinsic motivation. In Study 1, I differentiated between the value *of* creativity and the value *from* creativity. Typical definitions of creativity equate the value *of* creativity with product or output (Weisberg, 2015). For organisations, the value of creativity is typically the ability to achieve commercial targets or gain a competitive advantage. The value *from* creativity represents the meaning and purpose that being creative brings, irrespective of the output. Both are important to organisational success. However, the meaning gained from being creative was a source of intrinsic motivation and positive emotions, which research has demonstrated enhance both creativity and wellbeing (Fredrickson, 2001; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). A key question in facilitating creativity is how we can help people find their work meaningful, have the space to create meaning for themselves or craft the meaningfulness of their work.

### **Accomplishment**

The MERMA-ID model is less clear in the distinction between meaning and accomplishment. It was evident in the findings from this study that meaning, and accomplishment were closely related concepts. For participants in Studies 1 and 2, creative accomplishment was primarily derived from what was meaningful to them. For example, when asked how they defined creative success, Study 1 participants talked about impacting society, finding a new answer to a problem, or getting a reaction from the audience. Similarly, in Study 2, participants were motivated by engaging work, something they were proud of, which enabled them to feel connected to something bigger than themselves. These examples evidence the interconnected nature of meaning, emotion, relationships, and motivation.

In the PERMA model, accomplishment is defined as having a sense of working towards and achieving goals and having the mastery, competence, and efficacy to achieve them (Butler & Kern, 2016; Seligman, 2011). Seligman states that the emotion of pride is frequently experienced alongside accomplishment. Amabile and colleagues (Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Amabile & Pratt, 2016) argue that making progress in meaningful work is one of the most potent motivators for creative performance and contributes to the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), but one that organisational leaders frequently overlook.

The findings suggest that accomplishing a creative task was an important reflection of the participants' identity (Jaussi et al., 2007), contributing to their feelings of self-worth and creative self-efficacy (Tierney & Farmer, 2002, 2011). Achieving something that mattered to them, and being recognised and valued for those accomplishments, was part of who they considered themselves to be, and essential sources of motivation. Glynn's (2000) study of industrial unrest within an orchestra had at its heart the dissonance between the musicians' identity of valuing artistic integrity and the perceived economic focus of the management. Similarly, the participants in the present research appeared to experience their organisation's definition of creative accomplishment as being at odds with their definition of success. Study 1 participants described accomplishment as seeing their product out in the world, achieving something of significance that mattered and provided meaning. In contrast, participants perceived that, for their organisations, accomplishment tended to be more about reputation, awards, and profits. A source of



tensions between workers and leaders was the dissonance between their respective understanding of accomplishment and meaning. Whilst participants recognised that making money was vital for the organisation to thrive, it was perhaps best considered an enabling factor. If the organisation was profitable, creative workers could work on meaningful projects. But the organisations' definitions of success did not appear to be a primary motivator for participants.

Given the proximity between meaning and accomplishment, I considered whether they were separate concepts or whether the data supported an alternative category. I was mindful of the importance of retaining the integrity of the data and not seeking to make the model fit to achieve a "neat" solution. The data showed two potential alternative "A" categories: Ambiguity and Acceptance. Given the importance of ambiguity to creativity, its prevalence in the data, and the vital role of coping with ambiguity in SWPP theorising (Ivtzan et al., 2016), it could be a viable alternative. However, ambiguity and the broader conceptualisation of uncertainty are already captured in the model's Emotion and Dialectic aspects. As a coping mechanism in transcending paradox, acceptance is captured within Meaning, Motivation, and Emotion.

However, whilst closely linked, Meaning and Accomplishment should be considered separate concepts as reflected in the data as they represent aligned but distinct facets of creativity. Whilst all the MERMA-ID elements are interconnected, I consider Meaning and Accomplishment *interdependent*. When a task was meaningful, participants felt a greater sense of achievement and were prouder of their accomplishment. Creative accomplishment appears to be a positive reinforcing spiral (Fredrickson, 1998, 2001) and a source of meaning, motivation, and emotion. When the sense of accomplishment was absent, it was experienced as demotivating and a source of negative emotions. I postulate that meaning may be a framework against which accomplishment is measured or determined. The meaning assigned to a task or experience shapes what is considered an accomplishment.

### **Evolving to MERMA-ID: The addition of "Interconnected" and "Dialectic"**

The "I" (Interconnected) and "D" (Dialectic) elements were added to the MERMA model to reflect the interconnections and dialectics I saw in the data and theory. As the data analysis progressed, it became evident that each element of MERMA was separate

and connected and that each contained dialectics. Ballard-Reisch and Turner (2017, pp. 1-2) define dialectics as “the dynamic connected process between interdependent, mutually exclusive opposite poles”. Dialectics are inherently interconnected; one pole cannot exist without the other. Therefore, the Interconnected element of the model serves as a reminder of the dynamic connection between polarities that exist within any complex system. However, “Interconnected” also refers to the connection across each element. For example, the findings demonstrated how elements work together systemically. A meaningful task is likely to be intrinsically motivating and, depending on the outcome and context, can be a source of positive or negative emotion. The accomplishment of a meaningful task positively impacts meaning, motivation, and emotion. Similarly, relationships can be a source of positive and negative emotions, motivation and meaning.

In each study, the themes contained a dialectic at their heart. For example, in Study 1, the theme *The Value of Creativity* centred on competing tensions between creativity and the commercial purpose of the organisation. This theme highlighted differences in perception between what creative success meant to participants as opposed to perceptions of what their organisations valued as a source of tension. Within the *Relatedness* theme (Study 1), the dialectic of *self and other* was evident, a dialectic that recurred in Studies 2 and 3. In Study 1, tensions between different “tribes” (for example, creatives and non-creatives) provided a sense of belonging and alienation. Study 1 participants 4 and 10 discussed how their creativity, and creative identity, were amplified when working with teams of other creatives, whereas participant 1 expressed feelings of alienation and being misunderstood by others when they did not appear to value the same things that they did. In Study 2, the dialectic of *self and other* manifested in the tensions between leaders and creative workers. The *parent/child* dialectic featured strongly in Study 2, capturing both the supportive and nurturing relationship between leaders and creative workers and the unhelpful aspects of a parent/child dynamic such as controlling behaviour from leaders and dependency behaviours from workers. The *self /other* dialectic recurred in Study 3, reflecting “knottily entangled” boundaries (Fine, 1994, p. 72), for example, between my identities as a researcher, outside of the creative population being explored, and insider as part of the creative industries and as a creative person. Tensions arising from the dialectic of *self and other* were often infused with

emotions (e.g., frustration, anger, self-doubt), emphasising the interconnection between relationships and emotions.

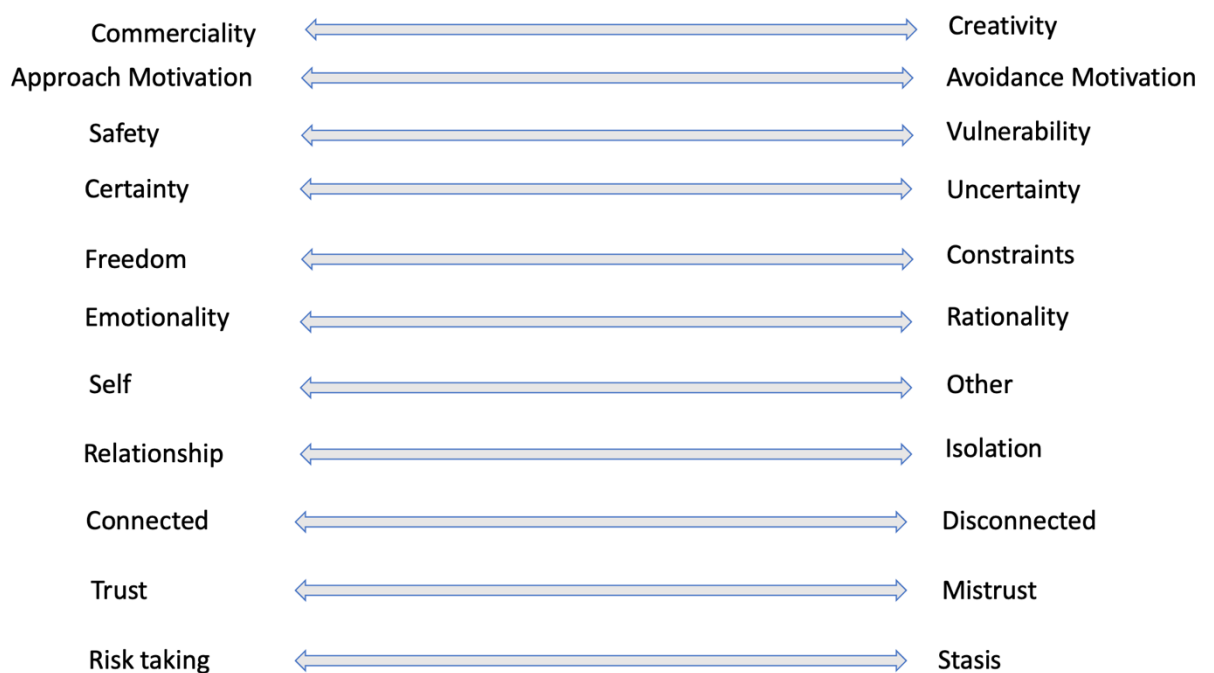
Across all three studies, the “push-pull” (Fairhurst et al., 2016, p. 5) of *certainty* and *uncertainty* was evident. Study 1 captured the paradoxical experience of uncertainty as an inherent part of creativity, experienced as both uncomfortable and pleasurable, a motivation to create, and an aversive state to be avoided. Creating boundaries is important for making sense of the world and providing meaning and clarity (Surman, 2002). Study 1 participants 7 and 11 described how planning and structure provided the freedom to create by “containing” the endless creative possibilities. Uncertainty provoked emotions (positive and negative) and was a motivation to create to resolve the uncertainty or to “find an answer” (Study 1, participant 2). The *certainty/uncertainty* dialectic was reflected in Study 2 by leaders, focus groups, and the document review. The inherently uncertain nature of the case study organisation’s business created tension between leaders and creative workers, who found it difficult to understand how their work contributed to organisational success. However, as in Study 1, focus group participants felt that uncertainty could be both pleasurable and a source of tension. Uncertainty gave individuals the freedom to create. However, it needed to feel safe to do so. In Study 3, I reflected on difficult emotions that arose from uncertainty and the important role of other people in helping create a safe space in which to explore and to manage and cope with those emotions.

The research highlighted the co-valence and complementarity of positive and negative emotions. Positive and negative emotions played an important but distinct role in participants’ creative experience. For example, Study 1 participants described their complex emotional relationship with creativity, which participant 3 described as a “love/hate relationship”. Participant 2 described creativity as “like the best thing in the world, but sometimes the worst thing”. In Study 2, focus group participants expressed their fears about the organisation becoming too bureaucratic and structured but, at the same time, felt that the organisation’s growth provided opportunities for exciting new projects and personal development. Study 3 captured the *Light and Dark*, the experience of positive and negative emotions in creativity, suggesting that if leaders recognised the paradoxical and dialectical nature of creativity, they might help their teams accept and transcend the challenges more effectively.

Scholars have recognised the role of polarity and paradox as an integral part of the creative person (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996), creative process (Rothenberg, 1999), and organisational life (George, 2007; Lewis, 2000; Smith & Lewis, 2011). This research concurred with the vital role of polarities in creativity and humanity (Jones, 1999) and highlighted a range of polarities in tension (see Figure 16). Systems thinking recognises the interconnectedness of elements of the system, the permeable boundaries between each component, and the tensions and paradoxes that the system creates. Where creative people appeared better able (or willing) to accept the tensions of being creative, they were at times in conflict with an organisational culture that sought the illusion of safety from binary thinking.

**Figure 16**

*Polarities Evident from the Findings of This Study*



Across the three studies, the data suggest that tensions were experienced as creative individuals attempted to balance polarities that could be eased or worsened by environmental factors such as organisational leadership and culture. Each of the studies demonstrated the critical role of organisational culture in creating conditions that enable creativity to thrive. Furthermore, the research demonstrated how polarities within individuals, such as self-concept and defence mechanisms, shaped responses to and experience of creativity, contributing to the system's complexity. For example,

participants in Studies 1 and 2 who felt insecure or feared they would be blamed for mistakes appeared to be less willing to make bold suggestions, preferring to propose incremental rather than radical changes.

Puccio (2020, p. 148) uses the term “macro-polarity” to describe a “universal, innate, and fundamental aspect of the human condition.” Reflecting on the type and nature of the polarities discussed in this chapter and throughout the thesis, it is clear that there is a “macro-polarity” within the data: threat versus safety. Perceived threats came from the self (defences, self-concept) and others (leaders, culture, environment). The extent to which people felt threatened by their organisational context or, indeed, by their self-concept appeared to influence their willingness to be creative and shaped the experience of creativity at work. Whether a situation was experienced as a threat or safe was shaped by the meaning people assigned to the situation. And it is evident from this research that an essential role for leaders is to make it feel safe for people to explore the uncertainty of paradox. As the research has demonstrated, different types of uncertainty are experienced differently, some more difficult than others. As Tetenbaum (1998) states, it is human nature to expect certainty, and one way to ease the discomfort of uncertainty is to use either/or thinking rather than reconciling opposites. However, uncertainty and discomfort are where change happens. Being on the “threshold” is uncomfortable but necessary to find answers.

The findings demonstrated that meaning appeared to help individuals cope with the discomfort caused by the tension of polarities. Because creativity was meaningful to participants, it seemed that they could accept the discomfort as part of the creative process. Furthermore, they trusted and had the experience to know that the discomfort was transient as the meaning and positive emotions experienced from creative accomplishment were worth the transitory pain.

### ***Summary***

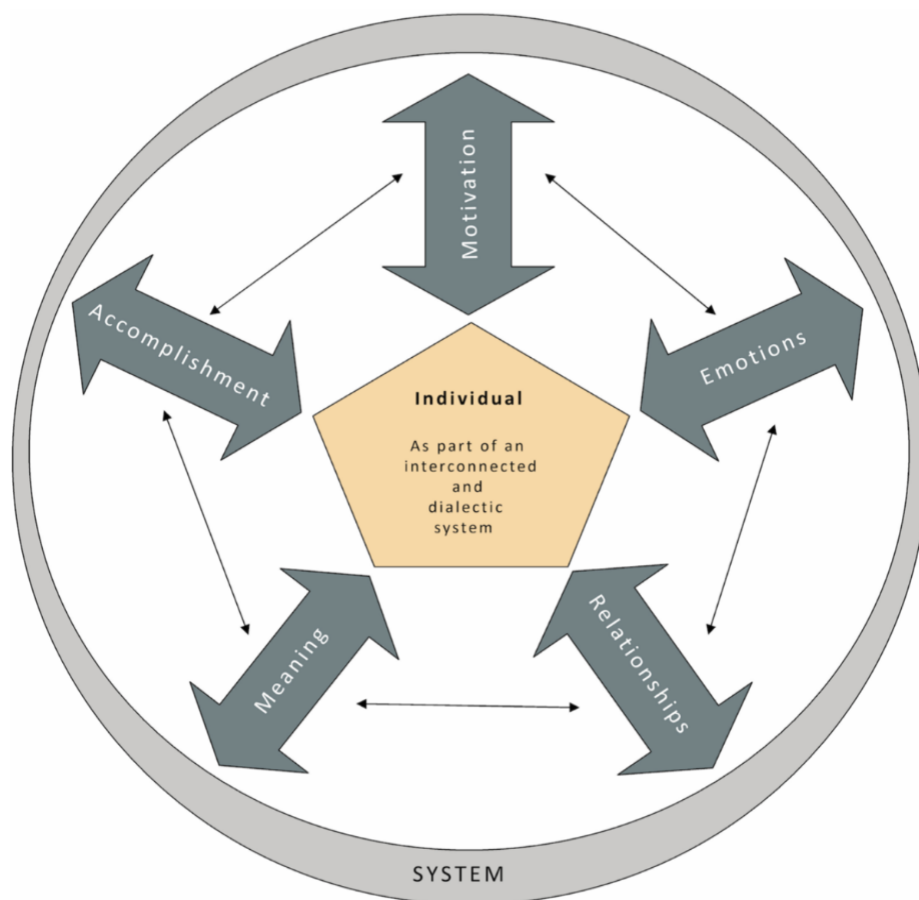
As a third wave PP model of creativity, MERMA-ID reflects the complexity, polarities, unconscious and humanistic aspects of creativity. Furthermore, MERMA-ID adds an original perspective to the PERMA model, combining the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and social systems of wellbeing. The I and D aspects of the model are a new contribution of this research and do not exist in PERMA. Furthermore, the I and D

elements more fully capture the dialectic nature of existence (second wave PP) and life's interconnected and complex nature (third wave PP).

In evaluating the MERMA-ID model's potential usefulness, I considered its contribution to understanding social and systemic creativity. Whilst each element of MERMA-ID addressed separate areas of creativity theorising, the originality and power of the model were evident when looking at it as a system rather than each element in isolation. The interconnection between elements underlined that MERMA-ID is a complex adaptive system (CAS). CAS comprises elements, referred to as *agents*, that learn and adapt in response to interactions (Holland, 2014). The interactions and relationships between parts of the system affect and shape the whole and vice versa. Figure 17 illustrates the development of MERMA to MERMA-ID, the individual as part of a dialectic and interconnected system.

**Figure 17**

*Proposed MERMA-ID Model Based on Seligman's PERMA Model (2011)*



### Beyond MERMA-ID: Other Themes Arising

Three themes were identified that have a less direct relationship with the MERMA-ID model but are powerful and recurrent in the data. *The Paradox of Commerciality and Creativity* captures the tensions between an organisation's need to be commercially successful with the need to maximise the creativity of its people. The theme of *Time* focuses on the paradoxical impact of time on enabling and constraining creativity within organisations and how the lack of time impacts leadership and creativity. The *Language* theme captured the importance of language in shaping the experience of creativity and how language acts as a sensemaking mechanism and a "window into culture" (Goldberg & Srivastava, 2017, p., 1) that influences the experience of creativity.

However, the boundaries between the themes were not always clear. It could be argued that these themes overlap with some elements of MERMA-ID. For instance, the *Paradox of Commerciality and Creativity* and *Language* themes are fundamentally about values (i.e., meaning and motivation) and how people make sense of their environment. In essence, the *Time* theme represents the value placed on getting creative tasks done quickly versus taking the time to make sure the quality of the creative output is the best it can be, which negatively impacted participants' sense of achievement, diminished the pride felt for their work, and consequently its meaningfulness. Furthermore, the theme captures the feeling of time pressure on creative workers, potentially leading to emotions such as anxiety, guilt, and fear. How much pressure their leaders put them under could be considered an aspect of relationships.

#### ***The Paradox of Commerciality and Creativity: "Like a Marriage that can Never Work."***

Throughout the research, the paradox of commerciality and creativity was a powerful force shaping the experience of the creative process at work. In essence, the paradox of commerciality and creativity captures one of the key tensions within a commercial business, arising from balancing an organisation's need to be commercially successful with the need to maximise the creativity of its people. The dilemma was articulated by Study 1 (Participant 11):

The [organisation model] is all about profitability. But to get greater profitability, you need to be able to harness creativity. I've always seen this juxtaposition between wanting amazing creativity and high profitability as a bit like a marriage that can never work...Creatives can create something which literally plucks at your heartstrings, but if you've got someone that's constantly looking at the bottom line,

it's a weird juxtaposition. It's a polar opposite, I suppose. And we see that a lot, especially at pitch time...Which takes me back to the dichotomy that we have here. I don't think you can have one without the other.

Some aspects of commerciality and creativity were reflected in a dissonance between the meaning of creative success and the value of creativity, explored in the Study 1 theme *The Value of Creativity* and the Motivation element of MERMA-ID. However, the paradox of commerciality and creativity is broader. In Study 2, the tensions between growth and creativity reflected the experience of FG participants who felt that commercial success and subsequent organisational growth resulted in increased bureaucracy and structure that stifled creativity. The leaders interviewed remarked that, as the organisation grew, they felt that headquarters leadership was less willing to take risks as the potential financial, and personal cost of failure was higher. Whilst participants in Studies 1 and 2 recognised the requirement for both creativity and commercial success, the competing tensions between each end of the pole had both an enhancing impact on creativity (e.g., more opportunities for exciting projects, more money available to develop ideas, more staff to help), and a dampening effect (e.g., increased bureaucracy, longer decision-making processes, less risk tolerance, fewer close relationships).

Organisation literature discusses tensions inherent in the paradox of exploration and exploitation (Smith & Tushman, 2005). In this context, exploitation is defined as the need to commercialise existing capabilities and develop new products or capabilities, whereas exploration is associated with searching for new possibilities and experimentation (March, 1991). Tuncdogan et al. (2015) argue that most literature about exploration and exploitation focuses on organisational antecedents rather than individual-level psychological precursors. However, it appears from the current study that considering the psychological experience of competing tensions, such as exploration and exploitation, may assist organisational leaders in understanding motivations and emotions associated with the need to deliver innovative new products and maximise the organisation's commercial returns.

### ***Time***

Time features in creativity research in several guises. Some researchers (e.g., Mainemelis, 2002) have examined time in the context of the production of creative ideas (e.g., the incubation stage of Wallas' (1926) 4-stage process of creativity). Others



considered the importance of the historical time (or *Epoque*) in which creativity happens (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996), how creativity develops with age (Csíkszentmihályi & Robinson; 2014; Terman, 1925), and time distortion and flow (Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). However, this section focuses on the paradoxical role of time as a resource and the tensions that time brings.

Amabile, Hadley, et al. (2002) described the paradoxical nature of time pressure on creativity. Under certain circumstances, time pressure appears to decrease the cognitive flexibility required for creativity. Amabile and colleagues argue that frustrations arise because of competing demands for workers' time, undermining their ability to focus on urgent tasks, which concurred with the findings of this research. Participants in Studies 1 and 2 felt that they often did not have sufficient time to produce the quality of creativity they wished, which caused them to feel stressed. Participants described being so busy that they felt there was not enough time to be creative. Leaders in Study 2 remarked that often they could not consider the long-term implications of their decisions. Similarly, once a task was completed, leaders could not maximise their effectiveness without sufficient time to learn from what worked or did not work. In Study 3, I reflected on negative tensions experienced due to the conflicting demands of work and home life.

However, beyond the frustrations from lack of time, negative time pressures impacted participants' enjoyment of work, and the pride felt for their accomplishments. They felt that, at times, they had to submit work they considered inferior to meet deadlines. Csíkszentmihályi (1996, p. 145) commented that "what counts is to be master of one's own time", underlining the importance of empowerment and trust in facilitating a positive experience of creativity. However, in Study 1, time constraints imposed by organisations in terms of where and when work was done suggested that many workers were not trusted sufficiently to be masters of their own time. Beyond task-focused time constraints, the findings suggest that giving someone time and attention is a form of love that builds connection, trust and belonging. Trusting parents give their children the freedom to explore, building relationships that provide emotional scaffolding and safety.

