

The creative small group – towards a framework of collaborative creativity within the creative sphere

by

Gerald R. A. Bartels

THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

In the
Department of Communication Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

August 2010

© Gerald R. A. Bartels 2010

Für Ila und Eliah

Table of Contents

CREATIVITY AND SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION	6
The nature of small groups	12
Small group communication	13
Creativity and creative small group	17
 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGY	 24
The qualitative paradigm	26
The interpretive paradigm	30
Key principles and assumptions of qualitative research	32
The philosophical and methodological foundation of qualitative communication research	36
Epistemological foundation	39
Phenomenology and hermeneutics	41
Sociological-theoretical requirements of qualitative communication research	46
Symbolic interactionism and social constructivism	46
Participant observation and ethnography	53
 RESEARCH METHODS	 57
Research setting	60
Participant observation	62
<i>A qualitative approach to participant observation</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Characteristics of participant observation</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>The object of observation</i>	<i>68</i>
<i>Access to the field</i>	<i>70</i>
<i>The role of the researcher in the field</i>	<i>71</i>
<i>The process and phases of tactical observation</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Early stage</i>	<i>74</i>
<i>Integration stage</i>	<i>77</i>
<i>Leaving the field</i>	<i>81</i>
<i>Field relations</i>	<i>82</i>

<i>Time</i>	85
Ero-epic (free) dialogue	87
Qualitative documents	92
Data collection and the process of interpretation	93
Data analysis and the process of interpretation	95
 CREATIVITY AS A COMMUNICATION PROCESS	103
Means of communication	103
<i>Face-to-face communication</i>	105
<i>The unplanned, creative communicative act</i>	106
<i>Creative vocal outbursts</i>	109
<i>The planned, creative communicative act – the creative brain starter</i> <i>dialogue</i>	112
<i>Tool-mediated communication</i>	117
The collaborative process of creativity	122
<i>The operational phase model of creativity</i>	125
<i>The thematic stage model of creativity</i>	126
<i>The role of the client and the collaborative process of creativity</i>	133
 ENVIRONMENTAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE CREATIVE SPHERE: SPACE, TIME, AND ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE	139
Creativity and Space	142
Creativity and time	147
A creative organisational culture, creative leadership and the need for change	150
 THE CREATIVE SPHERE - A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	170
 REFERENCES	179

Zur Methode wird nur der getrieben,
dem die Empirie lästig wird.¹

(Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Maximen und Reflexionen”)

Creativity, its manifestations, and its consequences are both nuanced and elusive.

As a “floating participant,” I dashed on a scooter through the Lebenswelt (lifeworld) of my participants and, for a while, abandoned the behaviour of a social researcher, a more or less passive observer of the moment. Grounded in the qualitative paradigm, this ethnographic study explores and interprets the various processes and means of communication used by a creative small group and strives to understand how the group members are influenced by and simultaneously define an environmental space that I call the creative sphere.

This understanding of creativity considers the various interactive and communicative acts and the diverse environmental attributes that constitute the creative sphere. Similar to the overlapping character of the pieces of a kaleidoscope, the interactions within the creative sphere provide colourful interrelations between its social elements. Thus, creativity refers to a contextual capability for meaningful novelty or novel ideas, which emerge from interaction.

The theoretical framework further develops previous understandings of creativity as only the relationship between creative individuals and their social environment. My work stresses the importance of the collaborative aspect of creativity. Consequently, I refer to communication as the driving force of the emergent phenomenon of collaborative creativity.

¹ Only he who finds *empiricism* irksome is driven to method.

CREATIVITY AND SMALL GROUP COMMUNICATION

For decades, research on the collaborative process of creativity has not attracted much attention of creativity researchers. This is astonishing because organisations have recognised the economic potential arising from their employees working creatively in collaboration. Larger organisations depend on creative teamwork and group collaboration throughout the development of complex products or services. Even though they employ experts, highly experienced individuals, organisations understand the advantage and necessity of collaboration. Furthermore, an organisation's survival depends on adapting to a constantly varying and fluctuating environment, and to do this, organisations in various sectors of our society need to facilitate innovative and creative processes that influence the overall decision-making mechanism.

