

# ORGANIZING CREATIVITY IN THE INNOVATION JOURNEY

# RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

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# ORGANIZING CREATIVITY IN THE INNOVATION JOURNEY

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# CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>List of Tables</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>About the Contributors</i>	<i>xvii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xxi</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xxiii</i>

## **Introduction Organizing Creativity for Innovation: Situated Practices and Process Perspectives**

*Elke Schuessler, Silviya Svejenova and Patrick Cohendet* 1

### **PART I TEMPORAL DYNAMICS OF ORGANIZING CREATIVITY IN ART FIELDS**

<b>Inside Out: When Ideas from the Core are Radicalized on the Periphery</b>	
<i>Stoyan V. Sgourev</i>	<i>19</i>
<b>Trajectories of Consecration: Signature Style and the Pace of Category Spanning</b>	
<i>Giovanni Formilan, Gino Cattani and Simone Ferriani</i>	<i>39</i>
<b>Arts Festivals: Configuring Creative Fields Through Temporal Strategies</b>	
<i>Candace Jones</i>	<i>65</i>

**PART II**  
**COMPARING CREATIVE PROCESSES IN ARTS AND**  
**SCIENCE: TENSIONS AND UNCERTAINTIES**

- Auto-Tuned and R-Squared: Reflecting Audience Quality Evaluations in the Creative Process in Music Production and Cancer Research**  
*Elizabeth Long Lingo and Hille C. Bruns* 91
- Organizing Uncertainty as an Asset in Creative Collaboration: A Comparison of the Music and Pharmaceutical Industries**  
*Oliver Ibert, Gregory Jackson, Tobias Theel and Lukas Vogelgsang* 115
- Between Anxiety and Hope? How Actors Experience Regulatory Uncertainty in Creative Processes in Music and Pharma**  
*Leonhard Dobusch, Konstantin Hondros, Sigrid Quack and Katharina Zangerle* 137

**PART III**  
**IDENTITY STRUGGLES OF CREATIVE**  
**AGENTS IN ORGANIZATIONS**

- Organizational Misfits as Creative Agents of Change: The Case of Pracademics**  
*Alice Lam* 163
- Ambiguous Zones and Identity Processes of Innovation Experts in Organizations**  
*Rotem Rittblat and Amalya L. Oliver* 187
- Creative Identity Work in the Face of Ambiguity: Defending, Distancing, Differentiating**  
*Heather Round* 207

**PART IV**  
**THE COMMUNICATIVE JOURNEY OF IDEAS**

- Do We Really Judge the Book by Its Cover? Idea Selection During Start-Up Weekends**  
*Guy Parmentier, Séverine Le Loarne-Lemaire and Maxime Mellard* 231

**Making Creativity, not Innovation. Lessons from the Field  
of Fashion**

*Raimund Hasse and Judith Nyfeler* 249

**Feedback on Creative Ideas: Toward a Communicative and  
Creative Action Perspective**

*Michael Hartmann, Jochen Koch and Matthias Wenzel* 267

*Index* 289

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# LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1.1	Edvard Munch, <i>The Scream</i> (1893).	27
Fig 1.2	Kazimir Malevitch, <i>The Black Square</i> (1915).	30
Fig 2.1	Dendrogram of Styles, Resulting from Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering on Between-Style Distances. Aggregated Styles Are Marked with Numbers in Box.	48
Fig 2.2	Partitioning of Sequences into 5 Clusters (Marked with a Star Symbol), Displayed as State Distribution.	50
Fig 2.3	Effect of Stylistic Diversity on the Number of Consecrated Records, for High and Low Levels of Stylistic Turbulence.	53
Fig 2.4	Trajectories of Style Before First (Left) and Second (Right) Consecrated Recordings. For Each Sequence, the Last Event Corresponds to a Consecrated Recording. Dark Events Reflect Macro-category Stylistic Change; the Height of Each Sequence Corresponds to Its Frequency in the Sample.	55
Fig 3.1	<i>New York Times</i> Attention to Edinburgh and Berlin Festivals 1945–1969 (Three-Year Smoothing).	82
Fig 3.2	Edinburgh and Berlin Festivals English Language Texts 1945–1999 – Google Books Ngram.	82
Fig 3.3	Edinburgher and Berliner Festspiele German Language Texts 1945–1999 – Google Books Ngram.	83
Fig 5.1	Shifts of Focal Uncertainty.	130
Fig 8.1	Creative Identity Work as a Bridge Between the Zones of Ambiguity and the Innovation Expert Formation.	196
Fig 11.1	Campaign Picture: “route de la soie” (Courtesy of Linda Suter for Company A).	259
Fig 11.2	Campaign Picture: “Instruments” (by Courtesy of Daniel Spehr for Company B).	260

