Ambidextrous tensions: Dynamics of creative work in the media innovation process

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes creative work in one of Europe's largest media organizations, in which a newly formed development team was tasked with creating a new multi-platform media product. The objective of this article is to explore the dynamics of team creativity in the process of developing and managing media content innovation. To do this, this study utilizes the concept of ambidexterity for understanding multi-level tensions between ongoing media production work and innovation processes that typically co-exist in media operations. The results of analysis indicate that due to pressures created by routine media production, media innovations require specific focus and prioritization to succeed. This requires recognizing, bal-

ancing and managing the ambidextrous tensions between exploration and exploitation in creative media work. In addition to practical implications for the management of media innovations, this study contributes to research on media innovations, particularly from the perspectives of creative work and organizational creativity.

Keywords

ambidexterity, creativity, media innovation, media management, media work, tensions

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INTRODUCTION

In the current conversion to a digital operating environment, media organizations struggle with the need to create and innovate new content, products and services as well as new organizational practices. However, research on creative work that focuses on media content innovation has been scarce; similarly, there are few case studies regarding creative work practices, including in media management research and media studies (e.g., Banks, Calvey, Owen & Russell, 2002; Berglez, 2011; Deuze, 2007; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011; Küng, 2008a; Malmelin & Virta, 2016; Mierzejewska, 2011; Mierzejewska & Hollifield, 2006; Nylund, 2013). There is both a theoretical and a practical need for research into creative industry organizations.

For instance, a deeper theoretical understanding is necessary for the management and governance of the creative production process (Davis & Scase, 2000; Townley & Beech, 2010; Townley, Beech & McKinlay, 2009). Further, empirical research on the internal dynamics and interactions in media organizations and teams is needed (Küng, 2008b; Mierzejewska, 2011). These are significant themes for understanding the meaning of creativity and innovativeness in media production and in media organization operations. There is a strategic need for organizational development, specifically among traditional media companies or “legacy media,” which is mainly due to the digital transformation of the industry.

The purpose of this article is to empirically explore the creative work of media professionals in the development process of a new media product. Our objective is to create understanding of the dynamics of team creativity in the process of developing and managing media content innovation. This study contributes to the evolving research on media innovations, particularly from the perspectives of creative teams and organizations as well as their management in the changing media industry. The theoretical basis of this article draws on research into both organizational creativity (as the prereq-

uisite for innovation) and media innovation (as the outcome of the creative process).

This study focuses on a creative team working on media product innovation in an *ambidextrous* operational setting. In this setting, the creative media work requires concurrent completion of both routinized production tasks and new assignments to generate innovation. Our aim is to identify ambidextrous tensions between simultaneous *exploitation* and *exploration* in an individual team member and the development team as well as at organizational levels. Based on the findings of the empirical study, we suggest that balancing the ambidextrous tensions of media work is crucial for media organizations. This perspective is highly relevant for media companies and media management aimed at supporting organizational creativity for innovation (Deuze & Steward, 2011; see also e.g., Mumford, Hester & Robledo, 2012; Styhre & Sundgren, 2005).

The article is structured as follows. First, we discuss our theoretical framework and the key concepts of media innovation, team creativity and organizational ambidexterity. Second, we describe the research context, empirical material and our methodological approach. Next, we turn to our case study focusing on ambidextrous tensions in

the creative work of the media organization’s development team. This is followed by a concluding discussion of the findings within the theoretical landscape of this study.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: MEDIA INNOVATION, ORGANIZATIONAL CREATIVITY AND AMBIDEXTERITY

The innovation scene in the media industry has specific features that emphasize the distinctiveness of media innovations. The research on media innovations has stressed the importance of defining the main characteristics of media innovations, including distinguishing the concept of media innovation from the traditional definitions of innovation and innovations related to other fields and industries (Bleyen, Lindmark, Ranaivoson & Ballon, 2014; Bruns, 2014; Dogruel, 2013; Dogruel, 2014; Storsul & Krumsvik, 2013). Innovation endeavors in the media are also typically organized differently from many other industries, and the absence of separate research and development departments or units is characteristic (Küng, 2013). Thus, innovations in media content are often pursued simultaneously while working on everyday production. This rela-

tionship between ongoing operations and innovation inevitably creates tension (Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010a) and requires the versatile creative capabilities of journalists and editorial teams.

