**WHEN CREATIVITY AND COLLABORATION COLLIDE:**

**A STUDY OF IDEA-SHARING AND IDENTITY AMONG TOY DESIGNERS**

Kimberly D. Elsbach
Graduate School of Management
University of California, Davis
Davis, CA 95616
(530) 752-0910
kdelsbach@ucdavis.edu

Francis J. Flynn
Graduate School of Business
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305
(650) 724-0312
flynn_francis@gsb.stanford.edu

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## ABSTRACT

Drawing on qualitative interviews and observation of toy designers in a large organization, we examine the challenges of encouraging informal collaboration among creative workers. We outline a framework of creative workers' professional identities and propose that challenges arise when informal idea-sharing behaviors threaten these identities. Overall, our findings suggest that conflicts between upholding norms of collaboration and affirming professional identities can help explain disappointments in output across groups of creative workers and may contribute to dissatisfaction among these workers and their peers. Our findings also help explicate the trade-offs between self-affirming and self-enhancing motives in professional identity management. Taken together, these insights extend and inform theories of informal collaboration and identity in the workplace.

# INTRODUCTION

Creativity is one of the most highly sought after, and equally elusive, resources in modern organizations. Although most firms value novel thinking and innovative ideas, many struggle to generate creative output on a regular basis. For managers interested in harnessing the benefits of creativity, organizational scholars have offered useful advice on how to increase creative output using different levers, including intrinsic motivation—"do what you love" (Amabile, 1997: 55), job design—"periodically adjust [employees'] work contexts" (Cummings and Oldham, 1997: 37), and social norms—"welcome dissent" (Nemeth, 1997: 72). Empirical research has proven the value of these insights, so that they are now well understood and strongly embraced by both academic scholars and practitioners.

More recently, advice on fostering creativity in organizations has revolved around the subject of group dynamics and interdependence (Paulus and Nijstad, 2003; Perry-Smith, 2006). According to survey evidence, most people in organizations strongly believe that groups are better able than individuals to generate creative ideas (e.g., Paulus et al., 1993; Stroebe et al., 1992). At the heart of this thesis lies a pair of fundamental assumptions: (1) that creative output is enhanced through diversity (in the form of opinions, ideas, relationships, etc.), and (2) that groups offer an optimal setting in which individuals can share diverse resources, and in turn, produce creative outcomes.

## Collaboration and Creativity

While the appeal of achieving creativity through collaboration and idea sharing is abundantly clear, the mechanics of effective idea sharing are less clear. Decades of research on brainstorming, for example, has concluded that pooling ideas from several people working in

isolation (i.e., the nominal group technique) is a more successful approach than having the same people try to generate ideas in an interactive group (e.g., Diehl and Stroebe, 1987; Lamm and Trommsdorff, 1973; Taylor, Berry, and Block, 1958). In one study, nominal groups produced 70% more novel solutions to a problem than did interactive groups (Paulus and Dzindolet, 1993). Such "productivity losses" in group brainstorming occur because individual members must wait for their turn to speak before offering new ideas (rather than offering them as soon as they come to mind). By the time a person's turn to speak comes around, these ideas may be forgotten (e.g., Paulus, Larey, and Ortega, 1995).[1]

While formal brainstorming techniques—as a means of creative collaboration—have received an extraordinary amount of attention from organizational scholars (see Paulus and Brown, 2003), brainstorming represents only a small fraction of the collaborative interactions among creative workers. Even at IDEO, a prominent product design firm that trumpets its brainstorming sessions, the average engineer participated in just 24 sessions a year—two sessions per month (e.g., Sutton and Hargadon, 1996).

Outside of brainstorming sessions, creative workers frequently interact with one another, but often in *informal* settings, such as hallway conversations, impromptu meetings, and discussions among colleagues seated near each other (Hargadon and Sutton, 1997). Creative workers, including designers and artists, often have access to worktables for product prototypes, screens for drawings, and tools and materials for tinkering. As individual employees converge on these spaces to work on projects, they may offer casual comments upon observing other projects that

[1] Other explanations for productivity losses in group brainstorming, such as social-loafing and evaluation apprehension, have not been well-supported by researchers (see Nijstad, Diehl, and Stroebe, 2003 for a review).

are underway. In addition, workers may seek out colleagues in other areas of a work site to solicit help and advice (e.g., Flynn, 2003).

Creativity scholars have suggested that the influence of informal interactions may be critical to the development of creative products in organizations (Amabile, 1996; Sternberg, 1999). For example, Amabile (1996: 233) proposed that creativity is stimulated, in part, by "a diversely skilled work group in which people communicate well, are open to new ideas, constructively challenge one another's work, trust and help one another, and feel committed to the work they are doing" (Amabile, 1996: 233). Other researchers have also found that the frequent sharing of ideas between colleagues may enhance creative output, at least up to the point where group members become isolated from outsiders (see Argote and Kane, 2003 for a review). Finally, group researchers have found that diverse groups are likely to perform better on creativity tasks than non-diverse groups when they are able to engage in open conflict over task issues (Jehn, 1995).

These positive effects of informal collaboration are attributed to the stimulating influence of unique input (Eisenhardt and Tabrizi, 1995; Lant et.al., 1992; Dunbar, 1995) and open dissent that liberates collective discussion from a rehashing of old ideas (Nemeth and Nemeth-Brown, 2003). In this manner, numerous studies of improvisation by jazz musicians (Kamoche, et.al., 2003; Hatch, 1999; Weick, 1999) have shown that collaborative behaviors such as "comping" (i.e., lending harmonic and rhythmic support) are essential to producing unique output. Further, researchers have recently found that "team creativity relevant behaviors" by individuals, such as "carefully listening to what others are saying", "asking other team members what they think", and "providing an alternative solution that is agreeable to other team members when a conflict

arises", provide an open and "experimental" context that is crucial to helping a team of creative individuals to produce creative output as a group (Taggar, 2002: 321).

**The Creativity/Collaboration Paradox**

Despite the growing consensus that collaboration can help facilitate creativity in organizations, an inherent difficulty exists in achieving such collaboration among *creative workers*. Specifically, creative workers often experience a conflict between normative pressures to engage in collaborative work and their personal desire to maintain an individual creative identity (Fletcher, 1999). This "creativity/collaboration paradox" presents a dilemma for managers who wish to promote creative collaborations without alienating their creative workers. As one manager of creative workers noted:

> It can be fantastically frustrating working with creators. They're petulant and difficult and refuse to pay attention and have different priorities. Dumb insolence is a classic characteristic of creative people and they are very dismissive of everybody else. -- *Tim Bell, Chairman of Lowe Bell Communications, UK.* Quoted in Fletcher (1999: 40).

Recent theorizing suggests that this dilemma is part of a large conflict in creative work between logics of economics and logics of art (Eikhof & Haunschild, 2007). In the following sections, we investigate this dilemma by first examining the professional identities of creative workers and then discussing how these identities appear to be at odds with common norms for collaborative behavior in organizations.