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# LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlation Matrix ( $N = 863$ ).	51
Table 2.2	Hurdle Models Predicting the Likelihood of Having a Higher Level of Consecration (Component #1) Conditional on Having Any Level of Consecration (Component #2).	52
Table 2.3	Clusters' Style Composition (First 6 Styles).	54
Table 3.1	Comparison of Edinburgh and Berlin Temporal Dimensions.	72
Table 3.2	Edinburgh's City Festivals: Entrained and Intense.	77
Table 3.3	Berlin City Festivals: Sequential and Sparse.	81
Table 4.1	Data Collection and Comparison.	97
Table 4.2	Navigating the Ideal and Real: Reflections of Audiences in Negotiating Quality Across the Settings.	107
Table 5.1	Case Overview.	123
Table 5.2	Dimensions of Uncertainty.	123
Table 6.1	Overview of the Interview Partners by Fields and Professional Groups.	145
Table 6.2	Codebook: Coding Anxiety, Indifference and Hope.	149
Table 6.3	Coding Emotional-Cognitive Experiences of IP-related Practices and Professional Groups.	150
Table 6.4	Coded Text Passages According to Field and Practice (in %).	151
Table 6.5	Coded Text Passages According to Profession and Practice (in %).	151
Table 6.6	Coded Text Passages by Interviewee's Professional Group and Their Self- and Other-Referencing of Emotions (in %).	153
Table 7.1	Interviewee Profile.	171
Table 9.1	First-Order Construct Examples.	213
Table 10.1	Fuzzy Set Membership Calibration.	239
Table 10.2	Analysis of the Necessary Conditions with Positive Conditions and Positive Outcomes.	240
Table 10.3	Analysis of the Necessary Conditions with Negative Conditions and Negative Outcomes.	240

Table 10.4	Truth Table (21 Configurations).	241
Table 10.5	Sufficient Conditions for a High Evaluation of Pitches by Participants.	242
Table 10.6	Sufficient Conditions for a Low Evaluation of Pitches by Participants.	243
Table 12.1	Validity Claims and Corresponding Modes of Speech in Communicative Action.	276
Table 12.2	Arguments in Criticizing Raised Validity Claims When Evaluating Creative Ideas.	278
Table 12.3	Forms of Habermasian Discourse and Their Relevance for Presenting and Evaluating Creative Ideas.	278
Table 12.4	Spheres of Action.	281

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# FOREWORD: RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONS

*Research in the Sociology of Organizations* (RSO) publishes cutting edge empirical research and theoretical papers that seek to enhance our understanding of organizations and organizing as pervasive and fundamental aspects of society and economy. We seek provocative papers that push the frontiers of current conversations, that help to revive old ones, or that incubate and develop new perspectives. Given its successes in this regard, RSO has become an impactful and indispensable fount of knowledge for scholars interested in organizational phenomena and theories. RSO is indexed and ranks highly in Scopus/SCImago as well as in the Academic Journal Guide published by the Chartered Association of Business schools.

As one of the most vibrant areas in the social sciences, the sociology of organizations engages a plurality of empirical and theoretical approaches to enhance our understanding of the varied imperatives and challenges that these organizations and their organizers face. Of course, there is a diversity of formal and informal organizations – from for-profit entities to non-profits, state and public agencies, social enterprises, communal forms of organizing, non-governmental associations, trade associations, publicly traded, family owned and managed, private firms – the list goes on! Organizations, moreover, can vary dramatically in size from small entrepreneurial ventures to large multi-national conglomerates to international governing bodies such as the United Nations.