In this article, we focus on creative work in media innovation processes. Although the concepts of innovation and creativity are occasionally interchangeably used in the context of the media industry, these concepts are grounded in separate schools of thought (e.g., Küng, 2008b). Innovation fundamentally concerns change (Christensen, 1997; Govindarajan & Trimble, 2010b), and it is classically defined as the introduction of something new or a novel combination of existing ideas, knowledge, competences or resources that has economic value (Schumpeter, 1934; Schumpeter, 1943). Creativity refers to the creation of something novel and unique, commonly used to describe new ideas (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Runco & Jaeger, 2012). The concept of creativity has traditionally highlighted the imagination and inner motives of individuals involved in the creative process (Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Styhre & Sundgren, 2005).

We understand creativity as emphasizing novel thinking as well as idea development, whereas innovation focuses on transforming the results of cre-

ativity into the form of concepts, processes or products (Bilton, 2007; Küng, 2008b). It is critical to understand the impact of the connection that these two phenomena have on the performance of media organizations (Küng, 2008b). Media organizations traditionally survived through content creation and production and typically needed a constant supply of creative ideas for new content innovation (Küng, 2007; see also Caves, 2000; Hesmondhalgh, 2007). The continuous need for novelty is also one of the main characteristics of media content innovation (Dogruel, 2014). Media content and product innovation include elements of novelty (or change) and usefulness (e.g., having commercial or social utility or added value) that embody the results of creative work.

In this article, our objective is studying media innovations from the perspective of creative work in media organizations and teams. Organizational creativity refers to “the creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system” (Woodman, Sawyer & Griffin, 1993, p. 293). The organizational approach to creativity is particularly useful in analyzing work on media innovations because it emphasizes factors (e.g., pro-

cesses, work environments or management practices) that facilitate creative work in organizations, groups and teams striving for innovative results.

To explore the dynamics and interplay of organizational creativity and innovation in a case of simultaneous routine media content production and new product development, we utilize the concept and theories of ambidexterity. Ambidextrous organizations are able to combine exploitation – i.e., efficiency in operations and successful competition in current mature markets – and exploration, which means developing new products and services as well as flexibly responding to environmental changes (Lavie, Stettner & Tushman, 2010; O'Reilly & Tushman, 2013; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008; Raisch, Birkinshaw, Probst & Tushman, 2009; Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996). Specifically, we draw on the research on contextual ambidexterity as “the capacity to simultaneously achieve alignment and adaptability at a business-unit level” (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004, p. 209; see also Birkinshaw & Gibson, 2004). These dimensions of ambidexterity define the organizational settings of our empirical study, in which the members of the development team are simultaneously responsible for innovating and developing new media products

and participating in routinized content production relating to extant publications.

Achieving ambidexterity in any organization is laborious (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004). Pursuing simultaneous exploration and exploitation characteristically entails and creates various tensions that are challenging to management (Andriopoulos, 2003; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2010). Managing and balancing the contradictions in organizational units that are tasked with both exploration and exploitation is vital at the individual, group and organizational levels; however, it is an arduous and often contradictory endeavour (Andriopoulos & Lewis, 2009; Lavie et al., 2010; see also Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004). The nature of the activities of exploration and exploitation is fundamentally different. Exploration aims at flexible adaptation to the demands of the changing surroundings, whereas exploitation focuses on the alignment of the present operations. The simultaneous aims for the efficient use of resources in current production and investing in creative ideation for future possibilities may collide and create tensions in organizations. Managers are confronted with the dilemma of balancing short-term profitable performance and long-term renewal and innovation (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996).

As in any other ambidextrous organization, the simultaneous need to optimize and innovate creates several types of tensions in the everyday practices of media companies (Küng, 2007). Media organizations need a constant flow of creativity for innovative content and products. At the same time, they are faced with diminishing resources and requirements for restructuring, streamlining, and increasing the efficiency of their operations. Creative work for media innovations clashes with the constraints of everyday production. The development of new media products competes with the same resources that are needed for the current operations. Paradoxically, the main obstacles in achieving innovation often stem from the established practices and routinized work patterns of media organizations (Ess, 2014).

Although there is a branch of research on ambidexterity in innovation studies, studies utilizing the concept of ambidexterity in the context of research on media innovations and media management are scarce (see Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander & Villi, 2014). Our objective is to approach this gap by examining the following research question: What are the central tensions of the media innovation process in an ambidextrous organizational context that should be considered in media management?