Regardless of their respective talents, creativity influences the daily pursuits of committed humans and empowers them to excel in whatever it is they undertake. Richard L. Florida (2002) reflects upon the ubiquitous character of creativity:

That driving force is the rise of human creativity as the key factor in our economy and society. Both at work and in other spheres of our lives, we value creativity more highly than ever, and cultivate it more intensely” (p. 4).

According to Dean Keith Simonton (1997), “Much of creativity occurs in a social environment, the interplay between individual creators stimulating the emergence of ideas that might not arise by more solitary means” (p. 315). Various researchers focus on the human interactions and activities that take place in the social systems that we call groups (Amabile, 1996; Isaksen, Murdock, Firestien, & Treffinger, 1993). Although the past 30 years have seen a tremendous proliferation of theories and models with regards to group decision-making performance, the notion of creativity in work teams and the research of creative small group communication are still trailing behind (Jarboe, 1999; Salazar, 2002). At the centre of the undertaken research lie inquiries such as: how to facilitate various communication techniques that

have been shown to enhance group creativity; how much groups benefit at the stage of decision making from a large number of ideas generated during the creativity phase, which is often called brainstorming; how much impact the improvement of creativity at the group level will have on the overall organisational innovation; and, finally, economic well-being.

Another main area of creativity research on groups focuses on how organisational environments might facilitate or hinder group creativity. Organisational characteristics that are currently under examination are: hierarchical structures (Basadur, 1997); culture and climate (Jarboe, 1996, 1999); surveillance, competition, and evaluation (Dunbar, 1995; Hilz, Johnson, & Turoff, 1986; Hollingshead & McGrath, 1995); and, the effects of group and societal structures on the outcome of the decision-making process (Amabile, 1988; Bormann, 1996; Hill & Amabile, 1993; Salazar, 1995; 1996; 2002). Thus far, the applied research approaches have led to an inconclusive explanation of creativity within groups in organisational settings and have left out the role of communication in group creativity. Studies with a focus on organisational characteristics or on the psychology of a creative individual disregard exploring the interaction that takes places between group members and focus on facilitating the role of a particular individual group member (Salazar, 2002).

This exploratory-interpretive study strives for an amalgamation of the research findings from the socio-psychological discipline with the communicational perspective because current research inadequately describes the overall process of creativity in small groups. Studies exploring creativity in small groups focus mostly on individuals and the facilitation of their particular creativity, however, they neglect describing and analysing the interaction between small group members. This is fascinating in a way because creative achievements no longer rely on individuals only, but rather, on collaborative efforts. Gerhard O. Mensch (1993) argues that “teamwork is an essential ingredient for successful innovation and transformation. Time and time

again studies of successful innovation have emphasized the need for and importance of close cooperation among members of multifunctional groups” (p. 262). Similar to Mensch’s deliberations, most researchers restrict their inquiries on collaboration to the implementation phase of a creative idea, which is also called innovation, and leave out the social process of ideation as such (Sonnenburg, 2009). In contrast, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) and Teresa Amabile (1996) underline the relationship between the individuals and the social aspects of creativity. Both conceptualize creativity as a phenomenon that is independent of the acting individual. Acknowledging the role of social attributes that influence a group’s creative performance, their research resulted in more comprehensive models on creativity in groups and teams (Nijstad & Paulus, 2003; Nemiro, 2002; Kurtzberg & Amabile, 2000; 2001). Indirectly, this field of research usually takes note of the communication function within small groups that are concerned with creativity, however Sonnenburg (2004) explicitly recognizes communication as “the core aspect for collaborative creativity” (p. 256). Grounded on the system theory of Niklas Luhmann (1990; 1984; 2000), Sonnenburg suggests a theoretical framework for collaborative product creation. Based on his experiences within the advertising industry, Sonnenburg (2007) admits to having left out the initial process of ideation and does not rely on specific research findings.