Empirical topics addressed by *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* include: the formation, survival, and growth of organizations; collaboration and competition between organizations; the accumulation and management of resources and legitimacy; and how organizations or organizing efforts cope with a multitude of internal and external challenges and pressures. Particular interest is growing in the complexities of contemporary organizations as they cope with changing social expectations and as they seek to address societal problems related to corporate social responsibility, inequality, corruption and wrongdoing, and the challenge of new technologies. As a result, levels of analysis reach from the individual, to the organization, industry, community and field, and even the nation-state or world society. Much research is multi-level and embraces both qualitative and quantitative forms of data.

Diverse theory is employed or constructed to enhance our understanding of these topics. While anchored in the discipline of sociology and the field of management, *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* also welcomes theoretical engagement that draws on other disciplinary conversations – such as those in political science or economics, as well as work from diverse philosophical

traditions. RSO scholarship has helped push forward a plethora theoretical conversations on institutions and institutional change, networks, practice, culture, power, inequality, social movements, categories, routines, organization design and change, configurational dynamics and many other topics.

Each volume of *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* tends to be thematically focused on a particular empirical phenomenon (e.g., creative industries, multinational corporations, entrepreneurship) or theoretical conversation (e.g., institutional logics, actors and agency, microfoundations). The series publishes papers by junior as well as leading international scholars, and embraces diversity on all dimensions. If you are scholar interested in organizations or organizing, I hope you find *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* to be an invaluable resource as you develop your work.

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# INTRODUCTION

## ORGANIZING CREATIVITY FOR INNOVATION: SITUATED PRACTICES AND PROCESS PERSPECTIVES

Elke Schuessler, Silviya Svejenova and Patrick Cohendet

### ABSTRACT

*This volume brings together empirical and conceptual papers that investigate the challenges of organizing creativity in the innovation journey in and across different empirical contexts. Seen as the basis for innovating new products, processes or services, organizing creativity is studied as intentional efforts that occur in teams, organizations, and fields. What creativity is, how it is defined, negotiated and recognized is hereby co-constructed with different audiences and in different economic and societal spheres. The papers in this volume extend our understanding of these contextualized social dynamics of organizing creativity in four directions. The first direction sheds light on the temporal dynamics of organizing creativity in artistic fields. The second direction compares creative processes in arts and science, thereby examining tensions and uncertainties in the creative process unfolding in two distinctive contexts of creativity. The third direction examines identity struggles of creative agents in organizations with clashing roles, professional norms, and ambiguities in creativity assessment. The fourth and final direction unravels the communicative journey of ideas from pitching to feedback, revealing how ideas are challenged, enriched, and acquire meaning in communicative interaction. Overall, the papers in this volume contribute to a situated view of creative processes in innovation which goes beyond questions of idea generation to account for*

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*dynamics of idea development, judgment, and dissemination which involve identity struggles, evaluation, and communication – processes which are at the heart of organizing for innovation.*

**Keywords:** Creativity; innovation; organizing; creative work; idea journey; process

## THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZING CREATIVITY FOR INNOVATION

The global coronavirus pandemic, which is ongoing at the time this volume goes into print, has significantly challenged our extant ways of living and working, as well as shattered lives, employment opportunities, businesses, and communities. Yet, it has also raised renewed calls from different quarters – from international aid institutions through business leaders to academics – for creativity and innovation that can provide novel crisis and post-crisis solutions that enable community resilience, sustainable businesses, and personal coping and well-being. Some examples of such crisis-driven creativity and innovation approaches include new digital forms of artistic creativity, albeit amidst an acute precarity in the arts sector, severely affected by the pandemic lockdowns; the immense and unprecedentedly fast-paced scientific creativity that has brought vaccines in record time, though drawing undoubtedly on decades-long research, development, and innovation; the frugal creativity and innovation in overwhelmed hospitals struggling to save lives with limited resources; organizations' resourcefulness in reimagining themselves to endure the crisis, and not least people's everyday creativity in helping each other and making do in the community. These are only some examples of the organizing power of creativity.