**Professional identities of creative workers.** Creative workers may be defined as "people who add economic value through their creativity. . . . [including] knowledge workers, symbolic analysts and professional and technical workers" (Florida, 2003: 68). Based on current conceptions of professional identities in organizations (Pratt et.al., 2006; Sluss and Ashforth, 2007; Fine, 1996; 2006) the professional identities of creative workers may be defined as the

person-based and role-based identity categorizations that creative workers use to define themselves at work.

Sluss and Ashforth (2007: 11) define role-based identity categorizations, or what they call "role-based identities" as the:

> . . . .goals, values, beliefs, norms, interaction styles, and time horizons typically associated with the role (Ashforth, 2001) - independent of who (what kind of person) may be enacting the role. For example, the role-based identity of a manager may include assigning tasks, monitoring performance, offering feedback, liaising with other departments, and doing strategic planning.

They go on to define person-based identities as the:

> . . . .personal qualities [e.g., traits and abilities] of the role occupant that bear on the enactment of the role-based identity. (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007: 12)

This definition suggests that a creative toy designer, for example, may define herself as "a designer in the doll department" (a role-based categorization), and "an expert in classic doll face painting" (a person-based categorization).

Research on fine artists and other creative professionals (e.g., Feist, 1999; Petkus Jr., 1996; Bain, 2005) suggests two person-based categorizations that are commonly claimed by creators (i.e., idealogically-driven, and non-conformist), and two common role-based categorization (i.e., independent creator, and maker of identifiable finished products or "shower"). We discuss these identity categorizations below.

Person-based Categorizations. A person-based categorization that is often linked to creative professionals is that of "idealist" (vs. pragmatist), (Bain, 2005). Specifically, professional artists commonly report that they consider the personal aesthetic and intellectual satisfaction they gain from creating to be the most important motivations for creative work, while meeting practical needs, such as satisfying a client or paying the bills, to be secondary. In a study of Scottish jazz musicians, for example, Macdonald and Wilson (2005: 409) reported that several of these

musicians showed disdain for their audiences needs and preferred to play for themselves. As the drummer lamented:

> Oh, [the audience] is not intelligent enough to understand [our music]. . . To me the best playing experiences I've had have been away from audiences because any of that stuff goes out the window, and you're only playing for the sake of the music. Because you really want to play the music.

Related to the categorization of "idealist" is the person-based categorization of "non-conformist" (Feist, 1999). That is, professional creative workers tend to think of themselves as pushing back against pressures to conform to established norms and accepted practices. As Bain (2005: 30) notes in his study of professional artists:

> This tendency to rebel against established norms -- to repeatedly question, challenge, and defy the limits of acceptability -- may have become the defining feature of what it means to be an artist in contemporary society.

Role-based Categorizations. One role-based categorization that seems essential to the professional identities of creative workers is that of "solitary" or "independent" creator (Feist, 1999). It is common, for example, for professional artists to put high importance on creating individual works of art (e.g., paintings, musical pieces, books, plays) that are recognizable based on these artists' signature styles (Petkus Jr., 1996). Such solitary work may be an essential dimension of the identity of a professional artist, in part, because an artist's stature and "name recognition" in his or her field is one of the only means of asserting professional status. An artist is less likely to gain such status if he or she is known only as part of a group or as a partial contributor to an artistic output. That is, unlike other professions, such as law, medicine, or engineering, there are no credentials, licenses, or governing bodies that certify an artist as professional. Instead, artists need "recognition from, and acceptance by, other well-established professional practitioners" (Bain, 2005: 35) to maintain their professional status.

Second, Bain's (2005) study of professional artists suggests that these creative workers view "showing" one's work in galleries and exhibitions to be an essential role-based dimension of their identity. The categorizations of being a "showing" artist is important to the identity of these professionals because it demonstrates that their art is legitimate and valued by society in general. Further, this categorization separates the professional artists from the non-professionals. As one artist in Bain's study noted:

> There's four mothers in my son's class at school who view themselves as artists. They're not professionals. They don't show. . . . When you've committed your lifeblood, the core of your very being to making art, and somebody casually says that she's an artist, it really wears you down. (Bain, 2005: 33)

For a creative professional outside of fine art—say a web designer—the role of "showing" might translate to having one's creative work incorporated into a product that is put into use or up for sale. That is, an important role-based categorization for creative professionals may be to "make identifiable finished products". If one's web designs never make it to the internet, then one may not have fulfilled this role as a creator. In support of this notion, Fletcher (1999: 42) notes, in his study of corporate creative professionals in Great Britain, that "creative people are judged and prefer to be judged by their output rather than by their personality."

**Collaboration and identity threats.** Given, as noted earlier, that the majority of people strongly believe in the benefits of collaborative work (Paulus et al., 1993), most large corporations today expect workers (including creative workers) to collaborate on projects, and to act as "good colleagues" in sharing information that can help solve work problems (Kram and Isabella, 1985; Shore, Barksdale, and Shore, 1995; Maitland, 2005). Such willingness to work in a team environment is viewed, not just as beneficial for creative output, but also as evidence that an individual is collegial and committed to the organization (Skarlicki and Latham, 1995). In

turn, observation of employee collaborative behaviors by managers has been shown to improve those managers' ratings of employees' promotability (Shore et.al., 1995).

At the same time, given our earlier explication of the professional identities of creative workers, we would predict that engaging in collaborative behaviors may threaten all of the person-based and role-based identity categorizations that creative workers possess. This prediction is, in fact, supported by research on psychological social depersonalization (Brewer, et.al., 1993), the "undesired self" (Ogilvie, 1987), and self-verification (Swann, et.al., 1981).

First, psychological research suggests that creative workers may feel a threat to their "uniqueness" when collaborating with others because such collaboration dilutes personal identification and association with a creative product (Snyder and Fromkin, 1980). Research on this type of "social depersonalization" (Brewer et.al., 1993) has shown that individuals may prefer to maintain distinctive self-categorizations, even if they are less self-enhancing than undistinctive self-categorizations, if they feel their uniqueness is threatened by the latter. Presumably, creative workers may be even more attuned to such uniqueness threats compared with other workers because distinctiveness is such a dominant part of their identities (Kasof, 1995).

Second, engaging in collaborative behaviors may threaten creative workers' identities because it forces them to affirm an "undesired self" (Ogilvie, 1987) by compromising their creative ideas, sharing in the creative process, or working towards pragmatic (vs. idealistic) goals. Ogilvie (1987) found that individuals are more strongly motivated to avoid an undesired self (defined as "how I hope to never be") than to realize a desired self, and may even form their idealized self in direct response to their undesired self (e.g., they decide to be independent and unique specifically because they hope never to be compromising and common).

Finally, engaging in collaborative behaviors in a diverse group may take away opportunities to affirm an idealized self. That is, if most collaborative creative work requires compromise and alteration of ideals, few opportunities may remain for doing independent, individual work that is, thus, *self-verifying*, i.e., that provides confirmatory evidence about their currently-held perceptions of their traits and abilities (Swann, 1985).