Paradoxically, time pressure was not always negative. Reflecting Amabile et al.'s (2002) findings that too much time may also be detrimental to creativity, participants in Studies 1 and 2 commented that deadlines were necessary to help them finish a creative task. Historically, the optimal creative process has been described as free from

constraints (e.g., Amabile, 1988, 1996; Shalley et al., 2004). Indeed, Harrison and Rouse (2014) suggest that rules, restrictions or close relationships were unhelpful for creativity. However, there is a paradoxical tension between freedom and constraint (Rosso, 2014). Beghetto (2016) points out that creativity requires a certain amount of conformity to ensure that the creative outcome is appropriate for the task at hand. Similarly, the findings from this research demonstrate that participants needed some rules to provide clarity of expectations. Furthermore, Beghetto suggests it is helpful to consider freedom and constraint as a continuum rather than a polarity. However, as with polarities more generally, finding balance over time between helpful and unhelpful constraints is a challenging and ongoing task.

### ***Language***

The importance of language in shaping the experience of creativity was an important thread throughout the studies. Metaphor is a mechanism people use to make sense and organise thought (Lakoff, 1992). A challenge of researching the experience of creativity is accessing thoughts and emotions that may be outside of conscious awareness. Srivastva and Barrett (1988) suggest that metaphor can point to hidden feelings or thoughts that people may be unaware of, or which are hard to articulate. As discussed in [Chapter 4, General Methodology](#), a central tenet of social constructivism is that people make sense of their world through language, cognition, social context and symbols (McMahon, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). Language is one of the fundamental ways we communicate with others and is imbued with cultural symbols. Language is relational and has the power to motivate and inspire or to invoke fear and vulnerability. The language used by leaders points to implicit values and beliefs, inside and outside of awareness, that shape the experience of being creative. However, leaders do not typically consider how the common metaphors within their organisations may indicate how the culture is experienced. Social and systemic theories of creativity (e.g., Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Glăveanu, 2010) consider how culture shapes creativity. This research considers the role of language in shaping the experience of creativity and a sign of, and potentially, cause of culture.

Participants in this study used metaphor to describe how they experienced creativity at work, the joys and the tensions, the shadow side of the organisation and its explicit values. Moran (2009) highlights two common metaphors for conceptualising creativity:

boundaries and organism. The boundary metaphor describes creativity as movement, pushing through and past boundaries. Many participants expressed tensions such as perceived boundaries put in their way by their leaders or themselves. The organism metaphor describes creativity in terms of growth, cooperation, and interaction, whereas the boundary metaphor emphasises the outcome. The description of creativity as an evolutionary process (Barron, 1995; Simonton, 2005) is one such organismic metaphor. Similarly, the parent/child metaphor in Study 2 is an example of an organismic metaphor, highlighting growth through positive interaction and constriction through constraint. The parent/child dynamic indicated the presence of strong, supportive relationships and the tensions resulting from frustration that workers did not feel trusted and empowered, feeling that they were “treated like children” (FG2).

A common analogy used by participants in Studies 1 and 2 was comparing the organisation to a machine or feeling like robots churning out unimaginative content. The organisation as a machine is a familiar metaphor in organisational theorising (G. Morgan, 2006), to illustrate the desire of leaders to minimise uncertainty rather than seeing work, and indeed creativity, as social and systemic. The machine metaphor represents the belief that organisations comprise independent parts that can be understood in isolation. If an organisation is like a machine, it is a closed system that is predictable and rational. Employees are “cogs in wheels” (FG1), and efficiency is paramount.

The prevalence of machine and boundary language supports a conclusion of this research that organisations appeared more focused on creative products or outcomes at the expense of the creative process. However, the creative process is essential in achieving creative output and a significant motivator for creative workers. Like “a marriage that can never work” (Study 1, Participant 11), the creative workers appeared to value both the creative process and product. In contrast, the organisations seemed to view the creative process as a messy inconvenience that they wished they did not have to contend with, not entirely understanding that the creative product is only possible because of the process. Rather than ignoring or trying to smooth out the ups and downs of the creative process, the findings from this study indicate that leaders must nurture it and shift their focus towards it, trusting that the product will be the likely outcome of an enabled process. However, rather than being irreconcilable differences, in identifying and

articulating desires and motivations, the research has indicated that product and process could be recognised as complementary rather than competing polarities.

Positive communication is a core aspect of positive leadership (Cameron, 2012). Positive communication uses affirmative and supportive language, rephrasing criticism in a constructive, supportive, appreciative way. The research demonstrated that unambiguous communication, clear goals and expected outcomes help foster creativity. For example, Study 1 participants felt the lack of clear direction from the organisation caused tension, increasing their sense of uncertainty, especially when the organisational context was not experienced as safe. In Study 3 I reflected on the way language used by leaders and more junior creative workers may point to the conscious and unconscious aspects of the organisation's culture. In Study 2 the parent/child language reflected the caring and nurturing aspects of the organisation's culture contrasted with tensions originating from perceived "parental control".

### **Concluding Remarks**

The purpose of this chapter was to consider the findings in the context of the MERMA-ID model, to explore whether and to what extent MERMA-ID was reflected in the data from Studies 1, 2, and 3, and to consider findings that sat outside of MERMA-ID. The MERMA-ID model connects creativity theory, second wave PP (emphasising dialectics), third wave PP (emphasising systems and complexity), paradox, and systems theories. Whilst each element of MERMA-ID addressed separate areas of creativity theorising, the originality and power of the model comes when looking at it as a system rather than each element in isolation. The interconnection between elements underlined that MERMA-ID is a complex adaptive system. Interactions and relationships between parts of the system affect and shape the whole and vice versa. As a second and third wave model of creativity, MERMA-ID re-establishes creativity at the heart of positive psychology by providing an integrated and systemic perspective on positive and negative factors that impact creativity. Creativity deserves to be central to positive psychology as it encompasses all three waves of PP. MERMA-ID is a practical and theoretically-based model that extends Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) work to include the phenomenological aspects of social and systems models. Furthermore,

MERMA-ID provides a framework for considering what creative workers and leaders can do to facilitate creativity within their organisation.

This research contributes to Positive Organisational Scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003; Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012) by articulating how positive forms of leadership may enhance the likelihood of creativity within the workplace and considering how managers could lead creativity more effectively. The findings demonstrated the relevance of communication, organisational environment, meaning, and relationships in developing creativity at work—the four leadership strategies that enable positive deviance (Cameron, 2008). Adversities and challenges are as much a part of POS as positive experiences (Cameron & Spreitzer, 2012). However, this research highlights the interconnection between individuals, the wider team, and the organisation and how, systemically, creativity can be facilitated or inhibited by how leaders shape the experience of work positively and negatively. This study illustrates shared characteristics of organisational flourishing and creativity and the necessity of a climate that encourages risk-taking, meaningful work, and supportive relationships.

In [Chapter 9, Conclusions and Recommendations](#), I summarise the practical applications of this research and its contribution to creativity theory and second/third wave positive psychology theory. The chapter summarises the key findings concerning the research questions set out in [Chapter 1, Introduction](#), and acknowledges the limitations of this research. Finally, the chapter considers opportunities for future research emerging from the findings.

## Chapter 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

### Summary of the Research

The thesis has presented three qualitative studies that considered the research questions outlined in [Chapter 1](#). To recap, the primary research questions were:

- What is the lived experience of individuals working as creatives and collaborating with/leading creatives within an organisational context?
- To what extent do existing social and systemic models of creativity capture the lived experience of being creative within an organisational system, and how do parts of the system influence and shape each other?
- To what extent is the newly proposed MERMA-ID model helpful in understanding and explaining creativity in a dialectic system?
- In what ways can individuals and organisations use these updated models and the learning from this research to practically facilitate creativity and employee wellbeing in the workplace?
- In what ways might the newly proposed MERMA-ID model help re-ignite interest in creativity within positive psychology theorising?

Collectively, the findings demonstrate how existing systems and social models of creativity could be improved to consider the individual within the system. Social and systems models of creativity (e.g., Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Csíkszentmihályi, 1988) emphasise that creativity relies on social context and other people to define it. However, this research argues that those models do not adequately consider the subjective experience – the emotions, tensions, and polarities – inherent in a complex system. Amabile and Kramer (2011) took a step towards understanding the creative experience by describing factors that nourish creativity and aspects that inhibit creativity. However, this research takes a further step to consider the dynamic interaction of different elements within a system, asking what it feels like to be creative, what causes positive and negative emotions in creative systems, and how organisational systems cope with those dialectic emotions.

The findings suggest that the system's dynamics (e.g., personal anxieties, leaders, co-workers, or organisational culture) appear to cause emotional responses that affect creative outcomes. The research shows that facilitating creativity at work is so much more than encouraging creative thinking or ideas. It is about trust, compassion, meaningful relationships, and safety. If we understand what it feels like to be creative at work, we can think about how to help people maximise their creativity and wellbeing. Furthermore, this research adds to existing social and systemic models of creativity by highlighting dialectics at work such as self/other, emotion/reason, and parent/child that influence the lived experience of creativity. A contribution of the 'MERMA-ID' model is to emphasise the extent of interconnection between factors that have separately been demonstrated to affect creativity (such as motivation and emotions) and consider the interaction between the elements.

### Review of the Three Studies

Study 1 explored how individuals working within a creative organisation experienced the process of being creative, to what extent they perceived it to be a source of uncertainty and tension and ways in which they coped with the process of being creative at work. The data highlighted common needs across the participants, such as the need for close and supportive relationships with leaders and co-workers, to feel valued for their work, and to feel supported through the more challenging aspects of the creative process. Study 1 illuminated dialectic and interconnected tensions inherent in the creative process. Tensions arose from perceptions regarding the organisation's culture and leaders' behaviours and internal tensions between the need for belonging and individuality.

The research demonstrated that the concept of value in definitions of creativity (e.g., Runco & Jaeger, 2012; Weisberg, 2015) is mainly product-oriented: the value *of* creativity. However, the value that creative workers derived *from* creativity was a significant source of meaning and motivation, which affects the creative product and has broader implications for staff wellbeing and organisational cohesion. A core facet of Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) systems model is the need for a creative idea to be validated by external gatekeepers to be considered creative. This research contributes a more nuanced perspective on the need for validation of a creative idea. The findings evidenced

that the need to be recognised and feel valued impacts intrinsic motivation. Similarly, an apparent disconnect between the creative workers and their organisational leaders regarding the definition of a creative accomplishment appeared to negatively impact employees' engagement and how valued they felt. An apparent disconnect between the creative workers and their organisational leaders regarding the definition of a creative accomplishment appeared to negatively impact employees' engagement and how valued they felt. Tensions between personal ontologies and the organisation's values and belief statements were highlighted by creative workers who often felt alienated by leaders who did not appear to value what they valued. However, the findings also demonstrated that participants seemed intolerant of organisational culture that did not overtly value the same things as them.

Study 1 found that tolerance of uncertainty in the creative process is context and domain-specific rather than a general character trait of creative people. The findings evidenced that certain types of uncertainty, such as uncertainty over basic, existential psychological needs (e.g., safety and belonging), were experienced as more uncomfortable than uncertainty over the direction of a creative project. The experience of uncertainty was dialectic. Uncertainty was experienced as uncomfortable and an aversive state. However, it appeared to be motivational and, paradoxically, sometimes pleasurable (Wilson et al., 2005). The findings suggest the need for a dynamic balance of uncertainty and certainty that provides the necessary clarity on required outcomes, but at the same time, sufficient uncertainty to provide excitement and motivation to find answers. Leaders play a critical role in ensuring that adequate clarity is provided regarding expected outcomes and must guard against deploying a command-and-control leadership style as a mechanism for coping with their discomfort with uncertainty.

Study 2 expanded social and systemic theories of creativity by examining the organisational context and culture in which creativity happens from the perspectives of those leading creative efforts and those being led. The data generated rich and detailed descriptions of the lived experience of individuals at different hierarchical levels in the organisation and their interactions. Competing tensions of organisational growth and creativity were explored, and the extent to which safe and supportive relationships affect the experience of creativity within the organisation. An original contribution of Study 2 was to provide insight into how individuals' emotions, anxieties, or perceptions (which I



referred to as "individual forces") influence the experience of being creative within an organisation. The findings highlighted the importance of a psychologically safe environment to explore and take risks necessary for creativity and emphasised the importance of taking the time required to adopt a mentoring or developmental approach to leadership. Furthermore, there was confirmation in this study that a vital leadership role is to enable creative workers to experience the uncertainty and vulnerability associated with creativity without fear of blame, censor, or shame.

The parent/child dialectic in Study 2 evidenced a tension between two critical aspects of typical definitions of creativity: the novel, child-like, playful, emotional elements of creativity and the functional, safe, rational aspects. The findings indicate that to be creative requires individuals to balance the disinhibited and exploratory child-like qualities with the ability to function maturely and practically within an organisational context. It is clear from the data that those two sides of creativity are often in tension. Furthermore, the parent/child metaphor evidenced the need for a relationship between leaders and creative workers based on trust, respect, compassion, and love, rather than a controlling or smothering relationship.

Study 3, an autoethnography, had two aims: to understand how the research influenced and changed me and my approach to creative work; and consider ways in which individuals and organisations could use the learning from this research to practically facilitate creativity and employee wellbeing in the workplace. Study 3 indicated some practical steps organisations might consider to help leaders and employees navigate the complexity of creativity which could be incorporated into a leadership development programme grounded in the MERMA-ID model. This research indicates that leadership behaviours are critical in shaping how creativity is experienced and thus whether/how it happens. Leading with heart requires leaders to develop meaningful relationships that help creative workers navigate the organisational system.

A key insight from Study 3 was the importance of leading with love, compassion, and vulnerability, recognising that those are, perhaps, uncomfortable words to use in a traditional organisational context. As detailed in Study 3, Barsade and O'Neil's (2014, p. 551) concept of "companionate love" describes the compassion, caring and warmth this research proposes. Leading creativity requires the courage to lead in a way that engenders and demonstrates trust, embraces uncertainty, and shows compassion for the

challenges associated with being creative. Furthermore, it is essential to consider the multiple systems an individual is a part of (such as work, family, self), how those systems interact and identify tension points. Tensions inherent in complex systems can be deeply unsettling. Leaders need to create a safe space where tensions can be openly discussed and supported. Other people (leaders, co-workers) are vital in helping creatives navigate the fog of uncertainty and to help them celebrate the joy, pride and meaning creativity often entails whilst also offering the permission, encouragement, freedom, and comfort to deal with the less conventional, positive, or 'neat' aspects that are also inherent in creativity.

The general discussion chapter considered the findings from all three studies through the lens of the newly proposed MERMA-ID (Motivation, Emotions, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment – Interconnected and Dialectic) model. Furthermore, the chapter draws together significant findings concerning the experience of creativity that may not necessarily fit as clearly within MERMA-ID but contribute important viewpoints to our understanding of the experience of social and systemic creativity. MERMA-ID is an original contribution of this research, expanding creativity theory by recognising how creativity's interconnected and dialectic nature impacts the experience of being creative at work and re-establishing the link between creativity and wellbeing. MERMA-ID represents a third wave positive psychology model of creativity that recognises the systemic nature of creativity and its inherent tensions. A surprising outcome of this research is that MERMA-ID, having been conceived of tentatively at the start, has become central to understanding ways in which creativity might be facilitated within organisations. MERMA-ID provides a framework for considering what creative workers and leaders can practically do to facilitate creativity in their organisation and may help leaders and employees fully own their part in enhancing the creative process.

Across the findings from the three qualitative studies was a vital message that, whilst simple to say, is more complex to achieve in practice. In essence, we need to recognise the humanity behind the creative worker and their need to feel valued for their creative skills, belong and contribute to the organisation's greater purpose, and for the creative process to be understood and supported, "warts and all". However, perhaps the need to recognise the humanity and vulnerability of the creative worker might also extend to all employees, regardless of their role.

Individuals need to be cared for, feel safe enough to take risks necessary for creativity and feel supported rather than blamed when creative ideas fail. For an individual to be creative involves vulnerability in the context of an organisation's "power" and control. Some individuals may hold back from fully expressing their creativity, resulting in a dynamic of "children" uncertain of "parental" support. The parental relationship is the archetypal "safety" provider for a child. To encourage creativity, managers and organisations must develop the skills and language necessary to communicate safety, boundaries, trust, and support for those involved in creative risk-taking, striking a balance between loving and trusting "parent" without infantilising professional creative adults and by developing good mentoring relationships. Given that being creative is an identity-level activity, the degree of managerial support required in the face of this potential vulnerability is higher than it might perhaps be for other employee categories.

The findings demonstrate a commonality between factors that facilitate creativity and thriving more generally. Factors shown to improve psychological wellbeing such as autonomy, purpose in life, personal growth (Ryff & Singer, 1998), relatedness (E. Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1995; Seligman, 2011), meaning in life (Seligman, 2011; Wong, 2011) and accomplishment or competence (R. M. Ryan & Deci, 2000) impact the lived experience of creativity. I propose that the MERMA-ID model acts as a bridge between creativity and wellbeing. Rather than feeling like a "cog in a machine" (an analogy used by participants in Studies 1 and 2), focusing on the person and their needs will likely enhance creativity.

### **Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

#### ***Alternative Methods***

This research was entirely qualitative in nature, and the primary data collection methods were interviews and focus groups, which Rouse and Pratt (2021) describe as powerful tools for understanding how people think and feel about a topic. Methods such as experience sampling (ESM: Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), the daily reconstruction method (Kahneman et al., 2004) and daily diaries (e.g., Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Conner et al., 2016; Kurtzberg & Mueller, 2005) have been used in creativity research to capture periodic self-reports of participants' thoughts, feelings, and emotions during their daily lives, and were possible alternative methods for this research. However, experience

sampling and daily diaries are perceived as time-consuming and demanding of participants, with potentially high attrition rates as participants drop out of the study (Forgeard et al., 2011). Participants need to be encouraged to complete the task consistently over time to generate rich data (Czerwinka, 2019).

A less common method of qualitative data collection – story completion (Clarke et al., 2019) – could have been an alternative method to capture participants' perceptions on how they experienced creativity at work. Story completion was initially developed within the psychoanalysis tradition to explore psychological meanings behind a problem situation and is a form of narrative inquiry where participants are asked to complete a story from a hypothetical scenario given to them by the researcher (Lupton, 2020). Story completion may be a means of accessing participants' meaning-making of a particular topic (Clarke et al., 2019). This method was dismissed because story completion is less suited to questions concerning personal experiences and views, given the indirect nature of data collection. The stories may not be a straightforward reflection of participants' experiences, thoughts, or feelings.

### ***Limitations of Interviews and Focus Groups***

Interviews are one of the most popular qualitative methods (Kvale, 1996) to identify and record lived experience. However, there are methodological limitations to interviews and focus groups. Hammersley and Gomm (2008) argue that what participants say in an interview is inevitably shaped by the questions asked and perceptions about what the interviewer expects them to say. Critics of interviews (e.g., Atkinson & Coffey, 2003) question whether they can provide stable perspectives or merely reflect what happened in the interview at a particular time, referring to the "performative" (p. 811) nature of the interview. The possibility is that respondents tell interviewers what they think the interviewer wants to hear and present themselves as they wish to be seen, rather than providing access to private experiences. Similarly, responses from focus group participants may be influenced by the impression of themselves they wish to portray amongst other group members. More powerful or vocal participants may sway views, or individuals may be reluctant to voice an alternative perspective, giving the impression that research findings reflect greater agreement on a topic than is warranted (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

Notwithstanding the ubiquitous nature of interviews in society, Hermanowicz (2002, p. 479) notes that interviewing is "deceptively difficult" due to the time necessary to develop the skills required to interview well. Likewise, the skills of the moderator are critical to the success of a focus group—for example: managing disagreements; ensuring the discussion is not dominated by one participant; ensuring the discussion stays on track; or resisting the temptation to interject with their own opinion (Beyea & Nicoll, 2000). Grønkjær et al. (2011) highlight a fundamental challenge with capturing the dynamics of focus group discussions in that findings are typically reported using quotations from one individual at a time, potentially giving the impression that individual perspectives can be separated from the interaction between other group members (Duggleby, 2005; Wibeck et al., 2007).

Despite the challenges of interviews and focus groups, I considered them to be the most appropriate method given the research aim of understanding the overall experience of creativity rather than specific, daily experiences of creativity. The document review of the staff survey and culture capture workshops provided the perspectives and views of a wider population than the interviews and focus groups. Furthermore, the meeting observation and document reviews provided the opportunity to triangulate the findings from earlier phases of data collection and explore any dissonance between what was said in the interviews and focus groups and what was demonstrated by behaviours in meetings or reflected in the documents examined. Given the research interest in the systemic nature of creativity, the opportunity to examine different perspectives was helpful.

### ***Different Populations and Cultural Backgrounds***

Given the aim of the research was to consider complexity, the interaction of socio-cultural and individual levels of creativity, and to consider the MERMA-ID model as a third wave PP model of creativity and wellbeing, the inclusion of a broader range of ethnic backgrounds and cultural variation in the research could have explored the potential impact of cross-cultural influences on perceptions of tensions and polarities, and ways of coping. Studies 1 and 2 explored the experience of some creative people in some UK- and North American-based creative organisations. And as the primary participant in Study 3, I am a white British citizen. Cross-cultural influences on perceived tensions, polarities and

coping mechanisms may have differed significantly from the findings provided in the Study 1 interviews and the Study 2 case study.

Research points to different cultural definitions and approaches to creativity. For example, Shao et al. (2019) note that collectivist cultures – a category which most Eastern cultures tend to fall into (Hofstede et al., 2010) – prioritise the “usefulness /appropriateness” aspect of creativity, whereas Western (more individualistic) social norms prioritise novelty and originality. Eastern cultures are also typically more willing to embrace co-existing polarities than Western cultures, which tend to adopt a more analytic and linear approach (Paletz et al., 2018; Peng & Nisbett, 1999). Responses to paradoxical tensions between Western and Eastern cultures likely involve different motivational and emotional influences. Furthermore, even within a Western culture, there can be distinct subcultures (e.g., ethnic background, class, gender) that may influence the experience of tensions. Future research that examines the similarities and differences between the subjective experience of creativity across cultures would be a helpful next step.

### ***Different Job Roles / Organisation Types***

The present research scope was limited to investigating the experiences of creative workers occupying a range of creative roles, employed within Western (UK and North American)-based creative businesses, as defined by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS, 2015). Future research could explore creativity in a broader range of businesses and job roles, to consider whether the findings resonate in those settings and, if not, which factors and characteristics (e.g., of the individual, leadership style, organisational or national culture) make the difference. For example, freelance workers constitute a large part of the creative industries workforce (Easton & Beckett, 2021). It would be fascinating to understand how freelancers, whose employment status is typically more precarious, experience the creative process in a work context, given this additional level of uncertainty. And since learning is a creative and developmental process, it would be interesting to explore whether the MERMA-ID model is applicable more broadly, for example, to learning and teaching in schools. Whilst this present research explored “Pro-C” creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009), would the “mini-c” creativity typical in a school setting demonstrate the same patterns in that type of creativity as well?

The decision to focus this research on a specific population reflected a core motivation for conducting the research: to understand creativity within creative businesses. As a first exploratory study into the experiences of creativity at work, a creative population (people who described themselves as occupying creative roles within explicitly 'creative' organisations) was considered most likely to be able to talk about their experiences of being creative. Theories of "everyday" (Richards, 2007) or "mini-c" or "little-c" creativity (Kaufman & Beghetto 2009) emphasise the important role creativity and problem-solving play in daily life and, as such, a broader population could have been considered. However, a population who potentially did not have the same expectation about being creative as the participants in this study did, would likely find it more difficult to discuss their experiences of being creative at work, especially given typical misconceptions of creativity being eminent and arts-based amongst the general population (Patston et al., 2018).