Yet, creativity has been *in* long before the pandemic, acknowledged as predominantly positive and desirable force by the academic community and managerial practice alike. Scholars in a range of disciplines such as psychology (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010), economics (Menger, 2014), sociology (Godart, Seong, & Phillips, 2020), and organization studies (George, 2007; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993) have sought to define it as a distinct field of study within their respective knowledge domains, synthesizing extant contributions, providing empirical evidence, and charting directions for further investigation. Commonly understood as the generation of novel and potentially valuable ideas (Amabile, 1988), creativity has been recognized for its value-creating role not only in artistic and esthetic endeavors (DeFillippi, Grabher, & Jones, 2007; Galenson, 2007), but also in a variety of organizational and social contexts (Amabile, 1996) as well as in everyday action (Joas, 1996). Critical voices have pointed to a general creativity imperative in a society of "singularities" marked by an ongoing quest for novelty and surprise (Reckwitz, 2017). They have argued that creativity is "a well-behaved category and phenomenon" in the context of a "dominant neoliberal, market-focused ideology of "creativity" in service of progress and growth (Rehn & De Cock, 2009, p. 223).

As part of this hype, creativity has been found essential and useful for innovation processes in all sectors of the economy and society (Mann & Chan, 2011). Yet, innovation research has often reduced the significance of creativity to the initial stage of idea generation in complex innovation processes, reserving for innovation “the subsequent stage of implementing ideas toward better procedures, practices, or products” (Anderson, Potočnik, & Zhou, 2014, p. 1298), despite recognizing that the realm between the two is a grey area (Gilson & Litchfield, 2017). However, creativity is a driving force throughout the innovation journey. Its role in that journey is much more complex, diverse, and nuanced than implied by the conventional *division of labor* between the two concepts. First, creativity matters not only at the journey’s outset, but also in resolving important challenges and resource needs throughout, e.g., when commercializing new products or services, or diffusing environmental or social innovations (e.g., Mumford, 2002). To fulfill its complex role in processes of innovation, creativity demands ongoing efforts in organizing across what Perry-Smith and Mannucci (2017, p. 53) have called the “idea journey,” a concept that bridges the “macro approaches to innovation with micro approaches to creativity.” Second, process studies of innovation have indicated that innovation processes are far less linear than commonly assumed by stage gate models (Van de Ven, 2017; Van de Ven, Polley, Garud, & Venkataraman, 1999). Rather, the innovation journey involves complex temporalities (Garud, Gehman, & Kumaraswamy, 2011) as well as multiple creative processes at different levels or related to different creative objects that are entangled with each other (Schiemer, Schüßler, & Grabher, 2019), shifting our thinking away from linear toward recursive or conjunctive process models (Cloutier & Langley, 2020).

By focusing on efforts of organizing creativity in the innovation journey, we seek to shed light on the organizing practices and processes unfolding in-between and connecting the behavioral micro-foundations of creative individuals and groups on the one hand, and the institutional and economic macro processes related to creativity and innovation on the other. The focus on organizing creativity hereby adds nuances to how the innovation journey unfolds and allows theorizing the non-linear, sometimes even paradoxical dynamics inherent in most efforts to organize creative processes for innovation (Cohendet & Simon, 2007; Lampel, Honig, & Drori, 2014; Ortmann & Sydow, 2018; Stjerne & Svejenova, 2016; Townley & Beech, 2010). For instance, rather than searching for an optimal *sweet spot* between organizational slack and structural constraints as a condition for creativity (e.g., Nohria & Gulati, 1996), organizational research on creativity argues that resource limitations are socially constructed as either constraints or opportunities depending on organizational context conditions and practices of organizing (e.g., Rosso, 2014; Sonenshein, 2014). While important contributions have been made toward capturing social and organizational practices of engaging in, negotiating, and organizing creativity, more work is needed to advance the theoretical understanding, empirical insights, and methodological possibilities in researching creativity as a process of organizing that involves individuals and groups, yet is also embedded in the economic and institutional constraints of the innovation journey.

## FROM ORGANIZATIONAL TO ORGANIZING CREATIVITY

Considered “a relatively unexplored area in organizational change and innovation” (Woodman et al., 1993, p. 293) in the early 1990s, organizational creativity is currently a diverse field of research spanning across levels of analysis: from the social context within organizations (e.g., Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Shalley & Gilson, 2004) through social and interorganizational networks (e.g., De Vaan, Stark, & Vedres, 2015; Gilsing & Duysters, 2008) to regional clusters and cities (e.g., Cohendet, Grandadam, & Simon, 2010; Lange & Schübler, 2018), and organizational fields (e.g., Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejnova, 2012; Sgourev, 2013). These contributions can be distinguished along two main – structural and practice – perspectives. In recent years, process studies of creativity have become more prominent, suggesting a move from studies of *organizational creativity*, often following a variance ontology, to studies of *organizing creativity* as a practice and process (Fortwengel, Schübler, & Sydow, 2017). Below we briefly overview main tenets of the structural and practice perspectives before outlining the process perspective, which is central to our bringing together of the contributions to this volume.