We base our analysis on the development team members' personal diary responses, in which they describe their work on media production and innovation and the complexities of balancing the two. In light of the theoretical background discussed above, this question is particularly relevant in relation to the specifics of media innovation interconnection to everyday media production. To begin, we describe the empirical context and material of the research as well as our approach to the analysis of the material. We then present the empirical findings based on the analysis. To conclude, we discuss the findings in relation to the theoretical background and suggest ideas for future research.

RESEARCH CONTEXT, EMPIRICAL MATERIAL AND METHODS

This article presents a case study on the creative work of a development project team in a media organization. A case study approach (Stake, 1995) utilizes a real-life case to explore and understand a phenomenon as a research object by focusing on observations. Our exploration of the dynamics and ambidextrous tensions of creative media work benefits from a qualitative analysis on the empiri-

cal research material, which is typical for case studies. A case study has the potential to provide a rich and detailed analysis of an empirical phenomenon (Hollifield & Coffey, 2006); in our case, it considers team creativity in developing media innovation.

The empirical analysis focused on a Nordic media organization that is part of a major international media corporation and specializes in magazine journalism and publishing. In the organization, a new editorial team was established to create, produce and launch a new multi-platform media product and service, i.e., media innovation. The media sector in question, magazine publishing, is a compelling environment for the analysis because of its rapid transition from traditional products and methods of working to produce a multi-platform service utilizing digital technologies.

The team under study was facing the challenge of creating new methods of working to produce innovation in a new organizational setting, in which they attempt to balance the requirements of routine production and media innovation. The team members were specifically selected from among the existing company employees to work on developing and launching a new multi-platform media product around a specific theme. Certain types of content expertise related to the new product were empha-

sized. These employees were invited to express their interest in working for the new development project. They were evaluated for suitability for the project, and the team was created accordingly. This was a novel organizational approach in the company. Previously, these media professionals had worked in traditional editorial units in the company's various magazines. At the beginning of the development project, the team members continued to work on their previous editorial tasks in addition to the media innovation development project with the development team.

The respondents in the study included all members of the newly established editorial team, comprising 10 media professionals. The team's job titles covered the major positions in magazine publishing: editor-in-chief, managing editor, copy editor, journalist, producer, art director and graphic designer. The mean age of the respondents was 43, and their professional experience in the media business averaged 16 years. All of the respondents had studied in higher education programs.

In our qualitative research, we used *the diary method* and *the critical incident technique* to collect the empirical research material. The diary method is particularly useful in capturing real-time, detailed experiences of organizational daily

life and the respondents' reflections on these incidents. Over a specific time frame, the diary study participants produce their personal views and thoughts on the research subject individually and without the presence of the researcher. Diaries allow the researchers to access the personal views of the respondents in their own words, e.g., concerning their work in the context of organizations. (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003; Bolger, Davis & Rafaeli, 2003; Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen & Zapf, 2010; see also Amabile & Kramer, 2011). In addition to the diary method, we used the critical incident technique in our research design. The critical incident technique is an empirical method that is effective in exploring organizational life (Flanagan, 1954; see also Butterfield, Borgen, Amundson & Malio, 2005). The collected research material reflects the specific critical incidents in relation to media production and innovation that the respondents found particularly significant in the context of their daily work and tasks.

The empirical material was collected in two phases: at the beginning of the content development project (seven weeks in late 2013) and at the beginning of the new editorial team's actual assignment (six weeks in early 2014). The respondents were asked to focus on the most significant

incidents of the week in the development project by writing personal and subjective weekly diary entries. Open-ended questions used to guide the diary writing were sent to the respondents by email once a week during both research periods. The questions were standard and repeated, asking that the respondents describe one event that had facilitated creative work and one event that had constrained creative work during the week in question. The respondents were also encouraged to freely describe any other incident they found significant from the past week. In addition to the questions, the emails contained instructions for answering.

In the first research phase, the material included 52 responses containing 186 diary entries (response rate: 74%); the second phase included 34 responses and 93 diary entries (response rate: 57%). In total, the entire period of empirical material collection produced 86 responses and 279 diary entries (total response rate: 66%). The response rate is considered satisfactory, particularly considering illness and other absences by certain respondents during the research period. Strict confidentiality was guaranteed to the respondents by promising that no one outside the research team would have access to the diary responses. The responses were sent solely to

the research team leader, who anonymized them prior to the analysis.