Recent research on the relationship between self-verification and creativity in diverse work groups showed that, when individual members of groups did not obtain self-verifications from fellow group members (i.e., fellow group members did not view the focal individual in ways consistent with his/her self-views), the groups performed poorer on a creative task than groups whose members did receive such self-verifications (Swann, et.al., 2003; Polzer et.al., 2002). These findings have been explained as resulting from the off-setting effects of self-verifications on interpersonal conflicts in diverse groups (Polzer et.al., 2002). That is, in diverse groups, interpersonal differences in values, beliefs, or opinions among members may cause "relationship conflict" (e.g., animosity and annoyance) that undermines group performance (Jehn, 1995; 1997). If group members receive self-verifications in these contexts, however, they may perceive that their distinct values and beliefs are better understood by others, feel more comfortable and accepted by others, and be motivated to apply their different perspectives in a constructive manner in problem-solving (Polzer et.al., 2002).

**Unpacking the paradox.** Together, the above findings suggest that managers interested in generating novel and useful ideas face a paradox —professional creative workers may be better able to generate creative ideas through interpersonal collaboration and might even affirm some aspects of their professional identities, but such collaborative behavior can also threaten other important aspects of their identities. To better understand this creativity/collaboration paradox,

scholars need to examine how professional identities and collaborative behaviors among creative workers are related in corporate settings. Thus, our goal in this paper is to examine how the professional identities of creative workers are related to their collaborative behaviors with others. In particular, we hope to answer the following research question:

*Research Question: How and why do specific types of collaborative behaviors affect (i.e., threaten or affirm) specific professional identities of creative workers?*

In the sections that follow, we first describe our research setting and our qualitative methodology, outlining both our protocol and the analytical tools we used to classify and synthesize the data we collected. Next, we attempt to develop a model of collaboration and identity, traveling back and forth between the evidence we gathered in the field and the extant literature that relates to the concepts of identity, collaboration, and creative work. Finally, in our conclusion, we discuss the implications of this model, both for organizational theory-building and for managerial practice. Specifically, we highlight from this study what may represent a novel, and potentially useful, insight on the critical problem of achieving creativity through collaboration.

## METHODS

We used exploratory qualitative methods, including interviews and non-participant observation, to develop theory about the relationship between collaboration and professional identity among a set of toy designers working in a large, for-profit organization. Given our current understanding of collaboration and identity concepts, summarized above, we approached this study as one of "theory elaboration" (Lee, et.al., 1999), in which our goal was to extend theory around a conceptual area, rather than to build completely new theory. Our data collection and analysis took place over a four-year period, from 2003-2006.

**Research Site**

The first author performed all data collection at the design center for a large U.S. headquartered toy manufacturer. At the time of the study, the company employed over 30,000 people in 43 countries and territories and sold products in more than 150 nations throughout the world. The design center housed over 200 toy designers, all of whom worked on the development of new toy prototypes. No manufacturing was performed at this site, and while marketing professionals and other administrative employees visited the design center to confer with toy designers, no administrative employees (other than clerical staff), were housed on site.

The physical layout of the 22,000 sq. ft. design center was an open plan design, with "Girls' Toys" occupying half of the open space, and "Boys' Toys" occupying the other half. Because an administrative reorganization was taking place in the girls' toys division during the time of the study, data collection focused completely on toy designers in Boys' Toys. Within the Boys' Toys side of the design center, there were large open workspaces separated by moveable partitions and smaller "cubicles" for individual workers. Designers working in specific toy areas (e.g., cars, action figures, games, etc), were geographically co-located within this large open space. The only enclosed spaces housed special machinery, lab space, and digital video production rooms, plus a few offices for senior staff. One could see and hear the work of toy designers across the large open floor plan, and prototypes in progress often occupied large spaces in the design center, both horizontally and vertically. Designers could easily see what others were working on in the public and private work spaces (unless individual designers took efforts to enclose their private cubicles).

**Participants**

Participants included 30 designers (27 male, 3 female; average age = 37.5 years; average time working at the corporation = 10.7 years) from boys' toys. All participants were actively engaged in designing new toy prototypes, and held the titles of staff designer (5), project designer (14), or designer (11).

### Data Sources

**Interviews.** The first author interviewed 30 toy designers over the course of the year 2003. She interviewed 6 designers from each of five different toy groups within boys' toys. We will refer to these toy groups by the pseudonyms: ACTION FIGURES, LICENSED TOYS, CARS, GAMES, and COOL IDEAS. Designers in ACTION FIGURES worked on the design of dolls resembling licensed comic-book heroes, and their accessories. Designers in LICENSED TOYS developed toys that were based on television shows and movies, and were used in franchising those entertainment products. Designers in CARS developed toy cars of many forms, along with track sets and accessories. Designers in GAMES developed all manner of games and puzzles for both boys and girls (although they were housed on the Boys' Toys side of the design center). Finally, designers in COOL IDEAS developed toy concepts that might fit any of the other design groups. Designers were typically rotated into the COOL IDEAS group off one of the other groups for a time, to allow them to provide creative input across many types of toys.

The interviews followed an open-ended format, with questions changing to follow interesting leads and new themes that arose during the interview. Interview questions focused on: what the toy designer did on a day to day basis, his or her current work group and projects, past work groups and projects while at the same company, collaboration at work and past and current experiences with collaboration, most fulfilling and enjoyable creative tasks at work, his or her creative identity and how it was affirmed or not affirmed at work, threats to creative identity,

specific collaborative projects that were affirming and/or threatening to creative identity, and tactics to maintain creative identity at work. All interviews lasted 60-90 minutes and were tape-recorded and transcribed.

**Observation.** The first author conducted approximately 100 hours of observation over the course of 3 years, from 2004-2006. She observed designers belonging to each of the 5 toy groups described above. In each day of observation, she focused on observing designers belonging to one of these groups, but routinely walked around the design center and observed or interacted with designers in other areas as well.

Observation consisted of both silently shadowing toy designers, as well as conversing with them about what they were doing and what others were doing. The first author had open access to everything that happened in the design center, and was invited to observe meetings, brainstorming sessions, focus groups, and prototype testing. Much of the time the first author would position herself in one of the large common work areas in the design center, so she could easily observe many designers working at the same time, as well as observe interactions and collaborations taking place in these work areas. She also observed individual designers by walking around the design center and checking into their work periodically, as well as observing from a distance for prolonged periods of time.

Observation focused on issues of collaboration, and idea-sharing, as well as conflict arising during these processes. Observation also focused on any behaviors or comments that revealed affirmations or threats to creative identity. The first author kept field notes during observations and also recorded more notes after each observation period.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an iterative approach, moving back and forth between theory-development, data review, and literature review (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Analysis proceeded in three stages.