Within the structural perspective, researchers have investigated the correlates of creativity with organizational structure, such as (de-)centralization, (in)formality or resource constraints (e.g., Cohendet & Simon, 2007; Godart, Shipilov, & Claes, 2014; Lampel et al., 2014). They have examined how organizational variables operate as a context to influence the creativity of individuals or groups (e.g., Moultrie & Young, 2009; Woodman et al., 1993), thus either studying creativity in organizations, such as contextual factors influencing group processes (Sawyer, 2006), or organizational creativity, often understood as the “fit” between structural factors of organizations and creative outputs. Network research has extended the organizational perspective on creativity to the structure of wider social and interorganizational networks (e.g., Burt, 2004; Cattani & Ferriani, 2008; Fleming, Miongo, & Chen, 2007; Obstfeld, 2005; Uzzi & Spiro, 2005). This literature highlights how the position within networks influences the flow of information including the potential generation of novel and potentially valuable ideas, e.g., through brokers spanning across structural holes in social networks (e.g., Noyes, Allen, & Parise, 2012).

Within the practice perspective, research has focused on the interface between or, more precisely, the duality of structure and agency rather than attributing stability and routine to structure and ascribing creativity and change to agency. As Fortwengel, Schübler, and Sydow (2017, p. 5) underline,

the “practice” view, understands creativity as a practised social process, in which structures play the important role of both enabling and constraining individual agents in pursuing creativity as a collective phenomenon.

Practice theories allow overcoming a predominant dichotomous view that considers *too much* organization as impairing creativity and *too little* organization as undermining it (Chen, 2012). Thus, creativity and organization do not exist

in opposition, but as mutually constitutive of each other. One example of such a practice-oriented study is Long Lingo and O'Mahony (2010) analysis of brokerage practices among producers, labels, artists, and songwriters in Nashville's country music industry. From a practice perspective, actors do not *disappear* from the analysis, but become contextualized through their roles and identities in the creative process.

In recent years, along with an overall interest in processes of organizational becoming and the emergence of novelty (Garud, Gehman, Kumaraswamy, & Tuertscher, 2016; Garud, Simpson, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2015), a third – “strong process” – perspective has gained prominence, moving research attention to “creativity as a constant flow of activity that crystallizes every once in a while in unpredictable moments of creativity” (Fortwengel et al., 2017, p. 5). Seeking to advance the understanding of creativity as processual, Håkonsen Coldevin, Carlsen, Clegg, Pitsis, and Antonacopoulou (2019) have noted the intertextuality of ideas, recognizing that they are not discrete or singular entities but, rather, develop in idea fields, a concept that overcomes the rather stylized and linear idea of the idea journey. Harvey (2014) sheds light on the collective process through which new ideas are developed by developing a dialectical model of creative synthesis as an outcome of multiple processes and interactions.

A process perspective allows us to better understand the intertwined processes of negotiations and interactions between members of the organization, and likely with external parties, that constitute the complex dynamics of organizing creativity in the innovation journey. For example, the idea journey unfolds in an ongoing tension between intentions and behaviors of ideators who seek to spark interest in an increasing number of allies and ensure the idea's organizational acceptance, and the vision, strategy, and expectations for the organization of its top management. As De Cock, Rehn, and Berry (2013) caution us, creativity as a “socio-economic good” is colonized by power relations and idea work itself requires acknowledging the role of co-optative power in the process of ongoing constitution and legitimating of ideas (Håkonsen Coldevin et al., 2019). A main consequence of this specific tension between the idea journey and strategic priorities is that it is difficult to isolate any linear sequence of stages. Furthermore, process studies help us to understand how organizational creativity is socially constructed and accomplished in a dual process of performing and attributing creativity (Koch, Wenzel, Senf, & Maibier, 2018), highlighting creativity as “located at the intersection of production and consumption – the two sides of the creative process competing for what should be seen as unexpected” (Godart et al., 2020, p. 494).

