Radically Involved

An explorative analysis of identity work in contemporary creative labour

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Abstract

A processual account and understanding of identities have become a highly relevant and productive topic in contemporary management and organisation studies since identity is key to developing an understanding of a range of individual and collective processes and outcomes. Instead of a stable aggregation, identity is understood as an ongoing accomplishment and as a set of multiple selves and narratives. Since it is essential for people to shape a coherent and distinctive notion of self-identity, while struggling with the various social identities which pertain to them, they employ identity work (Watson, 2008). The workplace in today's fluid times is seen by many as an arena for self-realisation while it confronts them with societal norms and organisational strategies. The notion of self-fulfilment through the job is especially apparent in the media and creative industries because the longing for self-expression constitutes the core of human creativity. Since there is a lack of studies addressing the interplay of identity work and strategy work in the creative sector, this thesis explores the current state of creative labour and creative identities. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten creative workers in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and The Hague, a fine-grained understanding of identity work and strategy work was developed. A mixed methodological approach, including aspects of grounded theory, phenomenology, and ethnography prepared and accompanied the interview data analysis. The analysis was carried out abductively through qualitative coding and mind-mapping. This process crystallised a multi-layered scheme of findings. Thus, identity- and strategy work processes were found on three levels: the microlevel (the individual), the mesolevel (the organisation), and the macrolevel (the societal and industry-specific context). Regarding the microlevel, it was found that creative workers indeed see creativity and thus their jobs as fundamental parts of their identities which leads to ongoing identity work in their organisational contexts. Many are intrinsically motivated, which can lead to a lack of personal distance to their work. Regarding the mesolevel it became clear that the creative agency is an environment that has extensive influence on a creative worker's identity work and play processes, for instance, through the extent to which the organisation culturally and operationally values creativity. Moreover, it became clear that especially younger creative workers enjoy being in a small team because it gives them room for individual development. On the macrolayer, some repercussions of neoliberalism seem to influence a creative's identity work. To illustrate, many respondents see their personal and professional goals as intertwined and seem to feel pressured always to deliver exceptional quality. Moreover, some influence factors immanent to the creative industries were found. The cultural and creative industries have specific entry barriers that can cause individual insecurities. Also, the nature of creative work was found to play a significant role in a creative's identity work. Since creative production is a compromise between art and service, the creative worker has to merge artistic and economic logics of practice. The interdiscursive approach of this study eventually paves the way for new research efforts beyond seeing identity and strategy matters as unified discourses.

KEYWORDS**:** *Identity work, Identity play, Strategy-as-practice, Creative work, Creative industries*

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In the course of today's increasingly fluid, reflexive, and narcissistic times, identity as a concept moved in the foreground of intellectual debates (Alvesson et al., 2008; Ashforth et al., 2008; Ashforth et al., 2011; Brown, 2015, 2017, 2020; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013; Haslam et al., 2017; Schultz et al., 2012). Conceived as the meanings that individuals attach to their selves and their social contexts (Hatch & Schultz, 2002), identity is core to human functioning (Alvesson et al., 2008). Today, organisational contexts more broadly and the workplace in particular have become the social domain where many identity construction processes come to light (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2020; Manto et al., 2010). Here, individuals try to make sense of who they were, are, and desire to become (Brown, 2015, p. 21). Identity today, is widely acknowledged as a set of multiple facets and categories that come to light in respective social settings (Alvesson et al., 2008; Brown, 2017; Haslam et al., 2017). To manage and maintain these multiple identities while aiming for inner harmony and coherence, or distinction towards others, people work and play with their identities continually (Anderson & Warren, 2011).

A processual account and understanding of identities have become a highly relevant and productive topic in contemporary management and organisation studies since identity is key to developing an understanding of a range of individual and collective processes and outcomes (Brown, 2015; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Schultz et al., 2012). Therefore, this research follows this stream of literature and focuses on identity not as a stable aggregation of perceptions resting in peoples' heads, but as a dynamic set of processes by which an organisation's or personal self is continuously socially constructed from the interchange between internal and external definitions (Hatch & Schultz, 2002, p. 1004). According to Schultz et al. (2012, p. 3), identity is seen as an "ongoing accomplishment" in which processes of constructing identity are open to contestation and as productive of fragmented, fluid selves that are characterised by multiple and diverse narratives.

This thesis focuses specifically on the notion of identity work (Brown, 2015, 2017; Oliver, 2015; Watson, 2008; Winkler, 2018), which devotes particular attention to how workers adjust their selves in dynamic workplaces (Coupland & Brown, 2012). Identity work is defined as "people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of their sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). It involves "mutually constitutive processes" through which people "strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity", while struggling with and trying to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them (Watson, 2008, p. 129). Here, the individual is confronted with numerous societal norms and top-down organisational strategies that influence a person's long-term understanding of self and situational behaviour (Oliver, 2015; Watson, 2003), as well as emotional and mental wellbeing (Winkler, 2018). While many people see their jobs as arenas for self-fulfilment and self-realisation, contradictory norms, work-pressures, or exhaustive

organisational strategies may lead to continuous moments of self-doubt, confusion, and other insecurities, thereby furthering struggles and tensions within individual identity work (Alvesson, 2010; Beech et al., 2012; Manto et al., 2010).

While there is increased attention on the importance of the media and creative industries as economically and culturally valuable employment fields, there is a lack of studies addressing the intersection of identity work and strategy work in these fields (Beech et al., 2012; Bhansing et al., 2020; Manto et al., 2010). Especially in the creative industries of highly-developed, post-industrial countries, people are longing for self-fulfilment through their profession, but have to cope with tensions arising from precarious labour conditions and strategic necessities of the organisation (Manto et al., 2010). Despite our growing and significant understanding of creative labour and creative identities (Bhansing et al., 2018; Bhansing et al., 2020; Lange, 2017; Round & Styhre, 2017; Schediwy et al., 2018; Werthes et al., 2018), there is a lack of studies that explore individual identity and strategy work in depth.

Theoretical Relevance and Scientific Gap

Therefore, this thesis project contributes to our understanding of identity work in the media and creative industries. Specifically, the contribution is to learning how strategy work and identity work intersect and play out in this context. Hence, the research question is designed as follows:

How do creative workers employ identity work to construct and develop their creative selves in relation to the organisational strategies in their contexts?

To answer this research question, this thesis focuses on workers identifying as creative and being active in the media and creative industries because, here, individuals often seek self-fulfilment in their work. Moreover, creative workers most possibly experience on-going struggles around creating a sense of self in their organisational surroundings. This may be related to general trends on how identities are constructed in changing organisational contexts, but also to more specific, industry-centered aspects, such as the need to balance creative and economic demands, freedom and structure, etc. (Hennekam & Bennett 2016). On these grounds, this research aims to put empirical attention on processes of identity constructions in the creative industries on the personal level in depth.

Social, Societal and Practical Relevance

Along the lines with the context as mentioned above, this research question immanently entails certain expectations. The creative industries are organised principally to capture the market value of human creativity (Jones et al., 2015). Hence, creative products have a symbolic nature and carry semiotic codes that originated in their production value. One can, therefore, speak of the creative

industries as one that attracts creative individuals that seek self-expression in their work. In this current research, organisational strategies and processes are, thus, expected to have a continuous and dynamic influence on the workers' creative selves regarding their confidence, creativity, productivity, happiness, motivation, and other phenomena.

The social and practical relevance of this research comes from a better understanding of the ongoing identity and strategy work of creatives as responses, reactions and stimulators of their organisational environments. Thereby, I consider it as necessary also to take on a critical perspective when examining this relatively new, interdiscursive research field. Unlike in 'traditional' workplace settings that employ steeper hierarchy structures, power is perhaps exercised more subtly in contemporary organisational settings such as the creative agency, which often operates in somewhat flat hierarchy structures. Towards this background, I assume that such an organisational environment unfolds new forms of individual identity- and strategy work processes and practices. In this study, I aim to develop a more fine-grained and reflective appreciation of the struggles these workers go through in their daily work-, and thus life routines. I am confident that such an in-depth exploration from a theoretically integrated perspective has the potential to suggest ideas for better socio-cultural and socio-economic support mechanisms eventually.

Aside from these scientifically and socially relevant aspects, this study could also offer practical implications for various parties involved. On the one hand, this study could allow individual (creative) workers to manage their perception of selves better since it shines a light on the multifaceted and interdiscursive phenomenon of identity work in the organisational setting. To be precise, providing an integrated theoretical view on today's state of creative work and thus the apparent societal and organisational influential forces on an individual's identity construction could unburden a possibly overstrained and exhausted creative worker. Since we often tend to be blind towards the objective, external perspective on personal issues, I am confident that a holistic reasoning as it is provided in this study could reduce any anxieties and insecurities a creative worker is facing in today's times.

Moreover, this paper could allow organisational directors and managers of a creative agency to handle and execute organisational strategies more competently. By hearing the creative employees' experiences, learning about their values, motivations, and intentions with their work practices, and by realising how these insights relate to the societal and industry-specific context, organisations can use their resources better, implement new effective strategies and treat their workers with more empathetic care.

Chapter Outline

In order to explore how creative individuals employ identity work to construct and develop their creative selves in relation to the organisational strategies in their contexts, this research paper is divided into six main parts. Following the current introduction, the theoretical framework introduces

the relevant theories and existing studies needed to gain a holistic understanding of identities in action and how that concept relates to creative work. Thus, after demonstrating the complex nature of human identity, I elaborate on the concepts of identity work, creativity, identity play, and strategy as practice. Moreover, the purpose here is to grasp the current status within the research field of identities in action in contemporary management and organisation studies. The third chapter focuses on the different aspects of the data collection and analysis method. Here, I argue why I chose to employ a qualitative research method, elaborate on the advantages and challenges of the in-depth interview, and guide through the analysis step-by-step. The following chapter presents the most novel research findings on three layers. In the fifth chapter, I discuss these findings with reference to the earlier mentioned theories and concepts. Here, I focus on reflecting upon the most present and illustrative findings and how they contribute to answering the main research question. Primarily, the multidimensional implications of (creative) identity work and strategy-as-practice are discussed, which eventually strengthens the theoretical and practical relevance of the research. Finally, I summarise and tie up the thesis in the sixth chapter.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

On the Complexity of the Self: Subject and Identity as Processes

> Das Subjekt ist ein Schlachtfeld. [The subject is a battlefield.] (Virno, 2003, p. 80 as cited in Broeckling, 2013, p. 19)

Humans are complex beings. Being a 'subject' is a phenomenon that scientists of the philosophical, psychological, anthropologist, sociological, and socio-cultural fields have been dealing with since many centuries. Despite the infinite number of foci when interpreting its underlying meaning, there are general assumptions about the individual being formed by external influences - which can already be explained purely from an etymological point of view. 'Subjectum' is Latin and means something like 'the subjugated', or 'the subserved'. Becoming a subject is a paradox process, it happens but is also being made in active and passive moments. Internal and external control are inevitably interwoven into one another (for a vivid and complex elaboration, see Foucault, 1979; Butler, 1997). The paradox is that, to be a subject, a human has to make itself what it already is while living a life that it is already given[1] (see Plessner, 1928, in Krueger, 2017).

Meanwhile, such a subject recognises, forms and performs as an independent 'I' (see Broeckling, 2013). However, it derives its ability to act from those very entities against which it asserts its autonomy - 'another' is needed in order to be, reflect and act (see Broeckling, 2013). Hence, becoming a subject cannot happen without power structures (see Foucault, 1979; Butler, 1997). Genesis and subservience, therefore, merge into one. Especially in phenomenology, subjectivity plays an essential role (see Husserl, 1977, in Knoblauch, 2004). The philosophical movement that was mainly shaped by Edmund Husserl in the second half of the 20th century is the study of the structures of experience and consciousness. Here, the scientific interest lays in the relation between the I, the experienced, and the experience. To be able to make such a distinction, Husserl established the method of 'phenomenological reduction' which aims to grasp the performance of human consciousness from a philosophical perspective. The method, here, is, to distinguish between the object of experience and the process of experiencing (see Husserl, 1977, in Knoblauch, 2004). For phenomenologists, the world is based on and constituted by processes of consciousness; according to them, outside of these processes, there is

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[1] This philosophical-anthropological perspective grounds on the concept of 'eccentric positionality', which was coined by Helmuth Plessner and describes a human's inherited relation to its environment (see Plessner, 1928, in Krueger, 2017). With 'positionality', Plessner means the fact that all living beings are put (positioned) in a specific environment. According to him, every living being is defined and recognised by a border that separates it from the world. Inorganic bodies like stones, for instance, do not have a relation to their environment. Instead, they simply have an edge that defines the body's end. Animals are positioned 'centrically': they have an inherited core, a center, but cannot relate to it. Human beings, however, do not only *are* a body but they also *have* a body and are able to relate to themselves. So, other than animals that 'merely' exist in their experience, in the 'here and now', humans can (and inevitably have to) refer to their experiences and experienced additionally (see Plessner, 1928, in Krueger, 2017).

nothing, one can make statements about (see Husserl, 1977, in Knoblauch, 2004). Therefore, the recognised is always a product of the recognition as well as, ultimately, of the recognising person - the subject (see Husserl, 2008). When recognition appears in situations of interaction, how can we make sense of the actions of others?

This question, which is not only a topic in scientific contexts but accompanies the daily life of every individual, paves the way for exploring the concepts of 'self' and 'identity'. A 'self' or 'identity' replaces the isolated subject in moments of daily life; a social world in which we live and communicate with others (see Schütz, 1971). Here, it becomes clear that the constitution of the self is not only happening through acts of consciousness but, to a significant extent, through the active confrontation with a just as active, autonomous and resistant social environment. In other words, identity is the result of a social process (see Mead, 1934). This processual understanding of identity, however, only started to spread and expand at the beginning of the 20th century (see Schulte, 2011; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013). Earlier, identity theorists saw an individual's identity, instead, as a substance. It was perceived as a fixed, inherent and immanent core that embeds all fundamentals of the self (see Schmitt, 2011). According to proponents of the so-called 'cartesian thought of substance', the external appearance (the behaviour) of a human would always be identical to the core within (see Schmitt, 2011).

This research builds on the processual view of identity (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Fachin & Langley, 2017; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2012), because it is more suitable for analysing such a complex, changing, and emergent phenomenon such as the strategy-and-identity work of creatives (Fachin & Langley, 2017).

Since questions such as 'who am I?' or 'what am I?' cannot be answered in absolution, it becomes clear that we are a multiplicity of interacting systems and processes (Watson, 2014). Nevertheless, why and what do we want to 'become' and how is such a state tackled? The humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers (1959) stated that humans have one fundamental motive in life; that is, to fulfil one's potential and be the best version of oneself. In the light of his person-centred understanding of personality and human relationships, Rogers (1951) developed several propositions that not only entail colourings of perspectives as mentioned above on the human complex but plausibly elucidate the relation between the individual and the world. The primary assumption is that, if identity is not a fixed, given entity, it changes continually. Here, as Rogers (1951) also states in his humanistic theoretical propositions, the environment functions as the production site of any potential identity category through norms, role patterns, language and legal requirements (see Reckwitz, 2015). Hence, an identity formation is the simultaneous combination of an individual's self-concept (a fluid product of a person's self-esteem, self-image and ideal self) and the socio-cultural as well as socio-political patterns of thought and action of its surroundings (see Rogers, 1959). In other words, individual thoughts and actions are a product of one's incorporated knowledge and self-reflection as well as external social demands (see Reckwitz, 2015). Important to highlight, here, is that such knowledge or perceptions one has of the self are more

or less vague on some dimensions than on others. The more value, attention or motivation someone projects on a dimension, the more present and clear is the perception of self (Markus, 1977 in van Knippenberg et al., 2004). In turn, the self-concept is a fundamental knowledge structure that organises an individual's memory and helps with orienting in society (see van Knippenberg et al., 2004).

Moreover, as aforementioned, identity is not something one can ultimately achieve. A processual identity instead is a multi-faceted momentum that happens in relation and reaction to its environment (see Coupland & Brown, 2012; Fachin & Langley, 2017). This perspective also means that, especially in today's complex societal realities, identities are not structured unidimensionally but rather as a multi-layered set of categories (see Coupland & Brown, 2012). The self is not only defined in terms of unique, individuating characteristics that distinguish one from others (personal self) but also of a variety of characters that other people think of a person, or the cultural, discursive, or institutional notions of who or what an individual might be (Watson, 2008). Specific social settings, for instance, may require a dimension of the self that elicits particular cognitive, affective or behavioural qualities (see van Knippenberg et a., 2004). Those multiple facets and versions of self that appear in respective contexts need to be managed, constructed, and maintained. Phenomena falling under those categories are conceptually thought of and referred to as the umbrella term 'identity work' (see Brown, 2015).

Identity Work

The concept of identity work aims to grasp the contextual fact that contemporary societies, and organisations within change more and more rapidly, thus are decreasing in its perceived comprehensibility, leaving certainty and individual commitment less evident (Coupland & Brown, 2015). Hence, identity work implies how individuals form, reform and redirect their identities in order to orientate themselves and others in society (see Brown, 2015). Such processes come to light through interactions within social settings of discourse and practice (Watson, 2008). As aforementioned, a person's sense of identity is, to a large extent, influenced by notions of social desirability and is, therefore, connected to processes of (self-) reflective questioning, conflict managing, struggling, repairing, and so on (see Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Watson (2008), to illustrate, defines the concept as follows:

> Identity work involves the mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social identities which pertain to them in the various milieu in which they live their lives. (p. 129)

This shows, identity work is seen as those moments where an individual mirrors external influences with internal desires to find solutions on, for instance, how to act accordingly. In turn, she highlights the concept of relationality as a vital element of identity formation (Watson, 2008). Therefore, identity work, the way how 'people strive to shape their personal identities' (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165), is significantly driven by what Goffman (1958) coined 'the presentation of self in everyday life'. In this entanglement of autonomy and heteronomy lies the paradox of self-constitution: because it is not entirely determined through its own, nor someone else's power, the self is full of contradictions and exists far from a full rationale (see Hauskeller, 2000). Since such a paradox can impossibly be solved, references of self and identity work processes multiply to a significant extent. The individual, as part of society, is in a constant process of accessing or restructuring its ways of thinking, behaving or living in order to reach the desired state such as belonging or individuality (for an inter-disciplinary discourse description, see Foucault, 1988). Here, depending on the (social) setting, identity work is not merely relevant to a coherent image that a person wants to present but often to an image a person wants to dissociate itself from to get a sense of distinctiveness (see Watson, 2009). According to Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003, p. 1165), identity work grounds in "at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological-existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them".

Thus, especially in moments where a person feels the need to defend a self-image in front of others, for instance, as a reaction to feeling disconnected to another person's social or moral values, the need for identity work becomes most apparent (see Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Those moments occur in various contexts in an individual's life: in therapy sessions, while discussing a theatre play with friends, when hosting a family dinner or reading an article, while trying to find a significant other on an online dating platform. Processes of globalisation have had a high impact, not only on many aspects of individual daily lives in post-industrial societies but also - more fundamentally - on the way individuals can imagine their present and future life. Bauman (2000) prominently coined the concept of "liquid modernity" to grasp these profound transformations. During these last decades, we moved from solid modernity to a liquid one: modernity, where societies, organisations, institutions and belief systems do not have time to solidify (Bauman, 2000). Giddens (1991) and other sociological analysts as well share the observation that societies are more fluid, diverse, and complex than they were only half a century ago. These societies are characterised by the co-existence of various cultural models in the context of liberal economic markets and a significant amount of choices and opportunities. Not one or two, but multiple alternative ways to design one's life are available. Simultaneously, economically relatively stable societies in liberal capitalist market structures are not only centred around work but also a 'successful' and 'meaningful' career. Since today's western societal structures provide people with a broader scope of choice regarding their life design, there is a desire for the individual to be psychologically as well as financially free (Rose, 1991). As a consequence, individuals seek

professional stimulation, meaning and success in increasingly open and differentiated workplace settings.

Therefore, identity work is often coming to light in the context of employments of today's post-industrial, "symbolic economy" (Zukin, 1995). For issues of meaning-making, motivation, loyalty, commitment, stability and change, group relations, logics of decision-making, leadership relations et cetera, a person's identity is the essential arena (see Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Regarding one's profession, there are numerous norms on how to behave correctly; also, the workplace is a stage for longer-term developments of personal self-images, value concepts or goals. Especially individuals who see their jobs as an arena for self-fulfillment, are consciously and subconsciously dealing with identity-forming issues in the workplace continually. Against this background, identity became a common and often discussed topic in contemporary management and organisation studies. According to Brown (2015): "Identities, people's subjectively construed understandings of who they were, are and desire to become, are implicated in, and thus key to understanding and explaining, almost everything that happens in and around organisations" (p. 20).

Nonetheless, why does the job in fields of the new economy in highly developed countries play such an essential role in an individual's identity? How does the current ideal type of worker look like and which consequences does this socio-economic imperative have on the workers themselves? In order to further ensure an understanding of the contemporary subject-work-relationship, I consider it useful to give a next, brief digression on the context. I assume that individuals form, stabilise and shift themselves depending on the respective material culture, as well as social and cultural practices and discourses (see Reckwitz, 2006). Against this background, I want to highlight the changing forms of work and self. Here, instead of making the impossible attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of employment structures, I aim to develop my own theoretical position by illustratively assembling different fragments and excerpts of the field. Moreover, after introducing the contemporary concept of the 'entrepreneurial worker' (Voß & Pongratz, 1998), I will expand and condense the discussion with the topic of creativity, on the hand as a highly coveted source of economic value creation, and on the other side as a basic form of human capital. We will thus move further into the research context of the present study: the creative industries, the creative organisation and the creative worker.

Identity Work in the Media and Creative Industries

The Entrepreneurial Self - a Neoliberal Archetype

In 1998, Voß and Pongratz formulated the prognosis that the arrangements of work, patterns of employment and work-related identity formations would undergo a long-term transformation. The authors elucidated such transformation by contrasting the dominant types of workers of different

historical eras. According to Voß and Pongratz (1998), the employed worker of Fordism, who defined the end of the exploited wage worker of early Industrialisation, in turn, got replaced by the highly individualised and self-controlling 'entrepreneurial worker'. The latter is, according to the authors, the new prototypical worker of the globalised neo-capitalism (Voß & Pongratz, 1998). They describe the 'entrepreneurial worker' as an exemplary figure that, instead of relying on a standard set of occupational, predominantly technical skills and stability of work settings like the Fordist worker, is characterised by new forms of individual responsibility and commitment (Voß & Pongratz, 1998). Based on some central theoretical concepts of industrial sociology (see Vonderach, 1980), the authors name three levels at which this transformation comes to light. Firstly, at the level of self-control, as "increasingly independent planning, control and monitoring of one's own activity", then, at the level of self-economisation as "increasingly active and goal-oriented 'production' and 'commercialisation' of one's own skills and performance - on the labour market as within companies" and, lastly, at the level of self-rationalisation as "growing conscious and elaborate organisation of the everyday life and life course and the tendency towards the commercialisation of one's lifestyle" (Voß & Pongratz, 2003, p. 24). Ultimately, for the entrepreneurial worker, the boundaries between employment and leisure, professional and private life are blurring, and the pressure to economise and optimise influences all areas of everyday life (see Broeckling, 2013). Simultaneously, these conditions underscore the appellative and prescriptive nature of this new figure: the entrepreneurial self is flexible, committed and innovative, it governs itself and therefore requires no detailed instructions; it is always working on optimising its own person so that it, in turn, can be presented and marketed more effectively (see Broeckling, 2013). This portrayal of entrepreneurial culture, therefore, was and is analogue to fundamental ideal conceptions of contemporary mankind.