**Stage 1: Defining the professional identities of toy designers.** In early analysis of transcribed interviews, the first author and a research assistant searched for themes regarding the creative identities of participants. Based on the definition of professional identity given in the introduction, we specifically searched for comments related to person-based and role-based self-categorizations by toy designers when defining their professional selves (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). We first coded half of the interview transcripts and discussed our findings. Based on this coding, we developed an initial framework of professional identities of creative workers based on role-based and person-based categorizations. We then discussed this framework with 10 toy designers during the observation phase of the study (see below). These ten toy designers unanimously validated the framework and its dimensions as an accurate depiction of their professional identities, and their beliefs about other toy designers' professional identities. Using this new framework, the research assistant and first author coded all the remaining interview transcripts for role-based and person-based categorizations. Inter-coder reliability was .86 (Cohen, 1960). All discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

The first author took this framework to the observation site and asked all toy designers to plot their own professional identity on a grid depicting the different role-based and person-based dimensions of professional identity included in our framework. She also asked other toy designers in the same group to plot the identities of their co-workers. There was very high agreement between the researchers' and toy designers' own assessments of professional identities. There was some variance between toy designers and their co-workers' assessments of

professional identities, but most were in the same general area of the identity grid. The identity grid is depicted in Figure 1. Based on these findings, we categorized each toy designer in the study according to this professional identity framework.

**Stage 2: Identifying threats and affirmations to identity.** In the next stage of analysis, a research assistant and the first author searched transcribed interviews and observation field notes for evidence of identity threats and identity affirmations. The most prevalent source of affirmations and threats to professional identities of toy designers were idea-sharing or collaboration events and behaviors (e.g., other toy designers not taking one's ideas seriously during a group project meeting, being forced to compromise on one's ideas by incorporating ideas from others, being afraid of offering ideas because they might appear stupid or uncreative). These idea-sharing events fell into four broad categories: giving ideas, taking ideas, not giving ideas, and not taking ideas. The first author and research assistant then re-coded all the interview and observation data for evidence that fell into these four categories. Inter-coder agreement was .75 (Cohen, 1960). All discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

**Stage 3: Uncovering reasons for identity threats and affirmations.** In the third stage of data analysis, the first author and a research assistant returned to the interview transcripts and field notes to search for reasons why idea-sharing affected the professional identities of toy designers. In this phase, we looked for similarities within and across groups of participants who had similar professional identities, based on our framework. Our initial discussions of the data revealed that most explanations for why idea-sharing affected professional identities were related to the effects of idea-sharing on specific dimensions of professional identity (i.e., specific idea-sharing behaviors affected specific role-based categorizations or person-based categorizations). We then coded all reasons why idea-sharing threatened professional identity according to the

dimension of professional identity each reason was related to (e.g., the role-based or person-based categorizations affected). Our inter-coder reliability was .81 (Cohen, 1960). All discrepancies were discussed and resolved.

## FINDINGS

According to our qualitative analysis, toy designers often perceived that collaborative idea sharing behaviors affected their professional identities. This insight helped us to develop a framework defining the professional identities of these toy designers. Further, our findings suggest that specific types of collaborative behaviors (i.e., idea giving or idea taking) affected specific dimensions of toy designers' professional identities (i.e., role-based or person-based categorizations) in specific ways (i.e., threaten or affirm these identity dimensions). We discuss these findings below.

### 1. Defining the Professional Identities of Toy Designers

Our data and analysis suggest that toy designers maintain individual, professional identities that reflect their specific skills and attributes, as well as their perceived roles as designers. These identities are separate from their specific job responsibilities. That is, all designers had basically the same job responsibilities (e.g., produce prototypes for toys in their toy lines), but differed in their self-categorizations of central and distinctive skills and roles.

We found that toy designers defined their professional identities primarily along one person-based identity categorization and one role-based categorization (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). The person-based identity categorization that appeared dominant in our data was related to the "creative approach" that designers used when working on new toy designs (i.e., what were their motivations and goals in approaching their creative task). This identity categorization appeared related to the identity categorization of "idealistic" described in the introduction. The role-based

identity categorization dominated our data was the "creative output" that designers felt most strongly defined their work (i.e., what types of work outputs did they think it was their role to produce, what outputs did they most strongly identify with). This identity categorization appeared related to the "shower" categorization described in our introduction. We describe these identity categorizations in more detail below.

**Person-based self-categorizations: Defining creative approach.** The toy designers in our study identified their "creative approach" along a continuum that ranged from "ideological" on one extreme to "pragmatic" on the other extreme, with the mid-range of the continuum defined as "flexible"—meaning someone who could approach things ideologically at times and pragmatically at other times. This is partly consistent with prior research on fine artists, which has shown that ideological motivation represents a common identity dimension of these creative professionals (Macdonald and Wilson, 2005). At the same time, our findings suggest that, at least in corporate contexts, an ideological approach may represent just one endpoint of a continuum of motivations and goals, along which creative workers define themselves.

The toy designers who defined themselves as strongly ideological in their approach to their work appeared to be concerned more with meeting their own standards for creative output than with meeting more pragmatic organizational needs and goals, such as goals for safety, cost, and size. For example, in a typical statement made by a toy designer with an ideological approach, one participant from the CARS group explained:

> I look at other artists and get inspired by their style or their quality of work and I am like I want to try to move that bar, I want to meet that standard but yet still make it my own style. . . . and really that is my ultimate happiness -- just doing art for myself. I can draw a cool car now and I can render it and it looks photo real and it is all nice, and that's what makes me happy.

This point resonates with past research showing that individuals who define themselves as "professional artists" are strongly motivated by the personal satisfaction they gain from creating and pursuing artistic ideals (e.g., Macdonald and Wilson, 2005: 409).

By contrast, the toy designers who identified themselves as working from a more pragmatic creative approach remained cognizant of a project's practical limitations. These designers strongly preferred a problem-solving approach and did not necessarily see their creative work as ideologically motivated. As one designer from the LISENCED TOYS group noted:

> What I'm good at is, I know how to grind [a project] through the system. I know how to style it the right way, I've got market research experience, I can get it through market research system…it's feasibility. And it needs to solve a problem. And that's a lot of what I do as a designer – solve problems.

Finally, the toy designers who claimed to have a more flexible creative approach (i.e., to be ideological at times, and pragmatic at other times) seemed to recognize the need for both approaches at different times in the creative process. Typically, these toy designers claimed that more ideological thinking was needed at the outset of a project, as a means of creatively exploring all options, while more pragmatic thinking was needed near the end of a project, when meeting cost, size, and safety needs became critical. Yet, there were occasions when pragmatic thinking was pushed in the beginning of a project (e.g., if time constraints were great), and ideological thinking was called for at the end of a project (e.g., when a suggested change made for cost reasons severely compromised a central feature of the toy—especially one identified in focus groups as an important influence on a purchase decision). By having a default style that was neither markedly ideological nor pragmatic, these designers were better able perform a greater range of behavior. As one "flexible" designer in the GAMES group reported:

> I like pursuing my vision for a design, but it definitely is true when you are stuck, when you have to just admit that you are stuck, not that you are defeated but rather that hey, this is one company again, one brain, and start going through the brain start picking out

> ideas from others. Normally if I have been looking at something too long or I have been thinking about something too long I get up and I go to my neighbors and I just say hey, here is this product and I'm just tired of looking at it. What do you think?