A focus on organizing creativity as a process thereby also reveals the more invisible or suppressed aspects of what is “happening under so much active and activist energy” in the pursuit of novelty (Rehn & De Cock, 2009, p. 223). Such a critical stance can involve attention to “creative deviance” (Mainemelis, 2010) or “creative chaos” (Chen, 2009), opening up the black boxes (Cohendet & Simon, 2015) or secret zones (Courpasson & Younes, 2017) in which ideas develop. Furthermore, creative processes are fraught with time pressure, uncertainty, and ambivalence. These can be obstacles, but also enablers of creativity that can be

harnessed as productive resources (e.g., Brinks, Ibert, Müller, & Schmidt, 2018). In sum, much is to be gained from unpacking both the idea journey and the contested idea work accompanying it.

## RESEARCH DIRECTIONS ON ORGANIZING CREATIVITY FOR INNOVATION

The papers in this volume highlight how ideas are collectively constructed by organizational members and audiences through interactions that involve continuous feedback, conversations, and negotiations. These interactions aim at building shared understanding and vision, providing emotional and cognitive support, coping with and reducing uncertainty, as well as gaining influence and legitimacy for those involved in idea development and for the ideas themselves. Thus, far from being established in advance, the value and meaning of an idea is developed through a mosaic of perspectives, contributions, and revisions that help shape a complex set of interdependent options (Garud, Tuertscher, & Van de Ven, 2013). Following repeated interactions, interlocking decisions eventually tighten this circle of possibilities and occasionally stabilize hypotheses about deliverables and models for creating value from the idea. A deep analysis of these interactions is key to the understanding of how and when a novel idea either successfully moves through the entire innovation journey or, rather, gets abandoned (prematurely or too late) in the process. The papers in this volume extend our understanding of organizing creativity in the innovation journey in four directions.

*First*, building on a longstanding tradition of creativity and innovation research in the context of cultural and artistic production (Jones, Svejnova, Strandgaard Pedersen, & Townley, 2016; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000), three papers in our volume provide insights into the *temporal dynamics of organizing creativity in artistic fields*, applying a temporal and processual lens to cultural production and acknowledging the importance of entrainment in creative processes. The first two papers (Sgourev and Formilan, Cattani & Feriani) focus on processes leading up to “consecration” of artistic work, whereas the third (Jones) investigates the role of arts festivals as central field conveners and how their organizing choices define which actors constitute the field in the first place. Together, these papers shed light on the creation, diffusion, and consecration of novel ideas and creative careers in artistic fields, thus providing a macro-perspective on organizing creativity for innovation.

Stoyan V. Sgourev’s paper “Inside Out: When Ideas from the Core Are Radicalized on the Periphery” posits a dynamic interface between core and periphery of artistic fields, whereby ideas appearing at the core are amplified on the periphery. He argues that quantitative and qualitative evidence from the history of art lend support to this argument, including breakthrough paintings such as “The Scream” by Munch and “Black Square” by Malevich. Conflicting theoretical perspectives present radical innovation as originating either from the core or the periphery of a system. Studies tend to bridge this divide by way of positions or roles. Inverting the established tendency of “tempering” of innovation from

the periphery at the core, this paper conceptualizes radicalization as a process of escalation of innovation in the form of sequences of ideas that originate at the center of a system and intensify at the periphery. In this perspective, the conditions favorable for the emergence of an idea may not be equally favorable for its radicalization, following a substantively different logic. This approach realigns the primacy of the core in diffusing ideas and that of the periphery in reinforcing distinctiveness.

The paper “Trajectories of Consecration: Signature Style and the Pace of Category Spanning” by Giovanni Formilan, Gino Cattani, and Simone Ferriani provides a temporal perspective on the dynamics of distinctiveness and consecration in cultural production. The authors conceive of consecration as an emerging property of creative trajectories and distinguish signature style and pace of category spanning as main features for consecration. Using a social-sequence analytic approach, they examine the stylistic positioning in the discographies of a sample of 863 electronic music artists, seeking to capture the “creativity rhythm” “of their careers. They find that music artists with both specialist identities (those who adhere to a specific style over time) and eclectic identities (those who engage in spanning multiple categories, provided the spanning is fast paced) lead to distinctiveness and consecration as ultimate legitimation of artistic work. This paper opens up opportunities for novel insights on how and when a signature style’s coherence is appreciated by evaluators, and the importance of setting the right pace and rhythm to enable entrainment between what cultural producers do and how market expectations develop.