Having discussed my research with other types of companies I work with, the extent to which the present research seems to resonate suggests the findings could apply well to other UK-based organisations (naturalistic generalisability: Smith, 2018; Stake & Trumbull, 1982). Just as we know that the complexities of organisational culture can impact on the experience of being creative at work, future research could explore how MERMA-ID might apply more broadly to other organisational and cultural contexts where creative problem solving and decision-making no doubt still occur. Montag et al. (2012) suggest creative performance predictors may differ depending on whether the creative performance was expected or not. Similarly, a study of non-creative populations may demonstrate different tensions to a creative population. For example, if an individual's identity is not closely aligned to being creative, workers in "non-creative" businesses might react differently when their work is used purely to generate revenue, as what makes these employees feel valued may differ (Claxton, 2014). The style of leadership required to support creativity in an environment where it is not a key activity may differ from that required in an environment where it is (Vessey et al., 2014).

### ***Cross Sectional/Longitudinal Research***

Even though the research was conducted over multiple months (Study 1: 3 months, Study 2: 18 months, Study 3: throughout the whole PhD timeline), the studies were cross-sectional, and therefore only capture a 'moment in time' (Bechhofer & Paterson, 2000). A

longitudinal research design might in future be used to better consider how the experience of creativity develops or changes over time. Researching at a different point in time may have produced a different perspective. For example, I am aware that the case study organisation underwent significant organisational change following the conclusion of my research. Had the research been conducted at that stage, the participants' experience of creativity and their leaders' attitudes to creativity may have differed. I would be curious to go back to the case study organisation and see how the organisational change may have impacted attitudes towards creativity and the lived experience of being creative.

### ***Recommendations for Future Research & Application***

#### ***A Mixed-Methods Study***

All qualitative (and quantitative) methods have their strengths and weaknesses. Arguably, one of the strongest research paradigms is one that combines the best of several different approaches while mitigating against their respective weaknesses, (i.e., a mixed methods design) with the generalizability of quantitative research, and the in-depth analysis of participants' voices obtained from qualitative research. Future research could expand on the qualitative results of the present studies, in order to empirically test the MERMA-ID model across a broad range of occupations and cultural settings. The research design could include the development of a MERMA-ID scale and a questionnaire or further interviews in other settings and with different populations to gather further data on the experience of creativity.

#### ***MERMA-ID Scale***

It is envisaged that a MERMA-ID scale would build on existing resources such as the PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016), which measures wellbeing based on Seligman's (2011) PERMA model, and therefore the design and testing process would mirror those used for PERMA. The PERMA-Profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) has been tested in recent studies and with various populations. For example, Bartholomaeus et al. (2020) assessed the PERMA-Profiler's factor structure, scale reliability and convergent and discriminant validity with 1942 Australian adults, finding acceptable reliability for the domains, except engagement, which displayed low reliability. The authors suggested that the three items in the PERMA Profiler relating to Engagement were not sufficient to provide an accurate



measure of that element. Watanabe et al. (2018) tested the profiler with a sample of 396 Japanese workers. The confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated adequate reliability and validity across the five PERMA dimensions. Similarly, testing of the scale amongst German-speaking adults (Wammerl et al., 2019) and Italian university students (Giangrasso, 2021) showed acceptable reliability and good construct validity.

In the MERMA-ID scale, Engagement would be replaced with Motivation, and new questions would be developed. A starting point for the Motivation questions might be Sheldon and Deci's (1993) Self Determination Scale or a more recently developed Motivational Value Systems Questionnaire (MVSQ: Merk et al., 2017) that aims to help individuals identify their values and become more aware of what motivates or demotivates them in an organisational context. Whilst the PERMA-profiler (Butler & Kern, 2016) includes three questions concerning negative emotions, to reflect MERMA-ID's emphasis on both positive and negative emotions, that element could be expanded using, for example, the Scale of Positive and Negative Experience (SPANE: Diener et al., 2009) that includes six items to measure positive feelings and six to assess negative emotions. However, most emotions scales treat positive and negative as separate, dichotomising positive as desirable and negative as undesirable. The MERMA-ID scale would aim to capture the dialectic aspect of emotions by measuring the existence and intensity of mixed emotions, building on Spencer-Rodgers et al.'s (2010) study measuring the correlation between dialectical thinking and emotional complexity. In the study emotional complexity was assessed using PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule: Watson et al., 1988), and dialecticism was measured using the 14-item Dialectical Self Scale (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2008). Spencer-Rodgers et al.'s (2010) results found a causal relationship between dialecticism and emotional complexity.

The Workplace PERMA-Profiler (WPP: Kern, 2014) was developed to adjust questions from the PERMA-Profiler to assess wellbeing at work. The WPP considers respondents' experience of positive and negative emotions, how engaged they feel in their work, whether they feel connected, supported, and valued by others, whether they experience a sense of purpose in their work, and feelings of accomplishment or making progress. Jimenez et al. (2021) evaluated the factor structure of the WPP in a sample of Chinese and US workers. Their results exhibited a weak measurement invariance, and the authors suggested an improved organisational PERMA measure was needed. However, Choi et al.

(2019) assessed the WPP's validity and reliability in a sample of 316 South Korean workers. Their findings demonstrated good convergent and divergent validity.

#### *MERMA-ID Questionnaire*

The MERMA-ID model was designed to provide a framework for creating an organisational culture that fosters creativity and improves employee wellbeing and therefore developing it as a psychometric questionnaire would need to offer comparable standards to existing research. Alternatives to developing a completely new MERMA-ID questionnaire already exist, including the KEYS Work Environment Inventory (KEYS: Amabile et al., 1996) or Situational Outlook Questionnaire (SOQ: Isaksen et al., 1999) which could be used to assess organisational climates conducive to creativity. KEYS (Amabile et al., 1996) considers elements of organisational environment that stimulate creativity (e.g., leader and organisational support for creativity, challenging work) and obstacles to creativity (e.g., workload pressure, organisational impediments). Amabile et al. (1996) described the conceptual model underpinning KEYS as a more specific and detailed articulation of Amabile's (1983, 1988) componential model of creativity. The SOQ (Isaksen et al., 1999) uses quantitative and qualitative methods to assess perceptions of the work environment's climate for creativity, innovation, and change, covering challenges and involvement, freedom, trust, tolerance of uncertainty and ambiguity.

Isaksen and Akkermans' (2011) used the SOQ in their exploratory study of 103 workers from various companies, industries, and countries. The results confirmed organisational climate as an intervening variable between innovation and leadership behaviour through mediation analysis and partial correlation. Ginns et al. (2021) developed a model for understanding student experience of creative school environments based on Amabile and Pratt's (2016) DCM. The model aimed to see how perceptions about the social environment affected intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation and academic and creative self-efficacy. Ginns et al. (2021) used a range of pre-existing measures, such as items from Bandura's (2001) measures of academic achievement self-efficacy, creative self-efficacy and Gnambs and Hanfstingl's (2014) measure of academic motivation for adolescents (based on Ryan and Deci's, 2000, self-determination theory). Confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated that, in line with predictions based on the componential model, intrinsic motivation acted as a mediating variable for several

pathways within the DCM (such as environmental factors, task motivation and self-efficacy). Although Ginns et al.'s (2021) study examined school environments, it may be possible to apply their methods to different populations as a measure underpinned by the DCM (Amabile & Pratt, 2016).

Whilst a number of measures capture elements of MERMA-ID, no single existing measure sufficiently captures all of MERMA-ID's components. The MERMA-ID model's I (Interconnected) element could be assessed using the Analysis-Holism Scale (AHS: Choi et al., 2007; Koo et al., 2018), which measures four dimensions: causality (i.e., everything is connected); contradiction (i.e., avoiding extremes); locus of attention (i.e., the whole is greater than the sum of its parts), and perception of change (i.e., situations can change at any time). Martín-Fernández et al. (2022) assessed the psychometric properties of the original 24-item AHS. They developed shortened versions of the measure – the AHS-12 (12-items) and AHS-4 (4 items) – which they argue provide a brief and concise measure. The study explored the reliability, validity, and measurement invariance of both the 12-item and 4-item AHS scale in five independent samples. The results demonstrated that both versions of the questionnaire demonstrated adequate reliability and validity on thinking styles, and measurement invariance across US and Spanish cultures.

The model's D (Dialectic) element may be captured by tolerance of ambiguity measures. Herman et al. (2010) proposed a new TA scale for international management research to consider cross-cultural phenomena and improve conceptual dimensionality and evidence of psychometric validity. Zenasni et al. (2008) used the Measurement of Ambiguity Tolerance (Stoycheva, 1998) and the Behaviour Scale of Tolerance/Intolerance of Ambiguity (Norton, 1975; Zenasni & Lubart, 2001) to examine the relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and creativity in a sample of adolescents and their parents. Alternatively, the Dialectical Self Scale (DSS: Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010) could be considered. The DSS was designed to assess self-perception of dialectical thinking and includes measures for tolerance of contradiction, cognitive change, and behavioural change. The DSS has been assessed in data sets from 21 countries, and demonstrated internal consistency reliability, test-retest reliability and good cross cultural measurement equivalence (Paletz et al., 2018). Further investigation, for example, confirmatory factor analysis, or deductive interviews would be required to evaluate the suitability of these measures for the proposed study and to triangulate against the MERMA-ID elements.

Examples of research using the DSS include Chen et al. (2013), who examined the effects of naïve dialecticism<sup>12</sup> on the psychological wellbeing of a group of participants with both an Eastern and Western (bi-cultural) background. Boucher's (2011) study used DSS to examine the effect of dialecticism on self-concept.

The aim of collecting qualitative data through an online questionnaire would be to consider the possible MERMA-ID scale's applicability and appeal in a broader range of organisational settings and a larger sample. Qualitative data on the experience of creativity in a wider range of sectors and populations may add to or challenge quantitative data obtained through application of the newly developed MERMA-ID scale, and may provide an additional perspective on how creativity is experienced. Amabile and Pratt (2016) included open-ended responses in their daily diary submissions, which provided insight into aspects of work-life that encouraged or inhibited creativity, such as clear organisational goals, and either too much or too little time. An online survey would enable participants to be more easily and more quickly recruited from a broader range of occupations, industry types and diverse cultures, allowing for greater generalisation of results.

#### *MERMA-ID as a model of general wellbeing?*

Although MERMA-ID was developed as a model of creativity, future research could explore MERMA-ID as a general wellbeing model that represents an update of the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011) to better reflect second and third wave positive psychology theory. Research examined PERMA's validity in a range of settings and with various populations, finding acceptable validity, with the exception of the Engagement element which was not as robust (Bartholomeus et al., 2020). The primary differences between MERMA-ID and PERMA are changing Engagement to Motivation, the inclusion of both negative and positive emotions, and the exploration of the interconnected and dialectic aspects of each element. Future research could explore whether Motivation was a more robust measure than Engagement, whether the inclusion of negative emotions and the

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<sup>12</sup> naïve dialecticism is defined as a belief system characterised by the acceptance of contradiction and an expectation of change (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010)

recognition of elements of wellbeing as being interconnected and dialectic could improve PERMA's validity.

#### *Leadership Development Course*

A mixed-methods study could be used to gather more data to support the creation of a leadership development course to assist leaders in thinking through ways to lead creativity more effectively. The programme would aim to teach leaders about the complexities of creativity, recognise the tensions inherent in creativity and of being part of a social system, and emphasise the importance of compassionate leadership that creates a psychologically safe space to cope with uncertainty. The course would aim to bring awareness to leaders about the importance of so-called softer leadership skills. The course would incorporate aspects of PP, POS and positive leadership, emphasising the importance of secure relationships, meaning and meaningful work, and positive communication in fostering a climate conducive to creativity. Both KEYS (Amabile et al., 1996) and the SOQ (Isaksen et al., 1999) could be used as a method of assessing which aspects of an organisation's culture are likely to be conducive to creativity.

#### **Original Contributions**

In summary, this research makes the following contributions to creativity theory and positive psychology scholarship:

- Expanding Amabile and Pratt's (2016) and Csíkszentmihályi's (1988) social and systemic models of creativity by highlighting the subjective, phenomenological experience of being creative at work, considering how the individual and broader organisational context contribute to this. By explicitly examining the emotional experience of creativity, I further contribute a theoretical perspective that considers the impact of being creative on employee wellbeing, the impact of emotions on creative production and how the experience of creativity affects the functioning of organisational systems.
- Proposing MERMA-ID as a third wave, positive psychology model of creativity that reflects the dialectic and interconnected nature of creativity, re-establishing creativity as a core pillar of PP theorising and updating current wellbeing models.

- Blending social and systemic creativity theories, second/third wave PP, systems theory, and paradox theory research to present an original, cross-disciplinary understanding of creativity that provides a broader understanding of how creativity may be experienced and influenced within the workplace.
- Contributing to positive organisational scholarship (Cameron et al., 2003) by articulating the individual and systemic (managerial/work culture) experiences of creativity and describing systemic tensions. Furthermore, the research highlights how managers might behave to lead creativity more effectively.

### **Practical Impact, Relevance and Consequences**

The research aimed to be of value both theoretically and practically. There are several conversations I would like to initiate in the future about creativity in the workplace and positive psychology, based on the knowledge gleaned from these studies:

- Highlighting ways in which managers can be supported to understand the impact of their language and behaviour on other people and how language impacts (and can be reflective of) the lived experience of being creative at work.
- Encouraging people to talk about the emotional and relational complexity involved in being creative so that leaders can support their employees' wellbeing. Similarly, I would like to encourage employees at all levels to talk about emotions, especially the difficult ones and to do so knowing that they will be supported with empathy.
- Considering how MERMA-ID could be used as a model for developing an organisational culture that enables creativity and employees to thrive.

### **Closing Thoughts**

As a reflexive researcher, I have asked myself what I might do differently if I started this research again. It is a difficult question to answer. The research is a product of the choices I made, shaped by my developing capability as an independent researcher and constrained, at times, by competing priorities of work and home life. Would I have reached the same conclusions had I completed the PhD full-time or had the breadth and depth of research capability and subject knowledge I now have? At the end of this PhD process, I am a different person from when I started. As Gabriel (2015, p. 3) states, “a

consciously reflexive researcher is aware that in undertaking a serious piece of research, they embark on a journey whose end will see them emerge as different subjects.”

The anthropologist and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston (2010, p.283) described research as “formalised curiosity.” The motivation to conduct this research was curiosity about how organisations might better help facilitate creativity and what it felt like to be creative at work, and, in part, to make sense of my professional experience of leadership within creative organisations. My lasting impression from this research is that creativity is grounded in the complexities of being human: a preference for certainty, a reluctance to feel and show vulnerability, and the need to have meaningful relationships. To imagine something that has not existed before is difficult, even more so in the context of systems that appear to prefer stability, predictability, minimal risk, and emotion. Against that backdrop, people are asked to be creative at work, which requires them to go against their own and their co-workers’/leaders’ basic human needs for safety and belonging. Instead, they deliberately court and manage uncertainty whilst somehow coping with the creative process’ emotional highs and lows, often on their own. By considering the subjective phenomenological experience of being creative, what it feels like to be creative at work, this research has offered ways for leaders to change their perspective and behaviours to better enhance the likelihood of creativity happening and, in doing so, enhance the wellbeing of their employees.

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## Appendix A

### Coding Report Example

This appendix shows an excerpt of a report containing coded text for each potential theme. A sample of coded text for the Study 1 theme *The Value of Creativity* is provided as an example.

Code	Pieces of coded text
Valuing creativity	24
Undervaluing creativity	19
Feeling valued	11

## Valuing creativity

”

[Pause] In words? [laughs] So, a lot of lip service for it. To a way, umm, so what they do is they put money behind somethings that some other businesses wouldn't.

Source: *Participant 1*

”

The thing is, you've sometimes got to, the world we live in you've got to try and be less worried about yeah, how many likes you get on an Instagram, that's the sort of new currency of how, how, what's the worth of something that's creative.

Source: *Participant 2*

”

Creativity, umm [pause] I don't think creativity is, I think, being a Dad and seeing my sons at school I don't think creativity, I don't think creativity is given the importance it should be,

Source: *Participant 2*

”

[pause] I think [sigh] I have...ummm...It's difficult to say because it's such a big organisation, and I know that a few members of staff do, and that's why I'm here because I don't think I'd be here unless a certain few people did value creativity, and yeah, but they are, umm, [sigh] I feel like the organisation is going in a direction, I've spoken to a few other people about it, of the other, not becoming less and less creative and less and less willing to give creative responsibilities to younger members of staff,

Source: *Participant 3*

”

but obviously [name] he really does value, I don't know if he's particularly creative, but I think he values people who think differently, basically, but obviously he's gone, kind of gone.

Source: *Participant 3*

”

What do you most dislike or find frustrating about creativity?  
P: That it can be perceived as fluff.

Source: *Participant 11*

”

what makes you say that you think that they undervalue it?

P: I think the time that you're given to do it, the expectation of how long it takes to do certain things, oh you can just do that. Like, when you say 'just' anything it undervalues the process or the, yeah, the process that it takes and the input that is needed to do something at a high level.

Source: *Participant 10*

”

Umm, incubation I think is really important, it's a really important part of creativity and it's the least valued part of it and actually, it's the most important bit.

Source: *Participant 9*

”

If you're not fostering that at all, then you're losing your own, you're losing money. It's just, it seems, it seems like such a simple equation to me and I don't understand why nobody else seems to, seems to understand that [laughing] and that's, that's again frustrating.

Source: *Participant 9*

”

But it is all worth it because you still get to be creative and I can imagine maybe, you know, I certainly wouldn't want to be a creative in this place that's been told that their stuff was being given out for free, that's not very exciting.

Source: *Participant 8*

”

and I suppose it's nothing to do with creativity I suppose that's about an organisation just appreciating every person's part of the cog, because you know, once one cog's broken and things slip right, the machine slips so....

Source: *Participant 4*

”

We're never, ever included. Ever. Ever. I've never been any organisation anywhere, I've been in everything from a printing company to beauty, banks, everything. The creative teams are never included with anyone else, I mean in big meetings or whatever, with anyone else. We're not included so, yeah, I don't know.

Source: *Participant 1*

”

it's not I just don't feel...a lot of, kind of, the things that I've done, I haven't really got, like, widespread credit for, like I wrote this diversity newsletter and then it was turned into something else and I wasn't, and I just don't think that I'm taken seriously