Similarly, as Rose (2000) identified in his political-sociologically intricate work, in an entrepreneurial self, economic success and self-actualisation presuppose and complement one another. Economic success (or the profession or 'career') and self-actualisation both follow the maxim of endless growth. As a consequence, the autonomous subjectivity of the modern self became the ultimate ethos of today's working society (Rose, 2000). Here, the influence of a neoliberalist mentality becomes evident. Not centralised planning and bureaucracy, but individuality and autonomy ensure the welfare of political and social existence. According to Rose (2000), this new mentality of autonomous regime comprises "'entrepreneurial' activities of autonomous entities - firms, organisations, individuals - that all strive to maximise their advantage by inventing and promoting new projects through individual and local calculations of strategies and tactics, costs and benefits" (Rose, 2000, p. 11). Therefore, the entrepreneurial self is a phenomenon in which personal development, economic success and career progress converge at the concept of autonomy: work became an essential part of self-actualisation (see Rose, 2000). Subsequently, such an intertwined relationship between personal and professional goals entails positive as well as negative consequences on an individual's life.

According to Voß and Pongritz (2003), this tendency towards self-economisation is mainly observable in seminal employment fields of the knowledge economy, whose structural core can be determined as the 'aesthetic economy' (see Reckwitz, 2012). This aesthetic economy and, in turn, aesthetic labour is what substantially determines late modern culture (see Reckwitz, 2012). In the centre of it all is creativity: "In late modern times, creativity embraces a duality of the wish to be creative and the imperative to be creative, subjective desire and social expectations. We *want* to be creative, and we *ought* to be creative" (Reckwitz, 2012, p. 10).

In the following subsections, I thematise creativity in its relevant theoretical aspects and, thus, bring together the concepts as mentioned above. The creative worker, as part of a creative organisation, which is an actant of the creative industries - so the argument -, is the ultimate embodiment of an entrepreneurial self that sees its work as an essential part of self-actualisation and, thus, a subject suitable for empirically exploring processes of identity work. To illustrate the typical creative worker, I introduce the concept of identity play. Despite having further ideas and thematic excursions in mind concerning this matter, I remain from including them in this chapter, due to lack of space. Instead, they will be discussed later regarding the research findings.

On Creativity and the Creative Worker

According to psychologists, humans are not only social beings but are insatiably longing for self-expression and self-fulfilment (see Maslow, 1971; Rogers, 1959; Buhler, 1971). It is scientifically proven and often stated that this desire to express oneself lives in every human being in the form of creativity, whether it be through exploration, play, design, production, invention, assumption, interpretation, or justification (see Argyris, 1957; Popitz, 1997). As difficult as it is to define the concept, human creativity bases on the imaginative power to envision the inexistent. Here, it seems like neither rigid control nor powers of manipulative interference can determine or stipulate those imaginary worlds (Popitz, 1997). Similarly, no individual can fully dominate one's creative abilities: "Because we are able to go beyond the experienced and imagine the inexistent, we win the freedom to be creative. However, every creativity is burdened with the weight of imagination that the self cannot think of" (Popitz, 1997, p. 89). This dichotomy demonstrates that, since the innovative or fantastic is a relational category and, therefore, is only sense-making in the comparative contrast, creativity means to create distinctions. According to the art critic and philosopher Boris Groys (2014), the new is, between the past and the future, created through associations, variations and recombinations. Simultaneously, neither the individual self nor a different person or an institution will ever be able to fully comprehend and master human creativity or 'the new'.

Despite being impossible to enforce, creativity is a human resource that everyone has in them to a certain degree (see Guilford, 1950; Rogers, 1959). Hence, according to Guilford (1950), an individual's creativity can be captured by fundamental psychological traits such as problem sensitivity

(recognising and locating a problem), fluidity (developing many ideas in a short amount of time), flexibility (leaving familiar ways of thinking and developing new ones), re-definition (restructuring objects and improvising), elaboration (adapting ideas to reality and redefining them), and originality (creating unusual and innovative ideas).

The human need to express and fulfil oneself constitutes the fundamental source of creativity (see Rogers, 1959). Simultaneously, the psychological research determined creativity as quantifiable and quantifiable by courtesy of the IQ-measured intelligence (see Guilford & Hoepfner, 1971; Torrance, 1974). As one consequence, creativity turned into an ability everyone wants to *have* and *multiply* as well as a resource that businesses want to *economise* and *exploit*. In late modern times, creativity is "one of our most precious assets" (Howkins, 2013, p. 7).

However, what exactly is creativity and how does it 'work'? Intending to conceptualise an indefinable construct, Hans Joas (1996) construed a theory of action that integrates creativity as a core element. On the base of this is his understanding that, instead of only being ascribed to an artistic genius, creativity is a common everyday phenomenon and an anthropological constant (Joas, 1996). Drawing on classical sociological contributions, the author names five metaphors that all capture the idea of creativity and, thus, are present associations with it: artistic expression, purposeful production, problem-solving action, liberating action (revolution), and emerging life (Joas, 1996). Broeckling (2013) introduces a sixth metaphor that captures the rather purist, purpose-free nature of creativity - the play. He assumes, during play, individuals are creative in an unproductive manner (Popitz, 1997, in Broeckling, 2013); and, "the human is only playing where he can be fully human, and he is only fully human, where he plays" (Schiller, 1795, p. 601, as cited in Broeckling, 2013).

A figure that embodies those associations with creativity is the creative worker, embedded in a creative agency. To find novel solutions for a problem, assert oneself in the (internal and external) competition, persuade new clients, et cetera, the contemporary creative worker thinks, acts, and works in the combined spheres of problem-solving action, purposeful production, and artistic expression (see Joas, 1996). Furthermore, remembering the entrepreneurial worker concept, he or she is driven by the autonomy of action and self-actualisation purposes (see Voss & Pongratz, 2003). Earlier, I introduced the related concept of identity work, which can be pinpointed as the relational, processual construction of identity to reach a more 'coherent' self (see Brown, 2015; Slay and Smith, 2011; Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003; Patvardhan et al., 2013). However, if we consider that a creative continually moves in spheres of the unique, fantastic, inexistent, is he (she, it) aspiring to be a fully coherent self? Or is the idea of a consistent creative somewhat an oxymoron, particularly in today's times? What I consider as especially relevant, here, addresses the 'play' metaphor as mentioned earlier.

Creative (Identity) Play

There are some cognitive and behavioural traits one needs to be a problem-solving, thus 'successful' creative. Here, analogue to the creativity associations as mentioned above, artistic phantasy, pragmatic attentive spirit, hard work and a somewhat destructive nature are essential factors (see Joas, 1996). Also, drawing on my own experience as a creative concept developer, I consider the naive lightness of play as just as essential for 'successful' creative work. The phenomenon of feeling free and unconstrained during a creation phase - attributes often associated with the nature of play - significantly enhances the likelihood to come up with an innovative idea or product.

Furthermore, to take a look at the context of creative work today, it is essential to consider external influences on the construction of identity. As I mentioned earlier, identity is neither an 'achievable' entity nor of sole construction; instead, human identity is multifaceted and multiple (see Brown, 2015). Therefore, studies increasingly suggest to see and treat 'identity' as a processual flow instead of a static unit (see Coupland & Brown, 2012; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013). As the name already demonstrates, this processual perspective on identity is interested in what an individual does, wants to be like and behaves in different situations rather than what an individual *is* (see Coupland & Brown, 2012). This approach strongly relates to the more and more uncertain world in which organisations and societies change more rapidly, thus requiring more flexible and discursive handling (see Coupland & Brown, 2012).

Individuals inevitably face an increasingly dynamic, virtual and temporary organisational world in which they are confronted with disadvantageous contracts (Ahuja et al., 2020). In Hoyer's (2020) 'gig economy', careers are less predictable, requiring individuals to adapt just as flexibly. Moreover, a person's social capital gets an increasingly crucial competitive advantage in a reality where networking and inter-organisational collaboration are the new norms (Ellis & Hopkinson, 2020). Principally, numerous rapid socio-cultural and technical developments pose both challenges and opportunities for organisational members.

Against this background, I assume that creatives *have to* as well as *want to* be masters of their ever-changing surroundings - which is notably present in the creative industries. Therefore, because coherence can only be of momentary existence, they do not only *work on* but *play with* their identities: to be continually creatively stimulated and adaptive in their constitution, as well as to cultivate their image as creatives (see Goffman, 1959).

In this chapter, I tried to highlight the multiple facets of the identity concept and aimed to demonstrate that identities are in continuous, active, as well as a passive construction. Importantly, instead of being characterised by a somewhat simple and clear sender-receiver-relationship, identity construction is a relational process of reactions, adaptions, distinctions, and interactions with active others. The many aspects and theories I used to underline this complexity, and the information overload

it might have caused for the reader, is an analogy to the continuous confusions, insecurities, and overstimulation and individual in general, and a creative worker in specific is facing in today's times.

To understand the interrelatioal aspects of identity more fully, and to conceptualise the work practice of creative workers in the organisation, the concept of strategy-as-practice is introduced in the following sub-section. Aside identity, identity work, and identity play, strategy-as-practice constitutes the final concept of the current theoretical framework.

Strategy-as-Practice and Identity Work of Creatives

Strategy-as-practice (SAP) has emerged "as a distinctive approach for studying strategic management, strategic decision-making, strategising, strategy-making and strategy work" (Golsorkhi et al., 2010, p. 1) since the last twenty years. As a contrast to the "mainstream" strategy research approach that primarily focuses on the effects of strategy performance, SAP is interested in how strategy activities take place (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). From this perspective, organisational strategising is enabled and constrained by social activities, processes and practices at micro-level (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Fundamentally, SAP research enables a valuable methodological and theoretical lens on exploring various aspects and processes of organising and strategising (Golsorkhi et al., 2010).

Especially towards the background of this study's theoretical framework, I consider SAP as significantly useful and complementary to the identity aspects as mentioned above, because it is part of a broader 'practice turn' in contemporary social sciences (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). This somewhat theoretical movement grounds on the work of Bourdieu (1990), Foucault (1977), Giddens (1984) and other prominent sociologists, and aims to understand how "agency and structure, and individual action and institutions are linked in social systems, cultures and organisations" (Golsorkhi et al., 2010, p. 1). Despite also being interested in a reductionist perspective on human activity, practice theorists see individual behaviour as "embedded within a web of social practices: praxis [how an action takes place] always relies on practices [the tools and methods of action]" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 288). Therefore, human action and its underlying meaning are what links together social structures and matters of agency (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Eventually, such a foregrounding of human practice helps to develop an understanding of why and how routines, rules, values, and norms are reproduced or resisted (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Moreover, the SAP research perspective enables an exploration of how organisational strategists (the individual workers) "shape their own lives and identities and the ways in which they contribute to the strategic shaping of the organisations in which they work" (Watson, 2003, p. 1305).

This multifaceted view helps to understand how identity work and play processes of creative workers appear as practices that are embedded in their fluid organisational settings, as well as influenced by underlying social and societal forces. As Watson (2003) underlines: "through utilizing this

perspective, both theoretically and empirically, vital insights are developed into how social processes both in and beyond the organizational context lead to particular strategic outcomes of significance to both the strategists' lives and their organization's future" (p. 1306).

Chapter 3: Research Design

A Qualitative Approach

This study focuses on the processes and practices of creative identities in the context of their organisational settings. To understand how creative workers see themselves and continually work and play with their identities at work, this study employs a qualitative methodology.

A qualitative methodology allows the examination and interpretation of the personal perspectives and experiences of the creative workers themselves (see Kvale, 1983). This in-depth exploration enables me, the researcher, to draw a valid image on identity construction in an organisational setting. To explain this somewhat confident position, I consider it useful to briefly elaborate on why this current study has a qualitative instead of a quantitative approach. Here, I mainly draw on Brennen's (2017) work on qualitative research methods suitable for media studies. Although some studies apply a mixed approach, qualitative and quantitative social science research has substantial inherited differences. Whereas the latter uses numbers to quantify data and be "systematic, precise and accurate" (p. 1), qualitative research is interpretive and theoretical (see Brennen, 2017). Therefore, instead of actual numbers and precision, the interpretation of subjective concepts uses language and thought (see Brennen, 2017). Differently put, this study aims to generate Thick Data which is a qualitative, ethnographic approach to research that wants to uncover people's emotions and life stories (Wang, 2016). The gathering of Thick Data happens with a rather small sample of participants because, here, the researcher can go in-depth with the context, thoughts and emotions in a way that Big Data (and other quantitative methods) is unable to provide (see Moisander et al., 2012). While doing so, qualitative researchers substantially see the social reality as constructed, thus expecting to find a variety of truths, meaning and beliefs, rather than a single reality (see Brennan, 2017). Therefore, to best possibly grasp such multifaceted realities and develop an in-depth understanding of social experiences, researchers of the qualitative school often use multiple methods, for instance, an ethnography-focused combination of focus groups and interviews (Brennan, 2017).

Since individual identities are multifaceted and procedurally constructed, this notion of 'triangulation' (Brennan, 2017), which contemporary organisation and managerial studies often use, could be useful. Such a multilayered qualitative approach is especially acknowledged in the process research field of organisational identities, since "process researchers seek to understand and explain the world in terms of interlinked events, activity, temporality and flow" (Langley et al, 2013, as cited in Fachin & Langley, 2017, p. 308). This study is interested in the identity work processes and practices of creatives in the organisational setting. To understand how these processes and practices come to play in everyday activity and interaction, as well as in their individually constructed understandings, it is essential to recognise the "multiplicity of meanings present in specific situations" when conducting the research (see Fachin & Langley, 2017, p. 323). To explore how people make sense within narrative

accounts and in situated interactions, Fachin and Langley (2017) suggest different research and analysis approaches that center around the real-time conversation. The qualitative interview is considered to be one of the best suited for understanding the context and meanings of relational identity construction, since people give meaning to life phenomena through the articulation of narratives (see Fachin & Langley, 2017).

Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews

> The image of the active interview transforms the subject behind the respondent from a repository of opinions and reasons or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge. (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 9)

Following existing methodological guidelines and reflections on researching identity formation and change (Fachin & Langley, 2017; Ravasi & Canato, 2013) and identity work (Brown, 2015, 2017), this study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews for gathering empirical data. Without doubt, identity is a unique phenomenon that demands a reflexive, iterative, interpretive and evaluative assessment when conducting interviews (Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009), considering that identity development is rarely an entirely conscious process (Coupland & Brown, 2012).

Principally, the in-depth interview focuses on gathering and understanding "descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (Kvale, 1983, p. 174). Similarly, Hermanowicz (2002), described the method of in-depth interviews as a predominant qualitative method for uncovering and understanding people's experiences and attitudes. Interviews are despite their targeted research intention a substantially elemental method since they ground on the principles of everyday conversations - "what's more natural than asking questions?" (Brennen, 2017, p. 27). Because humans ask questions when aiming to understand critical issues of life or get to know the opinions of a significant other, interviewing has not only been a research method for thousands of years but is also used in a variety of academic fields (Brennen, 2017). Psychologists, journalists, sociologists, and many others seem to appreciate this flexible method of gathering a large amount of information until today. These figures in our "interview society" (Silverman, 1993 in Holstein & Gubrium, 2003) that conduct systematic social exploration and investigation, treat interviews as their meaning-making "windows on the world" (Hyman et al. 1975, in Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 2).

The qualitative interview is flexible in the sense that the interviewer can structurally approach the one to one setting in a variety of ways. Whereas structured interviewing focuses on gathering factual

information and, contrasting, unstructured interviewing prefers organically developing conversations, this current study grounds on the principles of a semi-structured approach (see **Appendix A**[2]) (Brennen, 2017). Unlike in a "normal" conversation, the purpose-driven researcher does not want to come across as an "interesting, worthwhile person" (Babbie, 2013, p. 321). Instead, the interviewee listens, rather than talks, and thus explores the respondent's feelings, emotions and experiences on the base of a pre-established set of topics or questions (Brennen, 2017). Here, the semi-structured approach allows great flexibility, for instance, by spontaneously asking follow-up questions to either specify a given answer of diving deeper into some issues addressed (Brennen, 2017).

Fundamentally, qualitative interviews not only see the respondent as active in constructing their social reality but beyond that, as meaningful and meaning-making (Boeije, 2009). Since this study's research question seeks to explore relational identity construction processes of creative workers, seeing the respondent as active and meaning-making is hugely relevant. Moreover, some fundamental aspects of the theoretical framework assume that individuals actively behave in a certain way to be more coherent or likeable. To gain a fine-grained understanding of this topic, I confidently assume that semi-structured qualitative interviews are the most suitable method. Here, a next positive argument is that qualitative interviews not only allow in-depth exploration of the individual, but they also enable the researcher to comparatively look for common themes to eventually conclude the research matter (see Boeije, 2009).

Essential to mention is, that both parties in the interview are necessarily and inevitably active, thus making this semiformal guided conversation substantially interactional (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). Towards this background, the respondents are not seen and treated as bearers or transmitters of meaning. Instead, meaning is "actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter" (p. 3), making the respondents and the interviewer collaborative constructors of knowledge (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003).

> The trick is to formulate questions and provide an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication between the interviewer and respondent. (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 5)

Because of the interview's interactive nature, I, the research instrument (Ritchie et al., 2003), needed to consider some essential aspects when encountering the respondents. Firstly, since the semi-structured approach allows and demands a flexible performance, I had to be sufficiently familiar with the theoretical concepts and questions to be addressed in order for the interview to proceed smoothly and naturally (Babbie, 2012). Simultaneously, I needed some essential interpersonal skills to make the

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[2] Besides the topic guide, Appendix A also contains the link to a digital folder, where you can access the interview transcripts.

respondent feel respected, welcome and trusted to encourage her or him to talk freely (Ritchie et al., 2003). I consider these soft skills as essential for the respondents' willingness to open up about themselves and not feel judged or uncomfortable while doing so. Here, despite individual identity issues possibly being seen as sensitive matters, 'normal' interpersonal skills are considered as satisfactory tools to generate valuable results. *Why?* Because this study is interested in "open, situational and discursive sensitive nature of human subjectivity rather than depth- psychological issues contingent upon early identifications" (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003, p. 1168). How I paid attention to research quality criteria such as objectivity, reliability, and validity towards this background, will be discussed later on. Now, I will focus on the research context, the data collection process and sampling, the translation of theoretical concepts into a topic guide, the interview procedure, as well as the data analysis approach.

Context Description

This research project collected empirical data from interviews with workers from creative agencies in different cities of the Netherlands. Although the initial plan was to consider agencies in the two cities of Rotterdam and Amsterdam, I did not aim to draw a comparison between both, since the individuals themselves are the subjects of interest, rather than their places of residence. But why did I choose to conduct this research with creative workers in Dutch cities? What makes this context specific?

Fundamentally, the Netherlands is a thriving country that greatly values creativity and innovation (see Erp et al., 2014). These crucial factors for tackling social, cultural, and economic challenges are combined in the creative industries, which the national and local governments substantially support as a 'top sector'[3], for example through "encouraging creative talent, business people and researchers" (Erp et al., 2014, p. 5). A recent policy paper claims that the country's "economic activity in the creative industries is increasing and the business climate…is one of the best in the world" (p. 6) – thanks to the support provided through the government's appreciation and support (Erp et al., 2014).

Moreover, many scholars and policy-makers see the creative sector as a relevant model of work and employment (Been at al., 2014). According to them, recent phenomena such as project-based work, portfolio careers, entrepreneurship, self-employment, and temporary collaborations are especially observable in the creative industries, leading to discussions on the sector's job qualities (Kenney & Zysman, 2016; Mathieu, 2012; Florida, 2002; Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015; Banks, 2010; Morisawa, 2015, in Been et al., 2014). Meanwhile, today's times are characterised by a continuous urbanisation process, which increases the population numbers, as well as economic and cultural activities in many global cities (Florida, 2005). Consequently, larger Dutch cities like

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[3] As of 2011, the creative sector officially was a 'top sector', along with eight other sectors, for instance energy, high tech, water, and logistics (Been et al., 2018). The government considers these top sectors as particularly significant for the country's prospective economic development and state-supports them accordingly (Been et al., 2018).

Amsterdam, Rotterdam and The Hague have evidenced a continually accelerating population growth since the last twenty years, leading to a just as growing economy (CBS, 2020).

These mentioned fundamental aspects of urban growth, extensive governmental appreciation of the cultural and creative industries as well as their often-questioned job qualities underline the relevance to empirically explore the realities of creative labor and identity work in Dutch cities. Eventually, the interlinking dynamics of these political and social developments promise to evince captivating individual life stories and thus new knowledge about today's many-sided aspects and conditions of creative work.

Sampling Strategy

Individual human beings are amongst the most typical units of analysis for social research and, considering the norm of generalised understanding, any type of individual can be the unit of analysis for social research (Babbie, 2013). Since the outcome of the research is strongly dependent on the individual statements and opinions provided by creative workers, the respondents themselves are the decisive unit of analysis. Hence, I approached the data collection procedure through purposive sampling, since the eventually selected experts were expected to be information-rich cases, which help to understand the current phenomena regarding identity construction processes of creative workers in their organisational contexts (Gentles et al., 2015). As the topic of interest proposes, the purposive sampling procedure happened on two levels; namely, on the organisational (macro) and the individual (micro) level. Certainly, the idea was to get "my hands on as much data as possible", so the purposive sampling was fused with convenience sampling (cf. Noy, 2008) to ensure sufficient data.

Sample Characteristics

Here, the classification 'creative' comprehends agencies that offer services belonging to any of the following categories: strategy (consulting, planning, research services), design (visual-, motion-, user experience-design), technology (engineering, data and systems services) and advertising (promotional, public relations and marketing services). Regarding the selection of Dutch creative agencies, their differences regarding their services, client structures, sizes, and numerous other factors were not of particular interest. Instead, I expected a common cultural ground in regards to their modes of operation and working conditions in the creative industries. Agencies work project-based, produce creative products and continually need to adapt to external factors such as digital trends, client preferences or financial pressures (Hyman, 2018). These agencies attract and employ individual creative workers, the central interest of this research. Hence, I searched for creative agencies situated in Amsterdam and Rotterdam online, to eventually 'open doors' for interview participant recruitment. To be precise, I mainly looked up the 'team' or 'this is us' section on the organisations' websites and

contacted the individual creatives via email. In case individual contact information was not provided, I either approached a more general contact such as the office manager or approached the individuals through the social platform LinkedIn. In some cases, I got connected with prospective participants through other participants (Josh via Peter, Stuart via Nina) or Dutch friends living in the cities of interest (Frank). Hence, the respondents were not only acquired through purposive but also through the promising snowball or chain referral sampling method (see Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981).

Concerning the selection of participants, some criteria had to be applied. Firstly, the person of any gender, age or nationality had to be a full-time employee at the creative agency he or she works at for one year or longer to be familiar with its modus operandi and underlying culture. Moreover, the participants had to identify as creative workers to be considered suitable for this research. This identification became apparent when the respective person answered my first email in which I asked him or her to participate. Finally, because I am no master (unfortunately not even an okay-ish amateur) of the Dutch language, the participants needed to be able to express themselves in English confidently in order for the interview to proceed smoothly and naturally.

Procedure of Data Gathering

In total, I interviewed ten individuals who all fulfil the preconditioned criteria. Although it was my initial aim to include the experiences of fourteen to fifteen respondents in this study, I stopped with the data collection after ten interviews because the study was fully saturated at that point and the data was 'thick' and comprehensive enough to proceed with the analysis. Moreover, as the interviews were conducted in the difficult times of the corona pandemic, I made the experience of (kindly) getting rejected due to these circumstances by some organisations and individual creatives when I approached them with the research participation request. Hence, although it turned out to not be required, I am confident that the acquisition of more respondents would have been difficult. Similarly to many other professional fields, the creatives had to adjust to new pandemic-caused situations such as working from home. Therefore, they perhaps would not have been in in the frame of mind for participating in time-consuming research.