**Role-based self-categorizations: Defining creative output.** The toy designers in our study defined their primary role-based identity according to the creative output with which they most strongly associated. These creative outputs ranged on a continuum from "specialist" outputs that constituted only a part or "component" of the entire project, such as “primarily ideas” or “primarily products” on one extreme, to outputs that were more comprehensive and inclusive, such as “both idea and product,” on the other extreme. There were also designers who typically completed only part of the project, but could complete “either ideas or products” depending on what was needed. We labeled these designers as "flexible" in their output.

This method of defining professional identity by "what you do" has been described in other research (Pratt et. al., 2006). Further, the notion that professionals define themselves as specialists, who complete only part of a task or job, versus generalists, who can do any part of the job, is also common in studies of professionals in the practice of medicine (Pratt et.al., 2006), consulting (Ibarra, 1999), and finance (Smithson, 2005). Yet, our findings also suggest that for creative workers there is a role-based categorization beyond specialists and generalists: the comprehensive practitioner, who completes all tasks involved in turning out a product. Those who categorized themselves as more comprehensive in their output were similar to the solitary or independent artist categorizations discussed in the introduction (i.e., they did everything themselves).

A few studies of improvisation among musicians and actors provide insight on this comprehensive role-based identity (Zack, 2000; Crossan, 1998). In particular, research that examines the act of "blocking" during group improvisation, suggests that some individual

performers may have trouble giving up their own ideas about the direction of a performance and may resist falling in line with the lead of another performer (Vera and Crossan, 2005). Our findings suggest that the act of blocking may be related to individual creative workers' needs to affirm a "comprehensive output" role-based categorization. That is, blocking may be done by artists to maintain complete control over their creative output.

Toy designers who considered their role as encompassing the entire design process, from ideas to finished products, appeared to take personal ownership of a toy and were reluctant to cede control of any part of the process. Such designers were often concerned about whether the finished product remained true to their original vision, wary of any compromises that might change either the central idea of the toy or the way the finished product worked, looked, and felt. As one designer in CARS, who claimed this comprehensive role-categorization, noted:

> When I am assigned to a project or a project is assigned to me I feel like sort of the world is on my shoulders and I've been the one who has been charged with coming up with every solution and every facet of this product and it is my responsibility and I am not supposed to ask. I think I am a little bit of a control freak so I like being involved in the whole thing.

In contrast, toy designers who defined their creative output as "primarily ideas" focused on conceptualizing the toy and its primary features, perhaps through a drawing, computer model, or rough prototype, but stopped short of identifying or working on specific mechanisms, layouts, graphics, or modeling. As one designer in COOL IDEAS, who identified his role as to produce "primarily ideas", claimed:

> I think I bring more of…helping people formulate their ideas and finalize their ideas. I don't get into the finished products so much, I let other people do that.

In a related manner, those who defined their role-based identities as "primarily products" appeared to take great ownership in final working prototypes and making sure they looked and functioned in ways that met their goals. These designers were often focused on how specific

mechanisms worked, how artwork and graphics looked, and how the total "feel" of the product came across. As one “primarily products” designer in GAMES noted:

> I carry a little book around with me and the things that interest me the most are things that I see in front of me all the time, the small things that people miss. - They always say I was born to do cute stuff. I do cute really well. - I like things to look really nice - But it always seems to me it’s also you could stay those extra hours if you really wanted to get it looking good.

Finally, toy designers who perceived their role to be more generalist, including producing ideas or finished products, depending on what was needed, appeared to see themselves as good at all aspects of the design process, and capable of jumping into a design project at any stage. As one designer in CARS who defined himself as "flexible" in output noted:

> I have a variety of interests. I read generally technical stuff or things that interest me, but I'm able to take from a wide variety of disciplines and if not apply it directly use it as an inspiration for maybe a different way to look at a problem. I think I am pretty creatively flexible in that I try to find a solution that will fit the constraints that I am given. I am not completely unbounded.

**A typology of toy designers' professional identities.** Based on the dimensions of professional identity discussed above, we propose a typology of toy designers' professional identities. Specifically, our data and analysis suggest four different types of professional identities held by toy designers based on the role-based and person-based categorizations already defined. These identities include (1) *independent artists*, defined as idealistic in creative approach and comprehensive in creative output, (2) *visionaries*, defined as idealistic in creative approach and "primarily ideas" in creative output, (3) *craftspersons*, defined as pragmatic in creative approach and "primarily products" in creative output, and (4) *flexible creatives*, defined as either pragmatic or idealistic in creative approach, and either ideas or products as creative output. These professional identities are summarized and illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 1.

[Insert Table 1 and Figure 1 about here]

Overall, we found that the *flexible creative* was the most common type of professional identity held by toy designers in our study, accounting for almost half of the designers we interviewed. *Visionaries* and *craftspersons* together accounted for almost the other half of the designers we interviewed and were equally represented. Finally *independent artists* accounted for less than 10% of the total toy designers in our study, and were clearly the rarest type of professional identity encountered. These findings are not surprising in light of our findings about how collaborative behaviors related to each of these specific professional identities. We discuss these findings next.

**2. Relating Collaborative Behaviors to Professional Identities of Toy Designers**

The collaborative behaviors most commonly linked to our framework of professional creative identities were *creative idea-giving* and *creative idea-taking*. Creative idea-giving involved both unsolicited sharing of creative ideas, as well as providing creative ideas to colleagues when asked for help. It is important to note that, in the current study, creative idea-giving involved conceptual help in the form of a unique or distinctive idea, which differs from simply providing help in the form of effort (e.g., help setting up a toy prototype, or testing a mechanism). Creative idea-taking involved the implementation or serious consideration of creative ideas offered by colleagues. Again, creative idea-taking was distinct from merely taking help in the form of effort and required that the toy designer use or consider a conceptual idea that was unique and distinctive.

**Idea-giving and identity.** Idea giving affected both the role-based categorizations and person-based categorizations of toy designers. On the positive side, idea giving was affirming to those designers whose role-based categorizations were "primarily ideas", and person-based categorizations were "pragmatic".

In this manner, idea giving was affirming to the role-based categorizations for visionaries and flexible creatives, both of whom saw themselves as producing "ideas only" as creative outputs (at least part of the time). As one visionary in LISENCED TOYS noted:

> I give all my ideas, 110% all the time, and if I don't I am stunting myself because it is not one idea that is going to be the best idea. It is learning how to be creatively productive constantly. That's how I see my role here."