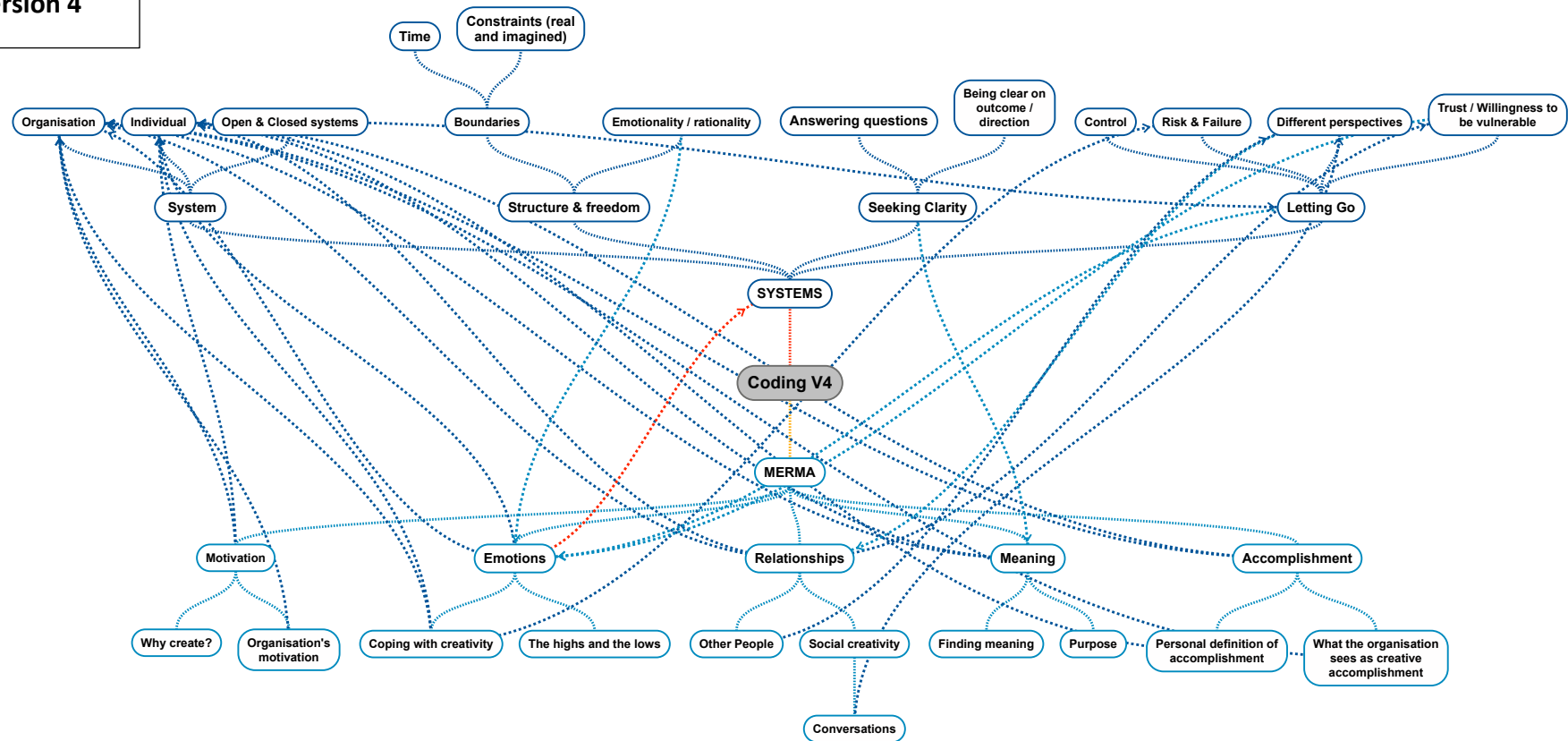
Source: *Participant 3*

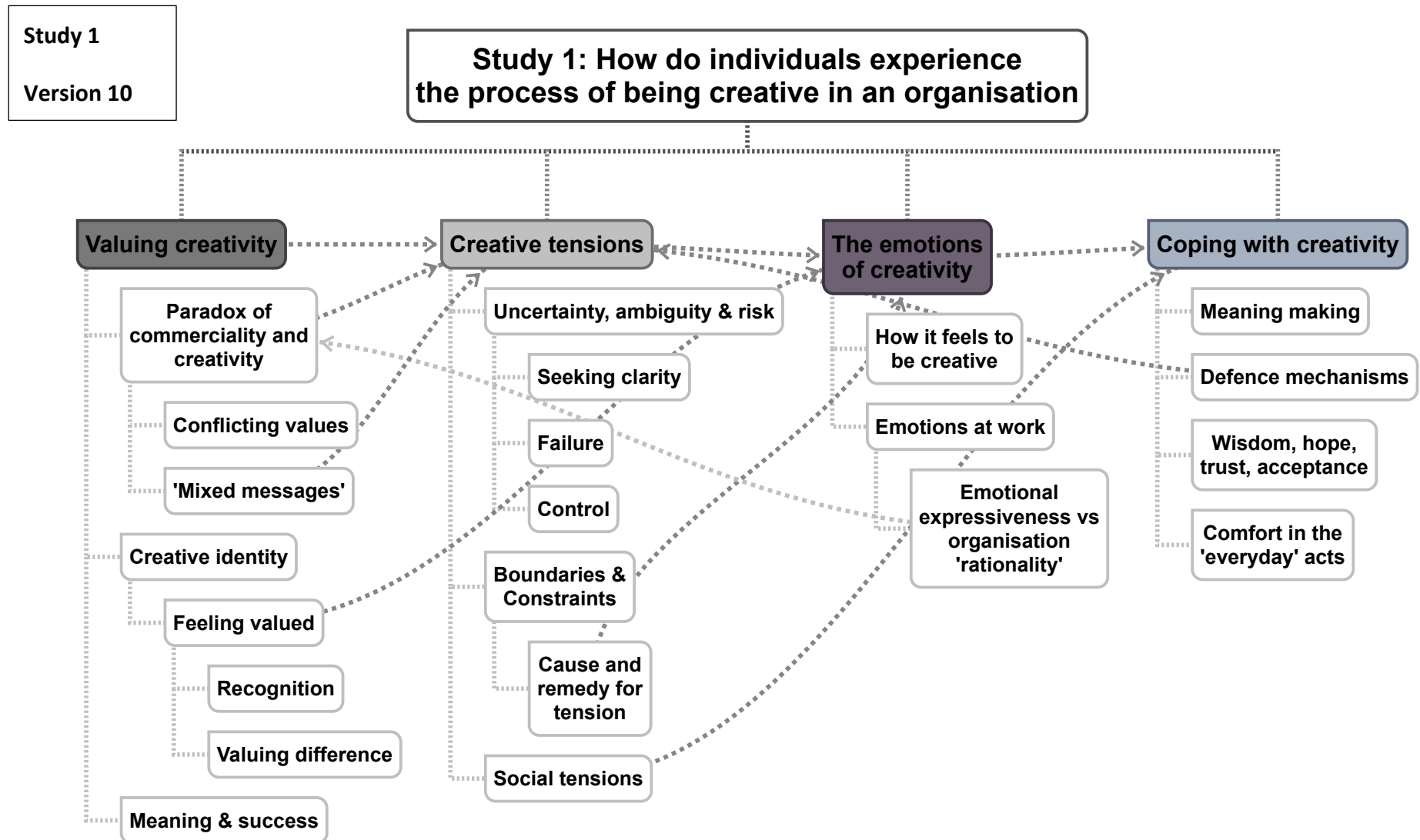
## Appendix B

## How the Themes Developed

## Study 1

## Version 4



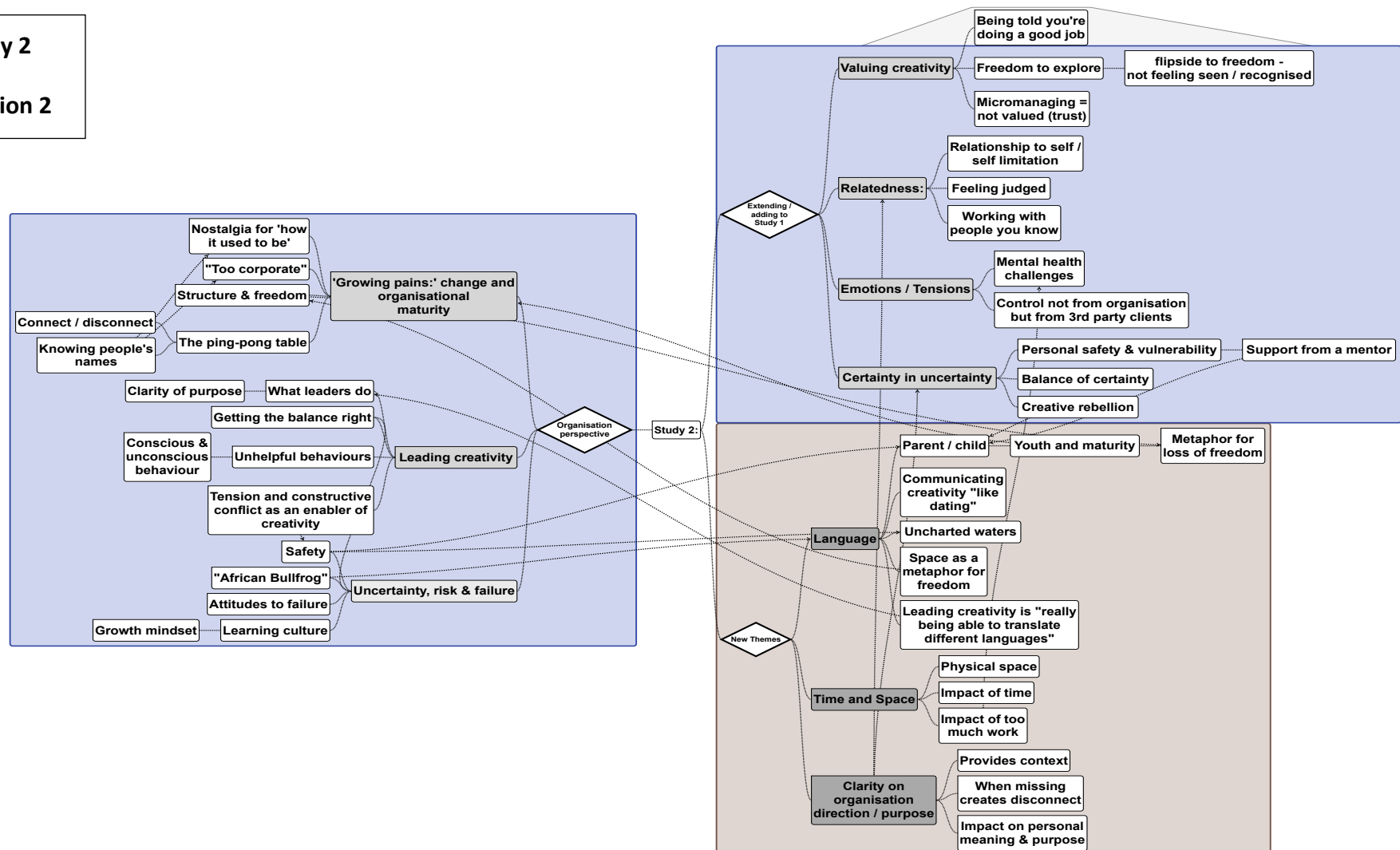


## Appendix B – Thematic Development Maps

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Study 2

Version 2





## Appendix B – Thematic Development Maps

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Study 2

Version 8

### Study 2 Themes Sept 20

How do S1 and S2 differ?

- Leaders were creatives
- Less of a gap between creativity and commerciality (why?)
- Learning culture

### Balancing internal forces: Polarities in the system

#### Paradox of growth and creativity

##### Now and Then

"How it used to be"

Process / structure

Freedom & constraint

Too corporate

Behaviour of leaders?

##### Symbols of change

The ping-pong table as a symbol of change

##### Connection / disconnection

Clarity on direction

Impact vs intent

#### Safety & vulnerability / Risk

##### Parent / child

Downside of mothership metaphor

##### Certainty / uncertainty

Individual insecurity & defences / see the role not the person

Seeing the world through different lenses

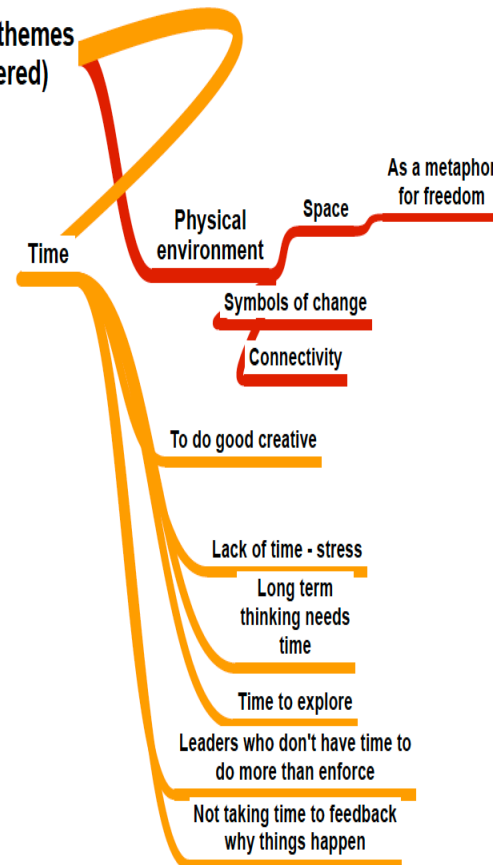
Learning / failure

#### Other polarities not covered

Leadership / creativity

Commerciality / creativity

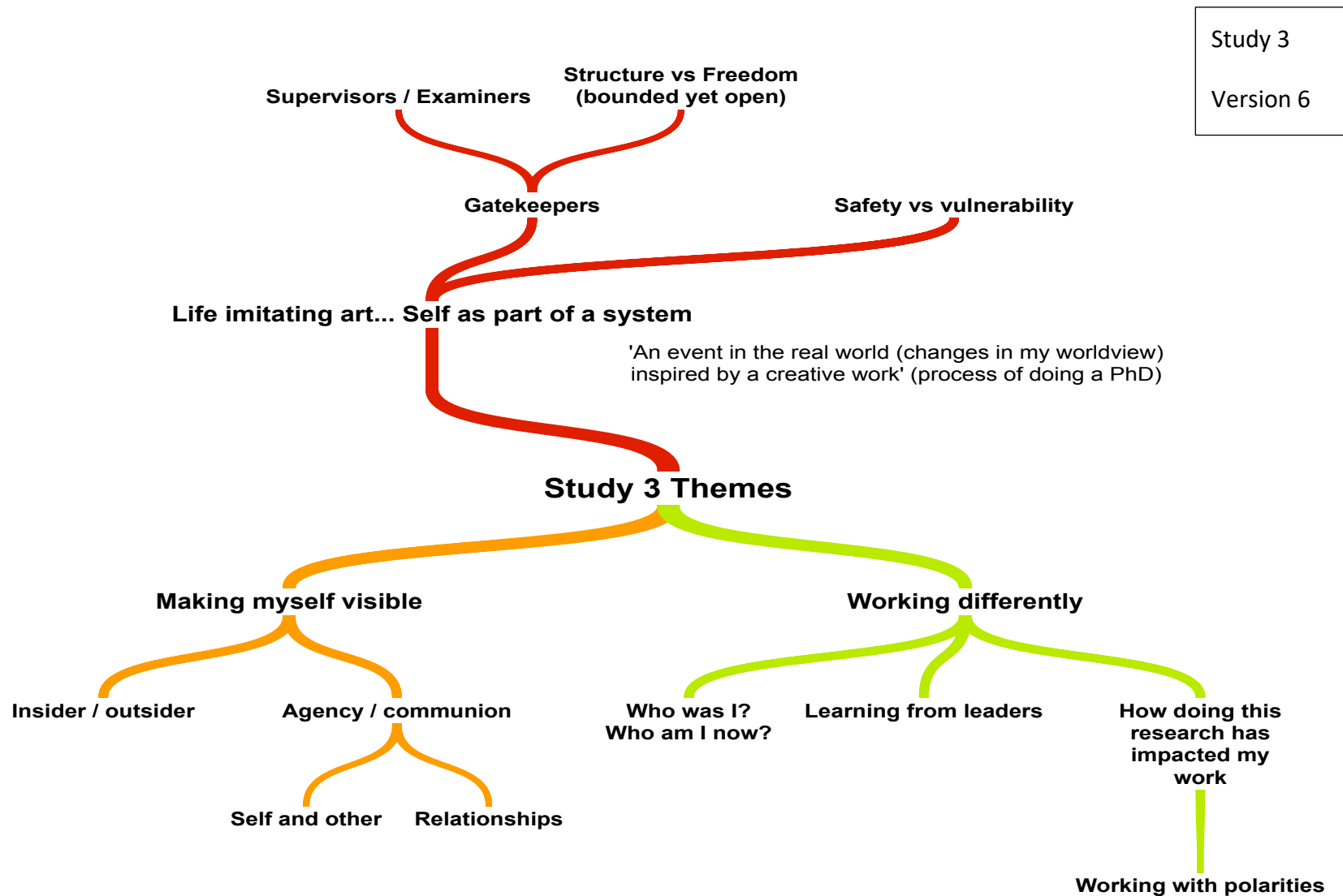
Additional themes (not covered)



Study 3

Version 3





**Appendix C**  
**Study 1 Ethics Pack**

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## Research Ethics Panel Application form

## Section 1: Researcher details

## 1.1 Contact details of researcher

Title	Ms	Forename	Diane	Surname	Herbert
Department: Psychology				E-mail: diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk	
				Tel. No./Ext	
Status:	Employee	Postgraduate Research	Postgraduate Taught	Undergraduate	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

## 1.2 Co-applicants (please include everyone who will be involved in the research project, including research assistants)

Name	Post held	Organisation
n/a		

## Section 2: Project details

## 2.1 Project title and timescale

Title	How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?
Proposed start date:	1 <sup>st</sup> October 2017
Proposed end date: (of data collection)	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2017

## 2.2 Costs and funding

<i>Please indicate the total costs and source of funding (if applicable):</i>
n/a

## 2.3 Brief project description

This study is part of my PhD research, the aim of which is to explore the process of creativity in order to better understand how creative individuals cope with, transcend,
--

and thrive within an environment of polarity<sup>13</sup>, paradox<sup>14</sup> and tension and what that may tell us about how organisations may be able to facilitate creativity more generally.

The study explores the emotional dimension of creativity and paradox, within the ‘MERMA’<sup>15</sup> framework, which I am suggesting represents five essential elements of creativity within organisations. The standard definition of creativity is defined as “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996).

Whilst creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society, the creative process can be uncertain, contradictory and a source of tension (A. J. Cropley, 1997). This research examines how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. It is a useful starting point because it will explore how it feels to be creative within an organisation, how creative people cope when situations are uncertain or ambiguous, how the organisational culture fosters creativity and how it copes with the challenges of the creative process.

Emotions are recognised as being important to creativity, their relationship being complex and, at times, contradictory (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). Research which explores the relationship between emotions and an individual’s capacity to cope, or indeed thrive, with paradox and uncertainty will be helpful in painting a complete picture of how individuals juggle polarities such as idea generation and idea implementation within their organisation (W. K. Smith & Tushman, 2005). This research will build on existing theory by exploring creativity and paradox from the perspective of individuals within the context of their organisation. Whereas there is a significant body of research on the paradoxes of innovation in organisations, there is scant research on the paradoxes of creativity in organisations (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al. 2011), and less still that explores creativity from the perspective of the individual. Innovation and creativity are closely linked concepts, however, innovation is defined as the “successful implementation of creative ideas within an organisation” (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The extant literature on paradox and innovation focuses on how the organisation recognises and responds to paradox from a cognitive perspective. This study is different in that it is specifically interested in how *individuals* experience and cope with the process of creativity within an organisational context which has not, to my knowledge, been explored to date.

---

<sup>13</sup> Polarity is defined as the presence or manifestation of two opposite or contrasting principles or tendencies (retrieved from dictionary.com)

<sup>14</sup> Paradox is defined as a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality, expresses a possible truth (retrieved from dictionary.com)

<sup>15</sup> ‘MERMA’ (Motivation, Emotions, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) is inspired by PERMA (Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, Accomplishment) which Seligman (2011) proposes represent the five essential elements of authentic and sustained wellbeing.

This study will look at how creative individuals respond to and cope with the emotional dimension of paradox and polarity within the creative process, and what that might tell us about how to facilitate creativity within organisations more generally.

The research will study:

- The individual's experience of the emotional or 'feeling' aspects of creativity.
- Individuals' perceptions of paradox, polarity, and tension within the creative process.
- The extent to which individuals may be conscious of the polarities and paradoxes of creativity.

Data collection will be through semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of individuals working in creative roles in organisations. They will be asked:

- To reflect on their experiences of being creative
- Their feelings about, and attitude towards ambiguity, contradiction, and risk within the creative process
- How they cope with any feelings that might arise as a consequence of uncertainty and the contradictory nature of creativity.

The interviews will be up to 90 minutes' duration, will be audio-recorded, transcribed, verified by the participants, anonymised, and analysed using thematic analysis. The participants will be individuals who are working within a creative role in an organisation that is part of the 'creative industries' (as defined by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2015)<sup>16</sup>. The recruitment of participants will be either through a key contact within an organisation (such as the HR Director or CEO) or via indirect networks and, if needed, social media.

---

<sup>a</sup>architecture; crafts; design: product, graphic and fashion design; film, TV, video, radio, and photography; IT, software, and computer services; publishing; museums, galleries, and libraries.

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### Section 3: Research Design

#### 3.1: Methodology/Methods

Please check boxes for all methodology/methods that you plan to use:

	<b>Methodologies</b>	
A	Case study	<input type="checkbox"/>
B	Ethnography	<input type="checkbox"/>
C	Life history/narrative	<input type="checkbox"/>
D	Action research	<input type="checkbox"/>
E	Participatory Research	<input type="checkbox"/>
F	Dialogic enquiry	<input type="checkbox"/>
G	Positivist-Statistical	<input type="checkbox"/>
H	Generic qualitative	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I	Other methodology: Please give details	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<b>Methods</b>	
A	Written questionnaires	<input type="checkbox"/>
B	Semi-structured interviews	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
C	Unstructured interviews	<input type="checkbox"/>
D	Focus groups	<input type="checkbox"/>
E	Observation	<input type="checkbox"/>
F	Analysis of pre-existing data from human participants (where this data is sensitive or could be identifiable)	<input type="checkbox"/>
G	Audio/video recording or photography in a public place	<input type="checkbox"/>
H	Audio/video recording or photography in a private place	<input type="checkbox"/>
I	Quantitative experiment	<input type="checkbox"/>
J	Other method: please give details	<input type="checkbox"/>



### 3.2 Research design

It is envisaged that an estimated number of 10 participants will be interviewed. Data collection will be through semi-structured interviews, allowing me to explore responses further and for unplanned themes to be drawn from the data.

The interviews will last up to 90 minutes and will be conducted privately in a mutually agreed location. My supervisor will be briefed on a case-by-case basis and safety considerations for me as a researcher and for the participants will be taken into account.

The interview questions and structure have been developed from a range of creativity and paradox theory (Appendix 1). Analysis will be inductively driven by patterns found in the participants' experience.

The participants will be asked to reflect on their experience of creativity both personally and within an organisational setting. Within this study, the emphasis will be on the emotional or 'feeling' aspects of the creative process. Participants will be asked to reflect on their feelings about, and attitude towards contradiction, risk, and uncertainty within the creative process.

The interviews will be audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, and taken back or sent to the participants to verify. They will then be anonymised and analysed using thematic analysis.

### 3.3 Ethical implications

This study will be conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's *Code of Human Research Ethics*. Full details of the study will be explained to participants through an information sheet (Appendix 2) and also verbally prior to obtaining the participant's signed consent (Appendix 3).

- The participants will be reminded that:
- The interview will be audio-recorded.
- Their data will be held in the strictest confidence and will be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention
- That they will not be personally identifiable, nor will the organisation in which they are working.
- That the purpose of the interview is for them to reflect on their experience of creativity on a personal level as well as within their organisation.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the interviews may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations.
- It will be explained to them that they can withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty and without having to give a reason, up until the point that the data are analysed (March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2018).

It is not anticipated that the nature of the interviews will cause any psychological distress. However, given the nature of the interviews which are exploring the conscious or unconscious existence of paradox and polarity within creativity, I will remain sensitive to the possibility that participants may become emotional during the interview and will pause, and if needed, terminate the interview were that necessary or if the participant chooses.

At the end of the interview, once the recorder has been stopped, the participants will be given space to reflect and discuss the interview should they wish to do so. They will be fully debriefed and offered possible sources of support should they feel that necessary (Appendix 4).

### 3.4 Risks to research team

It is not envisaged that these interviews will pose any specific risk and will take place with individuals in their place of work or in public locations. However, reasonable safety precautions will be adopted including following the Lone Worker Protocol (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm>). My supervisor will be provided with a copy of my interview schedule, the location of the interview and a contact mobile number. I will also notify my supervisor on conclusion of each interview.

### 3.5 Dissemination

A summary of the findings from this study will be disseminated to participants upon request. The findings may be shared at appropriate University fora such as the Positive Psychology Symposium or the Research Student's Conference. I will also write a paper with the aim of it being published in a peer-reviewed journal.

## Section 4: Participants and Recruitment

### Section 4.1: Participants

Purposive sampling will be used to select participants. They will be individuals who describe themselves as working within a creative role in an organisation that describes creativity as being critical to their business success. I will seek to recruit participants from a range of levels within the organisation as there may be differences in how they experience and cope with the creative process.

Given that the aim of the research is to explore the phenomenon of creativity, the interviewees need to be individuals who can reflect on their thoughts and feelings about being creative. It is envisaged that organisations are likely to be drawn predominantly from the 'creative industries' (e.g., advertising, architecture, fashion design, television and film production).

All participants will be over 18 years of age.

### Section 4.2: Recruitment method

Recruitment of participants will be conducted in accordance with the University's Guidance for Recruitment of Participants for Research.

As an HR professional, I have access to an extensive direct and indirect network which will be used to assist recruitment of participants. The two primary methods of recruitment are as follows:

Through a key contact or Gatekeeper (e.g., the HR Director or CEO) within organisations. The gatekeeper within the organisation will be formally approached to request permission to interview a number of their employees (Appendix 5). Recognising that

participants may prefer for the interview to take place at the workplace and during the working day, the Gatekeeper will be specifically asked to confirm that they are happy for this to happen. If the participants would prefer for the interview not to take place at work, a suitable location will be selected, taking into account safety considerations for myself and the participant.

The Gatekeeper will be asked to send out an email on my behalf (Appendix 6) requesting participants to volunteer for the study and to contact me directly via my Bucks email address if they are interested in participating, so that the Gatekeeper will be unaware of who has participated.

Through a key contact within the 'Creative Industries' who will be provided with information about the study and my Bucks email address which they will forward to individuals that might be interested in participating (Appendix 7).

Once the key contact has passed on my contact details, it will be for the potential participant to decide whether or not to contact me for further information. Their decision to contact me, or not, will remain confidential. If the potential participants do choose to contact me, they will be sent the 'email to prospective participants' (Appendix 6) providing details of the study. Should they decide to participate, a mutually acceptable location for the interview will be agreed, taking into account safety considerations for myself and the participant.

Should these two approaches not yield sufficient participants, I will recruit participants using selected online platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and Twitter). If social media platforms are used to recruit participants, full details (Appendix 8) will be provided either directly on the post, space allowing, or a link to my Bucks email address will be provided so that potential participants can request further information.

#### **Section 4.3: Vulnerability**

This study does not involve recruiting participants from a vulnerable population. However, I recognise that the act of reflection sometimes prompts feelings of vulnerability, and I will monitor the state of interviewees, should additional sensitivity be needed.

#### **Section 4.4: Incentives**

No incentives will be offered to participants; however, a summary of the research findings will be available upon request.