The data collection of my research has taken place over approximately seven weeks, from the beginning of March to mid-April 2020. Whereas the first three interviews were conducted face-to-face in the respondent's office buildings, the following seven interviews took place online as video calls. In order to make sure the respondents made an informed decision on granting consent, I elucidated them about the rather practical and legal framework of the study immediately before the interviews (see **Appendix B**) (Boeije, 2009). Here, it quickly became apparent that all respondents agreed with being titled with their first names in this current thesis. Moreover, none of the respondents coined disapproval regarding the companies they work at being named as well. To be recognised as an equal and trusted conversation partner, I also briefly informed the respondents about the study's purpose as well as my

personal and professional background, of course without the intentions of creating biased attitudes. Importantly, I asked for oral consent to be audio recorded, which then was done with a smartphone as well as a computer to ensure a safe recording and storage of the interview data. Finally, I elucidated the respondents about being free to stop the interview at any time should they feel any reason to do so, but none made use of this opportunity.

Of course, due to the respondents' busy schedules and long working hours, the interviews were held in a time and place of their choice. Each (virtual) face-to-face lasted for a minimum of 43 minutes, but the majority took longer than an hour. Since the interviews were semi-structured, thus based on a similar set of topics and questions but with significant room for flexibility, the interview duration mainly depended on how many follow-up questions were asked and how much the respondent was talking. Thus, I do not consider the disparities in matters of depth and length as a weakness. Importantly, I view shorter interviews as just as insightful and valuable as longer ones. All the necessary information about the ten conducted interviews is presented on the next page.

Table 1. Information on the conducted interviews

First Name	Profession	Agency Name	City	Date & Time	Location	Duration
Max	Lead Designer	Popcorn Stories	Amsterdam	3 March, 2 p.m.	Amsterdam	01:06 h
Nina	Creative Copywriter	Hoppinger	Rotterdam	6 March, 4 p.m.	Rotterdam	01:08 h
Joca	UX Designer	Momkai Studio	Amsterdam	9 March, 3 p.m.	Amsterdam	00:55 h
Marco	Design Strategist	Goodpatch	Amsterdam (in remote)	19 March, 12 p.m.	Amsterdam / Berlin (online video call)	01:20 h
Hans	Senior Architect	OMA	Rotterdam	19 March, 3 p.m.	Rotterdam / Berlin (online video call)	01:32 h
Stuart	Digital Strategy Consultant	Hoppinger	Rotterdam	26 March, 10 a.m.	Rotterdam / Berlin (online video call)	00:43 h
Peter	Creative Business Strategist	Keplar	Amsterdam	31 March, 7 p.m.	Amsterdam / Berlin (online video call)	01:08 h
Josh	Creative Director	Fresh Bridge	Den Haag	5 April, 12 p.m.	Den Haag / Berlin (online video call)	01:06 h
Rita	Copywriter	Achtung	Amsterdam	22 April, 9 a.m.	Amsterdam / Berlin (online video call)	00:45 h
Frank	Creative	Boomerang	Amsterdam	22 April, 6 p.m.	Amsterdam / Berlin (online video call)	00:46 h

Data Analysis

On the Interpretation Process

> "Great story! Good writing! Incisive thinking! But how do we know you haven't just made up an interesting interpretation?" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 18)

Since its early days, qualitative research suffers the criticism and skepticism about whether the researchers "are engaging in creative theorising on the basis of rather thin evidence" (Gioia et al., p. 18). In response to critical feedback received by reviewers as cited above, Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012) describe a holistic approach that meets the high demands of qualitative research's scientific

tradition while keeping the imaginative nature of qualitative, inductive research in social science alive. Directing their contribution to the field of organisation studies, the authors formulate several key features and tips for conducting the research design, data collection, data analysis, and grounded theory articulation (Gioia et al., 2012). Essentially, to present a convincing, data-driven account that anticipates the developing theory, it is important to carefully explain the execution and procedure of the data analysis beforehand (Gioia et al., 2012). In my eyes, such an aimed transparency begins with stating the methodological lens used when handling the interview data.

Subjective human experiences are explored to provide "insights into the experience" (Whitehead et al., 2007, p. 94). Importantly, every research method, as Whitehead, Dilworth and Higgins (2007) rightly determine, is governed by methodology, which is the "philosophical or theoretical knowledge and conceptual frameworks that guide the research methods used" (p. 95). In qualitative research, the three primary 'methodological lenses' are phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory (Whitehead et al., 2007). By illustrating that this current research includes parts of all these methodological perspectives, I want to generate further understanding on how I went on with the data analysis.

Firstly, phenomenologists study human phenomena and are interested in the lived-through essence of human experience (Whitehead et al., 2007). Here, I see myself as a phenomenologist because I am fundamentally interested in how individuals experience all aspects connected to their profession as creative workers, embedded in the modern agency. I aim to descriptively gain insights into the quality and meaning of these individual experiences (see Whitehead et al., 2007).

Secondly, ethnography is more focusing on how a group of individuals shares the experiences of these cultural phenomena. Researchers wearing this methodological lens explore human experience in an actual field and are driven by the question "what is happening here?" (Whitehead et al., 2007). Although I did not do ethnographic field observations in the traditional sense, I aim to get behind how individual identities are continually constructed in their alive, affecting organisational contexts. By asking the respondent interview questions about various processes at work and how they experience these concerning others, I consider this study also including facets of ethnography.

Lastly, going more rooted in the field of human behaviour, grounded theorists are interested in people that see themselves through the eyes of others, thus interpret their worlds through social interactions (Whitehead et al., 2007). Considering that this study's identity topic is substantially grounded on theoretical branches of social psychology and agrees with the assumption that an individual's sense of self is, to a large extent, influenced by notions of social desirability, I consider the grounded theory perspective also as relevant. Now that I highlighted the methodologically multifaceted nature of this study, why is it relevant for this current section, which aims to make the data analysis process transparent?

During the familiarisation with the data, it quickly became clear that the respondents' personal stories of their inter-organisational life-worlds require a just as creative analysis approach that includes

all mentioned methodological perspectives. In their work on data analysis in qualitative research, Harding and Whitehead (2013, pp. 128) provide a comparative overview of different data analysis approaches. Since this current study interlinks three approaches and thus, various analysis strategies, I consider it useful to demonstrate the relevant part of the authors' overview:

Table 3. Comparison of approaches to data analysis of popular qualitative methodologies

Research approach	Research focus	Type of data	Analysis strategies
Grounded theory	Human action and interaction	Anything relevant to the study can be data: interviews, observations, field notes	Coding (open, axial, selective): categorization, constant comparison
Phenomenology	The experience and meaning of phenomena	Texts, e.g. interview transcripts	Coding: categorisation, thematising, interpreting
Ethnography	The social organisation of experience	Anything relevant to the study can be data: interviews, observations, field notes	Coding: categorisation, interpreting

Here, it becomes clear that all presented qualitative analysis perspectives are holistic, inductive and use interpretive processes (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). In order to gain thorough insight and understand human experiences, qualitative researchers and theorists find unique new ways through adapting and re-modelling these methods (Whitehead et al., 2007). Since my interest in the ever-changing interrelations of creative individuals and their contemporary organisational contexts is a new theoretical phenomenon, the analysis requires a holistic, inductive and interpretive approach. This approach is way less complicated than it may appear now. To guide through the data analysis transparently and make the reader thoroughly comprehend its logic, I will now elaborate on the analysis process 'step-by-step'.

Steps of Analysis

> How can I know what I think until I see what I say?
> (Weick, 1979, p. 5)

Other than collected data such as photographs, video recordings and works of art, which may require direct interpretation, textual data like interview transcriptions mostly enable the researcher to code and take a closer look (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). However, "it remains an interpretive process requiring judgments about the level of detail and how to represent the data" (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013 as cited in Harding & Whitehead, 2013, p. 131).

The analysis logic that allows a remnant of doubt or uncertainty within the development of plausible conclusions is the so-called 'abductive' reasoning, which I took on in this study (see Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Similarly to grounded theory, "an abductive approach is fruitful if the researcher's objective is to discover new things – other variables and other relationships" (p. 595) (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In abductive reasoning, the researcher's main intention is to build an analytical framework that refines existing theories and is logically coherent (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). In this case, interpreting and understanding the interview data thus resulted from the empirical findings themselves, as well as from the theoretical insights won in the process (see Dubois & Gadde, 2002). So, *how did I go about?*

As often suggested (see i.e. Gioia et al., 2012), I approached the interview data analysis with the 'coding and categorising' method, which can be considered as the most fundamental, thus essential phase of the analysis process (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). Firstly, to get familiar with the data, I read every transcript at least once to identify recurrent expressions, themes and concepts that help to answer the main research question. Here, instead of briefly scanning different paragraphs, I paid attention to every line of the transcripts to eventually denote the underlined expressions, themes or concepts into new expressions that are an abstracted interpretation of them (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). This step is also called 'generative' or 'open coding', in which "data are broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 p. 102 in Babbie, 2012)". Since I approached the analysis iteratively, I moved back and forth over the data again and again, instead of being guided by linear steps (Petty et al., 2012 in Hardin & Whitehead, 2013).

Moreover, mapping these codes increased and contextualised the research focus. Here, the first maps were significantly spontaneous and sketchy but gained more form thanks to the iterative analysis approach. Here, in random order, the following concepts or main themes were created: 'strategy-making', 'state of flow, playing', 'always improving', 'current situation', 'ideology at work', 'variations of roles and attitudes', 'creative work(er)', '(what is) creativity', 'friction', 'meta-layer', 'project-based work', 'un-inspired?', 'pressure (sources and reactions)', 'agency life'. A selection of the first order mind maps is presented in the images on the next page.
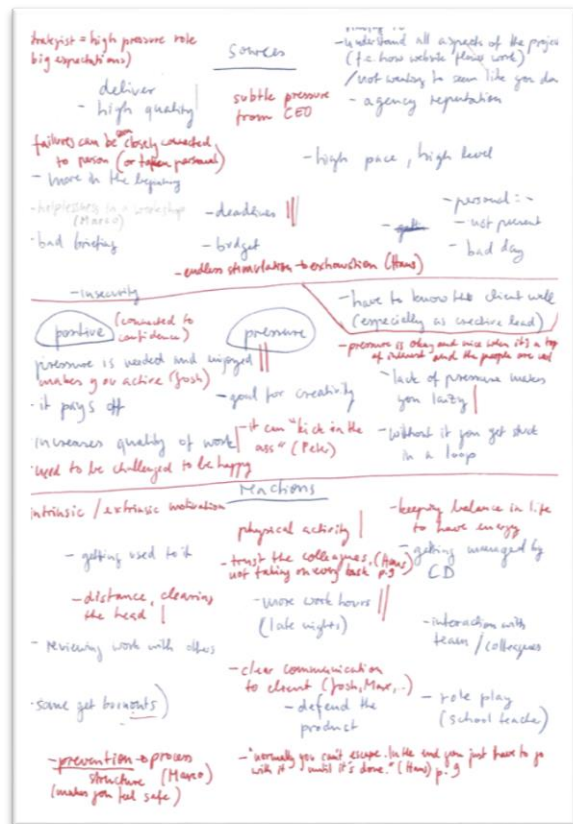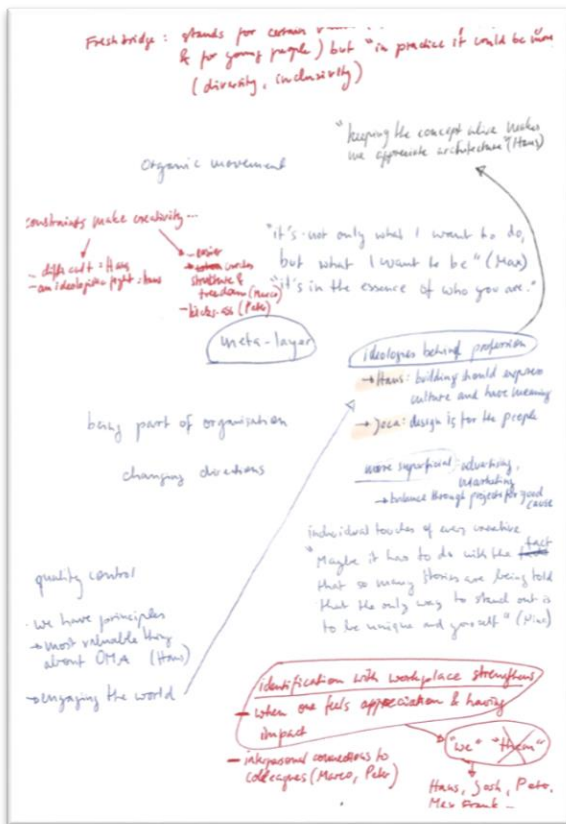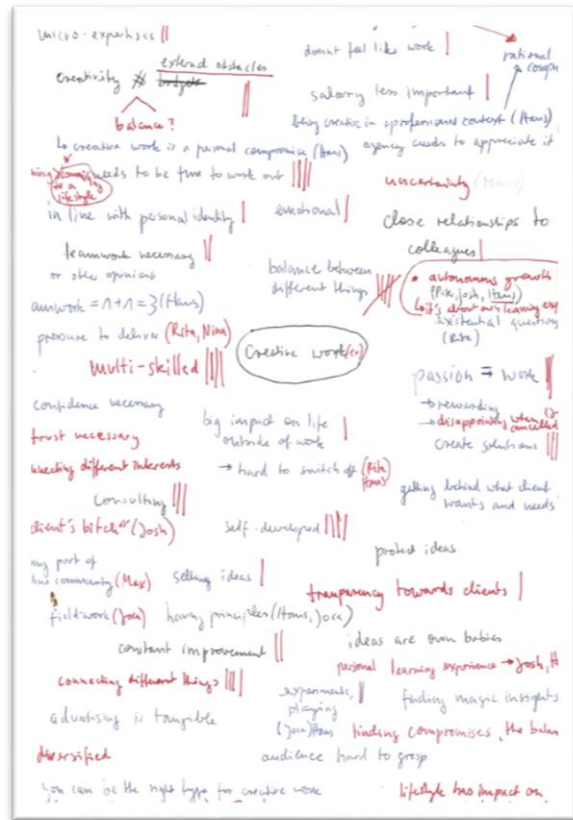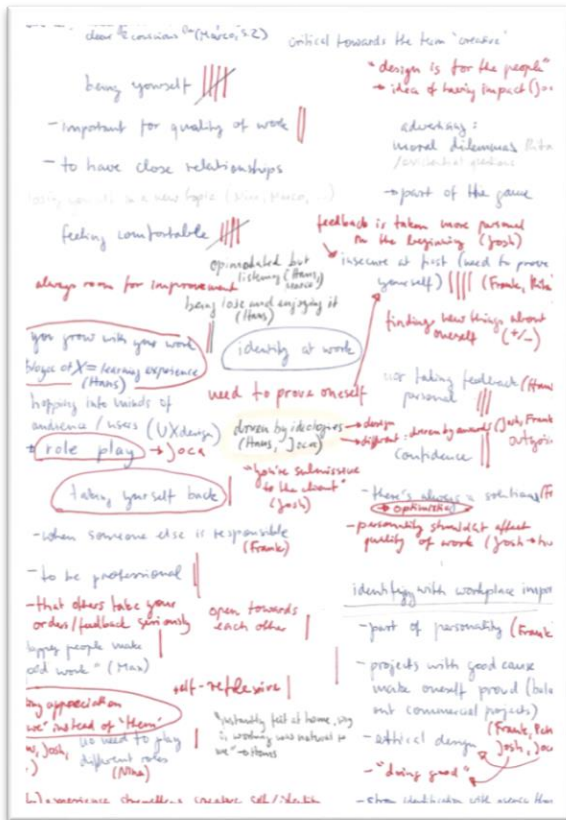
Images 1, 2, 3, and 4. Four out of fourteen exemplary first order mind maps (original scans)

Next, I further interpreted, condensed and abstracted these second-order observations while moving back and forth over the original textual data, to ensure that all relevant insights are included in the analysis. During that process of clarifying the research focus, it quickly became clear that the interview findings could impossibly be condensed on one layer. Instead, I realised that relevant aspects regarding the study's field of interest were not only found in respect to the individual, but also to the organisation and the greater societal, as well as creative industry-specific context. Therefore, to further explore these complexities, I distinguished the findings on three layers: the microlayer (the individual), the mesolayer (the organisation), as well as the macrolayer (the greater societal and industry-specific context). To gain flexibility during the process of visually organising and condensing the data, I created third observation schemata with 'Mind Manager', a digital mind mapping tool, one for each layer. Here, some themes were illustrated with original short quotes from the interview transcriptions to underline their respective meanings. Moreover, I added the respondents' or organisations' names to the respective 'maps' to make the schemata more comprehensible and vivid. Creating these digital mindmaps can be considered as stand-alone coding processes, since the interconnected individual 'maps' consist of an organising, central category ('micro-', 'meso-', or 'macrolayer'), between two and six main themes, and numerous sub-, sub-sub, or sub-sub-sub-themes. An impression of these mind maps can be won in the three figures below, as well as in **Appendix C**.

Figure 1. Mind map created for the interview findings on the microlayer: the individual
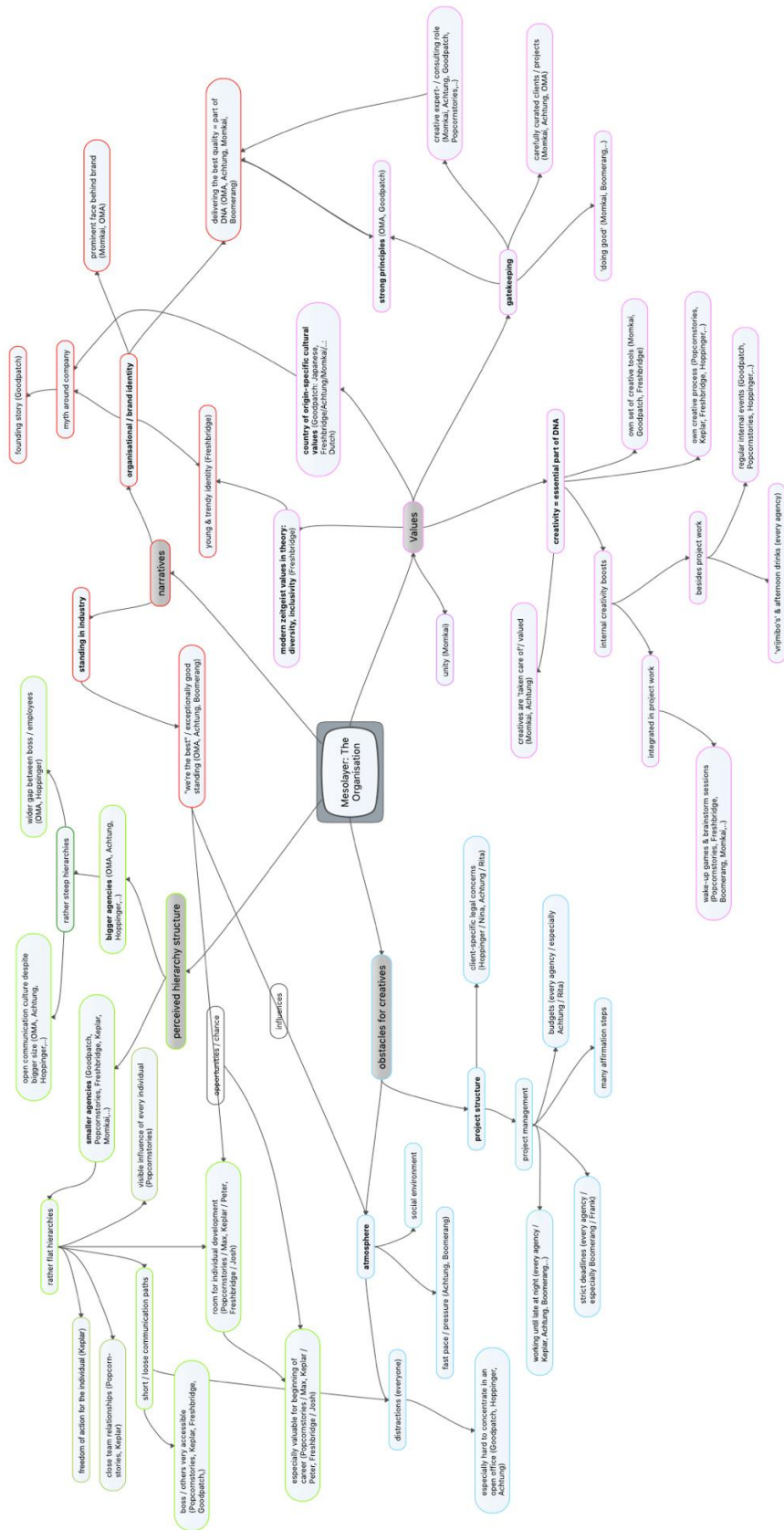
Figure 2. Mind map created for the interview findings on the mesolayer: the organisation
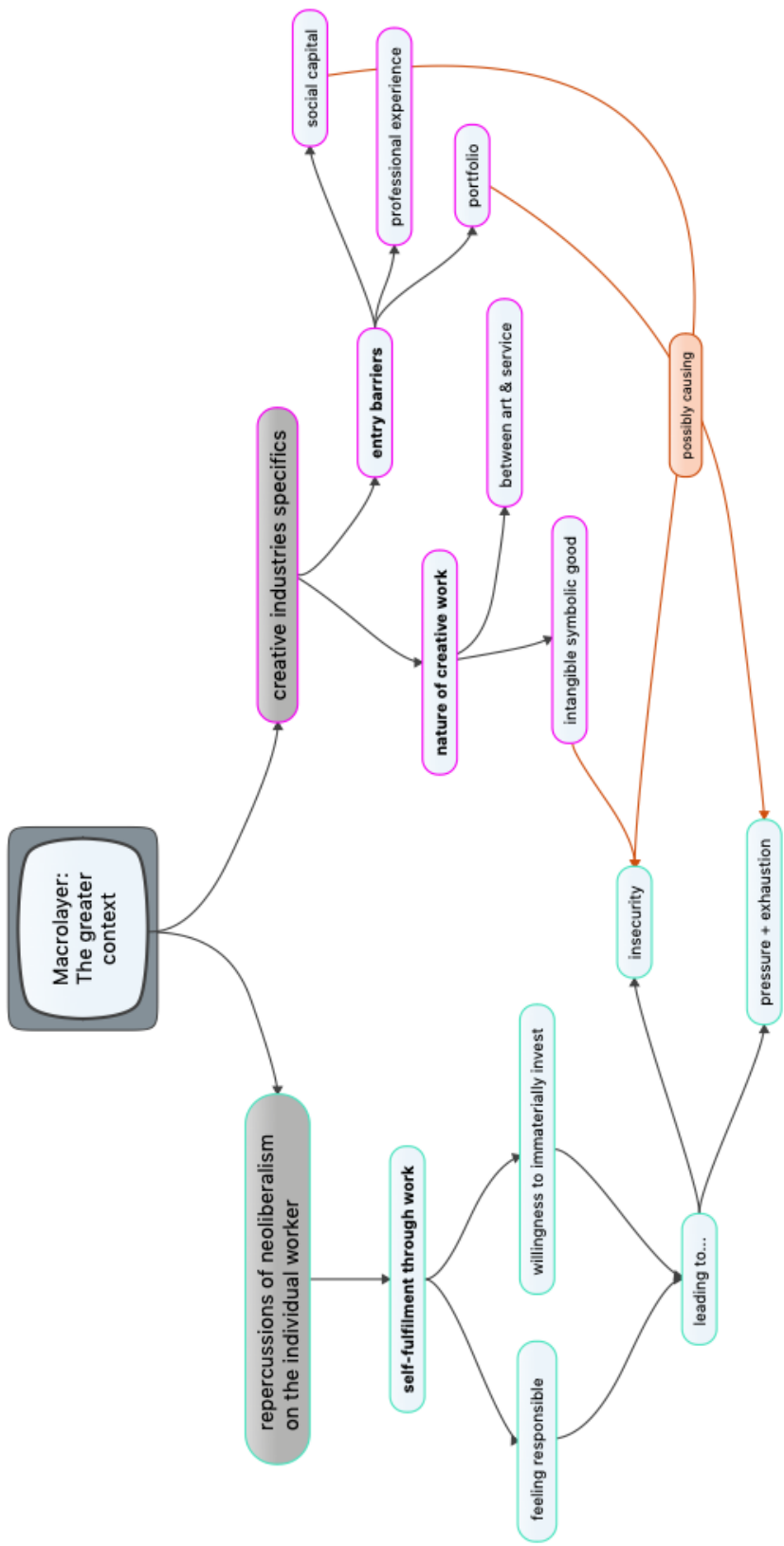
Figure 3. Mind map created for the interview findings on the macrolayer: the greater context

Finally, to further condense and clarify the interview findings, I created three individual coding tables that work as textual versions of the mind maps. These tables, where the data is supported with representative quotes, can be viewed on the following pages. Moreover, since both, the mind maps and tables, describe similar observations, I merged the content into three final schemata that visualise the data analysis in a simplified way. These consist of one central category and the main themes and can be viewed below, as well as in **Appendix C**.