In addition, idea giving was affirming to the person-based categorizations of craftspersons and flexible creatives, both of whom saw themselves as pragmatic in approach, and thus willing to help out as needed. In fact, many of these designers saw providing pragmatic advice to other designers as especially affirming to their self-concepts. As one flexible creative from ACTION FIGURES put it:

> I don't come up with the way out there ideas. It is more like well I have an idea of what cost is and what we can do so it is a little more grounded than if you just went to a convention and asked people if you could have any toy that you want what would you want? And that is what I'm good at, and I think it's why I'm valuable to other designers.

At the same time, toy designers who perceived that idea giving conflicted with their role-based categorizations (because they saw their roles as turning out products not ideas), or person-based categorizations (because they saw their creative approach to be idealistic, not pragmatic) were likely to perceive identity threats from the act of idea giving. For example, while visionaries found idea giving to be affirming to their role based categorizations as "idea" producers, they also found idea giving to be threatening to their person-based categorizations as "ideological" in approach. Similarly, idea giving was threatening to independent artists' ideological person-based identities because they fretted that the idea given would not be taken in its pure form, or would not be understood as they intended it to be. As one independent artist in the COOL IDEAS group lamented:

> Sharing ideas can be difficult. It depends on the willingness of the person that you are giving the idea to and a lot of it is just…do they happen to get it. Most of the time they don't get it, and I just don't even bother trying to give it.

Idea giving was threatening to toy designers who perceived their roles as either "primarily products" or as "both ideas and products." In these cases, the task of giving ideas to other designers was seen as something they were either not qualified to do (e.g., in the case of craftspersons), or not something they wanted to do (e.g., in the case of independent artists) because it was not central to producing their creative output. For example, one craftsperson in ACTION FIGURES noted how uncomfortable he felt in meetings, where he was expected to offer ideas, because he was not trained in the role of an idea person. As he reported:

> There are no bad ideas in a team meeting, but you are just sitting there with the people …just putting your head down and going this can't be happening, they can't be saying this, it can't be done, I honestly can't do this type of stuff. I would call that the unbounded out of the box and I don't participate, I mean I can't…by being an engineer by training.

**Idea-taking and identity.** Idea-taking behaviors also had positive and negative effects on the role-based and person-based categorizations of toy designers' professional identities. On the positive side, idea-taking affirmed the person-based categorizations of both craftspersons and flexible creatives. Both of these types of designers perceived their creative approach to be "pragmatic", which often required that they take input from others for the good of the design. These designers were most likely to remark that the overall product was improved by having other's input. As one craftsperson in the GAMES group noted:

> When we design games it can't really be one person's sole vision. Only because different people play things different ways and there really is no way to test how a different personality type will play something unless you sit down and play with them and it is like oh, you are going to do that? I never even thought someone would play in this order. And you need to take that into account when you're designing the board and pieces. So some of it is an investment in the success of the product, as opposed to an investment in my reputation as a designer.

However, idea taking did not appear to affirm the role-based categorizations for craftspersons and flexible creatives, who saw their roles as, primarily, turning out "products" rather than "ideas". We predicted that these toy designers would have viewed idea taking as affirming to their roles, because in order to focus on the finished products, they needed to take in ideas from others. Yet, we did not see any evidence to support this prediction. Instead, we saw evidence that craftspersons, in particular, perceived idea taking as threats to their identities. It was almost as if, once the project was in the finished product stage, craftspersons perceived it as a new project, and the generation of ideas related to finishing the product. In this manner, having the role of making "finished products" meant that a toy designer did not want to take ideas from others. As one craftsperson in the CARS group noted:

> It is a very difficult place to be here when you specialize in something or you have made it a goal to specialize at that. You do the research, you spend the time doing it and then you have a person come in and say it is all wrong. Just to almost fill the room with words to say what you are doing is wrong. I just put a year into a project that went down the toilet because it was mishandled by others -- and it had real potential.

Resistance to idea taking, then, may result from perceptions that such collaboration can hurt the creativity of the final product. Researchers have shown this outcome may actually occur when collaborators are low in ability or skill (Yetter, et.al., 2006). At the same time, other designers noted that resistance to idea taking itself sometimes hurt the finished product. One designer in the GAMES group put it this way:

> I have problems with designers who want the game to look a certain way and it actually hurts game play and that is the most important thing to me is how it plays. If you have a better idea of how it would look that is one thing but if you are going to say "this part of the artwork can only have eight spaces" and we need twelve, that is another thing. If the art won't allow for good game play, then we have problems.

We found that idea taking posed a significant threat to the role-based categorizations of independent artists and visionaries—who saw their roles as coming up with ideas, not taking

them from others. One visionary from COOL IDEAS described his resistance to idea taking as resulting from perceptions that he wasn't being allowed to do the job he was hired to do. As this participant put it:

> There are too many opinions, there are too many important people, there are too many 'A' personalities that want to be heard that maybe don't even have anything valuable to say but need to be heard as compared to a creative person, like me, who is often the outsider who is often quiet, often doesn't want to scream and yell, who doesn't think they need to scream and yell and think that they should be respected for being intelligent and creative which is why you hired them to begin with.

The most commonly-reported threats resulting from idea taking, however, were related to person-based categorizations held by artists and visionaries. These designers viewed their creative approach as ideological, and therefore, did not like to compromise their artistic ideals by taking input from others. As one artist in the CARS group noted:

> I have a tough time when somebody in design says they want me to change something because I think what I am doing is brilliant, and I know that I am wrong but the point is I put my stake in the sand. So a lot of it I push back on in terms of taking help I just really . . . .reject it and finalize around it.

Similarly, a visionary in the LISCENCED TOYS noted:

> I really have a problem with what I think are petty changes, like maybe make it darker blue and lighter blue. Why? Because now I think what happens is …you're losing your identity…because now you share that with someone else, whereas it was your baby. - but if everybody starts changing my design, the way it looks, it's not going to be my design anymore. So even though small changes start to add up.

In summary, our findings reveal that the professional identities of creative workers shape their reactions to collaboration in the form of idea taking and idea giving. These personal reactions may have important effects on the success of their collaborations. A summary of the effects evident in our data is shown in Table 2.

[insert Table 2 about here]

## DISCUSSION

Creative workers often are described as socially dysfunctional, bitterly resentful, and hopelessly prideful (Fletcher, 1999). According to some scholars, these “creative curmudgeons” may demonstrate clinically diagnosable sociopathic tendencies (e.g., Rothenberg, 1990). Indeed, some creative workers are prone to stress and mental illness if they are tied to extrinsic motivational constraints, such as interpersonal relationships (a phenomenon labeled the “Sylvia Plath effect” by Kaufman and Baer, 2002). This unflattering view of creative workers’ sociability may not be surprising given that many archetypal creative icons tend to be notoriously introverted and staunchly independent (e.g., Virginia Woolf, Vincent Van Gogh). In the context of organizations, these ideas imply that professional creative workers can be resistant to collaborating with others and therefore may struggle in interdependent task environments.