#### **Section 4.5: Permission / Gatekeeper**

Where recruitment of participants takes place via a key contact within an organisation, permission will be sought from the Gatekeeper. An initial conversation or email exchange will take place to provide details of the study and to answer any immediate questions. This will be followed up by a formal email providing further detail about the study (Appendix 5) and requesting permission to recruit participants. Permission will be obtained in writing via email from the Gatekeeper (e.g., HR Director or CEO). The Gatekeeper will be provided with an email requesting volunteers to participate in the research (Appendix 6) which they will be asked to send out on my behalf. Prospective participants will be provided with my Bucks email address to which they can respond, expressing their interest in participating, should they wish to do so. The confidentiality of

participants (or those expressing interest / requesting information) will be maintained and will not be shared with the Gatekeeper.

### Section 5: Consent procedure

This section will demonstrate how you will obtain informed consent from the participants. *Please include all supporting documents (e.g., Information Sheets, Consent forms and questionnaires).* Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to **each** of the following:

		Yes	No	N/A
5.1	All respondents will be given an Information Sheet and enough time to read it before being asked to agree to participate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	All participants taking part in an interview, focus group, observation (or other activity which is not questionnaire-based) will be asked to sign a consent form.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3	All participants completing a questionnaire will be informed on the Information Sheet that returning the completed questionnaire implies consent to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.4	All participants being asked to provide sensitive personal data will have the following statement on the consent form or on the bottom of their questionnaire "I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998". A tick box should be included to allow participants to give explicit consent for the collection and use of such data.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5	All respondents will be told that they can withdraw at any time, ask for their interview tape to be destroyed and/or their data removed from the project until it is no longer practical to do so (e.g., when the report has been written up).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6	Where full information cannot be given prior to participation (because it could influence outcomes) participants will be fully debriefed after participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.7	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

### Section 6: Confidentiality, Anonymity & Data and Records Management

This section will show how participants can expect confidentiality and/or anonymity and will show how any research data collected will be managed during and after the study. *Confidential data is not disclosed to other people; Anonymous data cannot be linked to the participant's personal details. Confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed in the event of disclosure of illegal activity or unsafe practice.*

Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to each of the following:				
		Yes	No	N/A
6.1	Questionnaires will be returned anonymously and indirectly. Please note that questionnaire data cannot then be followed up/clarified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Questionnaires and/or interview transcripts will only be identifiable by a unique identifier (e.g., code/pseudonym)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Data will be stored securely and lists of identity number or pseudonyms linked to names and/or addresses will be stored securely and separately from research data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.4	All place names and institutions which could lead to the identification of individuals or organisations will be changed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.5	I confirm that all processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) ( <i>including the Data Protection Principles</i> )	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.6	Consideration has been given to the limitations of confidentiality e.g., disclosure of illegal behaviour or unsafe practice.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.7	I confirm that processing of all security sensitive information will be in full compliance with the "Oversight of security - sensitive research material in UK universities: guidance (October 2012)" (Universities UK, recommended by the Association of Chief Police Officers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.8	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

### Section 7: Authorisation

*Authorisation of this application indicates satisfaction that the details are accurate, the proposed methods are appropriate, ethical concerns have been considered and that time and resources are available for the research to take place. The authoriser accepts responsibility for the applicant who is undertaking the work.*

**For Bucks employees:** Signed: ..... (Line manager)

Date .....

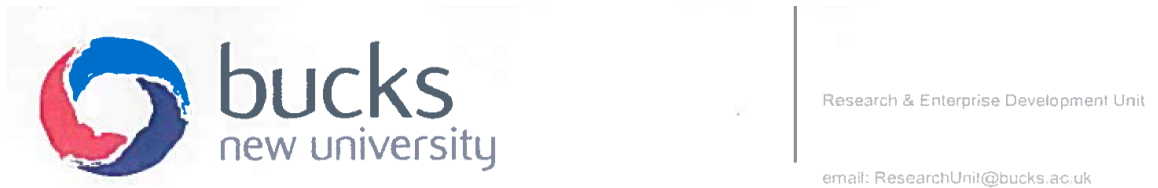
**For postgraduate researchers, postgraduate taught students, and undergraduate students:**

Signed ..... (Supervisor)

Date .....

*If original signatures are not supplied, the applicant must forward an email from the line manager / supervisor including the above authorisation statement.*

## Ethics Approval Letter



18 September 2017

Mrs Diane Herbert  
10 The Crest  
Bledlow Ridge  
High Wycombe  
HP14 4AQ

Dear Diane

**Ethical approval: Ref UEP2017Sep01**

I am writing to confirm that ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Panel of Buckinghamshire New University on 15 September 2017 for your project:

"How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?"

This approval is valid for data collection between 1 October and 31 December 2017.

Please ensure that you quote the above reference number as evidence of ethical approval and in all materials used to recruit participants.

The Research and Enterprise Development Unit must be notified of any amendments to the proposed research or any extension to the period of data collection.

I hope that your research project goes well.

Yours sincerely,

Dr M. Nakisa

Secretary to the University Research Ethics Panel  
Research and Enterprise Development Unit

Buckinghamshire New University  
High Wycombe Campus  
Queen Alexandra Road  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire HP11 2JZ

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Twitter: @bucks.ac.uk  
Facebook: bucks.ac.uk/facebook  
bucks.ac.uk

**Interview Schedule**

**How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?**

**Warm-Up Questions**

Could you tell me a little about yourself?

What is your role within the organisation?

How long have you worked for this organisation?

**Personal Experience of the Creative Process**

Could you tell me about your experience of the creative process?

*Prompt:* What is it like for you?

*Prompt:* What are the best parts of the creative process for you?

*Prompt:* What are the 'darker' (or less positive) parts of the process for you?

**Motivation**

What do you feel motivates / inspires you to be creative?

How do you feel about situations where the demands are uncertain or without clear boundaries?

How do uncertain situations affect your motivation to create?

Do you feel that your organisation values creativity?

*Prompt:* (Either way) How do you know?

*Prompt:* What do you feel the organisation does to encourage creativity within the workplace?

*Prompt:* What does it do that you feel discourages or hinders it?

To what extent do you feel you have time to be creative?

**Emotions**

What role do you feel that emotions play in your creativity?

What do you most enjoy about being creative?

What do you most dislike (or find frustrating) about being creative?

What, if anything, causes you tension within the creative process? How do you cope with that tension?

Have you ever faced a situation where there was no clear answer during a creative task?

*Prompt:* How did that make you feel / What emotions does it stir in you?

*Prompt:* How do you cope with uncertainty? What do you do about it?

To what extent do you feel that creativity involves contradictions in your experience?

To what extent do you believe the organisation is comfortable with situations where there is no clear answer?

**Relationships**

How important are relationships for your creativity?

To what extent would you say that conversations with others help you to be creative?

How comfortable are you asking for help from other people when you need it?

Are there opportunities to get external or very different perspectives via links to peers in other departments, organisations, conferences, etc.?

### **Meaning**

Do you feel the work you do here is meaningful?

*Prompt:* In what way?

*Prompt:* What do you think it means to do meaningful work?

What do you see as the purpose and/or ethos of the organisation?

Is there anything that makes you uncertain about that purpose?

How closely do you feel that the organisation's purpose aligns with your own?

How important do you feel creativity and fostering novel ideas is to the ethos / purpose of the organisation?

### **Accomplishment**

How comfortable do you feel about taking risks when it comes to being creative?

How do you feel when a creative project you're working on fails?

*Prompt:* Can you tell me about a time when a project didn't work out?

How comfortable do you feel the organisation is with taking creative risks?

How does the organisation respond to failures, both emotionally and procedurally?

*Prompt:* Can you give me an example?

*Prompt:* Is there a difference in how different people in the organisation react? (e.g., managers/CEOs vs. other creative workers?)

How do you personally define creative success?

How does the organisation define creative success?

When you are being creative, what gives you a sense of accomplishment?

*Prompt:* Can you give me an example of a creative success / accomplishment you're particularly proud of, and why?

30. How does the organisation respond to creative successes?

### **Wind-Down Questions:**

31. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?



## Participant Information Sheet

### How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?

This participant information sheet contains information about this study, so that you are able to make an *informed* decision about whether you wish to take part.

### Background and aims of the study

Creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society; however, the creative process can also be a source of tension. The aim of this study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative - its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

### Why am I being invited to participate?

I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process.

### What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your feelings about, and attitude towards your creative process. The discussion will be recorded on an encrypted device and then transferred to a password-protected computer, with the information being immediately deleted from any mobile devices following transfer.

### Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part; your participation is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw yourself and/or your data from the study at any time and without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be March 31, 2018.

### Will my data be identifiable?

The data you provide will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times:

Audio recordings and hard copies of any data will be anonymised. The files on the computer will be encrypted and the computer itself is password-protected.

The data will be kept in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.

Any identifiable information will be removed from the data, including names of individuals and organisations in which they work.

Anonymised direct quotations from the interviews may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations.

All of your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.

**What will happen to the data after the interview?**

The anonymised data will be analysed, and the findings will be summarised and may be presented in a research paper or in the final thesis. The findings may be presented at academic or research conferences and submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal or book.

**Who has reviewed the project?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Panel at Buckinghamshire New University (Ref UEP2017Sep01).

**How do I contact the researcher and / or obtain further information about the study?**

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher)

email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)

or

Dr Piers Worth (Supervisor)

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk)

Department of Psychology

Buckinghamshire New University

Queen Alexandra Road

High Wycombe

Buckinghamshire

HP11 2JZ

Tel. 01494 522 141 ext. 425

**Consent Form**

**How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?**

***The purpose of this consent form is to ensure that you are informed about the background and aims of the research, your right to confidentiality and your agreement to proceed with the research.***

***Please tick each box***

I have read and understood the participant information sheet..... ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project  
and I am satisfied with the answers I received..... ☐

I understand that taking part in the project will involve an interview of up to  
90 minutes, which will be audio-recorded and that the recording will be kept in a secure and  
password-protected file. .... ☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any  
time up until the point the data are analysed (March 31, 2018) and I will not be asked questions  
about why I no longer want to take part..... ☐

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this  
research. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly  
confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998..... ☐

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles,  
publications including papers, books and presentations, which may include anonymised  
quotations from my interview; however personal information will not be included and neither I,  
nor my organisation will be  
identifiable..... ☐

I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for the  
retention of data (currently 10 years after the study has finished) ..... ☐

I am happy to be contacted regarding participation in future studies..... ☐

On this basis I am happy to participate in the project.

Name of Participant ..... Signature..... Date.....

Name of Researcher..... Signature..... Date.....

## Debriefing

### **How do creative individuals experience and cope with the process of being creative within an organisation?**

Thank you for taking part in this project.

As mentioned in the participant information sheet, this research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University. The aim of the study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative.

Whilst creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society, the creative process can be uncertain, contradictory and a source of tension. This research examines how people experience the process of being creative, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. It will also explore how it feels to be creative within an organisation, how creative people cope when situations are uncertain or ambiguous, how the organisational culture fosters creativity and how it copes with the challenges of the creative process. If you are interested in reading more about this topic, two articles that may be of interest are: 'Why no-one really wants creativity' (Staw, 1995); and 'How to kill creativity' (Amabile, 1998).

In the current phase of my research, I was specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process. I am interested in exploring how to encourage creativity within organisations and how to mitigate some of the challenges of the creative process.

Whilst unlikely, were any part of this interview to result in stress or distress, it is my ethical responsibility to recommend you to the following sources of support:

- **Your GP**
- **The Samaritans (Tel. 116 123, email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org))**

If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme or an Occupational Health service, please consider contacting them.

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher)  
email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)

or

Dr Piers Worth (Supervisor)  
email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk)  
Department of Psychology  
Buckinghamshire New University  
Queen Alexandra Road  
High Wycombe  
Buckinghamshire  
HP11 2JZ

Tel. 01494 522141 ext. 4254

**References**

Amabile, T. M. (1998). How to kill creativity. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(5), 76–87.  
<https://hbr.org/1998/09/how-to-kill-creativity>

Staw, B. M. (1995). Why no one really wants creativity. In C. M. Ford & D. A. Gioia (Eds.), *Creative Action in Organizations: Ivory Tower Visions and Real World Voices* (pp. 162–166). SAGE Publications.

<http://haas.berkeley.edu/faculty/papers/stawnoonecreativity.pdf>

**Email to Organisation Contact/Gatekeeper (recruitment method 1)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Following on from our recent conversation regarding participants for my research, thank you, first of all, for agreeing to let me interview some of your employees.

As mentioned, the aim of this study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative - its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire (Bucks) New University.

In the current phase of my research, I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process.

Participants will be asked to take part in an interview that will last for up to 90 minutes and I am happy to come to your offices to meet them. I would just ask that we are able to meet in a private space. Since the interviews are likely to take place during the working day, and at your offices, please can you confirm that you are happy for this to happen.

Prior to the interview, the participant will be given an information sheet outlining the information given here. They will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they are happy to participate and understand what is involved.

I would like to audio-record the interview so that I can subsequently analyse the data. The data provided will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998, held securely in a password-protected file and kept in line with the University's policy on data retention.

Confidentiality is really important to me and the identity of the participant, as well as the identity of the organisation, will remain confidential at all times. Any identifying information will not be included in the transcript of the interview, in the thesis or in any publications or presentations.

The participant will be free to withdraw from the study at any time and without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be March 31, 2018.

Upon completion of the thesis, I will be happy to provide a summary of findings on request.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Bucks New University Ethics Panel.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do let me know.

I would be grateful if you could reply to this email so that I can demonstrate written consent to conduct my research within your organisation and to confirm that you are happy for interviews to take place during the working day, and at your premises.

Once again, many thanks for your help with my research,

Best regards,

Diane

## Email to Prospective Participants

### Request for Participation in a Research Project

#### ***Background and purpose***

Creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society; however, the creative process can also be a source of tension. The aim of this study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative - its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

#### ***Why am I being invited to participate?***

I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process.

#### **What Does the Study Entail?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in a confidential interview that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your feelings about, and attitude towards ambiguity, contradiction, uncertainty, and risk within the creative process. I would like to audio-record the interview so that I can subsequently analyse the data.

You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be March 31, 2018.

#### **Confidentiality**

The data you provide via the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be held securely in a password-protected file and will be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention.

Your identity, as well as the identity of the organisation in which you work, will remain confidential at all times. Your name and any identifying information will not be included in the transcript of the interview or in the final report.

#### **Next Steps**

If you would be interested in participating in the study, please contact me directly at my university email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk).

I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further details on the research.

Thank you.

Diane Herbert



**Email to Contact within Creative Industries (recruitment method 2)**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Following on from our recent conversation regarding participants for my research, thank you, first of all, for agreeing to forward the information below to people who may be interested in participating.

As mentioned, the aim of this study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative - its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire (Bucks) New University.

In the current phase of my research, I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process.

Participants will be asked to take part in an interview that will last for up to 90 minutes and I am happy to meet them in a mutually agreed location.

Prior to the interview, the participant will be given an information sheet outlining the information given here. They will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they are happy to participate and understand what is involved.

I would like to audio-record the interview so that I can subsequently analyse the data. The data provided will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998, held securely in a password-protected file and kept in line with the University's policy on data retention.

Confidentiality is really important to me and the identity of the participant, as well as the identity of their organisation, will remain confidential at all times. Any identifying information will not be included in the transcript of the interview, in the thesis or in any publications or presentations.

The participant will be free to withdraw from the study at any time and without having to give a reason up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be March 31, 2018.

Upon completion of the thesis, I will be happy to provide a summary of findings on request.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Bucks New University Ethics Panel.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, I can be contacted on my University email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk).

Once again, many thanks for your help.

Best regards,

**Information Sheet Attached (or Linked) Social Media****Request for Participation in a Research Project****Background and Purpose**

Creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society; however, the creative process can also be a source of tension. The aim of this study is to explore how people, working within a creative role in an organisation, experience the process of being creative - its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent they perceive it as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how they cope with this. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

**Why am I Being Invited to Participate?**

I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process.

**What Does the Study Entail?**

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in a confidential interview that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your feelings about, and attitude towards ambiguity, contradiction, uncertainty, and risk within the creative process. I would like to audio-record the interview so that I can subsequently analyse the data.

You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be March 31, 2018.

**Confidentiality**

The data you provide via the interview will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be held securely in a password-protected file and will kept in line with the University's policy on data retention.

Your identity, as well as the identity of the organisation in which you work, will remain confidential at all times. Your name and any identifying information will not be included in the transcript of the interview or in the final report.

**Next Steps**

If you would be interested in participating in the study, please contact me directly at my university email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk).

I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further details on the research.

Thank you.

Diane Herbert

**Information About You**

*I would like to ask some questions about you. This information will help me to explore any differences in how people experience and cope with creativity.*

*The data you share will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998. Your data will not be used to personally identify you and will remain confidential at all times. Your personal data will be kept separately from your interview responses in a secure file.*

My gender is .....

My age is .....

*If you prefer not to answer these questions, tick this box* ..... ☐

## Appendix D

### Study 2 Ethics Pack

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To assist the reader, where documents exist for both the focus groups and interviews (e.g., participant information sheet, consent form, debriefing), I have highlighted the sections that are different in **green for the focus groups** and **blue for the interviews**.



## Research Ethics Panel Application form

For additional guidance, please refer to the Ethics organisation on Blackboard, the University Research Ethics Policy, and the Code of Good Research Practice available on the Bucks website  
<https://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-policies/policies>

### Section 1: Researcher details

#### 1.1 Contact details of researcher

Title	Ms	Forename	Diane	Surname	Herbert
School: Psychology				E-mail: diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk	
				Tel. No./Ext	
Status:	Employee	Postgraduate Research		Postgraduate Taught	Undergraduate
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 1.2 Co-applicants (please include everyone who will be involved in the research project, including research assistants)

Name	Post held	Organisation
Claire Flint	Research Assistant	External colleague

### Section 2: Project details

#### 2.1 Project title and timescale

*Ethical approval is only valid for the time period specified on your application. Extension of period will require further approval.*

Title	A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.
Proposed start date:	7 <sup>th</sup> January 2019
Proposed end date: (of data collection)	30th September 2019

#### 2.2 Costs and funding

*Please indicate the total costs and source of funding (if applicable):*

Not applicable

#### 2.3 Brief project description

This study is part of my PhD research, the aim of which is to explore the process of creativity in order to better understand how creative individuals cope with, transcend,

and thrive within an environment of polarity<sup>17</sup>, paradox<sup>18</sup> and tension and what that may tell us about how organisations may be able to facilitate creativity more generally.

The study is the second (of a likely three studies) that will explore the creative process from a number of different viewpoints. The first study (reviewed and approved by the University ethics panel in September 2017) explored, through a series of semi-structured interviews with creative individuals, how those working in a creative role experienced and coped with the creative process within their organisation. Findings suggested that perceptions about the organisational culture and leadership impacted individual creativity (intentionally or otherwise).

The goal of the second study is to explore and potentially extend and develop the findings from my first study, and to explore the ‘other side’ of the story: a case study of how an organisation and its leaders experience and cope with the creative process. From the perspective of creativity as systemic (Csíkszentmihályi, 2014; Glăveanu, 2010b), it is important to explore the way in which the creative person influences, and is influenced by, their organisational context. The study comprises four phases designed to each capture a specific angle of the organisational culture surrounding creativity (see Figure 1 below).

This research will build on existing theory by exploring creativity and paradox from the perspective of individuals and their organisational context. Whereas there is a significant body of research on the paradoxes of innovation in organisations, there is scant research on the paradoxes of creativity in organisations (e.g., Miron-Spektor et al., 2011), and less still that explores creativity from the perspective of the individual and their organisational context. Innovation and creativity are closely linked concepts; however, innovation is defined as the “successful implementation of creative ideas within an organisation” (Amabile & Pratt, 2016). The extant literature on paradox and innovation focuses on how the organisation recognises and responds to paradox from a cognitive perspective. This study is different in that it is specifically interested in how *individuals* experience and cope with the process of creativity within an organisational context and what the organisation does through their culture, values, beliefs, and

---

<sup>17</sup> Polarity is defined as the presence or manifestation of two opposite or contrasting principles or tendencies (retrieved from dictionary.com)

<sup>18</sup> Paradox is defined as a statement or proposition that seems self-contradictory or absurd but in reality, expresses a possible truth (retrieved from dictionary.com)

behaviours that support or inhibit creativity, which has not, to my knowledge, been explored to date.

#### 1. Focus groups of three strata of creative workers:

- 3 Focus groups, each with c. 10 participants
- The aim is to verify the experiences and views gathered from creative workers in the previous Study 1 with those of creative workers in the current company, and to explore how different levels of an organisational creative hierarchy (juniors, mid-level, and creative leaders) experience the creative process similarly or differently.
- Data analyzed using thematic analysis

#### 4. Analysis of organisational communications and outcomes (such as annual reports, CEO speeches, key policy documents):

- To examine how these communications and documents suggest that the company supports or potentially inhibits creativity (through organisational discourse analysis of secondary written/audio-visual data)
- All data will then finally be examined as a system using organisational discourse analysis, and used to triangulate findings from the previous Study 1 and bring together the disparate phases of the ethnography to obtain a holistic view of the organisation's systemic response to the creative process. This may also highlight differences between individual views and how the culture manifests itself in a group situation and in objective outputs.

#### 2. Interviews with organizational leaders:

- 4-6 semi-structured interviews to understand the perceptions of organisational leaders on the importance of creativity to the organisation; their beliefs on how the creative process works; how they respond to and cope with tension, uncertainty and contradiction and how they lead given these beliefs and perceptions.
- Data analyzed using thematic analysis

#### 3. Observation of a creative team meeting:

- The aim is to explore the organisational and social dynamic of creativity within the organisation, how creativity is discussed in a group setting, exploring the collective social and psychological dynamics that influence and are influenced by the individuals' attitudes.
- Data will be analysed using organisational discourse analysis.

**Figure 1: Study Design**

#### References

- Amabile, T. M., & Pratt, M. G. (2016). The dynamic componential model of creativity and innovation in organizations: Making progress, making meaning. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 36, 1-40. doi:10.1016/j.riob.2016.01.001
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1988). Society, culture, person: A systems view of creativity. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *The Nature of Creativity* (pp. 325-339). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Glăveanu, V. P. (2010). Paradigms in the study of creativity: Introducing the perspective of cultural psychology. *New Ideas in Psychology*, 28(1), 79-93.
- Miron-Spektor, E., Gino, F., & Argote, L. (2011). Paradoxical frames and creative sparks: Enhancing individual creativity through conflict and integration. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 116(2), 229-240.

### Section 3: Research Design

#### 3.1 Research design

- **Selection of organisation and participants**

The organisation within which the case study will take place will be selected purposively, on the basis of appropriateness to the research question (Miles et al., 1994; Patton, 1999) and pragmatically based on the organisation's willingness to participate and location of the organisation (i.e., UK-based, reasonable travel distance). The organisation will be one that describes creativity as being essential to their business success and is likely to be from the creative industries or technology companies for whom research, and new product development are seen as vital to business success.

Data collection will be through the following methods:

- **Stage 1: Focus groups**

Participants for focus groups will be individuals who are working within a creative role in an organisation for whom creativity is a core part of their business activity. It is envisaged that three focus groups will take place, each one comprising a purposive sample of up to ten participants. Each group will represent a different hierarchical level in the organisation (one with junior members of creative staff, one with mid-level creative staff, and the third with more senior staff, responsible for leading creative teams) as there may be differences in how they experience and cope with the creative process given their relative positions in the company, and to allow participants to speak more freely, without their line managers being present. The focus group discussion guide (Appendix 1a) has been developed from a range of creativity and paradox theory and from questions arising from the first study (conducted in Q4 2017). Analysis will be inductively driven by patterns found in the participants' experience.