The research team met the members of the editorial team before the start of the first research period to present the research objectives, methods and practices and to answer the participants' questions. Additionally, between the research periods, i.e., before the start of the second phase, the first author met the editorial team to discuss the initial findings of the research and to motivate and instruct the respondents for the second research period. Participation in the research was voluntary but was recommended by the researchers and the managers of the team.

Our objective was to explore and generate understanding of the dynamics of team creativity in the course of media content innovation, focusing particularly on the ambidextrous tensions between routine production and a development project. Based on this goal, we started the qualitative analysis of the empirical research material by reading the diary responses several times, making extensive notes and memos. Thereafter, we discussed the initial observations and findings of the two researchers for comparison. In the second phase of the analysis, an emergent coding system was de-

veloped based on the empirical material, resulting in 20 initial categories. Thereafter, the first author coded the empirical material according to the categories to capture significant incidents in relation to the team's creative work. On the basis of this initial analysis and the respective discussions among the research team, a further emergent perspective was derived and added to the analysis. Accordingly, team creativity was itemized on three levels: the individual team members, the development team and the organization. In the third phase of the analysis, the research team further elaborated the coding results. Redundant categories were deleted, and the remaining categories were combined to form consistent entities, particularly focusing on the ambidextrous tensions. The final analysis phase included crosschecking the results among the research team and recording the findings according to the most prominent themes resulting from the categorization of the empirical material. The results are presented in the following section.

FINDINGS: AMBIDEXTROUS TENSIONS IN THE MEDIA INNOVATION PROCESS

In the following section, we present our findings by illustrating the tensions that the development team encountered in attempting to find a balance between the continuous production tasks and assignment to innovate. We structure the findings according to the levels of the individual team members, the development team and the organization. On each level, two main tensions were identified, as depicted in Table 1.

Individual level

At the individual team member level, two main ambidextrous tensions were identified: first, *enthusiasm for development/discipline in production* and second, *current duties/new responsibilities*. The first tension between development and production specifically concerned the allocation of individual resources between the routine production and the development project. The second tension, between current duties and new responsibilities, focused on how the team members experienced the change and contradictions in their existing and new roles.

The team members were specifically selected for the development team, and they felt eager to

Table 1.

Ambidextrous tensions in the media innovation process

<i>Individual level</i>	Enthusiasm for development	vs.	Discipline in production
	Current duties	vs.	New responsibilities
<i>Team level</i>	Expected results	vs.	Resource allocation
	Project planning	vs.	Project execution
<i>Organizational level</i>	Short-term sales	vs.	Long-term success
	Existing structures	vs.	Innovation initiatives

participate in the creative work of the development project. Experiencing involvement in the development work supported and maintained the enthusiasm and commitment of the team members. However, with the obligation to simultaneously work in the development team and continue with the ongoing production of the existing magazines, the allocation of individual resources and time became problematic and created tension. As one team member described, “*This does not mean*

that I would not willingly work for future development, but my basic duties have kept me busy, and I have not been able to attend many meetings because of overlapping schedules or because the meetings have been cancelled” (Respondent 5; the respondents are labelled 1-10). The routine production pressures often outweighed the opportunities for creative work in the development team. This led to feelings of disappointment: “*The complication of advancing the development project depends on*

my other projects. I am firmly tied to other duties until decisions are made concerning the development project and until I am assigned clear tasks. I do not have the opportunity now to participate in development and exploration" (Respondent 9).

The team members felt a greater sense of responsibility toward their existing duties than to the development project. The team members wanted to be involved, informed and consulted in relation to the development work but did not always put the necessary effort into participating in the new team's activities. In addition to the time pressures, the team members did not prioritize the development project tasks, and this added to the tensions between development and production: *"The others had to prioritize their tasks differently. They cannot clear their calendars on short notice. They do not feel that it is a priority either, even if they were in the office"* (Respondent 2).

The second individual-level tension comprised current and new work roles. Changes were essential in relation to the development project responsibilities; however, at the same time, the team members concentrated mainly on their current duties, as described by one, *"...I haven't experienced any differences yet. I'm working on two magazines, just as before"* (Respondent 5). Clarity on the new

responsibilities was lacking, and extensive tension was detrimental to the advancement of the development project. One respondent explained, *"The fragmentation of work and transition from the old to new duties is awkward and is creating pressure at the moment. I get surprisingly restless when my thoughts bounce around. I hope that the division of duties will become clearer later"* (Respondent 3). The imbalance between the expected transition to the new responsibilities and the lack of clarity of these expectations hindered the development project's progress, thus obstructing innovation.