Despite this seeming tension between creativity and collaboration, organizations frequently encourage their creative workers to share ideas in the interest of generating more novel products. Thus, understanding the source of creative workers’ aversion to collaboration becomes an important problem for those interested in the determinants of group innovation. Is it simply something about a creative worker’s disposition that leads her to shy away from collaborating with others? That is certainly one possible explanation. However, we highlight another possibility—one more rooted in social psychology rather than personality. Whereas the process of idea sharing may affirm some creative workers’ identities, for others it may threaten their self-concepts. Our findings suggest that personal and role-based identities help shape individual reactions to giving and receiving novel ideas. The insight here is straightforward—to predict whether someone will embrace or recoil from the act of collaboration, we must first understand how they define themselves as a professional creative worker.

**Theoretical Implications**

Our research findings relate to several existing literatures, including work on identity and idea-sharing, as well as self-enhancement and self-verification.

**Identity and idea sharing.** We found evidence that professional identities can influence idea sharing, in part, because of how idea sharing implicates professional identities. Whether people voluntarily provide help or agree to accept help reflects something about "who they are" and what others think of them. Those who provide help are conferred higher levels of social status among their peers, while receiving help can decrease one's status because it suggests incompetence and dependency (e.g., Flynn, 2003; Flynn, Reagans, Amanatullah, and Ames, 2006). For professional creative workers, these status dynamics may be more intense because their professional status is closely tied together with their independent artistic contributions. Many of these workers have concern that the artistic contributions they give to others and the contributions they receive can dilute their professional status, or how highly regarded they become in the future.

Employee reactions to receiving help have not been a primary interest for researchers interested in workplace cooperation (e.g., Flynn, 2006). Instead, most of the scholarly attention directed toward employee cooperation focuses on help-giving or patterns of giving and receiving help. According to Mauss's (1925) seminal treatise on gift-giving, the process of providing benefits to others involves a tripartite set of obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to receive, and the obligation to reciprocate. Although the norm of reciprocity occupies the spotlight in most discussions of social exchange, the experience of giving help and the experience of receiving it also have unique effects on employee motivation and performance. Like reciprocity, the obligations to receive help and to give help represent a critical force in maintaining and strengthening social bonds among workers (Flynn and Brockner, 2006).

The obligation to receive help encourages people to accept help graciously (Brown and Levinson, 1993). Our data suggest that this obligation often troubles creative workers, particularly when the help they have been offered is unsolicited. In response to an unsolicited offer of assistance, people may feel pressure to accept others' generosity, even if they are not in need of such assistance (e.g., Camerer, 1998; Cialdini, 1991). A refusal may lead those who offer help to experience a loss of "face" (e.g., Goffman, 1955) or feelings of embarrassment (Brown and Levinson, 1993; Grice, 1975). Refusing help might imply that the gesture was inappropriate, inadequate, or perhaps offensive to the target (e.g., Goffman, 1971). Thus, noncompliance can cause a rift in an employee relationship and, at the same time, violate organizational norms that encourage cooperation and respect for others' ideas.

The important insight gained from the present research is that the threat of receiving ideas from colleagues is powerful for some creative workers, but not for all of them. Several creative workers in our sample—the *craftspeople*, for example—were receptive to the helpful advice they were offered by others (at least at first), believing that the appearance and functionality of the finished product was their paramount concern. A similar point could be made for giving help in the form of ideas. Some creative workers felt affirmed by this gesture (e.g., visionaries), believing that it reinforced their need to be creative, whereas others felt threatened by sharing their ideas with others (e.g., independent artists) because they worried about the dilution of their overall contribution. In short, creative workers can adopt varied identities, which define their attitudes toward collaboration and their willingness to engage in it.

**Self-enhancement vs. self-verification.** In his comprehensive review of psychological research on the self, Baumeister (1998) notes that individuals seek three distinct types of information about themselves: (1) self-appraisals (Trope, 1975)—that provide accurate feedback

about their traits and abilities, (2) self-enhancements (Greenwald et.al., 1988)—that provide favorable information about their traits and abilities, and (3) self-verifications (Swann, 1985; 1987)—that confirm their perceptions of their traits and abilities. He also points out that these sources of information are not equally strong motivators. Instead, the motive to attain self-enhancements appears to be stronger than the motive to attain self-verifications, and much stronger than the motive to attain self-appraisals (Sedikides, 1993). As Baumeister (1998: 689) notes:

> [P]eople are most strongly driven to discover and hear favorable, flattering things about themselves. At a distant second, they desire information that confirms what they already believe about themselves. The wish to learn new, accurate information about the self is weakest.

According to Baumeister (1998), the professional creative workers in our sample may be more strongly motivated to receive feedback indicating that they are good colleagues (i.e., a self-enhancement) than to receive feedback confirming that they are independent artists (i.e., a self-verification). However, our findings suggest that highly creative toy designers were often willing to forego self-enhancements (e.g., being a good colleague) in favor of self-verifications (e.g., being an independent artist). In fact, our findings showed that toy designers were willing to not only forego positive self-enhancements, but also to receive negative self-deprecations (e.g., being a poor colleague) for engaging in behaviors that confirmed and protected their existing professional identities.

Current discussions of the trade-offs between motives for self-enhancement and self-verification have centered on instances in which individuals with low self-esteem (i.e., those holding unfavorable views of themselves) are also certain about their self-concepts (Baumeister, 1998). In these cases, psychologists have examined whether or not people seek out positive (but

inconsistent), or negative (but self-verifying) feedback. Their empirical findings suggest that self-enhancing feedback will be sought out if the low self-esteem individual would like to improve his/her affective state, while self-verifying feedback will be sought out if the same individual wishes to confirm an existing self-schema (e.g., Swann, 1990; Swann, et.al., 1989; Swann, et.al., 1987).

Our findings suggest a different context in which trade-offs between self-verification and self-enhancement exist. Specifically, we identify a situation in which an individual (presumably with high self-esteem) must decide whether or not to engage in a behavior that may be simultaneously self-verifying and self-deprecating. Here the choice is not to seek out positive or negative feedback, but to engage or not engage in a behavior that might signal both positive and negative attributes (e.g.., cooperative vs. dependent). In this manner, our findings relate to research on the negative act of "blocking" in group improvisation (when one individual rejects the suggestion or thought process of another). Most studies of blocking investigate how such an act affects the culture of "experimentation" that is central to high quality improvisation, and discuss the effects of blocking on the entire group, rather than on any individual (Vera and Crossan, 2005). Yet, our findings suggest that blocking may have positive effects on individual performers, if doing so affirms their creative identity.

In this manner, our findings provide important insight on the situational triggers that activate self-verification motives over self-enhancement. We propose that if a specific *behavior* (e.g., abstaining from collaboration) is both self-verifying and unflattering, an individual may nevertheless engage in that behavior if it is central to his/her distinctive professional identity, and if not engaging in that behavior can affirm an "undesired self" (Ogilvie, 1987). In the case of our toy designers, this means that those we defined as "artists", "craftspersons", and "visionaries"

may have withheld idea-giving or idea-taking behaviors because acting in those ways was central to their professional identities, and doing the opposite (i.e., engaging in idea-giving and taking) was viewed as threatening to these identities.