Premised that a comprehensive understanding of creativity involves considering the collaborative and interactive aspects of this phenomenon, this research study focuses on the role of communication within the processes of a particular creative small group. Grounded in the qualitative paradigm, the study explores and interprets the various processes and means of communication used by the creative small group and strives to understand how the group members are influenced by and simultaneously define an environmental space that I call *the creative sphere*.

Inspired by so many small group communication scholars, I accepted the challenge of exploring the social world of a creative small group in its natural setting. By means of an ethnographic study I observed within eight weeks the day-to-day interaction of a creative communication agency, which relentlessly tries to strike new paths in the field of creative communication to go beyond the usual production of communicative artefacts in the advertising business. As part of my understanding of a research study that is defined by the qualitative paradigm, I did not start my exploration with a specific framework in mind. Within the methodology and research method sections I outline the specificities of my participant observation approach, which is characterized mainly by the tradition of *Verstehen*, social constructivism, and pragmatism; according to Creswell (2009) a modern understanding of pragmatism is as follows:

There are many forms of this philosophy, but for many, pragmatism as a worldview arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions. ...Instead of focusing on methods, researchers emphasize the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem. (p. 10)

Creswell emphasises that we have to understand, in other words, to *verstehen* the explored social phenomenon. The notion of *Verstehen* has been one of the most important principles in qualitative research. Based on the early deliberations of Max Weber (1929) and Edmund Husserl (1950a; 1950b; 1958), many scholars, such Alfred Schütz (1944; 1971; 1974) and Roland Girtler (1981; 2004) — just to name the ones that are most relevant for my study—developed and applied the tradition of *Verstehen*. Deliberately or not, most qualitative studies will apply the concept of *Verstehen*.

The following quotation will explain why:

Moreover, the epistemological principle of qualitative research is *Verstehen* (the understanding) of complex relationships rather than explanation by isolation of single relationship, such as ‘cause-and-effect’. *Verstehen* is oriented, in the sense of ‘methodically controlled understanding of the otherness’, towards comprehension of the perspective of the other.

(Flick, Kardorff, Steinke, 2007, p. 23)

The tradition of *Verstehen* underlines the ideas of social constructivism, which stresses that the world we live in is not an objective reality, rather it is co-constructed by individuals and that we make sense out of our observations.

Throughout my field research I immersed myself into the reality of my participants and interacted with them in a profound and intense manner (Lüders & Reichertz, 1986). My observations and dialogues with the participants give rise mainly to an understanding of the interrelation of participants, their communication, and the space within the organisational environment. The analysis chapters of my thesis provide an in- depth interrogation and interpretation of the social phenomenon of the creative sphere. My intention is to enhance our understanding of the communicative process of collaborative creativity in creative small groups, which is of vital importance for organisations because they require collaboration throughout the creative process of developing complex products or services.

The conclusion will introduce a preliminary proposal towards a fundamental and theoretically sound framework of creativity in small groups, which is situated in the perspective of communication studies. This framework provides a foundation for further qualitative studies. It serves as a theoretical conflation of the various theories of creativity that are grounded in the sociological and psychological disciplines.

The nature of small groups

Small groups are all around us and we are members at least of one or more of them. The circle of life of human beings is determined by the dependence on other human beings, for instance parents who guide supportively our first years in life. We cannot exist without being a member of a social group (Elias, 1970). Although everyone has a broad idea of the characteristics of this social phenomenon, agreeing on a precise definition of a small group has proven to be an academic challenge for scholars around the world. Often, cultural backgrounds and experiences exacerbate the problem.

For the definition of the small group's nature and elements in this project, I refer to George Caspar Homans' (1950, p. 1) statement that a small group is composed of "a collection of people, few enough in number to be able to interact and communicate with each other on a regular basis in order to reach a common goal." According to Homan (1950), there are five basic elements of a (small) group that constitute this basic definition: *number, purpose, interdependence, perceptual boundary, and interaction*.

There is agreement on the number of people and this is significant for this research object. The majority of conducted studies and academic articles are based on the assumption that a small group is composed of at least three and no more than 12 to 15 people (Hirokawa, Cathcart, Samovar, & Henman, 2003).