Figure 4. Concept map created for the microlayer: the individual

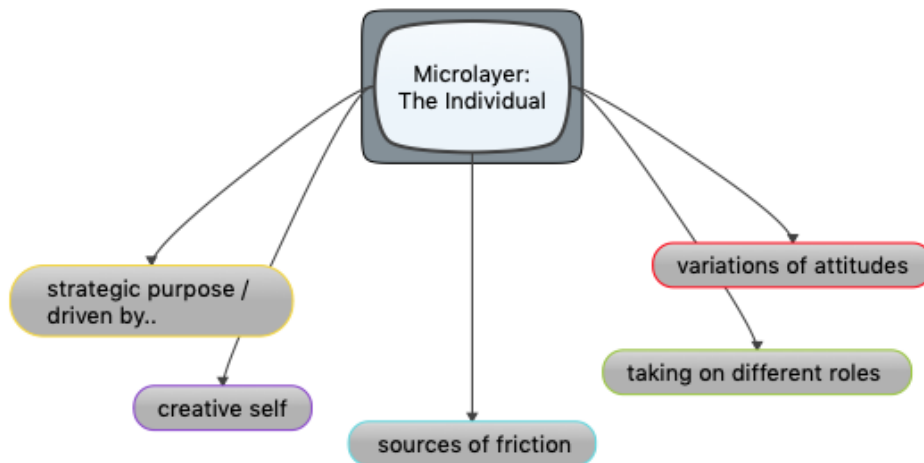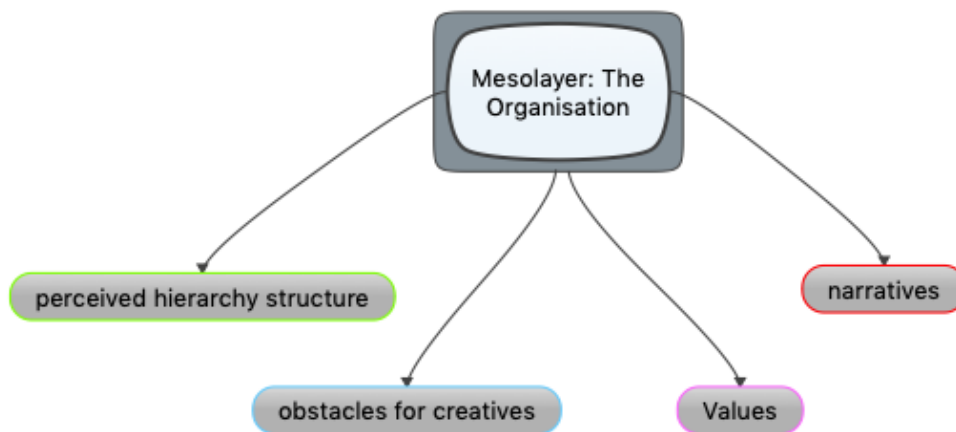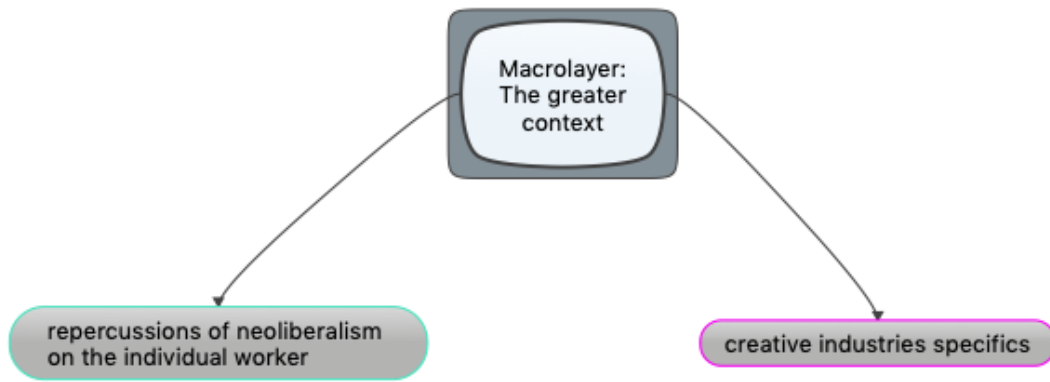**Figure 5.** Concept map created for the mesolayer: the organisation

Figure 6. Concept map created for the macrolayer: the greater context

Table 4. Data Supporting Interpretations of Second-Order Observations on the Microlayer: the Individual

Themes	Sub Themes	Representative Quotes
Variations of attitudes	Informal arenas	"With those Friday drinks it's always like 'Peter, can you put on some music?'. So, every time music is involved, I have to put some music. Which is awesome. And, yeah, I make stupid jokes, for sure." (Peter)
		"And when you get to be one-on-one with someone outside of the office, that's when the real shit happens. For example, we went to visit a client with some colleagues, we took the train and that was super personal, I was actually surprised, like holy shit, I don't even tell this my friends, you know. So, they are all very open but at the same time know what to keep inside the office and outside the office." (Peter)
	Formal arenas	"The interests of the user and the business are often conflicting. And, business interests are mostly to put as much in the product as possible to generate more revenue streams. It can also happen that the client gives me suggestions on the UX design. Then I think 'wait…we are the experts, not you'. Sometimes we have to defend our position, which is a bit annoying." (Marco)
		"The only thing I struggle with here, is…I'm the only copywriter here…so, not a lot of people have copywriting in their mindset. And that's sometimes a bit annoying when they only realise it when it's a little too late. I can still do something, but it won't be the best quality. Or they are just like 'oh, we need a text, but we don't have the budget, so someone else will just write it', and then that's that." (Nina)
		"Yeah, sometimes it happens that you're at the end of a project and the completion of it is longer and longer…then it can be frustrating, you also want to get things done and go on to the next project, but that's just part of the game and will always be a factor." (Max)
		"I did so many workshops but I'm still slightly nervous every time because I don't know the participants in the beginning…it can happen that you affront one or the other person to which you have to react correctly. So, there is this uncertainty, definitely…I don't think this uncertainty or insecurity will ever go away but that's okay." (Marco)
		"Of course, in the first couple of weeks no one gave a shit about me. But then there was a project for Nike where I did almost everything on a Sunday. So, that's where everyone realized that I'm going to stick around.…I think it took me about two months to really fit in." (Peter)
		"When I'm with a client, I have a different role, the client's interests are more in the center then." (Marco)
		"He has a higher standing anyways, so you don't treat him like one of the boys, you know." (Josh)
		"…because when someone else is the lead creative, I take myself back more because it's that person's responsibility, not mine" (Frank)
		"Other times I'm in strategy talks where I'm just sitting there and say some stuff once in a while, but I know that I'm not the most knowledgeable person in that field…I do feel that I act different and more low-key in a strategy conversation because I know that there are things I don't know about." (Josh)
		"…you have all these questions of how to build a cheap building in a fast and sustainable way, but…It's not just a technical product…so, when you enter a competition, there are so many things eating that away somehow…it's really fascinating to work on keeping that concept alive. Even if it can be very depressing, the challenge of doing that makes me appreciate architecture." (Hans)
Taking on different roles	Informal arenas	"Everyone knows me as someone who likes to laugh and I think my colleagues appreciate that. But I think it's also about seeing where the line is, you know. No, but I joke around, also with my boss, and I think he likes that." (Josh)
		"I'm also the extreme sport kid a little bit and also the DJ, which is also fun…" (Peter)
	Formal arenas	"…that's something I really like about this job because you're dealing with such different organizations and people…I think part of becoming…or being professional is…finding the right role for the right moment. I wouldn't call it theater, but I think it's similar to…debating, where you have a particular rhetorics, you play a particular role to get something done. At least if you work a lot with clients it's essential." (Joca)
		"But, most of the time it's also really fun to speak with people in a way that you're sort of moving them in a direction but not that they feel bossed around, you know? It's a game, and you don't even have to fake it." (Max)

"…if I've got something interesting, I want to chat to him or there's something I would like his input on…then I can just jump in and discuss with him. But mainly speaking, you know, he's still my boss and I treat him accordingly." (Stuart)

"In general, it's not easy to guide through a workshop because you have to be the facilitator but an expert of the content at once." (Marco)

"as a lead designer I'm sort of responsible for everyone's creative mindset… when we have a kickoff with the team I definitely try to see like, okay, how's everyone's mood and how are people feeling involved and what are people's ideas" (Max)

"I have an intern that I watch closely and have conversations with every week to see how it goes and look at the development and stuff. So, then I push myself to see where they can improve, and we try to closely monitor that development of our interns and employees." (Josh)

"I would say that 95% I am (myself), but there's always that 5%. As someone in a leadership position, you always have to maintain a certain demeanor at work, there's other people that are looking to you as an example. So you need to lead by example." (Stuart)

Sources of friction	The client	"Yeah, that's one of the moral dilemmas…when you do advertising. There are so many brands, and obviously there are some brands that do things that play against your values. Everyone sees that differently, but I think all of us have made work that we don't entirely support morally…" (Rita)
		"We were creating this web shop…and I knew that the client…wanted to sell as many of the products as possible. But I think my role as a designer is to sort of push back because if you put the full websites with pop ups and jet bots…that sort of hides the whole product…" (Joca)
		"It can also happen that the client gives me suggestions on the UX design. Then I think 'wait…we are the experts, not you'. Sometimes we have to defend our position, which is a bit annoying." (Marco)
	Colleagues	"The only times it ever starts getting frustrating at work is…when I see someone always being negative at work or if someone…or if someone's running other people down and then I can get an issue with that. And then that needs to be resolved very quickly because that kind of attitude has a big impact on the rest of the team." (Stuart)
		"Or a colleague or client becomes so stressed that the collaborations isn't that fun anymore. These things all affect my mood." (Nina)
	Personal reasons	"When the weather is horrible and it was raining, you came by bike, you forgot your jacket, you fell, someone shouted at you, you lost your keys…then your whole day is fucked." (Peter)
		"What's always in the back of my head is to start my own office. The limitation for me personally is, even if you work on projects that are really exciting, these projects are still for someone else. There's the freedom in that but at the same time you're just doing what someone else tells you to do." (Hans)
Preventing & solving friction	Regarding the client	"…for some we have projects we do in sprints, so those are like short, intensive weeks where we just work in one space together. Then the client is like a colleague from the studio because we have to sit, we have lunch together, we start together, we end together." (Joca)
		"You really try to prevent the unforeseen as good as possible. That's why it's good to have this process, because you can create a structure which makes you feel safe." (Marco)
		"Only when we get green light at every stage, we go to the next one. So, for animation and videos we created these seven steps…these are really helpful, not only to manage it but also communicate to the client…" (Max)
	Internally	"Sometimes it doesn't help because your energy wasn't the problem, maybe you got a bad briefing, or your mind was somewhere else….that's really the challenge for the creative director, to see what the right guidance and stimulus for the team is to start picking it up. So, the CD helps you to get on the right track again…" (Rita)
		"…there can be a problem, but when you have the same attitude of wanting to stay positive and wanting to fix something…this is the type of atmosphere that you need for being creative and I think this would also mean that everyone feels equal, there's not too much competition going on and people feel valuable and acknowledged and so on…happy people make good work" (Max)
	Personally / Individually	"(You can't force creativity) But you can grow it. I think it's something you need to take care of, something you need to feed by trying out new things, going to the museum, visiting your family, whatever you want to do. That way, you can harvest your creativity, you also need to give it some rest. Because otherwise there won't be room for new ideas." (Joca)

		"Healthy is…to keep a reflection journal. You know, where you talk about the things you've learned, the things you could have done better…I think that keeping track of this and reflecting on this inevitably makes you a more effective colleague if nothing else. It makes you more effective in a leadership position and also makes you more able to be more just yourself at work." (Stuart) "If I was this purist that wants the thing to be fully what I want, well, then I should have done something differently. I have my own projects for that…To learn new skills mainly. And for fun and also like, it's my work, it's also my hobby. I really like to think about new things. So it's both fun and educational…It's in me." (Joca)
The creative self	Identity / personality at work	"Well, in the first place, what I do needs to be fun. As long as I'm not having fun then I don't think you can be creative. I'm doing this work for almost four years now and it still doesn't really feel like work" (Frank) "Also, on the personal level I can really feel like myself. (…) For me personally, that is important. I've also been at agencies where the culture was super corporate, and I really didn't feel good in that environment" (Rita) "I know what you mean and in other companies I would totally understand that it's hard to be completely yourself and don't feel comfortable, but this is I think one of the main advantages of being in a small team. Even more when you work in a team for almost five years. It feels really personal, you know? And also, you have to be lucky what kind of personality your boss has, and I truly am lucky. For me, and also for the others, it feels more like a small family and we have a friendship-relation instead of a hierarchical…" (Max) "Also, what is creativity? Who's going to decide what's creative or not? Now I'm more confident to call myself a creative because I have a longer track record, and I feel that I've done good stuff and got recognition. But in the beginning, even in art school, I questioned my creative abilities, questioned if I'm good enough" (Rita) "I know that, even if a creative brief is super difficult, eventually something cool will happen. If you keep on talking, keep on researching, keep on talking with other people, there's always an outcome of every briefing. As long as you have that confidence, then you're going to fix every problem" (Frank) "I would say that, what I try as an employee and as a colleague, is to enjoy what I'm doing, joke around with it, have nice human interaction with the others. The result of something is better than your idea or someone else's idea, you find something better together. So, I like to be very opinionated but open and listening at the same time." (Hans)
	The naturally determined creative	"it's in the essence of who you are" (Max) "And since I was like twelve or thirteen I used to play a lot of Call of Duty and me and my friend started to get really good at it. We started to produce montages, like videoclips of us playing and we put that up on YouTube. For those videos we needed still background images, so I started learning how to use Photoshop to do that background and a logo, so I also used Illustrator. And then I picked up photography at some point and took photos at parties and concerts…I started as a junior visual designer which is basically a little bit of graphic design mixed with a lot of photography. So, I basically got in with my photography portfolio and then developed my graphic design and art direction skills and became more knowledgeable in marketing." (Josh) "I actually don't care about my salary, like, it's nice, but there are so many colleagues who are constantly focusing on their salary and how to get more money. I know that it's important but for me it doesn't matter. It will come eventually when you deliver nice things that come from the heart. When you have fun, eventually all of that will come." (Frank) "I started with photography, but was always writing together with my photography. And, after my graduation I decided that I didn't want to have a career as a photographer, because I was more passionate about writing. So, that's why I went for this kind of career path instead." (Nina)
Strategic purpose / driven by…	The individual learning experience	"What I do means a lot to me and I want to get better. I think it's also the person I am, I always want to do things right and please people with what I do. But I also think to be creative with all the aspects of my work, it's also important to develop myself. And also, like you mentioned, a lot of creatives see their job as part of their identity, so you could feel that you as a person failed when you're bad at something that has to do with your job. So, yeah, it is very intrinsic." (Nina)

	"I think that both practices (private- and work projects) form each other a lot. I really like that there's the space here to propose something new, and also a lot of things I learn here, like communication with clients but also other skills, I apply in my private life as well." (Joca)
	"I noticed that doing a little extra can actually improve the way I enjoy my work. I did some extra work, noticed that I grew, and other people also saw that and told me that, which was really motivating....I feel like I've become more valuable and because of that my work is more valuable for me personally." (Josh)
	"I also try to see how I can develop further at OMA. Like, what can I get out of it before I leave?" (Hans)
Industry recognition	"I actually won this pitch two or three years ago, it's called 'jonge honden', which means 'young dogs' in Dutch. It's an organization where young creatives can participate in pitches. When you win a prize there, you can go to the Cannes advertising festival. It was so nice. I want to stand there in a couple of years with a Lion award." (Frank)
	"Yeah, the way to do it is to win awards. There are a bunch of different awards in Holland and if you win a couple of those, you'll get noticed. That's what we're trying to do. So, at the moment we're working together with a bunch of different agencies to do some corona-related campaign. But you really notice that there is some sort of rivalry going on between agencies, it's cool, it's pretty exciting." (Josh)
More abstract ideologies	"There's this idea of having impact. I really like to design things that people use. And, I think digital design is quite democratic, you don't need to buy a website to use it. In that way you have a big audience and that's quite similar to what I learned in university about Bauhaus design, for example, that design is for people. That's also something I try to do." (Joca)
	"Reinier and I are doing speculative projects, also design projects, where we try to question the system. And, even when we're working with developers who act on the principles of earning as much money by lying to as many people as possible, it's almost like a holy war of working against that and working for the quality of the design." (Hans)

Table 5. Data Supporting Interpretations of Second-Order Observations on the Mesolayer: the Organisation

Themes	Sub Themes	Representative Quotes
Narratives	Standing in the industry	"Since I graduated, actually, Achtung was kind of the king of Dutch agencies" (Rita)
	Organisational / brand identity	"Our founder is Japanese, he was in San Francisco eight years ago and realised that digital design has a growing priority in the industry. He visited some agencies there and wanted to bring that to Japan…He went back to Japan and opened up an agency called Goodpatch, it's about doing good, basically. The Japanese culture is still a big part our DNA, we are very flexible, dynamic and resilient." (Marco)
		"I think in general I feel pressure but more of a pressure that I put on myself. Achtung is really one of the best agencies. You can compare it to the champions league kind of. You're playing on a higher level. Shitty creative work is just something that's not done there. As an agency we always deliver. I've never been in a situation where I feel like we can't make it, it's just not an option to present shitty work to a client. So, that creates pressure." (Rita)
Values	Modern zeitgeist values	"Because we try to be really diverse and inclusive and stuff, I think it could be a little more but it's hard to do, and I think we do that really well. And also, the way the company operates, we try to stand for and apply certain values and I really identify with those. So, when it comes to that, yes. But, in practice, it could be a little more…" (Josh)
	Country-of-origin-specific cultural values	"I purposely ask for it, there's no real system for feedback. It's very unofficial, which is also Dutch. My boss is really Dutch in that sense. He would be like 'yo Peter, you fucked up', he would just straight up tell me. He would also do that with positive feedback though." (Peter)
		"Every time a project ends, we do a retrospective session together with everyone who worked on it to see which things went well, what could've been better…We are really open to each other and stay professional; I really like that… I think that's also the Dutch culture." (Joca)
	Gatekeeping	"It depends on the partner, but we actually walk away from projects when we have really deep problems with a developer that wants to compromise on the design. That's what I really like about OMA, we have principles. These things keep me in the office longer, because you can still fight for these things as an architect." (Hans)
		"I think like one of the reasons I chose to join the studio after my masters was that I really liked the culture, which is both internal and external. External of course, really designing from this idea of creating calm designs and keeping the user in mind. Also being not too intrusive, and having an ethical way of designing things, which I think is quite special nowadays." (Joca)
		"At Achtung, everybody knows that the product we're selling is creativity. Of course, we want to prioritise the client's needs but we also see that what a client may ask for is not necessarily what they want or need. They come from a different expertise, so we listen to their needs and create a solution for that. But we're really protecting our work and are convincing the client. That's why we have good clients, because they come to us for that." (Rita)
	Creativity = essential part of DNA	"Internally also the type of projects, striving for the highest quality but also being a really kind company. I think there are lots of examples of other agencies where you're pushed to work until 2:00 AM and there is no culture like that here, people take care that you take rest. That's really important to me." (Joca)
		"For example with the animation thing, we actually made certain documents where we have all the phases already planned out, and that's a very valuable tool for us to communicate to the client, because often the client doesn't know how things work or how many phases the creative process really has." (Max)
		"Achtung really invests in things outside of the normal schedule, so every Friday we do afternoon drinks and always have a speaker, like someone interesting and creative. That stimulates creativity" (Rita)

		"once a month we organize this event where everyone has to bring some source of inspiration, doesn't really matter what it is, and which is also not relatable to the client work, but just for themselves. And this is something really cool because it gives people a chance to show where their sources of inspiration are, but also develop a feeling to speak about it, which also is helpful for speaking about it to the clients" (Max)
	Unity	"I think it's broader than Harald alone, of course he is the face of the studio for the outside world. But I think, talking about the whole identity of the studio, it's really in the group. I think it's also something that's really emphasized in the way we work, even if we create a proposal for requesting a briefing of a client, it shows on the cover the faces the people of the team. So if you compare it to a football team, I would say Harald is the captain, but you need the full team to actually win." (Joca)
Obstacles for creatives	Atmosphere	"I can concentrate much more here at home. For writing it's actually quite good, and I have my own routine. In the office there are so many distractions" (Rita) "However, it's really important to not get distracted. I kind of miss that state at the moment because I get so many emails and notifications that it's hard to go into this tunnel." (Marco) "Let's say there's people at your office that you don't necessarily see completely eye to eye with. And that kind of sits on your shoulders and that…really kills creativity and togetherness at work which has a massive effect on the people. You can't just put your head down and be creative, you have to be in the right frame of mind. You have to be in the right zone, you have to have the right people, the right culture. And, I think that's super important for people in any creative position to really feel like they're in the right environment that they have the right culture around them and they basically have the right tools around them in order to give their hundred percent." (Stuart) "Lots of people working at Boomerang had burnouts, actually. From 150 people maybe 10% were sitting at home with a burnout. It's crazy. It's weird what we do, basically selling air" (Frank)
	Project structure / management	"I think it's always going to be a fight for creatives in advertising agencies, not only with the client, but internally as well…you have to go through so many obstacles. You have to get (the idea) reviewed internally…when it survives you try to sell it to a client. When it's sold to a client then the real challenge starts because there's timing, there's budget, there are things that go unplanned and so on. And, during this whole process you always have to stand in for your idea, it's kind of like your baby. Because it's such an abstract thing it can quickly lead to insecurity, it's hard to protect something if a budget needs to be protected, for example. It's hard to fight for it, you can sometimes feel a bit lonely or frustrated." (Rita) "(Feel pressured?) Yeah, I do. Because we're working with really hard deadlines. For instance, I have this deadline on Friday which we have to present, the week after I have two other deadlines…so yeah, it's pressure…If you're stressful I can imagine that this type of work is driving you crazy" (Frank) "if you have deadlines coming closer and you have difficulties, then it really eats you up and you can't escape from it easily. You don't feel like a normal human being during that time…it's tough because you normally can't escape. In the end you just have to go for it until it's done." (Hans) "I think it's (the creative process) kind of stiff. I think it's a certain approach, like 'waterfall' or something, where everything happens step by step. First it's the designer, then the developer, and so on. In that sense I'm not sure if it's stiff, but I'm sure that it doesn't fit every project. Sometimes you want to do content first, sometimes the designers and developers want to brainstorm together, and then we need a different…way of working I guess." (Nina)
(Perceived) hierarchy structures	Bigger agencies	"Yeah, you get credits for projects for a certain extent but it's the partners of the office that get the credit. There are ten or eleven partners who also are against each other and try to get their own piece which probably happens at every creative agency. So, you're aware that you're giving away to a great degree and, in terms of public recognition, it's not equal to what you're producing at all. But that's the price you have to pay." (Hans)