Candace Jones’ paper “Arts Festivals: Configuring Creative Fields Through Temporal Strategies” compares the founding histories of the Berlin and Edinburgh arts festivals and pays particular attention to the temporal strategies used by the festival organizers and their different field-configuring outcomes. The empirical comparison of two festivals, founded roughly around the same time after World War II in different countries, reveals how the distinct spatial, cultural and material resources of each city shaped the festivals’ imprints and trajectories in unique ways. The temporal strategies of the festivals are rather different. Whereas in Edinburgh all arts festivals are entrained, i.e., temporally aligned, with the Edinburgh International Festival, in Berlin the different arts festivals were sequential and less tightly coupled. As a result, Edinburgh has become a new center in the global arts field thanks to the intensity of the festival experience as well as the audience and media attention, whereas the Berlin festivals configured a more local creative field of artists and audiences. In sum, the study suggests that the temporality of arts festivals has different consequences for the structure of creative fields.

*Second*, three papers in our volume *compare creative processes in arts and science*, thereby elaborating on tensions and uncertainties in the creative process unfolding in different contexts and domains of creativity. Uncertainty about what is considered as novel and valuable can stem from the regulatory institutions surrounding creative processes such as employment systems or intellectual property regimes or from audiences in the creative process. Creative practices may involve the deliberate avoidance of contact with particular audiences as a

means to reduce uncertainty stemming from evaluation (e.g., [Svejenova, Mazza, & Planellas, 2007](#)), or may involve audiences such as consumers, critics or peers to get feedback on creative ideas or products at different stages of the creative process ([Dempster, 2006](#)). Together, these studies illuminate that what is considered as *novel* and *valuable* is highly contextualized and negotiated throughout the innovation journey.

The paper “Auto-Tuned and R-Squared: Reflecting Audience Quality Evaluations in the Creative Process in Music Production and Cancer Research” by Elizabeth Long Lingo and Hille C. Bruns highlights how concerns about implementation – whether and how audiences might evaluate novel outcomes – infuse the collective creative process. For them, how audience quality evaluations shape the creative process remains largely unexplored. They examine this question through a comparative ethnography of two settings where big data brings audience quality evaluations to the fore – Nashville music production and systems biology cancer research. They find that actors encounter a fundamental tension between two competing standards of quality – the technically perfect, processed and ideal versus the empirically grounded, unprocessed and real – and show how actors navigate this tension vis-à-vis three different audiences: internal peers, extended community, and external reviewers. Based on ethnographic data, the authors illuminate the countless micro-decisions involved in producing a creative output, including considerations of audience evaluation, which plays a role throughout the creative process.

Oliver Ibert, Gregory Jackson, Tobias Theel, and Lukas Vogelgsang’s paper “Organizing Uncertainty as an Asset in Creative Collaboration: A Comparison of the Music and Pharmaceutical Industries” explores how uncertainty is organized as a productive resource in collaborative creativity aimed at the creation of novelty and sheds light on the trajectory of uncertainty in such processes. Drawing on eight creativity biographies (inspired by the innovation biography approach), four of music album production and four of pharmaceutical patent development, the authors reconstruct creative processes from idea generation to a tangible output, unraveling three distinct, yet interrelated practices for engaging with uncertainty – embracing, ignoring, and fixing – and revealing how these practices allow to continuously shift between uncertainty dimensions. Shifts in focal uncertainty help avoid blockage and re-contextualize previous knowledge. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that only repeated shifts of focal and relegated uncertainty dimensions can sustain creative collaboration processes over time. They posit that it is through the collective engagement with uncertainty that creative collaboration generates novelty and ascribes value to newness.

The paper “Between Anxiety and Hope? How Actors Experience Regulatory Uncertainty in Creative Processes in Music and Pharma” by Leonhard Dobusch, Konstantin Hondros, Sigrid Quack, and Katharina Zangerle examines emotional-cognitive experiences of regulatory uncertainty as a prevailing, yet understudied feature of creative processes in the arts and sciences. Empirically, the study compares the two fields of music and pharma, both increasingly shaped by intellectual property rights. The interviews provide ample evidence that musicians, researchers, managers and legal professionals experience regulatory uncertainty