A successful shift from current production to new innovation work was a crucial element for the success of the development project. However, the shift was complicated and laborious. A team member stated, *"I do not always understand how stuck we are in old habits. We produce tablet magazines with our 'print hats' on when we could do something totally different and thrilling"* (Respondent 2). Individual effort and willingness was required to move outside the traditional areas of journalistic work. This was described as follows: *"As content producers, we cannot give up and withdraw from discussions about business, and especially not in relation to technological platforms and solutions"* (Respondent 2).

Development team level

At the team level, creative work encountered ambidextrous tensions in relation to *expected results/resource allocation* and *project planning/project execution*. The tension between result expectations and resource allocation originated from the discrepancies felt between the objectives set for the development project by the company and the actual resources available for the work. The second tension between project planning and execution stemmed from experiences indicating that creative ideation was not leading to concrete decisions and deliverable results in the development project.

The upper management of the company defined the development project objectives and resources according to the company's strategy. The development team leaders were responsible for balancing the expectations with the resources available for the project. The goals established were ambitious, and the development team was aware of this: *"If this flops, this is not a small or even a medium-sized problem. A lot of money is involved, and the expectations for revenue are high"* (Respondent 2). Thus, the imbalance experienced between the expected result and the resource allocation created tension and anxiety within the development team: *"I feel irritated that numerous inspiring things,*

digital and print, are planned in this company, but if someone asks who is going to do all this work, the one asking the question is considered a difficult, change-resistant person" (Respondent 7). The different perspectives and priorities concerning development project resources and organizational level objectives collided at the project level, creating energy-consuming ambidextrous tensions. The coordination of the development work was tied to the schedules of other ongoing productions, which complicated the planning of the development team's work.

The target schedule for the launch of the new multi-platform media product was considered to be extremely tight by the development team. The complexity lies not only in combining the development work with the existing production schedules but also in developing the project team organization and resolving its resource and coordination issues. Thorough consideration to balance the expectations of and resources for the development team's work was important: *"After the planning stage, it would be useful to map out all the tasks expected of the team and be realistic about resources and expectations"* (Respondent 5). Many team members felt that they were not sufficiently involved in planning and design of the work they were expected to

do. It was also excessively easy for them to use the requirements of the familiar, ongoing production work as an excuse to avoid the tensions in relation to the development project.

The second team-level tension between planning and execution concerned the development project itself. Many team members were bound to the ongoing production tasks as discussed above, and the development team management spent a significant quantity of time and effort addressing resource questions at the company level. This led to the development team doubting the possibility of the project's success. One respondent summarized the situation as follows: *"Rushing and the shortage of personnel constantly hamper future success. The budget for the web portion of the project is scarce. The biggest worry now is who has time to take care of everything. The workload is enormous"* (Respondent 6). The procedures for supporting the development work in addition to the routine production appeared to be deficient, as described by a team member: *"The starting point of the project, that the concept will be clarified when doing it, is quite laborious"* (Respondent 7). Conversely, the team members also had moderately unrealistic expectations regarding the speed at which the various questions and open issues could

be addressed and settled by the development team.

A certain quantity of slack as well as "trial and error" is typical and necessary for creative work striving for innovation. However, an extensive lack of clarity shifts the focus away from the actual development work, as illustrated by a respondent: *"We come across these kind of unclear and imperfectly prepared issues. This is why we do a lot of redundant work. There is a frustrating number of open issues"* (Respondent 8). If ideas and plans do not lead to decisions and, particularly, to action, the ambidextrous tensions between planning and execution are notable, *"The meeting was energizing; our team is good at creating ideas. However, the weakness of the editorial unit was noticeable in the meeting. We talk a lot and throw out ideas but cannot really make decisions"* (Respondent 7). Ideation without concrete deliverables can easily turn against itself. This was particularly characteristic of the ambidextrous situation that demanded that team members balance their work between the development project and the existing production.

Organizational level

The third level of analysis concentrated on the organizational level. The two main tensions discovered here were *short-term sales/long-term success* and

existing structures/innovation initiatives. The former focused on the ambidextrous tensions between a rapid market launch of the new media product to generate income and having sufficient resources to develop the product so as to be sufficiently finalized before the launch. The latter tension between existing organizational structures and the innovation initiative, the development project, became evident in the efforts to balance the needs of the development project with the existing realities of various units and functions in the company.