	"What is nice about OMA in that regard is that it's not a place that silences people. It's not that you're encouraged to speak, since there are so many people shouting, but you really learn to express your opinion. That doesn't mean that the project will go in the direction you want it to go, but it's also your choice of what you want to do." (Hans)
Smaller agencies	"What I really like about working in a smaller agency is that, as a younger employee, you have some shorter lines to reach other positions because people are dedicated to it, people take time besides their projects and there's really the culture that if you have a good idea, you can persuade the other people. Like, if you have good reasons that it's a good idea, you can just try it out." (Joca)
	"I feel like the vibe is 'you do you' until you get it done. So, if you want to play the pacman machine, go on play it, but then you still have to deliver before the deadline. You just got to do your stuff, and everything else is totally up to you." (Peter)
	"…you can work the way you want to work. If you want to grow you can put in that effort and they will let you grow and help you as well. But also, if you just want to keep doing what you're doing then that's fine. You have to switch between both from time to time because, otherwise you're going to destroy yourself. I think that openness and that they give people the opportunity to grow when they want to, and to monitor their growth, I think that's more valuable than a lot of other things at a company…I think that's what has kept me there." (Josh)
	"Here you really see your influence, in a smaller team" (Max)
	"(The boss) is also very accessible for everyone, always in the office, and we have super flat hierarchies. Sure, everyone knows he's in charge of the office but he's not the highest boss. The boss is sitting in Tokyo. But no, I wouldn't say that. If anything's up, my colleagues can just go to him directly." (Marco)

Table 6. Data Supporting Interpretations of Second-Order Observations on the Macrolayer: the Greater Context

Themes	Sub Themes	Representative Quotes
Repercussions of neoliberalism on the individual worker	Self-fulfillment through work	"It is important to me. Because when you tell other people where you work it is part of your personality or who you are at the moment, right?" (Frank)
		"I'm the type of guy that stays at night to do it again. Then, in the morning it was good. I barely slept, but at least I could prove myself." (Peter)
		"I more and more I get in the situations where I have to discuss with people non-stop, so it's always spontaneous, there's endless stimulation. That's super nice but also really exhausting because at a certain point you don't want to talk to anyone anymore. The nicest moment is coming home and drinking a beer. Your brain feels like it's fried, and you can't talk one word anymore and you don't know who you are. So, it's a bit of both. It's too much of everything in the end, in those moments." (Hans)
		"…and if I don't get that balance right then waking up in the morning is tough, eh? It's tough to go to a job where people are expecting a lot of you and you don't really have the energy to follow it up. So it's a responsibility, it's my responsibility to make sure that I maintain that balance." (Stuart)
		"The more I get into the development of the ideas, the more I'm given freedom to do that, the more the ups and downs become personal, then I take it home with me. But I don't necessarily see it as a negative thing, I think it's kind of nice. It's not that I'm working 24/7 but I'm working on a project at any moment. I can be in a call at 11 pm on a Tuesday for half an hour, and that will stay in your mind afterwards, for sure. I think that's kind of okay. You just have to develop a way how to deal with that and find ways to escape" (Hans)
		"One of my bosses once told me this story…he said you need to understand that when you own a business, two things are going to happen. One, you're going to have to fire people and two, people are going to leave. That's just the way the world works. And he said, don't stress about it because a company never owes you anything and you never owe a company anything…so, basically, no one ever owes anything, anyone…when it comes to Hoppinger, I love it there and I love the people there and it's fantastic, but I'm in no way indebted to them." (Stuart)
		"Well, I wouldn't necessarily say that I adjust my life around work. I would rather say that work can have a major impact on how you feel outside of work. It's really hard when you can't think of good ideas at work, to just shut down the computer at six and say, 'oh well, okay, that was it for today'. It doesn't work like that, you kind of take it with you. Then you're maybe less able to enjoy yourself as much because your mind is in your work somehow." (Rita)
Creative industry specifics	Entry barriers	"And, yeah, we had two or three talks and then I took a personality test and it turned out that I'm not crazy, so they hired me…their plan is that they don't just hire people on the base of skills but also if you fit in the team, which is what a lot of companies do…In real life it's a lot harder to fake how you're going to be, so we do that test." (Josh)
		"And, it's funny because in advertising you need to be a team. Once you kind of break up with your teammate it can be a hard situation. Especially when you're a junior they really want teams because you don't have enough experience to be hired alone" (Rita)
	The nature of creative work	"…it's also like how well is well enough, you know, you always wish that you are better. But there's times where I just get frustrated cause I really don't feel like I'm making progress, but it doesn't happen super often"(Stuart)
		"…it's something you need to take care of, something you need to feed by trying out new things, going to the museum, visiting your family, whatever you want to do. That way, you can harvest your creativity, you also need to give it some rest. Because otherwise there won't be room for new ideas." (Joca)
		"…it's hard to name myself a creative, because you put yourself against so many good creatives. You kind of give yourself a title you need to live up to. To give you an example, for a long time I had the thought 'what if people are going to find out that I can't write',

'when are they going to find out that it's not good what I'm doing', 'why are they paying me, everybody can write'. I shared this insecurity with other creatives, and they told me they had the same thoughts." (Rita)

"I realized that being creative is a unique skill, it's not about having this exact book or showing off good grades, which also makes it hard…also, what is creativity? Who's going to decide what's creative or not? Now I'm more confident to call myself a creative because I have a longer track record, and I feel that I've done good stuff and got recognition. But in the beginning, even in art school, I questioned my creative abilities, questioned if I'm good enough" (Rita)

"…one day I opened the course catalog of the university and architecture caught my eye. I wanted to do something creative but at the same time I wanted something somewhat scientific. All my life I did drawings, was playing music and writing stuff. I didn't want to do any of that professionally but still wanted to be creative in a professional context." (Hans)

"I don't like every project but there are also so many constraints on how you build today that it's difficult to be very creative in architecture." (Hans)

Discussion of Quality Criteria

Ethical Considerations

In every form of academic, social research, the researcher should consider respective quality criteria regarding their study. In this case, since I made use of personal information in the form of qualitative interviews, there are some ethical aspects to consider regarding this research method. Importantly, qualitative interviewers have a moral responsibility for their respondents to ensure their physical and mental soundness when researching and should "use their knowledge and experience to act with integrity, honesty and fairness" (Kvale, 1996, in Brennen, 2017, p. 31). Here, I consider it suitable to mention that not only my manners and my personality but also my background in the field of interest ensure that this study's respondents were, and still are, treated accordingly. I am aware of the fact that identity issues regarding one's profession and workplace are substantially personal. By sharing just as personal experiences with working in different creative agencies, and thus also 'opening up' as a former creative worker during the interviews, I hope that the respondents felt treated appropriately and generally well in my presence. Here, I want to emphasise again that I see the respondents as fully meaning-making. Thus no given answer was interpreted as wrong, weird, or likely. Instead, since I am interested in their personal experiences, I treat(ed) to the respondents neutrally, without personal bias and prejudice - thus, objectively (Kvale, 2008).

Moreover, as aforementioned, I made sure that the participants gave informed consent when having agreed to be interviewed (see Brennen, 2017). Since I consider transparency as essential in that regard, I made sure that my research intention and approach were elucidated. Moreover, before starting the interviews, I asked the participants whether they are comfortable with his or her real first name being used in the current thesis. And, of course, each of the ten respondents will receive the final version of this study see what themselves, the others, and I have to say or assume about being a creative worker in today's times.

Reliability and Validity

Principally, the selected respondents are subjective individuals, and I am neither fond of treating expressions and stories unexceptionally objective. Therefore, I do not assume that this research study's findings could be reproduced by other researchers, even though I was consistent and transparent during the interviews and their analyses by staying close to the data. This study's reliability, therefore, depends on whether I am as diligent as possible in describing all the steps performed during the research. Precisely this was aimed for when describing the current research design as detailed as possible and supporting the steps taken with visual depictions of them. The similarity of interpretation of the interview findings could have been restored with feedback rounds; for instance, letting the interviewed

and other researchers review the interpretation. However, these steps were not taken due to time and organisational restraints.

Finally, regarding the validity, I consider it as useful to mention that knowledge, thus, validity in the postmodern era is not conceptualised as an objective one-to-one mirror of reality anymore (Kvale, 1995). As Kvale (1995) highlights, today, knowledge is instead seen as a social and linguistic construction of reality, based on interpretations of experiences with reality. Thus, according to Rorty (1979, as referred to in Kvale, 1995), communication between people like the qualitative interview becomes the "ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood" (p. 24). For an interview investigation, the concept of validation accounts for every step in the research process (rather than a somewhat final product control). It rests, therefore, in the researcher's craftmanship (Kvale, 1995). I iteratively and continually checked the credibility and trustworthiness of the theoretical framework, design, data, and findings of the study and, thus, aimed to ensure the verification of validity (see Kvale, 1995).

Reflections on the Impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic on this Research

As I am writing the final words of this thesis, the first half of 2020 has passed. Already at this point, it is safe to say that this year is a year of disruption and change, mainly caused by the coronavirus crisis. The coronavirus pandemic is an ongoing global pandemic of 'coronavirus disease 2019' (COVID-19), caused by 'severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2' (SARS-CoV-2). Since its identified outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December 2019, more than nine million cases of COVID-19 have been reported in more than 188 countries and territories, resulting in nearly half a million deaths as of 23 June 2020 (JHU, 2020). Since the virus is primarily spread between people during close contact but also through contaminated surfaces and the air, authorities worldwide have responded to the fast-spreading virus by implementing more or less strict travel bans, lockdowns, workplace hazard controls, and facility closures. As countries implement these necessary social distancing practices to contain the pandemic, the world finds itself in a great lockdown. The magnitude and speed of collapse that has followed are significant. This unprecedented crisis is characterised by substantial uncertainty about its impact on people's lives. Many aspects around the quality of human life depend on the epidemiology of the virus, the effectiveness of containment measures, and the development of therapeutics and vaccines, all of which are hard or impossible to predict. Also, many countries now face several crises - a health crisis, a financial crisis, and a social crisis, which interact in complex ways. Policymakers are granting unprecedented support to households, firms, and financial markets, and, while this is crucial for a strong recovery, there is considerable uncertainty about the state of the economic landscape when we emerge from this lockdown.

Aside from the tourism industry, the coronavirus crisis is particularly critical for cultural and creative sectors due to the sudden and extensive loss of revenue opportunities, particularly for the more

fragile players. While some actors in in developed countries benefit from public support (e.g. theatres and public museums), many small companies and independent professionals indispensable for the sector could be confronted with financial ruin (OECD, 2020). Consequently, this reality creates a fundamental threat to the survival of many firms and workers in cultural and creative production (OECD, 2020).

I started to conduct the interviews for this current research in March 2020, shortly before the World Health Organisation declared the virus outbreak a "public health emergency of international concern" (WHO, 2020). Therefore, I consider it as essential to reflect on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on this research. Firstly, as just mentioned, my respondents are actants of the cultural and creative industries in The Netherlands and thus primarily affected by the virus outbreak and its direct consequences on the sector. Aside from the natural anxieties and emotional overload every individual following the news cycle concerning the coronavirus pandemic was (and is) most probably experiencing, the participants of my research were perhaps facing further fears and insecurities towards this background. To illustrate, the creative workers possibly could have irrationally questioned the relevance of cultural and creative production and thus the relevance of their professions. Therefore, since this thesis foregrounds the identity concept, I am aware that the interviews could have taken a different direction if the COVID-19 pandemic would not have happened.

Also, in a practical sense, the pandemic had an impact on the data gathering procedure of this research. Due to hygienic reasons, travel restrictions, and respective workplace controls, only the first three interviews were conducted face-to-face in the offices of the respondents. These three interviews had the advantages that I gained a more diversified understanding of the respondents' organisational contexts since I was able to visit their offices. Seeing these rooms and getting the chance to introduce myself to other organisational members significantly enriched the interview experiences.

Moreover, the absence of a digital communication medium allowed the real-time consideration of nonverbal responses. Although all the remaining interviews were conducted via video calls online due to the pandemic-caused circumstances, no nonverbal cues were lost since the conversation partner, and I was still able to see each other through the screen. Instead, these interviews gained more personal colouring since both parties sat in their private homes when conducting the interviews. At this point, I want to express my gratitude towards my respondents again. I thank them all dearly for sharing their time, energy, and personal experiences under these severe circumstances.

Chapter 4: Results

Findings on Three Layers

The data analysis process crystallised a multi-layered scheme of findings. Identity work- and play processes, as well as identity constructing phenomena regarding strategy as practice, were found on three levels. Considering the current trend in organisational identity- and strategy research which recognises both (often interrelated) thematic fields as complex and relational projects rather than fixed entities (see Coupland & Brown, 2012; Fachin & Langley, 2017; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia, Patvardhan, et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2012), it is reasonable and valuable to describe the findings on three levels: the micro-, meso-, and macrolayer. Here, concentrating on either the individual, the organisational, or the societal layer would not pay tribute to the actual complexity of human identity and how it is constructed over time. These levels are not only interrelated but are continually intertwined in one another, as individuals will continue to construct their identities as parts of an organisation. Simultaneously, organisations continue to communicate specific values to their employees, and as broader socio-economic contexts continually develop and shape the organisation. However, to approach the result section in a clear, organised manner, I treat these layers as independent to one another. Here, although all findings would be noteworthy to present, a selection of engaging insights will guide through the subject matter.

Microlayer: the Individual

From the analysis of the qualitative interviews, it becomes clear that all interviewees, whether it is a conscious or somewhat subconscious process, work and play with their identities as creatives on the individual level. Here, these processes come to light on rather personal or individual as well as social stages. The self-concept, for instance, comprises both stages and many areas like the knowledge a person has regarding its appearance, skills, values or attitudes. Conceptions of the self may be more or less clear and evolve in interaction with others. The report of the findings on the microlayer is structured as follows: the analysis of the interview data shows that most participants have a clear conception of themselves as creative individuals.

So, firstly, I explain that a robust identification as a creative, in most cases, is connected to being intrinsically motivated as an employee and the eagerness to improve continually. Next, connected to the latter, it is shown that the participants have different strategic purposes regarding their professional activities. The last main observation presented on the microlayer focuses on more situational aspects of creative identity construction: varying roles and attitudes at work as well as sources and preventions of friction.

The Creative Self: Passion, Intrinsic Motivation & Continuous Improvement

What I remember vividly from all the interviews has become apparent in the iterative data analysis: most participants show a reliable identification as creatives that, moreover, seems to be a natural, core characteristic of themselves. The phenomenon of 'naturally' identifying as a creative strongly refers to the fact that, in one way or another, the participants chose their jobs because it's their passion, because it's "in the essence of who you are" (Max). During the interviews, my counterparts demonstrated that creativity and how to identify as a creative could be interpreted in numerous different ways. On the one hand, the creative self is perceived in close connection to one's upbringing:

> My mother is not a professional creative, but she did a lot with drawing and made jewellery, sketching, fashion design.... And my father was really into readings, we have a lot of… beautiful art books, and when I was little they took me to the museum. So I think that sort of sparked something... with a lot of these art forms, it's also really about looking at a lot of things and being trained at watching and describing what you see. (Joca, UX designer)

This quote illustrates that creativity and a somewhat schematic creative identification can be considered as an inherited approach to life. Other participants determine their creative selves instead through their practical skills that are the substantial drivers behind their profession:

> I started with photography, but was always writing together with my photography. And, after my graduation I decided that I didn't want to have a career as a photographer, because I was more passionate about writing. So, that's why I went for this kind of career path instead. (Nina, creative copywriter)

Moreover, some participants who have transformed their creative passion into their profession, seem to be willing to pay sacrifices for their jobs; for instance, they prioritise personally 'meaningful' aspects over economic reward: "the pay isn't amazing... I know that I could get more somewhere else. But the reason I'm staying is because the company offers me many opportunities to grow and it's also just a good fit, personality-wise…." (Josh, creative director). Also referring to the intentions behind his employment, Frank sees a strong correlation between passion and economic reward:

> ...there are so many colleagues who are constantly focusing on their salary and how to get more money...for me it doesn't matter. It will come eventually when you deliver nice things that come from the heart. When you have fun, eventually all of that will come. (Frank, creative)

Furthermore, for participants who are substantially driven by passion, project-related circumstances such as having to work longer in the evenings and the stress crystallising from that, don't seem to be seriously problematic. Instead, intrinsically motivated creatives see such demanding circumstances as an industry-specific given or, beyond that, transform an external aspect into an internal stimulus: "I want to take in as much as I can and I'm pulling myself through but also notice how rewarding that is. If I didn't want it to be stressful, it wouldn't have to be. But I kind of need that" (Josh, creative director).

Another aspect of intrinsically motivated, or naturally determined creatives is that they have multifaceted interests and self-taught skills which connects back to the topic of passion:

> ...since I was like twelve...I used to play a lot of Call of Duty and me and my friend started to get really good at it. We started to produce montages, like videoclips of us playing and we put that up on YouTube. For those videos we needed still background images, so I started learning how to use Photoshop to do that background and a logo, so I also used Illustrator. And then I picked up photography… (Josh, creative director)

Here, it becomes clear that intrinsically motivated creatives seem to build their 'careers' based on their gut instinct and personal interests instead of following a straightforward norm. In turn, this individual approach of assembling a unique 'career' piece by piece, often translates into having multifaceted tasks as an employee:

> ...the luck of UX design is that you can sort of form yourself because it's still quite a new discipline....And there's this nice translation of doing research and applying it…it sparks new ideas to me and...it's...really good to have this balance of both the reading and writing and actually creating and sketching and tinkering. (Joca, UX designer)

A just as present observation regarding intrinsically motivated creatives is referring to their superordinate strategic purposes at work. In this case, the individual learning experience seems to be the most critical driver behind a creative's employment relationship. In other words, instead of mainly seeing one's professional activities as a contribution to the organisation's overall performance, some participants instead see *themselves* as the project: "I also try to see how I can develop further at OMA. Like, what can I get out of it before I leave?" (Hans, senior architect). Stuart also lives this clear (and probably quite healthy) prioritisation: "basically, no one ever owes anything, anyone, anything. So when it comes to Hoppinger, I love it there and I love the people there and it's fantastic, but I'm in no way

indebted to them". Other participants see their and the organisation's growth more reciprocally intertwined:

> I think that both practices (private- and work projects) form each other a lot. I really like that there's the space here to propose something new, and also a lot of things I learn here, like communication with clients but also other skills, I apply in my private life as well. (Joca, UX designer)

The Underlying Strategic Intentions

Regarding a creative worker's strategic purpose, the individual learning experience doesn't seem to be the main focus of every participant. Two interviewees working in the advertising industry are particularly intrigued by the idea of industry recognition, for instance, through winning awards or doing projects for a good cause in collaboration with other agencies:

> I actually won this pitch two or three years ago, it's called 'jonge honden'.... It's an organization where young creatives can participate in pitches. When you win a prize there, you can go to the Cannes advertising festival. It was so nice. I want to stand there in a couple of years with a Lion award. (Frank, creative)

> ...the way to do it is to win awards…that's what we're trying to do. So, at the moment we're working together with a bunch of different agencies to do some corona-related campaign. But you really notice that there is some sort of rivalry going on between agencies, it's cool, it's pretty exciting. (Josh, creative director)

Here, what became clear from the data familiarisation is that creatives doing design-focused work seem to be driven by more abstract ideologies. Joca appreciates the profound accessibility of digital design and, in the wake of this, the idea of having impact:

> I really like to design things that people use. ...digital design is quite democratic, you don't need to buy a website to use it. In that way you have a big audience and that's quite similar to what I learned in university about Bauhaus design...that design is for the people. That's also something I try to do. (Joca, UX designer)

Similarly, Hans underlines his substantial, value-driven intentions as a creative: "what feeds the project is an artistic concept or an intellectual concept, rather than a practical one. ...(A building is) not

just a technical product, it should have meaning and express the culture we live in" (Hans, senior architect). This approach would come to light in the day-to-day business as an architect - especially in interaction with developers and other actants within a construction project: "...even when we're working with developers who act on the principles of earning as much money by lying to as many people as possible, it's almost like a holy war of...working for the quality of the design" (Hans, senior architect).

Having an idea about the participant's varying underlying intentions as part of their creative identities, it is essential to now elaborate on situative identity construction processes in the context of their workplace.

Variations of Attitudes and Roles

Before reporting on how the participant's attitudes and roles vary in different situations, I consider it useful to mention that all the interviewees principally feel comfortable and as 'themselves' at work. Regarding questions such as 'do you feel like you have to hide a part of yourself?', none of the creatives mentioned a burdening atmosphere regarding their general mood. Feeling comfortable and enjoying oneself in the work setting would even be a significantly crucial factor for the quality of the creatives' work: "...I don't pretend to be someone else. I walk in, do a stupid joke, no one laughs but me and then the day continues...I can only be productive in an environment where I'm comfortable and enjoy myself" (Peter, creative business strategist).

However, since identities are, often as a response to tensions, worked on and played with during social situations, this feel-good atmosphere cannot remain unexceptionally stable (see Beech et al., 2012). In some moments, some participants' attitudes change in a neutral sense, for instance, to be more reserved and take 'oneself' back. On the one hand, this reserved attitude comes to light when positive, humorous personalities like Josh and Peter want to be taken more seriously by colleagues: "...people were not taking me seriously because they thought I was joking...then I realized, okay, it's hard for people to take me seriously if I'm joking all the time, so now I'm more obvious...and maybe do it less" (Josh, creative director). On the other hand, some participants wear what Joca calls a "professional shield" when interacting with a client: "when I'm with a client, I have a different role, the client's interests are more in the center then" (Marco, design strategist).

Moreover, many participants seem to feel pushed into a negative attitude when they have to defend their position as creatives. Nina, for instance, sometimes feels the necessity to take a stand for her profession internally:

> The only thing I struggle with here is that...I'm the only copywriter here...so, not a lot of people have copywriting in their mindset. And that's sometimes a bit annoying when...they are just like 'oh, we need a text, but we don't have the budget, so someone else will just write it', and then that's that. (Nina, creative copywriter)

Similarly, Marco's can get frustrated due to a client's behaviour: "It can also happen that the client gives me suggestions on the UX design. Then I think 'wait…we are the experts, not you'. Sometimes we have to defend our position, which is a bit annoying" (Marco, design strategist). In terms of a rather positively connotated variance of attitudes, many participants get particularly motivated when they are confronted with a challenge:

> Even though we all wanted to go home, we stayed and created something insane, which I'm still proud of today...I guess that pressure doesn't necessarily influence creativity from a negative perspective. It can also work like a kick in the ass. (Peter, creative business strategist)

Moreover, most interviewees seem to appreciate the relaxed, positive atmosphere in informal arenas like an afternoon get-together where drinks are involved ('vrijmibo') : "with those Friday drinks it's always like 'Peter, can you put on some music?'...which is awesome. And, yeah, I make stupid jokes, for sure" (Peter, creative business strategist).

Also, regarding the creatives' more performative roles and how these vary in formal arenas, there are many interview insights. Interestingly, many of the participants, instead of being pushed into a negative attitude when having to take 'themselves' back in interaction with clients, perceive those situations as enjoyable. Max, for instance, highlights the playful aspect of target-oriented client management:

> ...most of the time it's also really fun to speak with people in a way that you're sort of moving them in a direction but not that they feel bossed around, you know? It's a game, and you don't even have to fake it. (Max, lead designer)

The utter enjoyment, as well as the importance of work-related role-playing, is also vividly highlighted by Joca:

> ...that's something I really like about this job because you're dealing with such different organizations and people, so I think part of...being professional is sort of finding the right role for the right moment. I wouldn't call it theater, but I think it's similar to...debating, where you have a particular rhetoric, you play a particular role to get something done. At least if you work a lot with clients it's essential. (Joca)

Another present observation, here, is that there seems to be a strong correlation in certain moments between having responsibility and taking on different roles. Leading a workshop, for instance, means having multiple roles at once:

> I wouldn't say you're a babysitter, but in a workshop you have to make sure that people listen to each other...also, you're...in a facilitator role and see that no one is bored...that you're not drifting away from the superordinate goal, et cetera. You need to follow certain rules and are responsible for actually having a product at the end...also, afterwards, when you do the follow up with a colleague, you have to make sure that...the UX design makes sense...I'm kind of a project manager as well. And a motivator...you're wearing many hats at once. (Marco, design strategist)

When no external actant like a client is involved, participants who are in a leading position mostly take on a supportive role. Here, it seems that principally positive and optimistic characters like Max and Frank see substantial value in creating and maintaining a healthy team atmosphere: "happy people make good work" (Max, lead designer). Moreover, Stuart highlights the internal responsibility that comes with a leading position: "...you always have to maintain a certain demeanour at work, there's other people that are looking to you as an example. So you need to lead by example" (Stuart, digital strategy consultant). In that regard, Josh actively wants to mentor rather introverted team members: "...I notice that introverted people don't talk as much...because they just don't have the energy or motivation....So, I just try to keep them engaged by talking regularly to them throughout the day" (Josh, creative director).