Participants will be asked:

- a) To reflect on their own experiences of being creative.**
- b) Their feelings about how the culture of their organisation, and the leaders within it, help or inhibit their/the company's creativity.**
- c) To give their views and perspectives on key findings from Study 1.**

The focus groups will be up to 90 minutes' duration, will be (with consent) video-recorded (to aid transcription of multiple people potentially speaking at once), transcribed, anonymised, and analysed using thematic analysis. A research assistant will attend the focus groups and her role will be to take comprehensive notes, check audio/video equipment, at the end of the focus group to ask any additional questions or follow up points on the topic being discussed, and to debrief with me following the focus group. The research assistant is a colleague who is an experienced facilitator



(biography attached in Appendix 9). She will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement (Appendix 10) and will be fully briefed regarding the nature of her role.

Participants will be provided with an 'additional information form' (Appendix 1f) at the end of the focus group should they wish to note down any further thoughts or reflections that they had not had the opportunity to mention during the focus group. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic information form (Appendix 2); however, they will have the option to decline to provide that information.

### **Stage 2: Semi-structured interviews with organisational leaders**

4-6 semi-structured one-to-one interviews will be conducted with 'corporate' leaders (e.g., leaders who are not specifically leading creative teams such as CEOs, divisional managing directors, leaders in Finance, HR). The interview questions and structure have been developed from a range of creativity and paradox theory (Appendix 3a). Analysis will be inductively driven by patterns found in the participants' experience.

The participants will be asked:

- a) To give their thoughts about the importance (or otherwise) of creativity to their work and that of the organisation as a whole.**
- b) Their beliefs about how creativity happens within their organisation, and where those have come from.**
- c) What they consider they do as leaders that helps creativity to happen, or that gets in the way, and how they have decided on these strategies (learning, personality variables, personal experience?)**

The interviews with leaders will be up to 90 minutes' duration, will be audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, anonymised, and analysed using thematic analysis. Participants will be asked to complete a demographic information form (Appendix 2); however, they will have the option to decline to provide that information.

### **Stage 3: Meeting observation.**

One meeting will be observed (overt non-participation observation). The type of meeting to be observed will be one where creative projects are being discussed or where a group is 'brainstorming' ideas. The purpose of the meeting observation will be to:

- 1. Provide some contextual insights into the behaviours, culture-in-action, language, stories, and beliefs/myths regarding creativity**
- 2. Observe the dynamics and social interactions between participants.**

Detailed field notes will be taken using the pro-forma (based on Creswell, (2007) (Appendix 4). The meeting will not be audio or video-recorded to reduce

distraction/self-consciousness within the team. The research assistant will be asked to independently note down her observations and thoughts which will be discussed following the meeting as a means of checking my own initial interpretation of events. The data from the meeting observation may be helpful in exploring potential contradictions and paradoxes and better understanding ways in which the culture may be helping or hindering creativity. Notes will be transcribed, anonymised, and analysed using organisational discourse analysis.

#### **Stage 4: Analysis of organisational documents/outcome data**

Documentation and any audio or video data will either be publicly available, such as annual reports and company values statements accessed from the company's website, or internal company documentation such as speeches by the CEO or key leaders in the business (written, audio or video) and internal documents or videos on organisational culture, values, and key performance indicators. Access to any internal documents will be negotiated with the Gatekeeper of the organisation (see Gatekeeper Letter, Appendix 7).

The documents will be analysed using organisational discourse analysis to explore how organisation communications consciously or unconsciously express support (or otherwise) of creativity in the business. It will also explore the myths and beliefs about creativity in the organisation. The purpose of exploring these data sources is to spot potential contradictions and paradoxes between the organisation's espoused values and the experience of creative workers and leaders within the organisation, and official and objective outputs of the company.

#### **Stage 5: Triangulation**

A triangulation matrix (Appendix 6), based on Farmer, Robinson, Elliott, and Eyles (2006), will be used to capture and compare the findings from each of the data sources and methods from this study and Study 1. I will look for convergence and dissonance of themes, extensions to the findings from Study 1 and any new themes that are identified.

### **3.2 Ethical implications**

This study will be conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's Code of Human

Research Ethics. Full details of the study will be explained to participants through an information

sheet (Appendix 1b & 3b) and also verbally prior to obtaining the participant's signed consent (Appendix 1c & 3c).

Participants will be reminded that:

- The data they provide will be anonymised and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription of the data, including names of individuals and the organisation in which they work.
- Their data will be kept in line with the University's and UK policy on data retention.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the focus groups, interviews and meeting observation may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations but they will be unidentifiable.
  - It is not anticipated that the nature of the focus groups or interviews will cause any psychological distress. However, I will remain sensitive to the possibility that participants may become emotional. Should this occur, I would sensitively suggest a 5 minute 'comfort break' during which time, I would check that the participant was OK and whether they wished to continue.
  - It will be explained to interview and focus group participants that they can withdraw from the study without penalty and without having to give a reason, up until the point that the data are analysed (September 30th, 2019).
  - It is possible that, during an interview or focus group, a participant may disclose data that could be construed as whistleblowing or personally sensitive. Were this to happen I would discretely approach the participant at the end of the session and suggest that they may wish to discuss their issue with their HR representative.
  - At the end of the focus groups and interviews, once the recorder has been stopped, the participants will be given space to reflect on and discuss the interview should they wish to do so. They will be fully debriefed and offered possible sources of support should they feel that is necessary (Appendix 1d & 3d).
  - Participants will be reminded that the focus groups and interviews will be audio-recorded onto an encrypted device, and then transferred to a password-protected computer, with information being immediately deleted from any mobile device following transfer. The audio recordings will be retained in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.

Focus groups – specific ethical considerations

- As I intend to video record the focus group, participants will specifically be reminded that the focus group will be video recorded for transcription purposes only, and that the video recording will be destroyed upon the production of a transcript.
- The importance of respecting their colleagues' confidentiality will be stressed and participants will be asked to sign, as part of the consent form, their agreement to keep details of the focus group (participants and content) confidential. I am mindful that whilst I will request that participants keep the focus discussion confidential, I cannot guarantee that will happen.
- It is also possible that individuals may not feel comfortable to speak freely within the dynamic of the focus group. The combination of focus group and individual data (from interviews with leaders and from Study 1) may help me check

whether the group dynamic appears to change participants' statements. However, given that the research is interested in the social dynamics and interactions, the group's behaviour and social interactions will be interesting data.

- Focus groups will be stratified by hierarchy, so that no-one will be in a focus group with their line managers, which should also encourage them to speak more freely.

#### Meeting Observation – specific ethical considerations

- The question of obtaining consent to observe a meeting has been considered and the ESRC's 'Research Ethics Guidebook: A Resource for Social Scientists' and other data sources for guidance were consulted on this question. On reflection, consent to observe the meeting will not be sought from individuals, as I feel this would be too disruptive and could further influence/distort how participants behave. However, the Gatekeeper will be requested to communicate to the meeting attendees in advance of the meeting (Appendix 5), letting them know that I will be sitting in on the meeting (together with a research assistant) to observe the creative process. The Gatekeeper will be consulted as to whether it is feasible, should any attendees not wish to be observed, for them to not attend the meeting.
- Feedback to the organisation would present general themes and my observations. Any feedback would ensure that no individual was identifiable (by name or job title). It is possible that my interpretations of the company or its leaders may be unflattering or critical. Were this to be the case, I would use my experience as an HR professional and coach to present honest and constructive feedback in a way that preserves the integrity of the message without being harsh or disrespectful.

### 3.3 Risks to research team

It is not envisaged that the interviews or focus groups (nor the observation or document review) will pose any specific risk and will take place with individuals in their place of work or in public locations. However, reasonable safety precautions will be adopted including following the Lone Worker Protocol (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm>). My supervisor and/or a trusted family member will be provided with a copy of my schedule, the location of the interview or focus group and a contact mobile number. I will also notify my supervisor at the start and upon conclusion of each interview or focus group.

### 3.4 Dissemination

Results of this study will form part of my PhD dissertation. A summary of the anonymised findings from this study will be disseminated to participants upon request. The findings may be shared at appropriate academic fora such as the Positive Psychology Symposium or the Research Student's Conference. I will also write a paper with the aim of it being published in a peer reviewed journal.

## Section 4: Participants and Recruitment

### Section 4.1: Participants

Purposive sampling will be used to select the organisation and the participants within it. Participants for focus groups / interviews in stage 1 (individuals reflecting on their own experience of the creative process) will be individuals who are working within a creative role within the organisation. I will seek to recruit participants from a range of levels within the organisation as there may be differences in how they experience and cope with the creative process. However, each focus group will be conducted with peers from a similar hierarchical level to minimise the likelihood of participants being in the same focus group as their line manager or 'higher ups' that might inhibit their willingness to speak openly.

Participants for the interviews in stage 2 (leaders within the organisation) will be a purposive sample of 'corporate' leaders e.g., leaders from parts of the organisation that are not specifically responsible for leading 'creative' employees.

The meeting to be observed (stage 3) will be selected on the basis of the nature of the meeting (e.g., discussing a creative project or 'brainstorming' ideas) and the host organisation's willingness to allow me and the research assistant to attend.

All participants will be over 18 years of age.

### Section 4.2: Recruitment method

Recruitment of the case study organisation and participants within it will be conducted in accordance with the University's Guidance for Recruitment of Participants for Research.

#### **Recruitment of case study organisation:**

The two primary methods of recruitment for the case study organisation are as follows:

1. Through a key contact or Gatekeeper (e.g., the HR Director or CEO) within organisations. The gatekeeper will be provided with information about the study (Gatekeeper letter, Appendix 7), the nature of the research, the access being requested and will be formally approached to request formal, written permission to conduct case study research within their organisation. Recognising that the focus groups and interviews will be conducted at the workplace and during the working day, the Gatekeeper will be specifically asked to confirm that they are happy for this to happen.

The Gatekeeper will be asked to send out an email on my behalf (Appendix 1e & 3e) requesting participants to volunteer for the study and to contact me directly via my Bucks email address if they are interested in participating.

2. I will recruit participant organisations using selected online platforms (e.g., LinkedIn and Twitter), providing full details (Appendix 8) either directly on the post, space allowing, or a link to my Bucks email address will be provided so that potential participants can request further information.

#### **Section 4.3: Vulnerability**

This study does not involve recruiting participants from a vulnerable population. However, I recognise that the act of reflection sometimes prompts feelings of vulnerability. Similarly, I am mindful that some participants may feel uncomfortable speaking about issues due to a fear of potential professional repercussions. Participants will be reassured that I (and the research assistant) will keep what they say confidential, and participants will be asked to respect the confidentiality of their colleagues and not to repeat anything they hear outside of the focus group. I will monitor the state of participants should additional sensitivity be needed.

#### **Section 4.4: Incentives**

No incentives will be offered to participants; however, an executive summary of the research findings will be available upon request.

#### **Section 4.5: Permission / Gatekeeper**

Formal, written permission will be sought from the Gatekeeper. An initial informal conversation or email exchange will take place to provide general details of the study and to answer any immediate questions. This will be followed up by a formal email providing further detail about the study (Gatekeeper letter: Appendix 7) and requesting permission to conduct the case study research and to recruit participants. Permission will be obtained in writing via email from the Gatekeeper (e.g., HR Director or CEO). The Gatekeeper will be provided with an email requesting volunteers to participate in the research (Appendix 1e & 3e) which they will be asked to send out on my behalf. Prospective participants will be provided with my Bucks email address to which they can respond, expressing their interest in participating, should they wish to do so. The confidentiality of participants (or those expressing interest / requesting information) will be maintained and will not be shared with the Gatekeeper.

Section 5: Consent procedure				
This section will demonstrate how you will obtain informed consent from the participants. <i>Please include all supporting documents (e.g., Information Sheets, Consent forms and questionnaires).</i> Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to <b>each</b> of the following:				
		Yes	No	N/A
5.1	All respondents will be given an Information Sheet and enough time to read it before being asked to agree to participate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.2	All participants taking part in an interview, focus group, observation (or other activity which is not questionnaire-based) will be asked to sign a consent form.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.3	All participants completing a questionnaire will be informed on the Information Sheet that returning the completed questionnaire implies consent to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.4	All participants being asked to provide personal data will have the following statement on the consent form or on the bottom of their questionnaire "I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with current UK Data Protection legislation". A tick box should be included to allow participants to give explicit consent for the collection and use of such data.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5	All respondents will be told that they can withdraw at any time, ask for their interview tape to be destroyed and/or their data removed from the project until it is no longer practical to do so (e.g., when the report has been written up).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6	Where full information cannot be given prior to participation (because it could influence outcomes) participants will be fully de-briefed after participation.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.7	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

Section 6: Confidentiality, Anonymity & Data and Records Management	
This section will show how participants can expect confidentiality and/or anonymity and will show how any research data collected will be managed during and after the study. <i>Confidential data is not disclosed to other people; Anonymous data cannot be linked to the participant's personal details. Confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed in the event of disclosure of illegal</i>	

<i>activity or unsafe practice. Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to each of the following:</i>				
		Yes	No	N/A
<b>6.1</b>	Questionnaires will be returned anonymously and indirectly. Please note that questionnaire data cannot then be followed up/clarified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.2</b>	Questionnaires and/or interview transcripts will only be identifiable by a unique identifier (e.g., code/pseudonym)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.3</b>	Data will be stored securely and lists of identity number or pseudonyms linked to names and/or addresses will be stored securely and separately from research data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.4</b>	All place names and institutions which could lead to the identification of individuals or organisations will be changed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.5</b>	I confirm that all processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with UK Data Protection legislation ( <i>including the Data Protection Principles</i> )	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.6</b>	Consideration has been given to the limitations of confidentiality e.g., disclosure of illegal behaviour or unsafe practice.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.7</b>	I confirm that processing of all security sensitive information will be in full compliance with the “Oversight of security - sensitive research material in UK universities: guidance (October 2012)” (Universities UK, recommended by the Association of Chief Police Officers)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>6.8</b>	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

<b>Section 7: Authorisation</b>	
<p><i>Authorisation of this application indicates satisfaction that the details are accurate, the proposed methods are appropriate, ethical concerns have been considered and that time and resources are available for the research to take place. The authoriser accepts responsibility for the applicant who is undertaking the work.</i></p> <p><b>For Bucks employees:</b>            Signed: ..... (Line manager)            Date .....</p> <p><b>For postgraduate researchers, postgraduate taught students, and undergraduate students:</b>            Signed ..... (Supervisor)            Date .....</p> <p><i>If original signatures are not supplied, the applicant must forward an email from the line manager / supervisor including the above authorisation statement.</i></p>	



**Section 8: Checklist for Applicant**

- ☒ The Ethics application form
- ☒ The Participant Information Sheet
- ☒ The Consent Form
- ☒ Letters seeking/granting permission for access to data/participants
- ☒ Materials for recruitment of participants
- ☒ Questionnaire
- ☒ Interview schedule
- ☒ Authorisation received
- ☒ Risk assessment
- ☒ Line manager / supervisor approval

## Ethics Approval Letter

 <b>bucks</b> new university	Research & Enterprise Development Unit  email: <a href="mailto:ResearchUnit@bucks.ac.uk">ResearchUnit@bucks.ac.uk</a>
23 November 2018	
<p>Mrs Diane Herbert 10 The Crest Bledlow Ridge High Wycombe HP14 4AQ</p>	
<p>Dear Diane</p>	
<p><b><u>Ethical approval: Ref UEP2018Nov01</u></b></p>	
<p>I am writing to confirm that ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Panel of Buckinghamshire New University on 23 November 2018 for your project:</p>	
<p>"A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations' experience and cope with the process of being creative."</p>	
<p>This approval is valid for data collection between 7 January and 30 September 2019.</p>	
<p>Please ensure that you quote the above reference number as evidence of ethical approval and in all materials used to recruit participants.</p>	
<p>The Research and Enterprise Development Unit must be notified of any amendments to the proposed research or any extension to the period of data collection.</p>	
<p>I hope that your research project goes well.</p>	
<p>Yours sincerely,</p>	
	
<p>Dr M. Nakisa  Secretary to the University Research Ethics Panel Research and Enterprise Development Unit</p>	
<p>Buckinghamshire New University High Wycombe Campus Queen Alexandra Road High Wycombe Buckinghamshire HP11 2JZ</p>	<p>Tel: +44 (0) 1494 522 141 Twitter: <a href="https://twitter.com/bucks.ac.uk">@bucks.ac.uk</a> Facebook: <a href="https://facebook.com/bucks.ac.uk">bucks.ac.uk/facebook</a> <a href="https://bucks.ac.uk">bucks.ac.uk</a></p>

**Discussion Guide Focus Group - stage 1****1. Consent Process and demographic information (Consent forms to be sent in advance) (10 mins)****Check that all consent forms and demographic info forms have been returned**

Below is a summary of the information in the consent form that can be used to make sure participants understand the information in the consent form:

- *Thank you for agreeing to participate. We are very interested to hear your opinion on how you experience the process of being creative within this organisation.*
- *The information you give us is completely confidential, and we will not associate your name, or the identity of this organisation, with anything you say in the focus group in the transcript of the session or in any subsequent reports or articles.*
- *We intend to video, and audio-record the focus groups so that we can make sure to capture the thoughts, opinions, and ideas we hear from the group. The video and audio recordings will be held on a password-protected computer and in password-protected documents.*
- *The purpose of the video recording is solely to assist me with accurately transcribing the thoughts and ideas of the focus group. The video will only be viewed by myself, will not be shared, or distributed in any way. The video recording will be destroyed as soon as an accurate transcription has been completed.*
- *If you would prefer not to be visible on the video recording, we will orient the video camera so that you are not within shot.*
- *The audio recording will be retained in accordance with the university's policy and UK law on data retention (10 years after completion of the study).*
- *You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time up until the point when the data are analysed (which will be September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019) without having to give any reason.*
- *We understand how important it is that this information is kept private and confidential, and we can assure you we will keep your identity and information confidential. We kindly ask participants to respect each other's confidentiality and not to discuss details of what was said within this room with anyone outside.*
- *If you have any questions now or after the focus group, you can always contact me, or my research supervisor. Our names and phone numbers are on the consent form.*

**2. Introduction (10 mins)****Welcome**

Introduce myself and the research assistant.

- The aim of the research
- What will be done with this information
- Why you have been asked to participate

**Explanation of the process**

Ask the group if anyone has participated in a focus group before. Explain what will happen and how the focus group will work.

*About focus groups*

- We learn from you (positive and negative)
- There are no right or wrong answers, we just want to hear your perspective
- Not trying to achieve consensus, we're gathering information. It's OK for you not to agree with your colleagues

*Logistics*

- Focus group will last about 90 mins
- Does everyone know the location? Where is the bathroom? Fire exit?
- Help yourself to refreshments

*Ground Rules*

- We would like to hear from everyone
- Please do discuss with each other, not just with me.
- Information provided in the focus group must be kept confidential
- Stay with the group and please don't have side conversations. It makes it really hard to capture everyone's view if there are side conversations.
- We ask that you turn off your phones.

Ask the group if there are any questions before we get started and address those questions. Place anyone who does not wish to be video recorded out of shot of the video camera.

**3. Turn on video & audio recorders****4. Introductions (5 mins)**

- Go around table: job here, how long you've been with the company

***Discussion begins***

*Make sure to give people time to think before answering the questions and don't move too quickly.*

*Use the probes to make sure that all issues are addressed but move on when I am starting to hear repetitive information.*

**Questions:**

1. Reflection on own experiences of being creative (15 mins)
  - a. Could you tell me about your experience of the creative process, what is it like for you?
  - b. What are the best bits of the creative process?
  - c. What are the less positive parts of the creative process?
2. How does the culture of the organisation, and the leaders within it, help or inhibit their / their company's creativity? (15 mins)
  - a. What does this organisation do that helps you to be creative?
  - b. What does it do that hinders your creativity?
  - c. To what extent do you feel that your managers / leaders understand what is involved in the creative process?

How accurate do you feel those beliefs are?

- i. Where do you think these beliefs may have come from?
  - d. How is the decision made to support or ditch a creative project?
- 3. Views and perspectives on key findings from study 1 (15 mins)
  - a. How do you feel about situations that are uncertain or when the demands are not clear?
  - b. How do you feel about uncertainty within the creative process?
- 4. To what extent do you believe this organisation is comfortable with situations where there is no clear answer?
- 5. To what extent is it important to you to be recognised for your creative efforts?
  - a. (Either way) can you tell me more?
- 6. To what extent does the way that you receive feedback from your managers / leaders affect your motivation to be creative?
- 7. How important are emotions to your creativity?
  - a. In what way?
- 8. To what extent are emotions talked about at work?
- 9. To what extent are boundaries important to your creative process?
- 10. To what extent do you feel the controls and boundaries in place in your organisation affect your creativity?
- 11. Final question (5 mins) - Is there anything else that we haven't discussed that you would like to mention?

#### **Wrap up (5 mins)**

That concludes our focus group. Thank you so much for coming and sharing your thoughts and opinions with us. If you have additional information that you did not get to say in the focus group, please feel free to write it on these forms that I will circulate. Alternatively, please feel free to email me any thoughts or reflections.

#### **Materials and supplies for focus groups**

- \* Spare Consent forms
- \* Demographic information sheet
- \* Additional information sheets, one for each participant
- \* Name tents
- \* Pads & Pencils for each participant
- \* Focus Group Discussion Guide for Facilitator
- \* Audio recording device
- \* Video recording device
- \* Batteries for recording devices
- \* Notebook for notetaking
- \* Refreshments

## Participant Information Sheet Focus Group – stage 1

### A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.

This participant information sheet contains information about this study, so that you are able to make an *informed* decision about whether you wish to take part.

#### Background and aims of the study

Creativity is considered as being integral to business success and sits high on the agenda of many company leaders. The uniquely human ability to imagine what does not yet exist is seen as critical to future business success and is considered by some to be the 21st century's most important economic resource. The aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

#### Why am I being invited to participate?

I am specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process within their organisation.

#### What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in a focus group that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on a) your feelings about your own creative process and b) your thoughts and feelings about how the culture of your organisation, and the leaders within it, help or inhibit your/your organisation's creativity. The discussion will be audio and video-recorded on an encrypted device and then transferred to a password-protected computer, with the information being immediately deleted from any mobile devices following transfer. I will be accompanied in the focus group by a research assistant who will be there to assist me with logistics and to take confidential notes.

#### Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part; your participation is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw yourself and/or your data from the study at any time and without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be September 30, 2019.

#### Will my data be identifiable?

- The data you provide will be anonymised and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription of the data, including names of individuals and the organisation in which you / they work.
- Video recordings will be used solely for the purpose of achieving an accurate transcription of the focus group discussion. The video will not be shared, copied, or distributed in any way. The video will be destroyed as soon as an accurate transcription has been completed.
- Audio recordings and hard copies of any data will be anonymised. The files on the computer will be encrypted and the computer itself is password-protected.
- The data will be kept in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.
- Any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription of the data, including names of individuals and the organisation in which they work.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the interviews may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations.
- All of your personal data will be confidential and will be kept separately from your focus group responses.

### What will happen to the data after the focus group?

The video recording will be destroyed once an accurate transcription has been produced. The audio recording will be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention. The anonymised, transcribed data will be analysed, and the findings will be summarised and may be presented in a research paper or in the final thesis. The findings may be presented at academic or research conferences and submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal or book.