A typical ambidextrous tension can be identified between efficient short-term exploitation and innovative long-term exploration. This finding was also significant in our case analysis. The pressure for launching the new media product as soon as possible was high, particularly for beginning sales: *“In some meetings, there has been a slight tension in the air. This is due to the very tight schedule. For example, media and consumer sales expect to have the information regarding what they can and cannot sell. They press us about this for good reason; however, it is not in any way realistic for us to have a finalized concept within the time available”* (Respondent 2). Another respondent stated the following: *“Selling the new service to customers and potential partners is difficult at this stage, as the*

service has not yet been launched and we do not have a clear vision of the user quantities” (Respondent 1). However, it was not only the requirements from the sales perspective for the development project that created tension but also vice versa. The new multi-platform service differed significantly from the traditional products offered by the company, and the mismatch between current skills and new demands for the sales organization was described as follows, *“It also became evident that the sales organization is not in shape to sell a digital product”* (Respondent 1). The development team considered the traditional demographic principles for magazine sales unsuitable for the selling of the new digital service.

The divergence between short-term sales and long-term success is easily ignored in the everyday work of media organizations, and this also occurred in the media organization studied. A respondent described the tension between the internally competing business units of the company as follows: *“Everyone has fierce growth targets and feels pressure to attract users and have a profitable business. Yes, we want cooperation. We keep repeating that, and we agree that it is the only way and is mutually beneficial. However, this is as far as we get because we do not make the deci-*

sions” (Respondent 2). In situations such as this, the potential synergies between organizational units vanish in the ambidextrous tensions between short- and long-term goals, and possibilities for future success may be lost.

The final ambidextrous tension of our analysis was observed between existing structures and the innovation initiative of the media company. Every production unit in the company did not consider the formation of the new development team to be a welcome solution. One respondent wrote, *“In a magazine editorial unit, the news about our development team is not necessarily positive”* (Respondent 1). This led to conflicting expectations being put on the team members simultaneously working on the development team and the ongoing production. The tension limited creative cooperation because ongoing production and the development project were considered to be competing or rival operations, not adjacent endeavours with distinctive characteristics that would both benefit the company overall.

The tensions between existing structures and the innovation initiative existed not only in relation to other editorial units but also between the development team and the support functions of the company. This tension was particularly re-

lated to problems with technology. The corporate functions responsible for providing technological services could not sufficiently meet the requests of the development team because the units were mainly trained to meet the demands of traditional print production. One respondent stated, *“Every single week, I get irritated by the technical systems that are light-years apart from our needs. The aims of the project or the new ways of working are stuck”* (Respondent 2). The frustrating tensions caused by technological incompatibilities severely restricted the creative work on media innovation, particularly because the complexities remained unsolved for a long time.

Above, we have discussed the ambidextrous tensions in the creative work of the development team in our case at the level of individual team members, the development team and the organization. The findings are based on the empirical analysis of team creativity in the media innovation process. Parallel to the tensions, the development team members had various means of coping with the pressures between production and innovation. These included a positive and constructive attitude regarding the development project, recognition and acceptance of the inevitable insecurities involved in development, an effort to commit to participate in team meetings and gatherings, as

well as an eagerness to learn new skills, particularly in relation to digital technology. Loosely structured, inspirational encounters with other team members or managers were particularly useful for fostering creativity. This type of situation characterized by collaboration supported individual and team creativity, thus enhancing the exploration for innovation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this article, our objective was to explore the dynamics of creative work based on an empirical case of media innovation. In particular, we focused on the ambidextrous tensions of creative work in the media innovation process and analyzed the tensions experienced by individual team members, and at the development team and organizational levels. Our case offered unique access to an ambidextrous media innovation process that occurred parallel to ongoing production with shared personnel resources, but simultaneously operated as a distinctive development project aimed at creating a new multi-platform media product.

As the previous research suggests, media innovations are primarily pursued in close connection with routine media production (Küng, 2013). Thus,

it is crucial to identify and evaluate the dynamics of exploration and exploitation in creative media work that strives to develop media innovations. We argue that it is essential to balance the efforts of exploration and exploitation at the individual, team and organizational levels to achieve contextual ambidexterity in media organizations. The ability to innovate is related to the goals and practices of creative team work in media organizations (Ess, 2014; van der Wurff & Leenders, 2008). Thus, it is central for media organizations to be capable of productively managing the practices and processes of developing creative ideas into innovations (Dal Zotto & van Kranenburg, 2008) in ambidextrous organizational settings. The role of management in providing supportive conditions for this and balancing the ambidextrous tensions is of vital importance (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; Lavie et al., 2010; Rosing, Frese & Bausch, 2011; Rosing, Rosenbusch & Frese, 2010; Zacher & Rosing, 2015).