As aforementioned, the current study's participants individually react to certain stimuli in their social, organisational contexts. Since a variation in attitudes and roles mostly is a response to some sort of experienced friction within, it is crucial to examine different sources, as well as (preventive) solutions to friction in the creatives' work contexts. From the analysis of the interview material, it became apparent that a variety of issues regarding the client, a specific project or other team members can cause individual friction. For example, Nina and Frank are sensitive to the mood of others and mention that a stressful atmosphere can have critical effects. However, here, I want to pay special attention to the rather personal spheres relating to friction. Peter, for instance, highlights that, as a creative, one can simply have tough luck: "when the weather is horrible, and it was raining, you came by bike, you forgot your jacket, you fell, someone shouted at you, you lost your keys…then your whole day is fucked" (Peter, creative business strategist). Other forms of friction come to light when a sort of personal space invasion influences the workflow: "especially Ellen was...sitting behind me all the time, looking over my shoulder to see what I'm doing...I really hated that so much" (Hans, senior architect). Moreover, despite

principally enjoying the high demands of being the lead strategist, Stuart exemplarily touches upon the topic of pressure:

> My role is a high-pressure role....you're expected to be at the top of everything, to exceed expectations both internally and externally. And...it's not like I can sit and work 20 hours a day and be a better strategist. That's not how it works. I have to...solve challenges in creative ways...So, it's a challenge and this pressure does come from the CEO. Not that he ever actively puts pressure, but it's there. Definitely. (Stuart, digital strategy consultant)

Now, as employees with individual human creativity as their most important tool, how do the participants protect this essential resource? Besides internal tools and solutions, what are their ideas for stress prevention, and how do they stay creatively stimulated?

Besides maintaining a healthy lifestyle regarding one's sleep rhythm, physical or mental state, many interviewees underline the importance of continuous self-reflection to stay alert towards one's professional performance. Often, this seems to be an inevitable thought process: "... 'this week I wasn't as enjoyable as I should have been' or 'this week I was a bit too much in my own world'…these things are definitely in my head, I do think about it" (Max, lead designer). In a more conscious context, some creatives mention the therapeutic and thus practical aspects of journaling: "Oh yeah, (I reflect) every day...for me, it helps a lot to write down these things because then they are out" (Joca, UX designer). Another often mentioned habit with preventive effects is to shift one's attention away from work, to use this distance for various forms of refreshing inspiration. Frank, for instance, finds creative stimulation in books, podcasts, conversations with strangers, or online. Others work on personal projects after work to continually improve their skills or, simply said, to have fun with their hobby.

Keeping a distance to work-related issues, however, is not always easy for some creatives: "it's sometimes hard to stay objective. But it's important to do that because what you're working on is for someone else, not for you" (Nina, creative copywriter).

Mesolayer: the Organisation

Moreover, next to the individual and social level, the familiarisation with the interview material crystallised an extensive amount of creative identity-shaping factors on the mesolayer: the organisation itself. Of course, these insights are based on conversations with employees and are, thus, highly subjective. However, since this study explores creative workers in their organisational contexts, aspects regarding the mesolayer are considered just as valuable as the ones at microlevel. This section is structured as follows. Since they can be considered as the core identity of an organisation, and in turn, play a substantial role in individual identity construction, it is first put a focus on narratives and values

the creative agencies act upon. These mostly concern gatekeeping and creativity. Next, I elaborate on factors that directly influence the work of creatives and are more (project structure specifics) or less (atmosphere) tangible. Lastly, strongly connected to the latter, perceived differences between small and rather big agencies are highlighted.

Narratives and Values

Interestingly, organisational narratives and values seem to play an essential role for many respondents regarding their employment relationship. Around some agencies, there seems to be a culture-specific myth which can act as a pull factor. Speaking about the agency's foundation history, Marco reproduces a narrative of his workplace:

> Our founder is Japanese, he was in San Francisco eight years ago and realised that digital design has a growing priority in the industry...he went back to Japan and opened up an agency called Goodpatch, it's about doing good, basically. The Japanese culture is still a big part of our DNA; we are very flexible, dynamic and resilient. (Marco, design strategist at Goodpatch)

Moreover, some organisations appear to have an exceptionally high standing in the industry or instead in the minds of industry aficionados: OMA in Rotterdam, Boomerang in Amsterdam, but particularly Achtung: "since I graduated...Achtung was kind of the king of Dutch agencies" (Rita, copywriter). For all these agencies, the motivation to unfailingly deliver the best quality output seems to be a substantial part of their organisational identity, since it is also evident for outsiders like Rita was a few years ago. In the context of today, she experiences this narrative in a different, more present way, when reflecting on pressure:

> ...in general I feel pressure but more of a pressure that I put on myself. Achtung is really one of the best agencies. You can compare it to the champions league kind of. You're playing on a higher level. Shitty creative work is just something that's not done there. As an agency we always deliver...it's just not an option to present shitty work...so, that creates pressure. (Rita, copywriter at Achtung)

Rita's perception of pressure that relates to the agency's high-quality standards is a vivid example of an organisation's gatekeeping values. The latter is, besides modern zeitgeist values like inclusivity and diversity at Freshbridge (Josh), an especially present observation from the interview analyses. Here, the value category I named 'gatekeeping' comprises agencies that seem to see their activities in the industry as carefully curated, well-thought-through contributions. Especially at the

Rotterdammer architectural firm OMA, Hans experiences strong work principles, which, in turn, evidently satisfies his superordinate intentions to create work with cultural meaning:

> ...we actually walk away from projects when we have...deep problems with a developer that wants to compromise on the design. That's what I really like about OMA; we have principles. These things keep me in the office longer, because you can still fight for these things as an architect. (Hans, senior architect at OMA)

Also at the advertising agency Achtung, as well as at Momkai Studios, Popcorn Stories, and Goodpatch, the substantial gatekeeping values seemingly come to light in the practical forms of careful curation and honest consultancy:

> ...of course, we want to prioritise the client's needs, but we also see that what a client may ask for is not necessarily what they want or need. They come from different expertise, so we listen to their needs and create a solution for that. But we're really protecting our work and are convincing the client. That's why we have good clients because they come to us for that. (Rita, copywriter at Achtung)

Moreover, as it became clear from the interview analyses, most creative agencies do not only critically examine if they are a good fit for the client's needs. They also do ethically driven, rather unprofitable projects to shape their operational principles or brand images. At Momkai Studios, Boomerang, Freshbridge and Keplar, this seems to be a substantial part of the organisational identity, as highlighted by Peter (Keplar) and Frank (Boomerang):

> We work a lot with sustainability...we don't make any margins with that, so I really like that...if we would only work for oil companies or something, then I don't know, it's important to me that the company stands for something. We definitely stand for doing good. (Peter, creative business strategist at Keplar)

> We do many projects for a good cause...we also had a boat at the gay pride or did a pro-bono campaign to make the traffic in the city better. Of course, we also do fucking commercial stuff but we also do things for a greater cause, sustainability...I'm...proud to say that I work at Boomerang. (Frank, creative at Boomerang)

What one principally expects from an agency operating in the creative industries became apparent in the interview analyses: creativity as a value seems to be an essential, if not *the* essential part

of most agencies' DNA. On the one hand, an organisation's appreciation for creativity seems to come to practice regarding its creative workers authentically. Joca, for instance, notices how he and other creatives in the team are treated with care at Momkai Studio: "...there are lots...of other agencies where you're pushed to work until 2:00 AM, and there is no culture like that here, people take care that you take rest. That's really important to me" (Joca, UX designer). Rita experiences a similar appreciation for creative work at Achtung:

> I still have to fight for my ideas but I don't have to defend my profession. At other agencies I almost...had to defend the core of what I do. You know, creativity is not only about giving in what the client says. I had to explain that always, and they wouldn't get it, which led to frustration and struggles. At Achtung it's different, the only struggle would be how to be better. (Rita, copywriter)

As a more material aspect of the creativity-value, most agencies have their own creative tools or creative processes which come to use during project work and also for marketing purposes. Often, the implementation of an overarching creative process has the aim to plan and structure a project efficiently: "...we actually made certain documents where we have all the phases already planned out, and that's a very valuable tool for us to communicate to the client because often the client doesn't know how things work" (Max, lead designer). Similarly, Marco, who often is the responsible leader in a workshop, highlights the efficient practicability of a creative process: "It's really good to have those anchor points because...it can get pretty chaotic. You always have to be able to orientate the whole team about what's going on. It's a good balance between freedom and structure" (Marco, design strategist).

From the analysis of the interview material, it became apparent that, besides the cultural and practical sense, organisations also value creativity in a situative, social sense. To keep the creatives engaged, most agencies have implemented various ideas in forms of corporate events or moments. These 'creativity boosts', as I called the overarching category, are, on the one hand, integrated into the regular project work in the forms of brainstorm sessions or wake-up-games:

> We have some things to push creativity, for example, something we call 'energiser' at the beginning of a meeting to loosen up...that really makes a difference, and you feel like you're more able to participate, communicate and collaborate...also, putting a lot of different people in brainstorm sessions...is also a good way. (Josh, creative director at Freshbridge)

On the other hand, many organisations regularly arrange collective creativity boosts outside of the daily operations, as vividly described by Rita:

Achtung really invests in things outside of the normal schedule, so every Friday we do afternoon drinks and always have a speaker, like someone interesting and creative...we also have something called 'trendy Tuesday' where someone presents a trend he or she heard about, not only creatives. There's so much emphasis and importance put on creativity...that also helps to be more creative. (Rita, copywriter at Achtung)

Now, as it has become clear that many agencies see creativity as an essential resource and, in turn, try to foster and multiply it, what are the factors that influence creative work? What makes creative work possible or more difficult?

Obstacles for Creative Work

How effective or enjoyable the practice of creative work is for the employees themselves, depends on many aspects regarding the organisation. Here, as the data analysis brought forth, these aspects are divided between project structural and less tangible ones that relate to the overall internal atmosphere. Regarding the latter, many participants elaborated on the importance of an atmosphere at work where they can be honest towards others, be themselves and act silly or have a bad day. As aforementioned, when reporting on the interviewees' creative selves, such an open, tolerant surrounding in the office is essential for being motivated and enjoying oneself at work. Now, how does it look on the mesolayer?

Stuart, for instance, highlights that the social environment in the office does not only have an impact on the individual but the whole team. Here, speaking about the ideal work environment for creatives, he emphasises the figurative subject matter:

Let's say there are people at your office that you don't necessarily see completely eye to eye with. And that kind of sits on your shoulders...and really kills creativity and togetherness at work which has a massive effect on the people. You can't just put your head down and be creative, you have to be in the right frame of mind. You have to be in the right zone, and you have to have the right people, the right culture...I think that's super important for people in any creative position to really feel like they're in the right environment...to give their hundred per cent. (Stuart, digital strategy consultant at Hoppinger)

Moreover, it became clear that being distracted easily is a present obstacle for many creative workers. Since the work of most participants partly consists of concentrated individual creation such as writing, coding or designing, distractions in the office can have inhibitory effects. Perhaps, this

realisation is present especially now, that the corona pandemic momentarily forces all employees to work from home: "I can concentrate much more here at home. For writing, it's actually quite good, and I have my own routine. In the office, there are so many distractions" (Rita). However, digitisation made a new type of distraction possible that even invades the private room. Here, when exchanging stories about the phenomenon of physical creativity, Marco reasons: "... it's really important to not get distracted. I kind of miss that state at the moment because I get so many emails and notifications that it's hard to go into this tunnel" (Marco, design strategist at Goodpatch).

The third observation regarding organisational obstacles for creative work connects back to earlier descriptions of an organisation's high-quality output as well as high industry standing. It seems that in some creative agencies, the perceived pressure by some employees to deliver a high standard output unexceptionally influences the whole atmosphere in an impactful way. Frank, for instance, opens up about a severe matter at his workplace: "lots of people working at Boomerang had burnouts, actually. From 150 people, maybe 10% were sitting at home with a burnout. It's crazy." (Frank, creative at Boomerang).

Regarding more tangible aspects that influence creative work on the mesolayer, most participants mentioned unalterable aspects of a project's management or structure such as the budget and deadlines. It has become apparent that many participants view the latter mentioned factors as obstacles for creative thinking or production. Framework conditions such as budgets and deadlines are not the creatives' responsibilities but define their work processes significantly. Josh exemplifies this inevitable reality:

> Every person costs more and all the hours are budgeted towards the client. So, it depends on the budget how many people can be involved for how many hours...for the smaller ones it's usually two to three people but we've done bigger ones where we're seven to eight people at a table...but it can just get very expensive very quickly. The more people, the more expensive is the meeting. (Josh, creative director at Freshbridge)

The next managerial aspect that directly affects creative work(ers) are project deadlines. In a simplified representation, this limitation is what ultimately distinguishes the creative employee from an artist: "the difference to someone who works as an individual artist...is that there's a deadline. You need to deliver. It's...not an option to say 'this week I didn't feel good'. The results are that you present shitty work..." (Rita, copywriter at Achtung). Many interviewees mentioned that, in cases where the project is far from being polished and perfect, deadlines often evoke pressure and stress. Nina illustrates: "sometimes there's too much pressure...we spoke about pressure also being a good thing, but if you approach the deadline and there's still a pile of stuff you can do to improve it then that creates pressure

that's too much" (Nina, creative copywriter at Hoppinger). Moreover, Hans highlights the consequences of not being able to change the deadline:

> If you have deadlines coming closer and you have difficulties, then it really eats you up...you don't feel like a normal human being during that time... it's tough because you normally can't escape. In the end you just have to go for it until it's done. (Hans, senior architect at OMA)

Principally, that pressure and stress are subjective and thus experienced differently by every individual is illustrated by Frank: "... we're working with really hard deadlines...I have this deadline on Friday...the week after I have two other deadlines…so yeah, it's pressure...if you're stressful I can imagine that this type of work is driving you crazy" (Frank, creative at Boomerang). Besides those internal managerial obstacles of project-based work, some participants also feel restricted by external obstacles. Nina, for instance, has to deal with client-specific legal concerns:

> When you're working for a big company where every content has to go through a legal department, then that's not really a good match because anything I write, they might tell me that nothing from that can be put online. So, there are different rules and legal concerns for some clients. (Nina, creative copywriter at Hoppinger)

Moreover, the phenomenon as mentioned above of standardised creative processes is experienced as an obstacle for creative work by some participants when they feel restricted by them: "I'm sure that it doesn't fit every project. Sometimes you want to do content first, sometimes the designers and developers want to brainstorm together, and then we need a different...way of working I guess" (Nina, creative copywriter at Hoppinger).

The Perceived Hierarchy Structures

From analysing the interview material, it became clear that not only shared narratives and values but also aspects of the daily operations in an organisation have several influences on creative work. What I wondered in this context, do employees of a small agency have different perceptions of creative work-related obstacles than employees of a rather big agency? Moreover, do the perceived organisational hierarchy structures influence the interviewed individuals themselves? In order to get a feeling about these issues, I roughly distinguished between big (> 30 employees) and rather small (< 30 employees) agencies while analysing the interview data. Here, despite being conscious about the lack of reliable information on the hierarchy structures and events in the organisations themselves, I consider the participants' experiences as valuable and insightful.

Against this background, it became apparent that the individual perceptions of working in big or small agencies indeed vary. How accessible an agency's chief executive officer (CEO) is to the employees, for instance, seems to depend on the size of the organisation. At Goodpatch, Marco explains: "(the boss) is...very accessible for everyone, always in the office, and we have super flat hierarchies...If anything's up, my colleagues can just go to him directly" (Marco, design strategist).

Moreover, small agencies and their employees' perception of flat hierarchies seems to have positive effects on the team atmosphere:

> ...for us it's really important that we have one plateau, and everyone is standing on the same level, you know?...it doesn't really matter if you're an intern or if you're the boss...that's something he created and what the whole team really enjoys. (Max, lead designer at Popcornstories)

Having this 'one plateau', as Max figuratively describes it, gives any team member the feeling to be acknowledged and valued: "here you really see your influence, in a smaller team" (Max, lead designer at Popcornstories). How important that is for a creative's self-esteem, is demonstrated by Peter: "you feel that you have an impact, that you're important. That's when it's all worth it" (Peter, creative business strategist at Keplar). Other related phenomena that appear to be especially present in the perception of flat hierarchies are 'freedom of action' as well as 'room for development' for the individual creative. Younger participants like Josh seem to enjoy the latter mentioned aspect. Here, he reflects on the most valuable features of his workplace:

> ... that openness and that they give people the opportunity to grow when they want to and to monitor their growth, I think that's more valuable than a lot of other things at a company...I think that's what has kept me there. (Josh, creative director at Freshbridge)

Similarly, Joca substantially appreciates the room to experiment as a junior creative, which he correlates with the advantages of a small agency:

> What I...like about working in a smaller agency is that, as a younger employee, you have...shorter lines to reach other positions because...people take time besides their projects and there's...the culture that if you have a good idea...if you have good reasons that it's a good idea, you can just try it out. (Joca, UX designer at Momkai)

Contrasting here is an aspect that relates to the more hierarchical organisational structures of more prominent agencies. Hans, who works as a senior architect at OMA, a prestigious architectural office in Rotterdam, opens up about the sometimes challenging realities of being part of a known brand:

> ... it's the partners of the office that get the credit. There are ten or eleven partners who also are against each other and try to get their own piece... So...you're giving away to a great degree and, in terms of public recognition, it's not equal to what you're producing at all. But that's the price you have to pay. (Hans, senior architect at OMA)

However, despite operating at a significantly higher level regarding size and structure as opposed to small agencies like Popcornstories, Keplar or Momkai, OMA is not an organisation that makes its employees feel unheard or anonymous:

> When I talk to my boss I have to say 'yes' much more...but what I do like about the Netherlands is that you don't have to be a slave, you can say things when you disagree...even though it's not necessarily easy...I like that sort of environment where people are clear about what they like and believe in. Of course, they know that they have to do what their boss tells them, but they are also clear about what they think and are proactive. (Hans, senior architect at OMA)

Continuing here, it becomes clear that agencies with more extensive structures can (perhaps against the general societal expectations) still have an internal communication culture that is similarly interested in individual opinions:

> What is nice about OMA in that regard is that it's not a place that silences people. It's not that you're encouraged to speak since there are so many people shouting, but you really learn to express your opinion. (Hans, senior architect at OMA)

Macrolayer: the Greater Context

Although individuals, as well as companies, can be considered as autonomous entities, they exist and act embedded in a grand societal context that grounds on norms, values, trends, et cetera. As aforementioned, our new world of work which is often particularly easy to observe in the creative industries stimulated some substantial changes in organisations and the self. Organisations like the creative agencies explored in the wake of this current research, change just as rapidly as societies and thus, require the individual worker to adapt to this environment flexibly. Whether it be a conscious or somewhat subconscious influence, are the participants 'worked on' by their societal contexts and, if so,

are they aware of it? To explore this question on the macrolayer, firstly, this chapter presents those interview findings that show neoliberal repercussions on the modern employee. Mainly, those aspects are signs of seeking self-fulfilment through the job, as well as of pressure and the demands to be flexible. Moreover, from the shared experiences of the participants, it became clear that the creative industries, in which their workplaces operate, have some specific characteristics. More precisely, I will elaborate on interview insights referring to the nature of creative work as an intangible good between arts and service lastly.

Repercussions of Neoliberalism

To start, most of the participants, if not all of them, seem to have chosen their work partly because the craft is their passion and a substantial part of their creative selves. Thus, as reported earlier when exploring the microlayer of interview findings, creativity is an asset that is naturally a part of the participants, which, in turn, leads to an intrinsic motivation at work and the eagerness to improve continually. Regarding the greater societal and socio-economic context, this individual motivation connects to the concept of self-fulfilment, which is, today, often looked for in the workplace. Here, the fact that one's choice of employment mirrors one's inner self is demonstrated by Frank when being asked whether identification with his workplace was essential to him: "it is important to me. Because when you tell other people where you work, it is part of your personality or who you are at the moment, right?" (Frank, creative). Here, Frank highlights that not only his job in itself but also how others connect it to him as a person is forming his identity continually.