### Who has reviewed the project?

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Panel at Buckinghamshire New University (UEP2018Nov01).

### How do I contact the researcher and / or obtain further information about the study?

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher)

email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)

or

Dr Piers Worth or Dr Genevieve Cseh (Supervisors)

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk) or [genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk)

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**Consent Form Focus Group – stage 1**

A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.

***The purpose of this consent form is to ensure that you are informed about the background and aims of the research, your right to confidentiality and your agreement to proceed with the research.***

***Please tick each box***

I have read and understood the participant information sheet..... ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and I am satisfied with the answers I received..... ☐

I understand that taking part in the project will involve participating in a focus group of up to 90 minutes, which will be video and audio-recorded..... ☐

I understand that the video and audio recording will be kept in a secure and password-protected file and that the video recording will be viewed only by the researcher in order to complete an accurate transcription of the focus group. The video will be destroyed upon completion of the transcript, and will not be shared, copied, or otherwise distributed in any way..... ☐

I agree to respect the privacy of other focus group members by not disclosing the identity of fellow participants or any content discussed during the focus group..... ☐

I understand that, whilst the researcher and research assistant commit to keeping my identity confidential, my identity will be known to other focus group participants and that the researcher cannot guarantee that others in these groups will respect the confidentiality of the group (although they will have been requested to do so) ..... ☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the point the data are analysed (September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019) and I will not be asked questions about why I no longer want to take part..... ☐

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998..... ☐

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications including papers, books, and presentations, which may include anonymised quotations from my interview; however personal information will not be included and neither I, nor my organisation will be identifiable..... ☐

I understand that the data (excluding video recording, which will be deleted upon completion of the transcription) will be kept according to University guidelines for the retention of data (currently 10 years after the study has finished) ..... ☐

I am happy to be contacted by the researcher regarding participation in future studies pertaining to this PhD ..... ☐

On this basis I am happy to participate in the project.



Name of Participant .....

Signature..... Date.....

Name of Researcher.....

Signature..... Date.....

**Debriefing Focus Group – stage 1**

**A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.**

Thank you for taking part in this project.

As mentioned in the participant information sheet, this research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University. The aim of the study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. It will also explore how it feels to be creative within an organisation. Whilst creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society, the creative process can be uncertain, contradictory and a source of tension. I am interested in how the organisation copes with the challenges of the creative process. If you are interested in reading more about this topic, two articles that may be of interest are: 'Why no-one really wants creativity' (Staw, 1995); and 'How to kill creativity' (Amabile, 1998).

In the current phase of my research, I was specifically interested in speaking to people who consider creativity an essential skill that they regularly use in their work, to better understand their experiences of the creative process. I am interested in exploring how to encourage creativity within organisations and how to mitigate some of the challenges of the creative process.

Whilst unlikely, were any part of this interview to result in stress or distress, it is my ethical responsibility to recommend you to the following sources of support:

- **Your GP**
- **The Samaritans (Tel. 116 123, email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org))**

If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme or an Occupational Health service, please consider contacting them.

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher) email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)

Or

Dr Piers Worth or Dr Genevieve Cseh (Supervisors)

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk) or [genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk)

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**References**

Amabile, T. M. (1998). How to kill creativity. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(5), 76–87.

Staw, B. M. (1995). Why no-one really wants creativity. In C. M. Ford & D. A. Gioia (Eds.), *Creative Action in Organizations: Ivory Tower Visions and Real World Voices* (pp. 162–166). SAGE Publications.

**Email to Prospective Participants Focus Group – stage 1**

Request for participation in a research project

My name is Diane Herbert, and I am currently researching for a PhD in the psychology of creativity in organisations. I am interested in speaking to people (at all levels of the organisation) who consider creativity to be an essential skill that they regularly use in their work.

The aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity

If you are interested in taking part, you will find more information on the attached sheet [Appendix 1e]. If you do choose to take part, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your feelings about, and attitude towards your creative process and how the culture of the organisation helps or inhibits your (and your organisation's) creativity.

If you would be interested in participating in the study, please contact me directly at my university email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk). I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further details on the research. My research has been approved by the ethics committee of Buckinghamshire New University.

Thank you,

Diane Herbert

**Additional Information Form Focus Group – stage 1**

**A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.**

If there is anything that you didn't get to say during the focus group, or any additional thoughts you would like to share, please make a note of them here and hand or email this form to the Researcher ([diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk))

**Information About You - Focus Groups and Interviews – stages 1 & 2**

*I would like to ask some questions about you. This information will help me to explore any differences in how people experience and cope with creativity.*

*The data you share will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2016. Your data will not be used to personally identify you and will remain confidential at all times. Your personal data will be kept separately from your interview/focus group responses in a secure file.*

My gender is .....

My age is .....

*If you prefer not to answer these questions, tick this box* ..... ☐

**Interview Schedule Interviews – stage 2****Warm-Up Questions**

Could you tell me a little about yourself?

What is your role within the organisation?

How long have you worked for this organisation?

**Main questions**

To what extent do you believe that creativity is important to the organisation?

What makes it important (or not)?

How important is creativity to your role? And the roles your team perform?

What makes it important (or not)?

What do you feel that the organisation does to encourage creativity within the workplace?

Prompt: In what way?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

What do you feel the organisation does that discourages or hinders creativity?

Prompt: In what way?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

To what extent do you feel that there are adequate resources (i.e., time, money, people) to be creative?

If you had a magic wand, what would you change about this organisation's culture? What makes you say that?

To what extent do you feel that you encourage your staff to be creative?

Prompt: Can you give me an example?

Prompt: What do you do as a leader that encourages creativity?

How do you feel about situations where the demands are uncertain or without clear boundaries?

How does the organisation respond to situations where there is no clear answer?

How do you feel about taking risks?

How comfortable do you feel the organisation is with taking risks?

How does the organisation respond to failures, both emotionally and procedurally?

Is there a difference in how different people in the organisation react to failure? (e.g., managers, CEO?)

To what extent do you feel there is a tradition of respect for learning and organisational culture?

To what extent do you feel that it is appropriate to express emotion in the workplace?

Prompt: What makes you say that?

Prompt: What are the 'rules' around emotional expression at work?

How do you personally define success?

How does the organisation define success?

Thinking about your own leadership style, what do you feel you do that encourages creativity to happen?

Is there anything you feel you could do differently that would encourage creativity to happen more?

Prompt: What makes you say that?

To what extent do you believe the organisation is clear about its mission and purpose?

To what extent do you believe the mission and purpose resonates with employees?

Prompt: Is this important? What makes it important (or not)?

To what extent does the organisation's purpose align with your own purpose?

**Wind down question:**

Is there anything else that you would like to tell me?

## Participant Information Sheet Interviews – stage 2

### A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the creative process

This participant information sheet contains information about this study, so that you are able to make an *informed* decision about whether you wish to take part.

#### Background and aims of the study

Creativity is considered as being integral to business success and sits high on the agenda of many company leaders. The uniquely human ability to imagine what does not yet exist is seen as critical to future business success and is considered by some, to be the 21st century's most important economic resource. The aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

#### Why am I being invited to participate?

I am interested in speaking to leaders who occupy general leadership roles, and who are not directly responsible for leading creative teams.

#### What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you agree to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your perceptions about the organisation's culture and your feelings about, and attitude towards contradiction, uncertainty, and risk in relation to creativity within your organisation. The discussion will be audio-recorded on an encrypted device and then transferred to a password-protected computer, with the information being immediately deleted from any mobile devices following transfer.

#### Do I have to take part?

No. It's completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part; your participation is voluntary. You can choose not to answer any particular questions and you are free to withdraw yourself and/or your data from the study at any time and without having to give a reason, up until the point at which the data are analysed, which will be September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019.

#### Will my data be identifiable?

The data you provide will be anonymised and any identifiable information will be removed from the transcription of the data, including names of individuals and the organisation in which you / they work.

Audio files on the computer will be encrypted and the computer itself is password-protected.

The data will be stored in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.

Anonymised direct quotations from the interviews may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations. They will be edited so that you are unidentifiable.

All of your personal data will be kept confidential and will be kept separately from your interview responses.



**What will happen to the data after the interview?**

The anonymised data will be analysed, and the findings will be summarised and may be presented in a research paper or in the final thesis. The findings may be presented at academic or research conferences and submitted for publication in an academic or professional journal or book.

**Who has reviewed the project?**

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Panel at Buckinghamshire New University (UEP2018Nov01)

**How do I contact the researcher and / or obtain further information about the study?**

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher)

email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)

or

Dr Piers Worth or Dr Genevieve Cseh (Supervisors)

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk) or [genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk)

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## Consent Form Interviews – stage 2

A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the process of being creative.

*The purpose of this consent form is to ensure that you are informed about the background and aims of the research, your right to confidentiality and your agreement to proceed with the research.*

**Please tick each box**

I have read and understood the participant information sheet..... ☐

I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and I am satisfied with the answers I received..... ☐

I understand that taking part in the project will involve an interview of up to 90 minutes, which will be audio-recorded and that the recording will be kept in a secure and password-protected file. .... ☐

I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time up until the point the data are analysed (September 30, 2019) and I will not be asked questions about why I no longer want to take part..... ☐

I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2016 ..... ☐

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic articles, publications including papers, books, and presentations, which may include anonymised quotations from my interview; however personal information will not be included and neither I, nor my organisation will be identifiable..... ☐

I understand that data will be kept according to University guidelines for the retention of data (currently 10 years after the study has finished)... ☐

I am happy to be contacted regarding participation in future studies pertaining to this PhD ..... ☐

On this basis I am happy to participate in the project.

Name of Participant ..... Signature..... Date.....

Name of Researcher..... Signature..... Date.....

### Debriefing Interviews – stage 2

#### A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the creative process.

Thank you for taking part in this project.

As mentioned in the participant information sheet, this research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University. The aim of the study is to explore how an organisation and its leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. It will also explore how it feels to be creative within an organisation. Whilst creativity is seen as being a highly desirable business skill given the pace of change in society, the creative process can be uncertain, contradictory and a source of tension. I am interested in how the organisation copes with the challenges of the creative process. If you are interested in reading more about this topic, two articles that may be of interest are: 'Why no-one really wants creativity' (Staw, 1995); and 'How to kill creativity' (Amabile, 1998).

In the current phase of my research, I was specifically interested in speaking to people who are in general leadership roles to better understand their perceptions on the importance (or otherwise) of creativity to the organisation, the perception of how the organisation's culture supports or inhibits creativity, and how leaders respond to, and cope with tension, uncertainty, and contradiction. I am interested in exploring how to encourage creativity within organisations and how to mitigate some of the challenges of the creative process.

Whilst unlikely, were any part of this interview to result in stress or distress, it is my ethical responsibility to recommend you to the following sources of support:

Your GP

The Samaritans (Tel. 116 123, email: [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org))

If your organisation has an Employee Assistance Programme or an Occupational Health service, please consider contacting them.

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please contact either:

Diane Herbert (Researcher) email: [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk) or my supervisors Dr Piers Worth or Dr Genevieve Cseh

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk) or [genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk)

Department of Psychology

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#### References

Amabile, T. M. (1998). How to kill creativity. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(5), 76–87.  
<https://hbr.org/1998/09/how-to-kill-creativity>

Staw, B. M. (1995). Why no one really wants creativity. In C. M. Ford & D. A. Gioia (Eds.), *Creative Action in Organizations: Ivory Tower Visions and Real World Voices* (pp. 162–166). SAGE Publications.

<http://haas.berkeley.edu/faculty/papers/stawnoonecreativity.pdf>

**Email to Prospective Participants Interviews – stage 2****Request for participation in a research project**

My name is Diane Herbert, and I am currently researching for a PhD in the psychology of creativity in organisations. I am interested in speaking leaders within general or corporate functions who are not directly responsible for leading creative teams.

The aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity

If you are interested in taking part, you will find more information on the attached sheet [Appendix 3e]. If you do choose to take part, you will be asked to participate in an interview that will last for up to 90 minutes, during which I will ask you some questions on your perceptions about the organisation's culture and your feelings about, and attitude towards contradiction, uncertainty, and risk in relation to creativity within your organisation.

If you would be interested in participating in the study, please contact me directly at my university email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk). I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further details on the research. My research has been approved by the ethics committee of Buckinghamshire New University.

Thank you,

Diane Herbert

## Meeting Observation Form - Stage 3

Research question: <b>A case study exploring how creative workers, leaders and organisations experience and cope with the creative process.</b>	
Date: Start time: End time: Location: Participants:	
<b>Descriptive Notes</b> <i>(e.g. physical setting, accounts of events / activities, attendees, hierarchical level)</i>	<b>Reflective Notes</b> <i>(e.g. themes, quotes, questions, interpretations)</i>
Sketch of layout <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 250px; margin: 10px 0;"></div>	

Adapted from Creswell (2014)

**Meeting Observation Communication from Gatekeeper – stage 3**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am writing to let you know that I have invited two additional people to the meeting on [DATE], Diane Herbert (PhD Researcher) and Claire Flint (Research Assistant). Diane is conducting some research within this organisation to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within the organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. The research forms part of her PhD in the psychology of creativity in organisations at Buckinghamshire New University. Diane has asked to observe a meeting where creative projects are being discussed. Claire will be assisting Diane in note taking. The purpose of the observation is to better understand the organisational and social dynamics of the creative process in a group setting.

I wanted to make sure that you are fully aware of the reasons for Diane and Claire's presence and to let you know some important information about the confidentiality of anything discussed in the meeting. I have discussed this project with Diane, and she wanted me to let you know that this research will be conducted in accordance with the British Psychological Society's code of ethics and has been approved by Buckinghamshire New University's ethics committee.

Please be aware that:

- The meeting will not be audio/video-recorded, but confidential notes will be taken.
- The notes will not refer to individuals by name and no personally identifiable information will be taken.
- The data will be kept in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.
- Diane is interested in the dynamics and group interaction rather than in the individuals present at the meeting.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the observation may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations but they will be unidentifiable

Diane and Claire will not be participating in the meeting and will be sitting at [the back / to the side of the room]

If you would prefer not to be observed, you may choose not to attend the meeting without having to give any reasons. If you have any questions, you can contact Diane directly (her email is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk)).

Kind regards,

**Triangulation Matrix** (Adapted from Farmer, Robinson, Elliott, and Eyles, 2006)

Theme	Focus Group	Interviews	Observation	Document analysis
Growth	Less connection with others Lack of space More helpful structure as well as bureaucracy	Growth meant more structure. Work pace was relentless, no time to catch breath	“The ambition is doubling the size of the business in 3 years from business we don’t currently have”	“Expanded and grown rapidly world’s changing – pulled in different directions”
Structure & Freedom	More boundaries as organisation grew More bureaucratic	Perception of more involvement from ‘Mothership’	MD’s style – open, inclusive, doesn’t have to be right Meetings 1 & 2 were informal style, all staff much more formal	Policies were structured, not reflective of espoused culture “Not enough structure”
Symbols of change	Ping-pong table going “Too corporate” Not knowing everyone’s name Space	Physical environment. Pressure to find enough space. More pressure on financial results	Outgrowing office space – standing room only in meeting 2. All staff – quite large audience, not everyone could hear. Reticence to ask questions	“We’re operating in an old way in a new world”
Parent / Child	Rebellious child – do it anyway!  Child-like, playful qualities of creativity vs constraints of being ‘grown up’	“The youngsters”  Nurturing and caring, but also controlling parent	Toys in the office Soft toy awarded as ‘recognition’ Talked about a social event, but with quite precise instructions – we’re leaving office at 4pm, please come in earlier to get stuff done Pattern of senior person talking to more junior	“Good that we’re young – sometimes we’re spoken to in some communications it feels like we’re children – ‘passive aggressive’ tone.” “Tone Check ‘we’re all adults here’ ‘don’t be that guy’” “Keeping ‘family’ alive”

Theme	Focus Group	Interviews	Observation	Document analysis
				“Bonkers, roller coaster, feels like a treadmill, structure and adulthood which is good, but also brought a lot of chat and less action.”
Uncertainty	Comfortable with risks, it’s an opportunity to be creative	The nature of the business is uncertain. Not everyone copes in same way	“I don’t think this is the answer but we’re closer to the answer and asking the right questions”	“Paralysis by analysis, ‘not sure what the parameters are anymore” “Uncertain future/fragility/lack of business certainty”
Failure & Learning	Is it safe? Have people been fired for making a mistake? Shame / vulnerability	Failure is part of creativity – as long as we learn.	“If we think this is a good idea, why don’t we just do it rather than wait a quarter?”	“Strengths can be weaknesses – seeking out the balance in that”
Safety & Vulnerability	They need me, they won’t fire me.  Is it safe to approach SLT?	Are leaders willing to be vulnerable?	Was all staff safe for everyone to speak up? Lots of questions in other 2 meetings. Felt supportive & open	“Quite a few people in the Company feel uncomfortable about talking they’re going to break down or get sick”



**Gatekeeper Letter**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

As discussed, the aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

In the current phase of my research, I am seeking to conduct a case study with an organisation for whom creativity is a core business requirement. The research will explore how an organisation's values, stories and beliefs impact creativity and innovation. The case study will comprise the following elements:

**Focus groups.** It is envisaged that three focus groups will take place, each one comprising up to ten participants from a different hierarchical level in the organisation (one with junior creative staff, one with mid-level creative staff, and the third with more senior staff, responsible for leading creative teams)

**Interviews** with leaders who are not directly leading creative teams. They may be leaders within 'corporate' or global functions. I would like to interview between 4 and 6 leaders.

**Meeting observation.** I would like to observe a meeting in which creative projects are being discussed or where a group is 'brainstorming' ideas. The purpose of the observation would be to provide some contextual insights into the culture-in-action.

I would like to **review documents** such as the annual report, speeches or communication from the CEO or key leaders in the business; documents that describe the organisation's values and culture; documents that describe any creative outputs or achievements.

Participants will be asked to take part in either a focus group or an interview (depending on the role they occupy). The focus group meeting or interview will last for up to 90 minutes and I am happy to conduct the focus groups and interviews at your offices. I would just ask that we are able to meet in a private space. Since the focus groups and interviews will take place during the working day, and at your offices, please can you confirm that you are happy for this to happen. Prior to the focus group or the interview, the participants will be given a participant information sheet outlining the information given here. They will be asked to sign a consent form to indicate that they are happy to participate and understand what is involved. The participant will be free to withdraw from the study at any time and without having to give a reason, up until the point at

which the data are analysed, which will be September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019. I will be accompanied in the focus group by a research assistant who will be there to assist me with logistics and to take confidential notes.

Confidentiality is really important to me and the identity of participants as well as the identity of the organisation will remain confidential. Any identifying information will not be included in any transcripts (focus groups, interviews, meeting observation, review of documents), in the thesis or in any publications or presentations. I would like to audio and video record the focus groups and to audio-record the interviews so that I can subsequently analyse the data. The data provided will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be handled in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), 2016, held securely in a password-protected file and will be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention. The purpose of video recording the focus group is simply to help me to produce an accurate transcription. The video will only be viewed by myself. It will not be shared, copied, or distributed in any way and will be destroyed as soon as an accurate transcription has been achieved. Should any participant be uncomfortable being visible on the video, the video recorder will be positioned in such a way that they are out of shot.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Panel at Buckinghamshire New University (ref: UEP2018Nov01).

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do let me know.

I would be grateful if you could reply to this email so that I can demonstrate written consent to conduct my research within your organisation and to confirm that you are happy for the focus groups and interviews to take place during the working day, at your premises.

**Information Sheet Attached (or Linked) Social Media****Request for participation in a research project on creativity in organisations*****Background and purpose***

Creativity is considered as being integral to business success and sits high on the agenda of many company leaders. The uniquely human ability to imagine what does not yet exist is seen as critical to future business success and is considered by some to be the 21st century's most important economic resource. The aim of this study is to explore how an organisation, its creative workers and leaders experience and cope with the creative process. The research will explore how the culture, values and behaviours within an organisation may facilitate or inhibit creativity. The research forms part of my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University.

***Why am I being invited to participate?***

I am looking to conduct a case study within an organisation that considers creativity to be essential to its success.

***What does the study entail?***

The case study is likely to comprise focus groups with individuals who occupy jobs that require creativity, and one-one interviews with leaders involved in creative or innovative work. In addition, I wish to review documents such as the annual report, speeches or communication from the CEO or key leaders in the business, and documents that describe the organisation's values and culture.

***Confidentiality***

The data you provide will be kept in the strictest confidence at all times, will be held securely in a password-protected file and will kept in line with the University's policy on data retention. The identity of individual participants, as well as the identity of the organisation will remain confidential at all times. Any identifying information, including names of the organisation and participants, will not be included in the transcript of the interview or in the final report.

***Next steps***

If you feel your company would meet these criteria and you have authority to suggest your company for this research (all individual involvement is still at the discretion of individuals), please get in touch with me directly at my university email address which is [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk).

I will be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have and to provide further details on the research.

Thank you.

Diane Herbert

**Appendix E**  
**Study 3 Ethics Pack**

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Example of My Data Collection Log (Chang, 2008) .....	448
Guidelines for Auto-ethnographers (Tolich, 2010) .....	449
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### Research Ethics Panel Application form

For additional guidance, please refer to the Ethics organisation on Blackboard, the University Research Ethics Policy, and the Code of Good Research Practice available on the Bucks website <https://bucks.ac.uk/about-us/governance-and-policies/policies>

#### Section 1: Researcher details

##### 1.1 Contact details of researcher

Title	Ms	Forename	Diane	Surname	Herbert
School: Human & Social Sciences (Psychology)				E-mail: diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk	
				Tel. No./Ext	
Status:	Employee <input type="checkbox"/>	Postgraduate Research <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Postgraduate Taught <input type="checkbox"/>	Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/>	

##### 1.2 Co-applicants (please include everyone who will be involved in the research project, including research assistants)

Name	Post held	Organisation

#### Section 2: Project details

##### 2.1 Project title and timescale

*Ethical approval is only valid for the time period specified on your application. Extension of period will require further approval.*

Title	Embracing polarity, paradox, and tension: How studying this subject has changed me and the work that I do.
Proposed start date:	1 <sup>st</sup> July 2019
Proposed end date: (of data collection)	31 <sup>st</sup> December 2019

##### 2.2 Costs and funding

*Please indicate the total costs and source of funding (if applicable):*

n/a

### 2.3 Brief project description

The aim of my PhD research is to explore the process of creativity in order to better understand how creative individuals cope with, transcend, and thrive within an environment of polarity<sup>19</sup>, paradox<sup>20</sup> and tension<sup>21</sup> and what that may tell us about how organisations may be able to facilitate creativity more generally. The PhD comprises three studies which will explore the question from different perspectives. The current application is for the third of these studies, the purpose of which is to allow me to look back and to look forward, to understand how the research is changing me, changing my potential professional perceptions, and ways in which I work.

The first study was reviewed and approved by the University ethics panel in September 2017 and is now complete. The research explored, through 11 semi-structured interviews with creative individuals, how those working in a creative role experienced and coped with the creative process within their organisation. Findings suggested that perceptions about the organisational culture and leadership impacted individual creativity (intentionally or otherwise).