**Directions for future research**

While the findings from our research offer insight on the problem of creative collaborations in organizations, they also introduce a number of compelling questions. How can artists who adopt conflicting identities resolve their conflicts in a productive manner, if they can at all? Further, what pairing of identities, or combination of identities among a group of professional creative workers, lead to the most creative collaborations in terms of idea novelty and usefulness? Finally, what can managers in organizations do to activate a desired identity for a particular creative worker (or for many creative workers), assuming that such identities are not stable and enduring, but can be primed by situational influence? Future research might find it worthwhile to investigate the answers to many of these questions by assessing creative workers' professional identities and tracking the outcomes of their informal collaborations.

Future research might also find it worthwhile to investigate the psychological mechanisms highlighted in our discussion. Previous research has linked the process of self-verification to creativity in work groups—when members of diverse groups see their colleagues as their colleagues see themselves then creative task performance improves (Polzer, Milton, and Swann, 2002). In our sample of toy designers, the diversity of creative identities was apparent to everyone, although it is unclear whether colleagues' accuracy in appraising one another's creative identities had an impact on their work. It would be interesting to examine whether the level of agreement between self-reports of professional identities ("I think of myself as a visionary") and colleagues' reports ("Greg thinks of himself as a visionary") influenced their

idea-sharing behaviors. That is, if Greg views himself as a visionary, then is Greg willing to give help to, and accept ideas from, only those colleagues who recognize and acknowledge his visionary identity? Additional work on the notion of interpersonal congruence in judging creative identities might yield some useful insight on creative collaborations.

We recognize that our study is limited in several respects. In particular, the professional creative workers in our sample are employed by only one firm, whose product line is targeted to a specific demographic market. While we did not consider between-firm variance in how professional creative workers collaborate, we suspect that such variance exists and that it is likely meaningful. For example, we would expect the distribution of professional creative workers who identify themselves as independent artists, visionaries, craftspeople, or flexible colleagues to vary according to the task environment, industry norms, and organizational culture. Whereas some firms may strongly emphasize the need for collaboration (and informally reward it) others may espouse independent, competitive values. In a more “dog-eat-dog” organizational setting, craftspeople may find that shunting aside advice from their colleagues poses a less significant threat to the role-based component of their professional identity.

We have attempted to illustrate that creative workers have unique professional identities that help differentiate themselves from one another in ways that correspond to their personal self-concepts and role-based priorities. This contextualized view of professional creative identities suggests that if creativity scholars want an answer to the important question of “Who helps, when, and why,” they need to more completely understand how creative workers themselves answer the question, “Who am I … and what does it mean if I help you or you help me?” For managers in organizations, the value in recognizing the multi-dimensionality of professional creative identities is significant. Firms aware of such multi-dimensionality might be more

successful in recruiting the type of creative workers they want or encouraging existing workers to adopt a particular creative identity—effective means toward generating more creative collaborations.

## CONCLUSION

In 1954, Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues conducted a study in which children attending a camp were asked to work on a joint problem with camp members from a rival group (The classic "Robbers Cave" experiment). In that experiment, Sherif discovered that introducing a common superordinate identity by way of interdependence (and a sense of shared fate) elicited greater cooperation and ultimately more creative solutions to joint problems. Many organizational researchers have since validated this seminal finding and further explored how superordinate identity can be activated, strengthened, and changed in the interest of facilitating creative collaborations. In the present research, we suggest that the link between identity and creative collaborations in organizations may be more complex. Aside from considering whether others share a superordinate identity, workers may ask themselves if giving help and advice, or accepting it from a colleague, affirms their desired self-concept and/or threatens it. To better understand how collaborations among professional creative workers can help stimulate innovation, we must appreciate these different personal and role-based self-categorizations and how they influence the process of idea sharing.

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**Table 1**
**Evidence of Creative Identity Types Among Toy Designers**

| **Creative Identity Type** | **Independent Artist** | **Visionary** | **Craftsperson** | **Flexible Creative** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Person Based Categorizations: Creative Approach** | Idealistic<br><br>" I am a creative person who doesn’t want to fit in with the crowd. That is what stands me apart, that is what I strive for. People who are the creative type usually want to stand out. " | Idealistic<br><br>"I try to be more visionary and leading edge, and let someone else worry about the practical side." | Pragmatic and Collaborative<br><br>"Sometimes other designers' ideas are not selected and I think that disappoints them because it is too far out there or…wow that is neat, that is interesting but I am not sure how we will market that. I think about how it will fit into our line. If it is too weird I tend to rein it in to something that is feasible." | Pragmatic or Idealistic<br><br>"I think I am pretty good at taking whatever targets I have and just accepting and being creative from the stand point of fitting within the constraints I am given. I think I am pretty creative in that I try to find a solution that will fit the constraints that I am given." |
| **Role Based Categorizations: Creative Output** | Both Idea and Product<br><br>"I know there are other designers in my group that don’t have a problem with coming up with an idea and then letting it go and having somebody else run with it. I guess I feel more ownership I guess. I want to carry it through further down the road." | Ideas Only<br><br>" In terms of creativity how I am different from some of my colleagues is I would say basically my thought process, the way I am able to think abstractly. For me its more about the ideas than actually seeing the finished product. There are some of us who like to work on the problems here, and we really enjoy finding creative solutions." | Product Only<br><br>" I just enjoy working with my hands so much and I think that is the bulk of the guys out here. - . I like to come up with something, I work on it extremely fast, creative, competitive, let me build my model." | Either Idea or Product<br><br>"If you look at it as a collective gathering of individuals that all work for the same company you can still have ownership in it and have it be extremely kick ass because quite truthfully if you at least get people’s input…it is not like you have to actually use their input but you can start to build your own consensus in your mind." |
| **Interview Evidence** | Strong | Moderate | Strong | Strong |
| **Observation Evidence** | Strong | Moderate | Moderate | Moderate |

**Table 2**
**Effects of Idea-Giving and Idea-Taking on Professional Identities of Toy Designers**

| **Creative Identity Type** | **Independent Artist**<br>- idealistic approach<br>- idea & product output | **Visionary**<br>- idealistic approach<br>- idea only output | **Craftsperson**<br>- pragmatic approach<br>- product only output | **Flexible Creative**<br>- flexible approach<br>- idea or product output |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Effects of IDEA GIVING on Professional Identity** | Threatens Role-Based and Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Affirms Role-Based and Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Threatens Role-Based Identity Categorizations and Affirms Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Affirms Role-Based and Person-Based Identity Categorizations |
| **Interview Evidence** | | | | |
| **Observation Evidence** | | | | |
| **Effects of IDEA TAKING on Professional Identity** | Threatens Role and Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Threatens Role and Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Affirms Role-Based Identity Categorizations Threatens and Person-Based Identity Categorizations | Affirms Person-Based Identity Categorizations |
| **Interview Evidence** | | | | |
| **Observation Evidence** | | | | |

**Figure 1: A Framework of Creative Identity**