Moreover, the interview analyses emphasised many somewhat negatively connotated demands on today's creative worker. There is, for instance, the fact that some employees in creative agencies work until the point of being 'burned out': "...from 150 people maybe 10% were sitting at home with a burnout. It's crazy" (Frank, creative at Boomerang). Of course, being careful with this presumption, this reality can be considered as a repercussion of neoliberal phenomena regarding the working individual. During the interviews, many participants not only demonstrate their often experienced exhaustion due to their jobs but also their fundamental willingness to continually invest large portions of their energy. Peter, for instance, accepts a sleepless night for a satisfactory performance: "I'm the type of guy that stays at night to do it again. Then, in the morning, it was good. I barely slept, but at least I could prove myself" (Peter, creative business strategist). That these fast pace and ambitious demands at work can sometimes be 'too much' is exemplified by Hans:

> ...there's endless stimulation. That's super nice but also really exhausting because at a certain point you don't want to talk to anyone anymore. The nicest moment is coming home and drinking a beer. Your brain feels like it's fried, and you can't talk one word

anymore and you don't know who you are...it's too much of everything in the end, in those moments. (Hans, senior architect)

Moreover, seeing oneself as responsible for mastering such demanding pace in the organisation is demonstrated by Stuart, who opens up about his work relationship:

With my job...there's lots of uncertainty and sometimes that's energising. Sometimes it's not. So on the days that's energising. That's great. Good for me. You know, thumbs up, I'll be there giving 110% tomorrow morning. On the days that it's not, then I need to make sure that I do the things that are going to energise me, like going for runs and seeing my mates and just recharging and clearing my head. And if I don't get that balance right then waking up in the morning is tough, eh? It's tough to go to a job where people are expecting a lot of you and you don't really have the energy to follow it up. So it's my responsibility to make sure that I maintain that balance. (Stuart, digital strategy consultant)

Despite not complaining about the subject matter, Peter also illustrates the effects of feeling responsible for a project and thus, the overall organisation's performance: "if it's Thursday and we have to deliver something by Friday morning...my boss would order beer and pizza, we put on some music and everyone keeps working…." (Peter, creative business strategist). Here, I consider the feeling of seeing oneself as responsible for the organisation's performance as strongly connected to the job being a platform for individual self-development. That the work contents of creatives are often topics that are important and close to them personally, can have consequences on their private lives. Hans, for instance, is available for incoming calls at any moment:

...I'm working on a project at any moment. I can be on a call at 11 pm on a Tuesday for half an hour, and that will stay in your mind afterwards, for sure. I think that's kind of okay. You just have to develop a way to deal with that and find ways to escape. (Hans, senior architect)

Eventually, the severe difficulties of finding a clear division between work and leisure are made comprehensible by Rita:

Well, I wouldn't necessarily say that I adjust my life around work. I would rather say that work can have a major impact on how you feel outside of work. It's really hard

when you can't think of good ideas at work, to just shut down the computer at six and say, '...okay, that was it for today'. It doesn't work like that, you...take it with you. Then you're maybe less able to enjoy yourself as much because your mind is in your work…. (Rita, copywriter)

Creative Industry Specifics

Aside from considerable societal developments regarding employment in modern times, many aspects are influencing the individual creative worker that seem to be mainly associated with the creative industries. Their entry barriers, to start with, seem to be partly demanding a high amount of social capital. Here, not only a satisfying portfolio and curriculum vitae (CV), but the 'right' social personality plays a significant role for possible employers, as demonstrated by Josh:

> ...we had two or three talks, and then I took a personality test, and it turned out that I'm not crazy, so they hired me...basically...they don't just hire people on the base of skills but also if you fit in the team, which is what a lot of companies do...we had some bad experiences with people being very different in the application process compared to their application. In real life it's a lot harder to fake how you're going to be, so we do that test. (Josh, creative director at Freshbridge)

Moreover, Rita highlights that a creative worker often gets allocated with a partner when the respective employer classifies him or her as inexperienced: "...especially when you're a junior they really want teams because you don't have enough experience to be hired alone" (Rita, copywriter). How important one's portfolio, as well as social capital, is to new actants of the creative industries, is explained by Max:

> I think, especially when you're looking for a job it's all portfolio based...so it can be quite competitive and easy to feel demotivated...but...if you really want something and put the energy into it then you will end up somewhere. And it's always about connections and people you know. (Max, lead creative)

Also, from the analysis of the interviews, it became clear that formulated insecurities of some participants seem to connect to the nature of creative work, which, in its core, is the economisation of human creativity. Thus, many of the interviewees highlight that their work is something inherently intangible and incomparable: "I realised that being creative is a unique skill, it's not about having this

exact book or showing off good grades, which also makes it hard" (Rita, copywriter). Against this background, remembering the first years of her career as a creative, Rita asks herself:

> Also, what is creativity? Who's going to decide what's creative or not? Now I'm more confident to call myself a creative because I have a longer track record, and I feel that I've done good stuff and got recognition. But in the beginning, even in art school, I questioned my creative abilities, questioned if I'm good enough. (Rita, copywriter)

Being aware that her lack of self-esteem partly grounds on the nature of her character, I see a clear causality between the intangibility of creative work and an individual's tendency to question his or her creative abilities, especially during the beginning of the career. In the wake of this, Rita continues to share her realisation that she was not the only creative with severe self-doubts:

> ...for a long time, I had the thought 'what if people are going to find out that I can't write?', 'when are they going to find out that it's not good what I'm doing?', 'why are they paying me, everybody can write!'. I shared this insecurity with other creatives, and they told me they had the same thoughts. (Rita, copywriter)

Similarly, Stuart demonstrates the inherent insecurities of a creative worker: "how well is well enough? You know, you always wish that you are better...there are times where I just get frustrated because I really don't feel like I'm making progress" (Stuart, digital strategy consultant). Besides being intangible, Joca thinks that one's creativity, since it is the essential resource for creating symbolic meaning, should be nurtured:

> I think it's something you need to take care of, something you need to feed by trying out new things, going to the museum, visiting your family, whatever you want to do. That way, you can harvest your creativity, you also need to give it some rest. Because otherwise there won't be room for new ideas. (Joca, UX designer)

Moreover, some interviewees demonstrate that their profession, as it is in the nature of creative work, are neither fully an art form, nor fully a service. Instead, it is a mix of both, which can cause a somewhat creative frustration. Senior architect Hans explains: "I don't like every project, but there are...so many constraints on how you build today that it's difficult to be very creative in architecture". Similarly, when interviewing Rita, we reasoned:

Interviewer: Maybe it's also a type of insecurity that comes...with the fact that you turn your passion into your job. I think that often pushes you into reality because there's a pressure of always delivering good quality, but then it's also a form of art.

Rita: Exactly.

However, this somewhat paradox form of employment can also be seen from a different point of view. Eventually, the participants actively choose not to work and live as an individual artist, as exemplified by Hans:

It was more like a rational compromise...one day I opened the course catalogue of the university and architecture caught my eye. I wanted to do something creative, but at the same time, I wanted something somewhat scientific. All my life I did drawings, was playing music and writing stuff. I didn't want to do any of that professionally but still wanted to be creative in a professional context. (Hans, senior architect)

Chapter 5: Discussions, Reflections, and Further Ideas

The theoretical framework of this study builds on our current understanding of identity as a complex, relational process every individual goes through. The data analysis process crystallised identity construction aspects of a creative worker on three levels that are inevitably intertwined in one another. Here, the theoretical framework turns out to provide significant lenses. Whereas the introduced and just as interconnected theoretical concepts around identity, creativity, and creative work explain many interview findings, there is much more what can be learned and which I want to discuss in this section critically. Therefore, this section highlights new contributions to the research field. Again, the promising layer-systematic will structure the elaboration — however, this time in reverse.

Thoughts on the Context

> Identity is a phenomenon that arises from the dialectic of the individual and society. (Berger & Luckmann, 1969, p. 186)

Most of the creatives in this study identify strongly as "being creatives". A natural passion is their drive, and they are intrinsically motivated to improve continually, to develop themselves through their jobs as creatives. Often as a consequence, they seem to feel responsible for the performance of their workplaces and are willing to pay personal sacrifices to ensure a satisfactory creative output. I am fully aware that the constitution and construction of creative identities are uniquely personal. Also, I consider it as necessary to say that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' way to experience identity matters in the workplace. Thus, I am not judging the respondents' life stories. However, the data analysis shows that there are relevant aspects regarding the societal context that strongly influence a creative worker's construction of self concerning his or her organisational surrounding. I aim to critically observe those influence factors and establish possible connections to gain new insights into the field.

To start, I want to emphasise the uniqueness of the analysed employment field because I see a correlation between the inherent nature of creative work and somewhat negatively connotated aspects around the individual's creative self. Creativity, as I introduced it earlier, is a basic human phenomenon that every individual *has, should have,* and, therefore, *wants* to have. Creativity is a term that immediately awakes positive associations: a person is considered creative when he or she is artistically talented, able to master fast and strategic thinking, or designs the living room in an original, aesthetically pleasing way. All these creative aspects can be captured by fundamental psychological traits such as problem sensitivity, cognitive flexibility, and originality (see Guilford, 1950) and make up for the basic human need for self-expression and self-fulfilment (see Rogers, 1959). In other words, creative talent in its endless variations remains an essential psychological need for the individual. Simultaneously,

creativity is not a universal or absolute quality and, therefore, there is no formula for ensuring a creative output – creative acts happen, or they do not.

The participants in my research belong to a relatively new category of workers. Illustratively summarised by Taylor and Littleton (2016), the phenomenon of contemporary creative workers became apparent with the rise of the cultural and creative industries[4] approximately forty years ago. Because they began to recognise the economic potential of creative products and a 'creative class' (Florida, 2002), governments and policy-makers in metropolises all over the globe claimed these industries as areas of growth (see Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Fundamentally, these industries capture a capitalist system in which cultural and artistic production is "utilised to assist in attracting consumers and creating the desire for mass-produced commodities" (O' Connor, 2011, in Taylor & Littleton, 2016, p. 21). Naturally, the economisation of human creativity creates an inherent dichotomy of creative work, which this study's respondents clearly experience. In their work on the logics of creative production, Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) highlight that there lies a central paradox in this form of value creation. According to the authors, the producers' "necessity to manage and market habitually incorporated non-economic norms and values" (p. 521) causes inevitable inner tensions. Here, the assumed reason why creative workers inevitably need to balance the conflicting paradigms of (artistic) creativity and business connects back to the workers themselves. Creative work - so the general assumption - attracts creative individuals who not only value autonomy and "non-conformist ways" (Davis & Scase, 2000, p. 8, as cited in Eikhof & Haunschild, p. 524), but are "passionately involved in their work" (Howkins, 2001, p. 125, as cited in Eikhof & Haunschild, p. 524). Here, this current study's results provide significant lenses.

Many creative industries scholars have been examining the possible consequences that can occur when intrinsically motivated creatives and their abilities are systematically economised and managed. Towards this background, some contributions have been done on the particularities of specific employment systems (e.g. Haunschild, 2004; Kanter, 1995; Menger, 1999), on how a companies' creative capital is enforced and managed (e.g. de Monthoux, 2004; Sutton, 2001), and other related fields. However, Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) underline that the dichotomy of creative work fundamentally affects the intrinsic motivation of creative workers themselves. To understand the relationship between art and business in creative production, the authors empirically explored individual work practices in German theatres (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Here, they draw on Bourdieu's understanding of individuals as producers of social practices that are determined by specific *logics* of practice (Bourdieu, 1990). Similarly to the theoretical understanding of identity work, identity play, and strategy-making, social practices comprise various behavioural or cognitive aspects of an individual's life[5] (Bourdieu, 1990, in Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). In their qualitative study, the authors observe the

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[4] For an attempt to define the creative industries, see, for example, Howkins (2001).
[5] According to Bourdieu (1983), an individual's production of social practices grounds on his or her forms of capital: economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital. Due to lack of space, I can only suggest to further read about his renowned theory.

exact phenomena which are inherent characteristics of the creative industries: the co-existence of artistic and economic logics (see Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007).

In our current case of creative workers, I made similar observations. On the one hand, project-based creative work as it is employed in a creative agency is determined by economic logics of practice (see Bourdieu, 1990). Instead of working as individual artists, the interviewees are employed at an organisation with explicit market orientations. Their work practice happens under clear conditions and follows the principles of economic value creation. On the other hand, the respondents' work practice grounds on artistic logics of practice (see Bourdieu, 1990). Their individual and shared creative abilities make up the essential core of their work. Simultaneously, many participants demonstrated their primary intentions of contributing to art and society as a greater good.

This co-existence of inherently different logics of practice explains the individual creative worker's ongoing identity work. As mentioned above, the artistic or creative logics, as well as economic or business logics both represent specific socially held expectations, norms and other characteristics. Towards this background, identity is a multifaceted process that translates these expectations and norms into situational behaviour, desires and aspirations (see Leitch & Harrison, 2016). Since creative work is a linkage between art and commerce, fantasy and reality – so to say –, I understand why it is difficult for some of my respondents to draw a line between their jobs and their selves.

Another aspect that regards the nature of creative work is the *nobody knows* principle, which refers to the "fundamental uncertainty that faces the producer of a creative good" (Caves, 2003, p. 74). Just as a creative momentum cannot be forced, an audience's perception of a creative product cannot be predicted (Caves, 2003). Here, although it might cause some momentary insecurities, one could assume that my respondents do not have to face the *nobody knows* principle since their economic reward does not directly depend on a product's market success. Nonetheless, the interview analyses demonstrated that many respondents quickly feel responsible for their work when there is a close connection to a current project. This responsibility, for instance, becomes apparent when they naturally work as many hours in the evening as a project may need. However, I want to emphasise that the latter mentioned aspect is only a rough assumption rather than a factual claim since essential information on the creatives' work circumstances such as internal politics is missing. What we *do* know from the interview data, is that the intangibleness of creativity can often lead to inevitable insecurities: "also, what is creativity? Who's going to decide what's creative or not?" (Rita, copywriter).

On the other hand, the *nobody knows* principle significantly concerns the next higher entity – the organisation. The creative agencies of this research are examples of organisations that operate in the creative industries. As mentioned earlier in the 'research design' section, despite their differences regarding their market orientations, size, client structures, et cetera, the agencies operate under similar industry-specific conditions. Whereas their focus is digital design, advertising or architecture, creative agencies principally work project-based and continually need to adapt to external factors such as digital

trends, client preferences or financial pressures (Hyman, 2018). Most importantly, they all produce creative products under the *nobody knows* principle (see Caves, 2003).

Their endeavour to economise, thus govern human creativity, inevitably faces the problem of incalculability. In the end, a creative product's market success is never entirely predictable, and the creative worker's eureka moment is never entirely enforceable. So, to ensure the efficient use of this crucial resource, organisations try to unfold the productive aspects of their employees' creativity.

Towards this background, what have we learned from this current research? How do the indirectly explored organisations try to mobilise creativity, and how do they rein and regulate it simultaneously? Which aspects happen intendedly, and which influential factors for a creative worker to feel good and stimulated in a team are somewhat intangible? From talking to the participating creative workers, it has become apparent that some internal aspects regarding how their respective workplace treats creativity are more efficient than others eventually. To underline and discuss the issue of reining and mobilizing creativity on the base of the interview insights, I want to develop a somewhat guideline for the 'ideal' creative agency. Of course, by extracting seemingly useful aspects regarding that matter, I do not want to ignore or oppress the individuality of each organisation. I am aware of their inherent operational and cultural differences and thoroughly support the agencies' uniqueness. Instead, I aim to shine a light on the respondents' experiences by underlining their similarities. In the following section, I discuss some elements of how an organisation could, and perhaps should, deal with their employees' creativity. Thereby, I will focus on creative tools and processes as parts of an organisational strategy. The relevant theoretical discussions of less tangible aspects like internal atmosphere, culture and narratives will be elaborated on at a later stage regarding the microlayer.

How to Unleash and Support, while Disciplining Creativity

Firstly, connecting back to the nature of creativity and the *nobody knows* principle, it seems to be essential for an organisation to focus on the process when aiming for a satisfactory final, creative product since no team leader can eventually enforce the creative eureka moment. However, one can somewhat entice it through enthusiasm or persistence, or both at once. Here, it is essential to highlight that most participants seem to be intrinsically motivated as creative workers. Many of them are passionate about their profession because it is a fundamental part of themselves, of their identities. The respondents enjoy the inherent diversity of working project-based, and, as many highlighted during the interviews, often develop a close relationship to their current projects. As a consequence, it seems like the creatives feel responsible for delivering the best quality output while, simultaneously, utterly enjoying the work. Here, the aforementioned economic and artistic logics of practice both come to play (see Bourdieu, 1990).

For an employer, these must be perfect operational conditions. Similar to the 'entrepreneurial worker' model as coined by Voss and Pongratz (1988), the intrinsically motivated creatives show the

tendency to internalise control mechanisms increasingly since their work is a match to their own interests and priorities. Similarly, Pinchot (1985) named this new type of worker 'intrapreneur' – a neologism of the term 'intracorporate entrepreneur'. According to the management literature author, the intrapreneur is characterised by a risk-taking and innovation-driven nature and, therefore, is a valuable resource for an organisation (Pinchot, 1985). The fundamental reason for the intrapreneur to be significantly ambitious would be the fact that he or she is primarily motivated to satisfy self-realisation and performance needs, instead of the pursuit of economic profit (Pinchot, 1985). Remembering the respondents' personally driven strategic intentions and their willingness to pay sacrifices for their work, the intrapreneur model seems to be still relevant today. To keep these determined workers in the organisation and obtain their significant benefits, Pinchot (1985) mentions some internal framework conditions that would be necessary to consider as an employer. Principally, these aspects regard the intrapreneur's longing for independence and adventure (Pinchot, 1985). To illustrate, he names the free choice of tasks, a decision-making autonomy in an environment of clear organisational goals, sufficient time, internal tolerance for failure, and interdisciplinary teams (Pinchot, 1985). A management that considers these bottom-up freedom-factors, as Pinchot (1985) continues, would eventually lead to a mutually flourishing relationship in which the individual intrapreneur develops further while remaining in service for corporate success.

Towards this background, we can observe some apparent similarities with the contemporary creative agency model in which relaxed hierarchy structures seem to stimulate the creative worker to operate autonomously and seize the room for self-development purposes. This internal environment, in which an organisation proactively supports creatives with developing their practical skills as well as their selves further while realising corporate goals, is an apparent observation made in this research. Here, especially younger respondents seem to experience such a flourishing work environment. Repondents such as Joca, Peter, and Josh highlighted their contentment with being able to autonomously realise their multifaceted practical interests in a small, intimate team that feels like a family. Since they also demonstrated their eagerness to continually deliver high-quality output, the mutual benefits of such a work environment becomes clear.

Apart from these less objective viewpoints of how to handle creativity, there are some aspects concerning project work a creative agency should consider. These aspects regard the metaphor of play, which I introduced as part of the theoretical framework. We remember that not only metaphors such as artistic expression, purposeful production and problem-solving action but also the play capture the idea of creativity (Joas, 1996; Broeckling, 2013). Towards this background, organisations should allow their creative workers to be playful and purpose-free within the purposeful act of doing project work in order to ensure a satisfactory creative product.

To stimulate creative, innovative ideas, each of the indirectly explored organisation integrates playful aspects in the process of creative project work. Similarly to my research and data analysis approach, most of these processes are iterative, where many ideas, prototypes and concepts are tested,

changed, rejected, and polished, again and again[6]. From hearing the participants' experiences, it seems that two principles are particularly influential for creativity during the first phases of project work: *no critique* and *collective brainstorming.*

Firstly, *no critique* refers to the importance of not judging the quality of ideas to increase the number of possible solutions. Also, in the context of a general sense of individual well-being in the team, having an open and honest feedback culture seems to play an essential role for the respondents. Closely connected to the free exchange of ideas is *collective brainstorming,* the second influential principle for creative work:

> …putting a lot of different people in brainstorm sessions…is also a good way…then you already have twenty to thirty ideas that are well thought out. And, based on that, we try to come up with new stuff…. (Josh, creative director at Fresh Bridge)

Here, Josh highlights the synergetic power of thinking in a group, which seems to be particularly valuable when people from different disciplines exchange their ideas in a free, non-judged way. These two principles appear to resemble the metaphor of play and, thus, significantly increase the likelihood for creatives to work out a satisfactory creative product.

To find concluding words about those aspects referring to the mesolayer, I want to emphasise that an organisation actively influences the individual construction of creative identities in many ways. Since this study's participants appear to be intrinsically motivated, passionate and feel responsible for their work, their respective work environments have significant power on these individuals. Eventually, the creative workers' state of well-being and, thus, productivity, depends to a great extent on how the organisation handles its most valuable resource - individual and collective creativity.

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[6] According to Broeckling (2013), most creative process models ground on Graham Wallas' *The Art of Thought* (1926), in which the author determines four steps of problem-solving thinking: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification. From my experience as a creative worker in different creative agencies, I can confirm that project-based work is structured similarly.

Between Micro and Meso: Contributions to Strategy-as-Practice

> We discover that because organisations comprise so many different constituent actors and because they have such diversity of stakeholders…they have an even greater capacity for dynamism than individuals do. Such dynamism further enhances the dynamism of identity. (Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012, p. 60)

Alongside the common perspective of seeing individual identities as flows and processes instead of static entities, this quote above underlines that organisations, too, have identities that are continually changing. To explain the constant state of flux in both categories, Gioia and Patvardhan (2012) highlight their human parallelism: "organisations are created by, inhabited by, and function to accomplish the goals of individuals" (p. 51). This understanding demonstrates that what individuals and groups of people see as 'the organisation' or 'their employer' is a process of social construction, driven by a "multiplicity of goals, interests and understandings within that 'virtual' entity" (Watson, 2003, p. 1306). Towards the background of this exact phenomenon, where the organisation and the individuals within are construed and maintained interdependently and in continuous flux, Watson (2003) places the concept of 'strategic exchange'. This concept comprises the exchange relationship between an organisation's strategic identity or direction and the personal strategies of the strategists themselves (the employees) (Watson, 2003). In other words, the author wonders about how an organisation is shaped by the personal values, motivations, priorities and identities of the strategy-makers themselves (Watson, 2003). Here, the author argues that how individual strategists express themselves through the work, actively shapes the corporate strategies in their contexts (Watson, 2003).

As it has become clear, I approached my study with a similar understanding. From the interview data, it has become vividly apparent that the creative workers are active parts of the organisational strategies around them in the sense that they carry their individual intentions, values and personalities into their work practices. Max, for instance, is a good example for a someone who shapes the organisational strategies by how he approaches and applies respective practices at work. During our interview, he demonstrated his strong identification with his workplace by merging organisational events with his own life-story as a creative. In the first months of his five years at Popcorn Stories, Max experienced how the small agency iterated its market orientation. Thereby, he played an essential role in finding the 'right' path, the 'right' principles, the 'right' people for this new organisational strategy. Moreover, he told me about his close relationship with the agency's CEO; he showed a somewhat pride for his leadership style and highlighted how happy he would be with his team of creatives. Combined with his general inherited moral values and opinions on the industry and on creative work, Popcorn Stories' organisational identity - in the form of narratives, values, and other strategies - gets shaped and maintained by Max' personal strategic practices, as his internal contributions as a creative producer and team leader lay at the core of the company's DNA. Therefore, the performance of a creative agency is

not only enabled and constrained by prevailing societal and industry-specific practices but also, fundamentally, by the strategic exchange with the actors involved (practitioners) (see Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

This phenomenon also became significantly apparent when other respondents opened up about their underlying intentions with their practice as creative workers. In their work on strategy-as-practice, Vaara and Whittington (2012) demonstrate that there is broad understanding about the role of leaders and managers in strategy-making, while the knowledge of how organisational actors beyond the managerial ranks contribute to strategy-making is "still thin" (p. 311). Here, the current research findings provide significant lenses. On the one hand, many respondents seem to experience the organisational strategies in their context as utterly supportive of their internalised strategic intentions, which eventually leads to a somewhat cooperative and parallel strategy work (see Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Joca, for instance, demonstrated that Momkai Studio, his workplace, is a place whose identity and praxis are congruent with his underlying intentions of doing "design for the people" that foregrounds user interests. In combination with his passion-driven intrinsic motivation as a creative worker, these fitting strategic intentions lead to a thriving praxis. To illustrate, on his initiative, Joca created a synoptical table where he gathered his and his colleagues' preferred methods and tools to provide the whole team with new ideas for creative work practices.

On the other hand, this study also crystallised processes of resistance regarding strategy-making beyond managerial ranks and, thus, suggests new knowledge on strategy-as-practice-research (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Similarly to how I structured the current research findings, Vaara (2010) pays attention to strategy at micro-, meso-, and metalevel to develop a "more nuanced understanding of strategy as a multifaceted interdiscoursive phenomenon" (p. 43). Interesting here is the understanding of how the conceptions of organisational strategy are contested through social interaction at microlevel (Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2004 in Vaara, 2010). According to Samra-Fredericks (2003, 2004), specific ideas and voices in an organisation are promoted or marginalised through rhetorics and other social practices. By opening up about her struggles as the only copywriter in the agency, Nina highlights how she sometimes experiences processes of resistance at microlevel. A lack of knowledge about the profession of copywriting most likely goes against the organisation's self-understanding as creative experts. However, Nina often feels the need to defend her profession within the team. As a consequence, I assume that she – whether consciously or subconsciously – develops a distance towards the apparent internal strategic praxis or the somewhat abstract organisational identity[7].

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[7] Here, it would be insightful to explore the linguistic microelements of strategy-as-practice further (Vaara, 2010). Josh, for instance, reproduces organisational strategy discourses by the use of the pronoun "we" instead of "I", and by connecting these with specific idioms such as "inclusivity" and "diversity". Thereby, he somewhat embodies organisational narratives and translates these into action. Further examining such rhetorical tactics would deepen our understanding of how organisational strategy discourses are legitimised and resisted (Vaara, 2010). For a more fine-grained analysis, this current study can provide sufficient material.

Between Work and Play: Contributions to a Creative's Identity Construction

These exemplary strategic practices at all interlinked facets of strategy discourse are connecting to matters of individual identity construction. Since the respective organisations have significant differences in their narratives and identities, and creative workers are, as every individual – unique and complex social beings that change over time, each of the respondents perceive themselves and their work in their ways. Despite the relational and subjective nature of creativity and creative work, the fine-grained, discursive handling of the qualitative interview data allows me to draw an image about identity in this context.