The second study was reviewed and approved by the University ethics panel in November 2018 and data collection began in early March 2019 and is currently ongoing. The aim of the second study was to explore and potentially extend and develop the findings from the first study through a case study with one creative organisation. The case study is exploring the ‘other side’ of the story: how a profoundly creative organisation and its leaders experience and cope with the creative process.

The purpose of the proposed Study 3 (the subject of this application) is to allow me to look forward to back and to look forward, to understand how the research is changing me, changing my potential professional perceptions, and ways in which I work. I consider autoethnography to be an appropriate method as it seeks to connect self-narrative with the social and cultural context, analysing and interpreting wider social and cultural questions from the ‘first-person’ perspective (Chang, 2008, 2016). The aim is that by better understanding my own learning of organisational creativity and how it handles polarity, paradox, tension, and uncertainty, I will be

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<sup>19</sup> Polarity is defined as “the quality of exhibiting opposite or contrasted properties or powers in opposite or contrasted directions; the state of having two opposite or contradictory tendencies, opinions, or aspects” (retrieved from OED Online.com)

<sup>20</sup> Paradox is defined as an apparently absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition, or a strongly counter-intuitive one, which investigation, analysis, or explanation may nevertheless prove to be well-founded or true (retrieved from OED Online.com)

<sup>21</sup> Tension is defined as a “condition of strain produced by anxiety, need, or by a sense of mental, emotional, or physical disequilibrium” (retrieved from OED Online.com). The term is being used to refer to both the negative and positive subjective experience of tension.

able to take this knowledge and potentially apply it to a subsequent intervention to help organisations understand how to flourish creatively.

The types of data that will be examined will include field notes taken during studies 1 and 2; a reflective journal written throughout the research process; my reflections and spontaneous ideas about creativity. I also wish to refer to perceptions and memories of conversations that I have with individuals who influence my thinking and sensemaking about creativity (subject to ethical requirements, detailed in section 3.2). These may include informal interviews with friends, colleagues, mutual acquaintances through a supervisor, or chance encounters. As Chang (2008) notes, a story about the self is never just about the self alone; other people are an integral part of one's self-narrative. Similarly, given my stance that creativity is a relational process, it feels natural and appropriate to include thoughts and observations on the ways in which other people have influenced my thinking and sensemaking about the process of creativity within organisations.

### Section 3: Research Design

#### 3.1 Research design

*Describe and justify the methodology (e.g., qualitative, quantitative, mixed-methods) and methods (e.g., interviews, focus groups, quantitative experiment, observations) you intend to use. Include details of and reasons for your sample selection and size to enable robust outcomes.*

The research in this third study will be exploratory qualitative research, within a constructionist paradigm.

The method I will be using is Anderson's (2006) analytical autoethnography, which situates the researcher as: i) being a full and visible member of the research context, and ii) being committed to developing a theoretical understanding of the phenomena in question. The analytic approach to autoethnography is distinguished from what is typically referred to as an 'evocative' approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), which tends towards a more literary style of writing, rather than incorporating formal analysis (Humphreys & Learmonth, 2012). The analytic approach situates a researcher as participant observer, with a commitment to theoretical analysis.

The data to be used in the research will be drawn from a variety of sources such as: field notes taken during studies 1 and 2; a reflective journal written throughout the research process; my reflections and spontaneous ideas about creativity. I also wish to refer to perceptions and memories of conversations that I have with individuals who influence my thinking and sensemaking about creativity (subject to ethical requirements, detailed in section 3.2). These may include informal interviews with friends, colleagues, mutual acquaintances through a supervisor, or chance encounters. The data will be collated using a 'data log' (Chang, 2008, p.119), an example of which is shown in Appendix 1. The data will be analysed following Chang's ten steps for analysing and interpreting autoethnographic data (detailed in Appendix



2). The steps include: i) searching for recurring topics, themes, and patterns; ii) connecting the data with broader cultural themes iii) contextualising my experience in relation to the wider social context, using literature and conversations with other people to provide that context; iv) using new and existing theory to provide a framework for the autoethnography.

### 3.2 Ethical implications

I am conscious that as primary participant in this research, ethical considerations apply to myself, alongside my ethical commitment to others. In accessing my memories and perceptions, I will be mindful of my own wellbeing and will seek appropriate support should this be necessary. Tolich (2010) suggests ten guidelines for autoethnographers to follow in order to protect themselves and those included in their story. I will use the guidelines as principles to follow in my research. For example, I will only include personal data that I am comfortable being publicly available and will pay attention to any future vulnerability that may arise from what I write (see Appendix 3 for details of the guidelines).

Whilst the emphasis of the research is autoethnography, part of this will entail reflections back on informal interviews with friends, colleagues, mutual acquaintances through a supervisor, or chance encounters. Unlike formal interviews, the informal interviews are conversations that came about through encounters that occurred as part of my everyday professional and personal life. As I may wish to reflect back on what people have said to me that has influenced my thinking on this subject, retrospective opt-out consent will be sought should I wish to directly refer to or cite the conversation. These conversations are, broadly, ones happening in present time, and I propose to address this as I go. Past conversations are likely to be limited. Details of study 3 will be explained through an email which combines the information sheet and consent form covering confidentiality, how the information will be used, and the individual's right to decline or limit what may be included, or to withdraw from the study completely. I will offer individuals the opportunity to read any part of the text that refers to the conversation in which they feature, should they wish to do so. Individuals will be informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study, ask for the recording of the conversation in which they participate to be destroyed, and/or their data to be removed from the project at any time up until the point the data are analysed (31<sup>st</sup> March 2020). They will not be asked questions about why they no longer want to take part (Appendix 4).

If individuals do decline or opt to limit what may be included in any analysis or write-up, I will respect their wishes and their data will not be included. Individuals who agree to be included will be asked to decide on (or be allocated) a pseudonym so that their identity remains confidential in any direct discussion of them and their part in any informal interview.

As with any other form of qualitative data gathering, any individual cited in the autoethnography will be reminded that:

- Their data (any notes taken during or after the informal interview, or any audio recordings made, with permission) will be held in the strictest confidence and will be kept in line with the University's policy on data retention.

- That they will not be personally identifiable, nor will the organisation in which they are working.
- That the purpose of the conversation is to talk about creativity and / or leadership on a personal level as well as within their organisation.
- Anonymised direct quotations from the informal interviews may be used in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations.

It is not my intention to discuss matters of a sensitive or intimate nature during the informal interviews. Furthermore, it is not anticipated that the nature of the conversation will cause any psychological distress. However, I recognise that the act of reflection sometimes prompts feelings of vulnerability. I will remain sensitive to the possibility that individuals may become emotional during the conversation or may disclose information that they would not wish to be shared.

### References

- Anderson, L. (2006). Analytic autoethnography. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(4), 373–395.
- Chang, H. (2008). *Autoethnography as method*. New York: Routledge.
- Chang, H. (2016). Autoethnography in health research: Growing pains? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(4), 443–451.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A. P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Humphreys, M., & Learmonth, M. (2012). Autoethnography in organizational research: two tales of two cities. *Qualitative Organizational Research: Core Methods and Current Challenges*, 314–327.
- Tolich, M. (2010). A critique of current practice: Ten foundational guidelines for autoethnographers. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(12), 1599–1610.

### 3.3 Risks to research team

*Briefly outline any risks of physical or mental harm to those conducting the research and how you propose to minimise these risks. A risk assessment should be attached for any research due to take place outside of the UK or where a researcher is placed in a potentially vulnerable situation.*

As mentioned in section 3.2, I will remain conscious that as the focus of the research is on my personal and professional experiences, I will be mindful of the duty of care I have towards my own wellbeing and that the act of reflection can prompt feelings of vulnerability and will seek appropriate support should that be necessary.

It is not envisaged that the informal interviews with others will pose any specific risk and they have, or will, take place with individuals in their place of work or in public locations. However,

reasonable safety precautions will be adopted including following the Lone Worker Protocol (<http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg73.htm>) .

### 3.4 Dissemination

*Please state how you intend to disseminate research findings. Include details of any Intellectual Property or security issues and whether dissemination is local or national.*

The findings may be shared at appropriate University fora such as the Positive Psychology Symposium or the Research Student's Conference. I will also write a paper with the aim of it being published in a peer-reviewed journal, and of course this will also form a section of my eventual PhD dissertation.

## Section 4: Participants and Recruitment

### • Section 4.1: Participants

*Describe who you are looking to recruit into the project and why, including any criteria for inclusion / exclusion.*

Whilst I am the primary participant, I also wish to refer to perceptions and memories of informal interviews that I have with individuals who influence my thinking and sensemaking about creativity (subject to ethical requirements, detailed in section 3.2). These participants will not be actively recruited, and may include friends, colleagues, mutual acquaintances through a supervisor, or chance encounters. All participants will be over 18 years of age.

### • Section 4.2: Recruitment method

*Provide a brief outline of how potential participants will be approached and recruited into the project (any recruitment materials should be included with the application). Please refer to the Bucks Guidelines for recruitment of participants for research on Blackboard (Ethics, Ethics at Bucks).*

The primary participant in this research is me. Other participants referred to will be individuals I have met through the course of my research, work, and personal life.

• **Section 4.3: Vulnerability**

This study does not involve recruiting participants from a vulnerable population. However, I recognise that the act of reflection sometimes prompts feelings of vulnerability, and that additional sensitivity may be needed.

• **Section 4.4: Incentives**

*If your project will involve offering incentives of any kind, state what the incentives (financial or otherwise) will be and provide a brief justification as to why you feel this is necessary for the project.*

No incentives will be offered to participants; however, a summary of the research findings will be available upon request.

• **Section 4.5: Permission / Gatekeeper**

*Please give details if permission is required for initial contact with participants or to access data (e.g., Headmaster, NHS R&D committee, Company manager, Head of School, HR). Include any documents for seeking permission or where permission has been granted. Please also explain whether a gatekeeper is required to negotiate that access to participants/data, and if so, who would act in that capacity.*

n/a

**Section 5: Consent procedure**

**This section refers to those individuals that I may wish to quote or cite in my autoethnography**

This section will demonstrate how you will obtain informed consent from the participants. *Please include all supporting documents (e.g., Information Sheets, Consent forms and questionnaires).* Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to **each** of the following:

		Yes	No	N/A
<b>5.1</b>	All respondents will be given an Information Sheet and enough time to read it before being asked to agree to participate.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>5.2</b>	All participants taking part in an interview, focus group, observation (or other activity which is not questionnaire-based) will be asked to sign a consent form.  N.B. all participants will be asked to formally reply to an email (Appendix 4) indicating their consent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5.3	All participants completing a questionnaire will be informed on the Information Sheet that returning the completed questionnaire implies consent to participate.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.4	All participants being asked to provide personal data will have the following statement on the consent form or on the bottom of their questionnaire "I consent to the processing of my personal information for the purposes of this research study. I understand that such information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with current UK Data Protection legislation". A tick box should be included to allow participants to give explicit consent for the collection and use of such data.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.5	All respondents will be told that they can withdraw at any time, ask for their interview tape to be destroyed and/or their data removed from the project until it is no longer practical to do so (e.g., when the report has been written up).	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.6	Where full information cannot be given prior to participation (because it could influence outcomes) participants will be fully de-briefed after participation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5.7	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

### Section 6: Confidentiality, Anonymity & Data and Records Management

This section will show how participants can expect confidentiality and/or anonymity and will show how any research data collected will be managed during and after the study. *Confidential data is not disclosed to other people; Anonymous data cannot be linked to the participant's personal details. Confidentiality cannot always be guaranteed in the event of disclosure of illegal activity or unsafe practice.*

Please answer YES, NO or NOT APPLICABLE (N/A) to each of the following:

		Yes	No	N/A
6.1	Questionnaires will be returned anonymously and indirectly. Please note that questionnaire data cannot then be followed up/clarified.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6.2	Questionnaires and/or interview transcripts will only be identifiable by a unique identifier (e.g., code/pseudonym)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.3	Data will be stored securely and lists of identity number or pseudonyms linked to names and/or addresses will be stored securely and separately from research data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.4	All place names and institutions which could lead to the identification of individuals or organisations will be changed	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.5	I confirm that all processing of personal information related to the study will be in full compliance with UK Data Protection legislation ( <i>including the Data Protection Principles</i> )	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.6	Consideration has been given to the limitations of confidentiality e.g., disclosure of illegal behaviour or unsafe practice.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.7	I confirm that processing of all security sensitive information will be in full compliance with the “Oversight of security - sensitive research material in UK universities: guidance (October 2012)” (Universities UK, recommended by the Association of Chief Police Officers)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6.8	If you answered NO to any of the above (or think more information could be useful to the reviewer) please state, why here:			

### Section 7: Authorisation

*Authorisation of this application indicates satisfaction that the details are accurate, the proposed methods are appropriate, ethical concerns have been considered and that time and resources are available for the research to take place. The authoriser accepts responsibility for the applicant who is undertaking the work.*

#### For Bucks employees:

Signed: .....

Line manager

Date .....

#### For postgraduate researchers, postgraduate taught students, and undergraduate students:

Signed .....

Supervisor

Date .....

*If original signatures are not supplied, the applicant must forward an email from the line manager / supervisor including the above authorisation statement.*

**Section 8: Checklist for Applicant**

- ☒ The Ethics application form
- ☒ The Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 4)
- ☒ The Consent Form (see Appendix 4)
- ☐ Letters seeking/granting permission for access to data/participants
- ☐ Materials for recruitment of participants
- ☐ Questionnaire
- ☐ Interview schedule
- ☐ Authorisation received
- ☐ Risk assessment
- ☒ Line manager / supervisor approval

## Ethics Approval Letter

 <b>bucks</b> new university	Research & Enterprise Development Unit  email: <a href="mailto:ResearchUnit@bucks.ac.uk">ResearchUnit@bucks.ac.uk</a>
12 July 2019	
Mrs Diane Herbert 10 The Crest Bledlow Ridge High Wycombe HP14 4AQ	
Dear Diane	
<b><u>Ethical approval: Ref UEP2019Jun01</u></b>	
I am writing to confirm that ethical approval was granted by the University Research Ethics Panel of Buckinghamshire New University on 1 July 2019 for your project:	
"Embracing polarity, paradox and tension: How studying this subject has changed me and the work that I do."	
This approval is valid for data collection for 2 years from 1 July 2019.	
Please ensure that you quote the above reference number as evidence of ethical approval and in all materials used to recruit participants.	
The Research and Enterprise Development Unit must be notified of any amendments to the proposed research or any extension to the period of data collection.	
I hope that your research project goes well.	
Yours sincerely,	
	
Dr M. Nakisa  Secretary to the University Research Ethics Panel Research and Enterprise Development Unit	
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## Example of My Data Collection Log (Chang, 2008)

Data set	Date	Type	Location	Source
1	March 2019	Meeting / informal interviews	At individual's place of work	Notes from meeting
2	Oct 2017 – Feb 2-19	Reflexive notes	Notes were taken in a variety of locations. At home, in coffee shops, whilst travelling	Reflective account Excerpts from literature
3	Oct 2018-date	Reflexive notes	At home	Thoughts on doing autoethnography
4.	September 2018	Lecture notes	Summer School, Capri, Italy	Notes taken during lecture on autoethnography
5.	October 2018	Essay	At home	Reflective essay on findings from first study, 'what I would do differently as a leader'
6.	February 2017	Reflective journal	At home	Reflexive journal about research process
7.	August 2017	Recorded conversation	Individual's place of work	Conversation about creativity, sharing thoughts and reflections

**Guidelines for Auto-ethnographers (Tolich, 2010)****Consent**

1. Respect participants' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007).
2. Practice "process consent," checking at each stage to make sure participants still want to be part of the project (Ellis, 2007).
3. Recognise the conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript (see Jago, 2002; Rambo, 2007).

**Consultation**

4. Consult with others, such as an Ethics Panel (Chang, 2008; Congress of Qualitative Inquiry).
5. Auto-ethnographers should not publish anything they would not show the persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006).

**Vulnerability**

6. Beware of internal confidentiality: the relationship at risk is not with the researcher exposing confidences to outsiders, but confidences exposed among the participants or family members themselves (Tolich, 2004).
7. Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo by anticipating the author's future vulnerability.
8. Photovoice anticipatory ethics claims that no photo is worth harming others. In a similar way, no story should harm others, and if harm is unavoidable, take steps to minimise harm.
9. Those unable to minimise risk to self or others should use a nom de plume (Morse, 2002) as the default.
10. Assume all people mentioned in the text will read it one day (see Ellis, 1995a).

### Information Email

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

Following our recent conversation, I wanted to provide you with some information regarding my research and to formally request your consent to cite or make reference to our conversation. I also want to be explicit about my commitment to keeping your information confidential.

This research is the third study for my PhD in the psychology of creativity at Buckinghamshire New University. The aim of the PhD is to explore how individuals experience creativity in their organisation, its highs but also its possible lows - for example, to what extent creativity is perceived as being a source of uncertainty, risk, and tension, and if so, how individuals cope with this. In this third study I wish to look back and to look forward, to understand how the research is changing me, changing my potential professional perceptions, and ways in which I work. I am hoping that this study will help me to better understand how to facilitate creativity within organisations and will inform the design of a positive psychology intervention.

I believe that creativity is a highly relational process, therefore it feels natural and appropriate for me to include thoughts and observations on the ways in which other people have influenced my thinking and sensemaking about the process of creativity within organisations. Part of the data that I wish to use are my own personal reflections and perceptions on the conversation we have had. I would like your permission to refer to and / or cite our conversation in my PhD thesis, or any reports, academic publications (including articles, books, and presentations) that I may write.

If you would prefer me not to cite or make reference to our conversation, that is completely your decision, and one that I will respect. I am happy for you to read any part of the text that refers to the conversation in which you feature should you wish to do so. If you wish to determine limits of what may, or may not, be included, I will respect your wishes and your data will not be included or it will be limited according to your wishes. You can withdraw from the study, [ask for the recording of our conversation to be destroyed] and / or your data to be removed from the project at any time up until the point the data are analysed (31<sup>st</sup> March 2020). You will not be asked questions about why you no longer want to take part.

I am committed to keeping the data you provide me safe and secure. I will not include your name, names of individuals mentioned or the organisation in which you / they work. Any identifiable information will not be included in my PhD thesis, or any reports, academic publications (including papers, books, and presentations). I may use anonymised direct quotations and/or paraphrased recollections from the conversations in reports, academic articles, publications, including papers, books, and presentations. I will not share any of your personal data, which will be kept confidential.

**\*\* Since you kindly gave me permission to audio-record our conversation on an encrypted device, I would also like to be clear about what happens to that recording. As I mentioned at the time, the recording was transferred to a password-protected computer and was deleted from any mobile devices following transfer. The purpose of the recording is purely to enable me to reflect back on our conversation and it will not be shared or distributed in any way. The recording is kept in accordance with the University's policy on data retention.**

I would be grateful if you could formally reply to this email indicating that:

- I have your consent to cite and/or make reference to our conversation

- You consent to the processing of your personal information for the purposes of this research study
- You understand that your personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and handled in accordance with current UK Data Protection legislation

As this study is part of my PhD, it has been reviewed and approved by the University Ethics Panel at Buckinghamshire New University (Ref UEP2019Jun01).

If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, please ask me, or email me at [diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:diane.herbert@bucks.ac.uk). Alternatively, you can contact my research supervisors (details below).

Dr Piers Worth or Dr Genevieve Cseh

email: [piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:piers.worth@bucks.ac.uk) or [genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk](mailto:genevieve.cseh@bucks.ac.uk)

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**\*\* This section will be included if the conversation was recorded (with permission)**

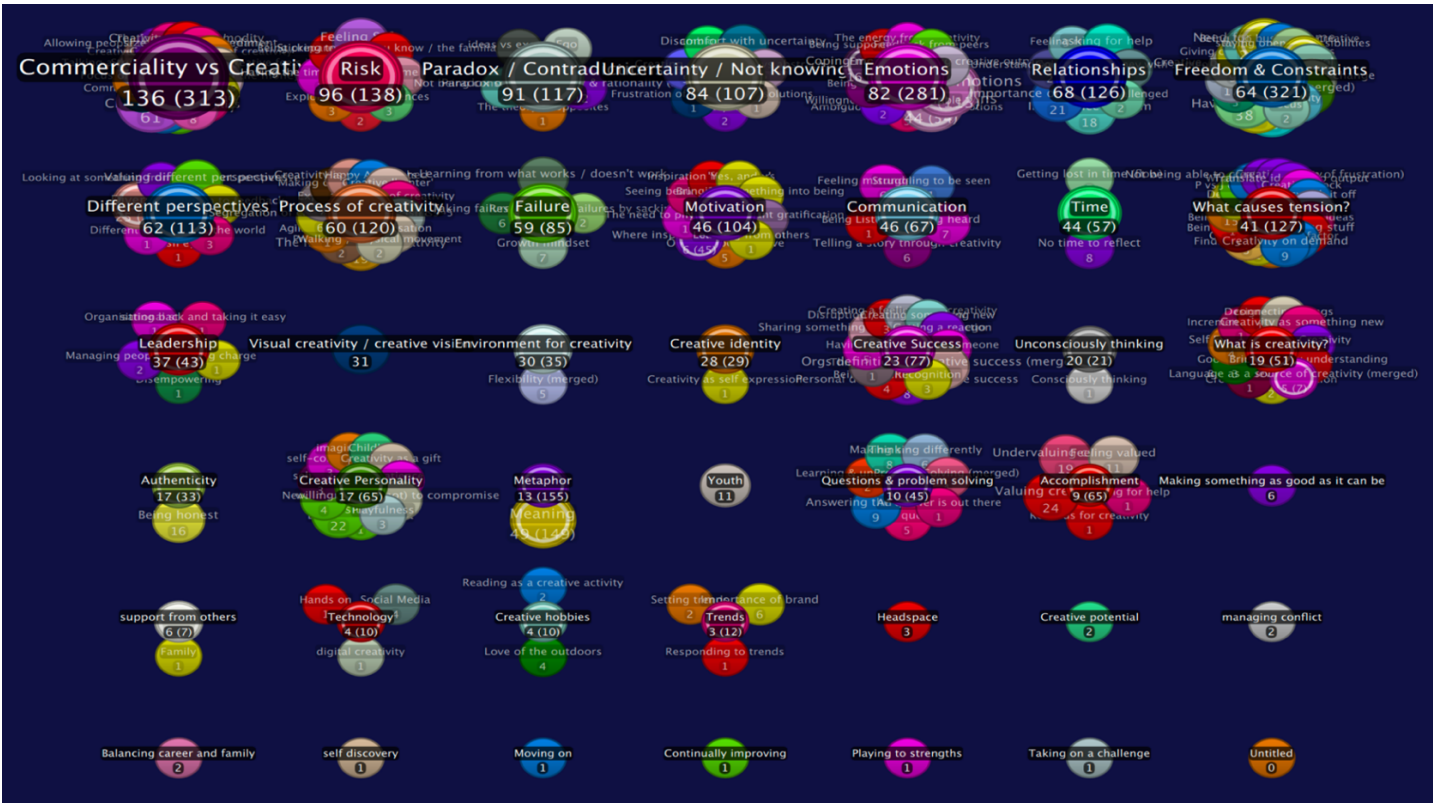
## Appendix F

### Six Phases of Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

	Phase	Description of the process
1	Familiarising yourself with your data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2	Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3	Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4	Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extract (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5	Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6	Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis of the research questions and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Appendix G

Excerpt of Data Analysis (Study 1)



Appendix H  
Excerpt of Data Analysis (Study 2)