As Govindarajan & Trimble (2010a) have stated, tensions between innovation initiatives and ongoing operations are unavoidable in most organizational settings. Tensions were also an inevitable consequence of the ambidextrous situation that combined exploration with exploitation in the media organization discussed in this article. On the basis of our analysis, we suggest that the pressures

of routine production have a tendency toward defeating innovation efforts in an ambidextrous situation in media organizations unless they are accorded special focus by management at all levels. Managing ambidexterity, particularly the ambidextrous tensions analyzed above, is a fundamental requirement for media management to secure the innovation potential in media organizations.

As we have argued, ambidextrous tensions characterized the dynamics between the ongoing production work (understood as exploitation) and creative content development for innovations (understood as exploration) in the media organization studied. These tensions were evident at three levels: (I) the individual team members, (II) the development team and (III) the organization. Two main ambidextrous tensions were identified at each of the three levels as follows: (I) the individual team member level – (1) enthusiasm for development vs. discipline in production and (2) current duties vs. new responsibilities; (II) development team level – (3) expected results vs. resource allocation and (4) project planning vs. project execution; and (III) organizational level – (5) short-term sales vs. long-term success and (6) existing structures vs. innovation initiatives.

In accordance with these results, there is a need for balancing the ambidextrous tensions in media innovation. Thus, our study suggests several practical implications for media management. In balancing the ambidexterity between ongoing routine production and work towards media innovation, the team leaders are confronted with the multi-level tensions explored and discussed in this article. In planning for media innovation, it is vital for media management to anticipate the various ambidextrous tensions at different levels and consciously focus on balancing them before and during the innovation process. In accordance with the previous research on ambidexterity, the ambidextrous tensions in media organizations require specific management efforts, i.e., ambidextrous leadership (Rosing et al., 2011; Rosing et al., 2010; Zacher & Rosing, 2015). This enables the ideation for exploration and efficient operations for exploitation to occur simultaneously or in close proximity, giving both sufficient emphasis but being clear regarding the objectives of the two approaches. Without considering the ambidextrous tensions characteristic of creative work, even the largest companies with affluent resources face an increased risk of failure in striving for media innovation, particularly due to

the management work overload and the volatility of the innovation processes.

However, in relation to practical management procedures, further empirical research is needed in media organizations to improve the understanding of media innovation in ambidextrous contexts, particularly the management thereof. Focusing at the middle management level would be significant because creative work that aims for innovation in media organizations is often team-based, and the role of team leaders is central in managing the work and tensions in practice. Team-level leaders are also required to balance the ambidextrous tensions between the interests of individual creative professionals and the organizations' top management. Another interesting approach would be to analyze the way in which the various ambidextrous tensions in media work are interrelated. In media organizations, this is further complicated by the tensions between journalistic ideals and business targets.

We want to finally note that, despite the natural tendency of understanding "tension" as something that creates difficulties and is thus negative, in the analyzed case, the ambidextrous environment of the new production team also reflected positive potential. For example, the respondents were able to

apply their recently acquired new technology skills especially in the development project tasks, but also in the day-to-day production. When this behavior occurred, it enhanced the team members' creativity and ability to ambidextrously balance the requirements of both the routine production work and the innovative new content of the development project. Thus, the positive potential of ambidextrous tensions for media innovation would be worthy of future research interest.

Our empirical research contributes to the media innovation literature by exploring the creative work process of a development team aiming at innovation in a media company. In particular, we complement earlier studies on media innovations by identifying and construing the role of ambidextrous tensions between ongoing routine production and creative media innovation processes, thus breaking new ground in the emerging research of media innovations. Despite the prospect of the resulting categorization of ambidextrous tensions for future media innovation research, it has to be taken into consideration that the analysis is limited to a single case study. Thus, the results of the study may need further elaboration to represent media innovation projects more generally. Although this study is an auspicious effort to explore and explain the ambi-

dextrous character of a media innovation process, more empirical as well as theoretical research on ambidexterity in media organizations is necessary to extend the comprehension of this complex phenomenon.

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