Earlier, I introduced the concepts of identity work and identity play as processes through which people build, form and revise an identity for themselves concerning respective social and societal contexts (Alvesson et al., 2008; Nielsen et al., 2018). For a creative worker, this identity-forming and reforming may include tensions between the need to be creative and, thus, act upon artistic logics of practice, and the need to be commercially successful, which would perhaps mean to act upon economic logics of practice (see Bourdieu, 1990; Beech et al., 2012). Or it may include tensions between the need to be a flexible employee and the need to enjoy one's time-off after six or seven p.m. (see Kirpal & Brown, 2007). Moreover, as some respondents demonstrated, it may include the question of whether the creation of a specific creative product reflects one's moral principles. Most of this identity-forming and reforming of creative workers happens in their specific organisational environment and is driven by the need to adapt, fit in or impress (see Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Goffmann, 1959).

Here, it is essential to pay attention to the differences between identity work and identity play. With identity work, a person strives for creating a somewhat stable, coherent narrative about oneself over time (Beech et al., 2012). According to Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010), the notion of identity work, therefore, is based on two underlying assumptions: "the importance of external (public) display of role-appropriate characteristics, and the desirability of internal identity coherence" (p. 11). Hence, identity work primarily is about acting and looking analogue to the social roles a person aims to represent and is about managing or reducing discrepancies and tensions regarding such representation (Goffmann, 1959; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

Meanwhile, the concept of identity play does not aim for coherence. Rather than goals and objectives, the fundamental drivers of playful behaviour are child-like discovery, ease and enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, in Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Here, whereas activities framed as 'work' are oriented towards a specific goal, 'play', instead, focuses on the processes and means themselves (Glynn, 1994, in Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). As a consequence, goal-oriented, rational activity loses significance, "making room for other guidelines for decision making, including intuition, emotion… expression and creativity" (Isen, 1999, in Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 13). Analogue to a child imagining to be a mom during play, identity play is "concerned with inventing and reinventing oneself"

and is, therefore, defined as "the crafting and provisional trial of immature (i.e. as yet unelaborated) possible selves" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 13).

As mentioned before, I consider identity play as a theoretical and practical concept which should play a significant role in creative work. Since creative agencies foreground, economise and take advantage of their employees' creativity, they should provide an organisational setting which is a safe place for practising play. Here, 'safe place' means to construct an environment (whether it concerns social, economic, cultural, or operational aspects) with significant room for individuals to imagine and employ new and untested thoughts and behaviours (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010). Creativity is about imagining the inexistent, the fantastic. Isn't it logical then for a creative worker to not only be playful when producing an innovative product but to also be playful with their identities?

From the analysis of the interviews, it has become apparent that all respondents enjoy the playful nature of doing project-based work in their creative agency contexts. To illustrate, Max notices: "it's a game, and you don't even have to fake it". Moreover, Joca uses the analogy of theatre when coining creative work as "finding the right role for the right moment". Other respondents enjoy gaining micro-expertises when familiarising with a new project or like to 'joke around' in the office. Towards this background, I assume that for a creative worker, crafting "immature…possible selves" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 13) is more prominent than aiming for a coherent, socially desirable self, as it is the primary goal when doing identity work (Beech et al., 2012)[8].

For a creative worker to have a safe and adventuresome room for identity play in the organisational setting, I think that many aspects regarding the mesolayer (the organisation), as well as the macrolayer (the societal and creative-industry-specific context), should be considered. Here, some aspects concerning organisational identity and strategic praxis, as well as freedom for individual autonomy and self-development became apparent in the interview data analysis and were discussed above. What also has become clear is that an organisation has the power to consider and construct some influential factors. In contrast, others regarding society and the creative industries remain somewhat inevitable and abstract.

Lastly, I want to formulate my assumption about the final instance that 'holds together' higher- and lower-level discursive elements regarding a creative worker's identity work and play processes. Eventually, it is the individual him- or herself, who frees his or her identity from the constraints of social validation to enter a sphere where play, failure, and the co-existence of competing selves is not only accepted but desired and enjoyed. Here, I imagine that, besides the personality and character, someone's confidence and underlying intentions as a creative worker, play a significant role. For a more fine-grained understanding of the interdiscursive conditions "under which settings may or may not

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[8] Similarly to Ibarra and Petriglieri (2010), I consider identity work and play as complementary, instead of opposite to one another.

function as identity 'playspaces'" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 20) for a creative worker embedded in a creative agency, this current thesis works as a base for further research.

Graphic Illustration of the Research Findings

To summarise and concise the research findings and thus provide a base for further theory development and research, I designed a graphic illustration as shown below. Here, the identity work and strategy work of creatives across all three levels are demonstrated as multifaceted, interactive discourses.

Macrolayer:

Identity work, identity play and strategy as socially, historically and structurally constituted discursive elements

Embedded in / draws from

Reproduces / transforms

Mesolayer:

Identity work, identity play and strategy work as narrative, rhetorical, cultural and operational constructions in specific organisations

Embedded in / draws from

Reproduces / transforms

Microlayer:

Identity work, identity play and strategy work as relational cognitive and behavioral acts
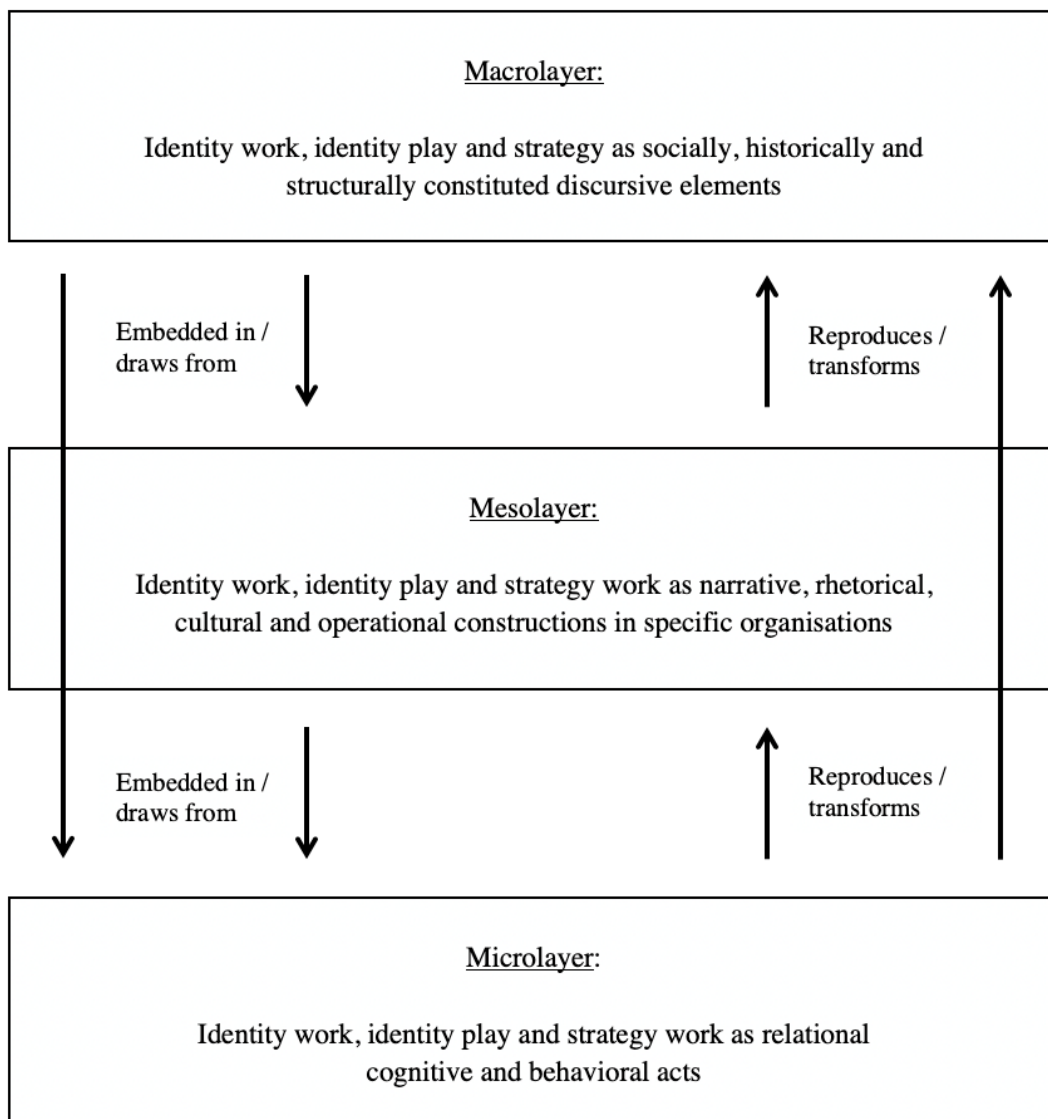
Figure 7. Identity- and strategy-work as multifaceted, interactive discourses

Reflecting on the Study's Limitations

Despite enabling an in-depth, multilayered understanding of real-life experiences of creative workers, this current research inherits some limiting aspects that need to be considered. Principally, studying individual identity construction is inevitably subjective. Identity is not only a complex issue in theoretical terms, but it is a very personal – if not the most personal – concept that people experience, understand, and talk about in an infinite variety of ways. Here, the concept of creativity further complicates the debate. As the respondents themselves demonstrated, what is creativity, and who or what determines a 'good' creative product? Why are some people seen as 'more' creative than others? I assume that the understanding of identity and creativity aspects is personally, culturally, and perhaps even socio-demographically driven. As a consequence, the individual respondents could have interpreted my questions differently, thus, making comparability at a later stage difficult. However, since demographic aspects were not of importance when considering the individuals as participants for this research, I see possible variations in the ways they spoke about identity and creativity matters as an enrichment, instead of a limitation.

More important to consider, is that identity aspects such as attitudes, roles, and motivations can be made up and created with the intentions to be socially desirable. Therefore, these personal stories and experiences are incredibly hard to verify. Considering that creatives enjoy playing, demonstrations of instantly created identities, instead of 'real' identities, this must be considered as a limitation. To remedy, I reminded the respondents during the interview that they could speak freely and did not need to please me, the researcher, in any way. Moreover, identity and processes of identity construction are byproducts of one's internalised knowledge and memory, which are distorted, context-specific interpretations of social phenomena. Although some respondents opened up about their habits to self-reflect regularly, I asked the interviewees to delve in their memory for personal aspects that were perhaps not thought about often. So, I have to assume that the interview findings could differ from a similar conversation on another day, in another place or another surrounding. But as a qualitative researcher, I value this study as a product of these specific interviews, this particular time and place, instead of seeing it as a flaw, as perhaps a quantitative researcher would do.

Moreover, my role as the researcher might have had an impact on the transferability of the findings acquired. Before the interviews started, I told the participants about my own experiences from being a creative concept developer in different creative agencies. Also, I shared some stories during the interviews to possibly help the respondents remembering a similar situation; thus, I possibly appeared to have expertise in creative work during the interviews. For instance, the participants shared their experiences with creative processes or creative methods. I knew, or assumed I knew, what they were referring to and did not question these remarks in great detail. As a consequence, there might have been a loss of meaning in some aspects of the conversations where I did not question complex aspects of creative work. Eventually, my expertise as a former creative worker might lead to difficulties when

wanting to conduct the same study with a different researcher who might not have the same understanding of creative work as I do. To remedy this, I ensured transparency in reporting all the steps taken in this research.

Ideas for Further Research

To further explore how individual behaviour of creative workers is embedded within a web of social practices in a creative organisation, it would be insightful to examine one creative agency in detail. By interviewing a whole team of creatives independently about various identity construction aspects, a more fine-grained understanding of the interlinkages of human agency and social structures could be won. Here, it would be essential to explore further how independent the creatives in a flat hierarchy structure are in reality, or if power on the employees is perhaps exercised more subtly. This exploration would enrichen the work of Kirpal and Brown (2017). To densify the respective findings, it would be useful to densify the research by interviewing internal positions of power, for instance, the CEO, to get first-hand information on managerial intentions. Doing fieldwork observations in the agency's daily operations would further enrichen the somewhat subjective findings with real-life insights into internal social interactions. Here, it would be necessary to conduct these observations with a team of researchers to ensure the findings' validity and reliability and to be able to observe multiple phenomena at once. Vaara (2010) suggests to take on a "critical organisational discourse perspective that draws from critical discourse analysis" (p. 31) to examine the linguistic aspects of a socially constructed reality. This methodological perspective allows extensive flexibility and, thus, enables us researchers to integrate different analysis methods, such as a textual examination of strategy-papers at mesolevel, and a conversation analysis at microlevel. Such an interdiscursive and flexible approach would enable an in-depth and critical perspective on how different sources of power in an organisation influence individual, as well as groups of creative workers.

Moreover, it seems necessary to me to further investigate the role of age and individual life circumstances and how they positively or negatively influence a creative career. This study's respondents belong to a younger generation and do not have worked in their respective professions for more than ten years. The participants' willingness to pay sacrifices while enjoying the playful aspects of their jobs could be linked to their perhaps independent and autonomous life circumstances. What I wonder is, does creative work as it is typically experienced in the agency-setting favour young individuals? Which influential factors, here, relate to the micro-, meso-, or macrolevel? To answer these questions and further enrichen these discourses on creative work and identity, I assume that a quantitative survey study addressing a large part of the population would be useful.

Chapter 6: Conclusions

With this current thesis project, I attempted to gather, analyse and interpret in-depth insights into the life-worlds of creative workers. Based on the assumption that these individuals see their jobs as significantly fundamental parts of their identities, I aimed to explore how creative workers experience themselves in their just as complex and dynamic organisational surroundings. To get a fine-grained understanding of such a multi-layered and intimate topic, I designed a qualitative study that foregrounds individuals as meaning-making and active in constructing their social reality. Through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten creative workers in Rotterdam, Amsterdam, and Den Haag, I had the chance to hear about the respondents' experiences, values, and opinions on various self-regarding phenomena that happen in a creative agency. Thanks to the respondents opening up about their perceptions of creative work in their contexts, the main theoretical concepts were illustrated and densified with real-life impressions. Thus, the analysis of these findings granted the chance to answer this thesis project's central research question, which reads: 'How do creative workers employ identity work to construct and develop their creative selves in relation to the organisational strategies in their contexts?'. The analysis, which was based on iterative qualitative coding and mind-mapping, crystallised a multi-layered scheme of findings. Here, it became apparent that identity-forming processes of creative workers do not only happen within the individual him- or herself (microlayer), but also in regards to the respective organisation (mesolayer), as well as greater societal and industry-specific aspects (macrolayer). This classification turned out to be significantly useful since it pays tribute to the complexity and interconnectedness of individual human actors, contemporary organisational structures and operations, as well as the working of societal forces.

I approached this study with the loose presumption that creative workers experience themselves in their organisational settings relatively similar, regardless of their professional focus, gender, nationality, or age, and regardless of the market orientation, size, and structure of their workplaces. Now, while acknowledging all case-specific nuances, I can confidently endorse this presumption.

Concerning the microlevel, which comprises personal and social aspects of a creative's identity-formation, it became apparent that most of the participants seem to see creativity as a core characteristic of themselves. Whereas some see creativity as a somewhat abstract, inherited approach to life and others instead as a practical skill, most participants demonstrated a passionate identification with their jobs. This intrinsic motivation, as I demonstrated, further relates to the creatives' different underlying intentions and purposes with their professional practices. Here, it became clear that the respondents' individual learning experiences are their primary drivers, whether it is characterised by receiving public recognition, developing one's practical skills, or doing 'good'. What I assume, is that these internalised aspects of a creative worker's identity already play a fundamental role in how he or she experiences aspects of the organisational setting.

For instance, some intrinsically motivated creatives seem to feel responsible for the overall organisation's performance or specific projects and, as a consequence, sometimes have difficulties in 'switching off' and drawing a line between professional and private life. Not having enough distance to one's work is one of many sources of friction in a creative's identity. Also, it became apparent that identity work happens as a response to tension in social settings, for instance, when the respondents feel the need to defend their role as responsible, creative experts in front of a client or other colleagues. These tensions highlight that individuals aim to act analogue to the social roles they aim to represent and, in turn, that they aim to reduce discrepancies regarding that representation (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010).

Also, the concept of identity play is a significantly present observation made in this study. Other than identity work, activities framed as identity play are concerned with the "crafting and…trial of immature…possible selves" (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2010, p. 13). As I elaborated on in the discussion, play is a fundamental element of creative thinking and creative work. In this study, it became clear that the creative workers find enjoyment in the inherently playful aspects of doing creative work, for instance, when they imagine the world of a respective target audience or negotiate with a client. This phenomenon is often framed as 'role-playing' and, thus, highlights Goffman's theory of social life being an analogy to stage play (1959).

Furthermore, thanks to examining the layer-specific discourses independently, it became apparent that the organisation, the creative agency itself is an environment that has a significant influence on a creative worker's identity work and play processes. Firstly, organisational narratives and values seem to be crucial determining factors for many respondents regarding their work relationships. Here, the value of gatekeeping or high-quality control is a present observation. Is that connected to an organisation's prominent standing in the industry, this value can awake pride in the individual worker, on the one hand, and pressure to deliver on the other hand. Perhaps, these reactions inevitably appear in recurring combinations. Also, the value of gatekeeping or quality control could be observed in the context of an organisation's somewhat code of conduct. From analysing the interview data, it became apparent that most agencies do not identify as passive service providers. Instead, they carefully curate their clients and projects to ensure a mutually thriving collaboration from which both parties individually benefit. Such "strong principles", as senior architect Hans coins it, seem to be positively received by creative workers who have similar strategic purposes and views on the industry.

As it is the concept that connects many others, creativity as an organisational value got thorough attention in this study. Based on the respondent's experiences, I argue that creative organisations have the responsibility to create a safe environment for creative (identity) play since they economise a fundamental human resource and significantly benefit from intrinsically motivated employees. Similarly to the 'intrapreneur' concept, creative workers seem to long for independence and adventure (Pinchot, 1985). By unleashing and supporting, while disciplining creativity, organisations like these

examined here, can build and maintain a safe and flourishing environment for creative workers. Here, I elaborated on more ('creativity boosts') and less tangible (atmosphere) aspects.

Regarding the macrolayer, the interview data analysis crystallised some societal and creative industry-specific influences on a creative worker's ongoing identity construction. One the one hand, the respondents indirectly underlined some repercussions of neoliberalism when sharing their experiences. Before, I briefly thematised the 'entrepreneurial self' concept to illustrate the prototypical ideal worker of today's times (see Voß & Pongratz, 1998; Broeckling, 2013; Rose, 2000). In an entrepreneurial self, economic success (or the profession or 'career') and self-actualisation both complement each other and follow the maxim of endless growth (Rose, 2000). This neoliberal mentality of an intertwined, autonomous relationship between personal and professional goals could be observed in this current study. Here, one aspect connects to the mentioned self-realisation purposes and intrinsic motivation of creative workers. As a more negatively connotated neoliberalism repercussion, I underlined that some respondents often feel pressure and work until the point of exhaustion. However, they demonstrated ways to deal with these conditions and see them as a constant challenge. Lastly, this study highlighted other influential factors on a creative worker's identity that are immanent to the creative industries. For a young creative to find employment, not only a sufficient CV and portfolio, but a network (social capital) is needed, which can cause frustration and insecurities.

Regarding the latter aspect, the binding nature of creative work has significant influence. Since it centres around an intangible symbolic good, many respondents demonstrated that there is never 'enough' (effort, skill, …). This uncertainty connects to creative production as a compromise between art and service (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). Thus, the creative worker has to merge artistic and economic logics of practice in his or her work-life (see Bourdieu, 1990).

Examining the micro-, meso-, and macrolayer independently has proven to be useful. Creative work, embedded in a creative agency, could be carved out as a unique phenomenon that is worth to examine in-depth. Similarly, it was discussed that creative workers themselves have an impact on the organisational praxis, considering that the contemporary firm is just as complex and dynamic as the individuals it comprises and as its societal context. These findings contribute to broaden the discussion in management and organisation literature about identity construction and organisational identification as currently initiated and enforced by Brown (2020) and his colleagues. Moreover, the findings enrichen the discussion by having extracted the nature and praxis of creative work in-depth. Thus, valuable insights on the interconnectedness of internal and external power structures concerning an individual's ongoing identity construction could be gathered, which brings the strategy-as-practice research further (see Watson, 2003; Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2004). This multifaceted interdiscursive approach paves the way for new research efforts beyond seeing identity- and strategy-matters as unified discourses.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

I.   **Introductory questions**

> Becoming acquainted with the interview partner

- ❖ Personal background

II.   **Self-concept and Identity**

> Exploring knowledge, the interviewee has about her- or himself

- ❖ Creative worker (identification, competencies, experience being one)
- ❖ Employee of company X
  - ➢ Do you identify with this company? Is that important to you?
  - ➢ How do you see yourself most of the time? (Roles, attitudes, etc.)
  - ➢ Do you **perform different roles** in different situations?

III.   **Identity Work**

> Elaborating on identity construction in the organisational setting

- ❖ Individual level
  - ➢ How do you present yourself at work?
  - ➢ difference between you as an employee and you as 'just a normal' person?
  - ➢ have to 'hide' a part of your personality at work? impact on your attitude?
- ❖ In relation to others
  - ➢ In what way does this presentation of yourself change in various (work) settings?
  - ➢ **Do you sometimes feel pressured and limited in your ability to think creatively?**
    - ■ In what situations can you think the most freely and creatively?
  - ➢ typical approach to project-based teamwork?
    - ■ Feel connected to the team during the process?
    - ■ How do you like yourself as a team player?
    - ■ in a conflict with yourself? (TENSIONS CREATIVITY // PROJECT WORK) → PRESSURE?)
    - ■ What do you think triggers that feeling? Are you aware of it in the moment?
    - ■ How do you react and learn from it?
  - ➢ Pressured to reach a certain goal? (getting an important client etc.)

IV.   **Identity Play**

> Exploring the 'less serious' side of identity work - freedom and playfulness

- ❖ The workplace as a stage for different selves
  - ➢ Do you feel that you can express yourself freely at work? Please elaborate on your experiences.
  - ➢ What do you enjoy about working project-based?

- ➢ Do you like discovering new sides of you?
- ➢ How does that relate to your role as a creative worker?

V.   Strategy

> Further exploring individual identities as practitioners

- ❖ The individual life strategy
  - ➢ Do you generally aim to carry your personal values and motivations in the work practice?
  - ➢ What kind of values are those? (Artistic, social, political?)
  - ➢ How does that translate in the work you do? Can you think of examples?
- ❖ In-turn
  - ➢ Do you agree with how project-work is approached here? Would you like some things to change? Please elaborate.
  - ➢ Do you feel that your own strategic practice influences the workplace somehow? If so, how?
  - ➢ Is it *a give & take?* Do you think the company will change and grow with you?

VI.   Round-up

- ❖ The individual and his/her workplace
  - ➢ what kind of influence does your everyday work surrounding have on your creative self?
  - ➢ How do you see that for the future?

To see all the relevant interview data, go to:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1N7nBjVioZJywpFcRxaX8EAz-jYnJJka8?usp=sharing

Appendix B: Unsigned Consent Form

<u>Informed Consent for Participating in Interview Research</u>

Description:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study on how workers in the Dutch creative industries employ identity work in relation to the organisational strategies in their contexts. The study's purpose is to explore the experiences, feelings, and values of creatives in Amsterdam and Rotterdam regarding their daily work processes in the agency they are employed at.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to your personal experiences with day-to-day workplace settings.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

Risks and benefits:

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should not use your name in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by using wording alternatives such as "participant 1", "creative 2", etc.

I will use the material from the interviews exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

Time involvement:

Your participation in this study will take 40 – 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

Payments:
There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

Participant's rights:

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish— Dr. Sven-Ove Horst (horst@eshcc.eur.nl).

Signing the consent form

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

 Name   Signature   Date

I give consent to my identity being revealed in all written data resulting from this study:

 Name   Signature   Date

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

Thank you so much for participating in my Master Thesis research. I greatly appreciate it! :)

With kind regards,

Lilli Zylka

lillizylka@gmail.com | +4917662829485

Appendix C: First Order Mind Maps and Concept Maps

To be able to see the details of these mind maps properly, please view the digital PDF files, which you can access here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1N7nBjVioZJywpFcRxaX8EAz-jYnJJka8?usp=sharing