The members of a small group must have a conjoint purpose. The effectiveness and overall quality of small groups' undertakings depend upon the degree to which small groups' participants are committed to a commonly agreed-upon group goal. However, group members might have individual purposes and do not always strive for the same things. But there must be at least one common target, which they all want to achieve and contribute to. Without this important characteristic a small group does not function.

The element of *interdependence* refers to the interaction between members of the system small group. Especially in a small group, behaviours, actions and communication, in general, are influenced by and influence the other group members. The group as a system relies on the tasks and assignments of its members. In that way, failures relating to the obligation of a specific group member will make it difficult for the other group members to carry out their task and in the end will endanger the whole group project. This is especially true if vital tasks are assigned only to one group member and there is no so-called *plan B*.

Another essential feature of a small group relates to *perceptual boundaries*. The existence of a small group relies on a commonly perceived identity. It is not just the feeling of togetherness that is characteristic for group members; more importantly, the group members must see themselves differentiated from those who are outside that particular group. There are different and distinguishing ways for group members that help them to orientate and to specify if they are an “insider” or an “outsider” of that particular group.

So far, I have addressed the characteristics of a small group, e. g. number, purpose, interdependence, and perceptual boundary. The essential components of interaction and communication, respectively, will be addressed throughout the following description of small group communication.

Small group communication

There is indeed no agreed upon definition of communication and what it is that we study in the field of communication studies. However, a serious research commitment needs to adhere to academic research requirements and so we need to come to an understanding regarding the definition of communication and small group communication respectively.

The terminology and interpretation of communication have altered over time. First, the term communication was used more as a fashionable etiquette and, lately, has become a buzzword. Nowadays, it is on everyone's lips. The Latin verb *communicare* generally means to share, to inform, participate, attend, etc. It is difficult to find another word especially in the English language since all the translations that are enumerated here also have another Latin root word. Here, we should focus on the assumption that communication is characterized by a social behaviour, according to Roland Burkart (2002), Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin, and Don D. Jackson (1967), and Max Weber (1964), just to name a few. The concept of communication is more than the agreement on a distinctive definition. Nevertheless, for the purpose of observing group communication I also cannot deny the necessity of a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of communication and small group communication respectively.

It is still common among scholars of creativity research to utilise Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver's understandings of communication as an information transmission vehicle (Nijstad & Paulus, 2003). Gerhard Maletzke's (1963) definition of communication also relies on the transmission character of communication but also points out that: "Communication is the mediation and transfer of meaning between [human] beings" (p. 18). I understand Malezke's (1963) definition as an initial situation within the field of communication and suppose that because there are various and distinct traditions of communication studies, a broader definition enables scholars to reflect upon and bring together the various ideas of their particular disciplines.

With regards to small group communication, Thomas E. Harris and John Sherblom (2005) expand the metaphorical interpretation of communication by defining small group communication as: "the transactional process of using symbolic behaviour to achieve shared meaning among group members over a period of time" (p. 4). This and similar definitions do not seem to sufficiently cover the substratum of small group communication, since small group

communication is a complex process, which involves a compound interrelationship between various group members and dynamic elements. The emergence and further development of a small group depends regularly on the establishment of communication channels and the sharing of relevant common goals, beliefs, and values.

Therefore, a small group requires regular interaction and communication among its members. It enables group members to provide feedback, coordinate actions, control and solve difficult group situations, and to agree upon specific rules and group procedures (Poole & Hirokawa, 1996). B. Aubrey Fisher (1976) coined the term *groupness* to emphasize the necessity of an environmental atmosphere characterized by a certain similarity among people, sine qua non for a viable small group. And so we still need to develop an understanding of communication that will also consider the interaction and behavioural aspects of small groups. Luhmann's (1984) theoretical deliberations on the phenomenon of the system seem to function as a guide towards understanding small group communication since small groups can be thought of as social micro-systems (Elias, 1970). Luhmann defines communication as an emergent phenomenon that is beyond the scope of the participants of a particular communicative act and opposes the Shannon and Weaver's transmission of communication model (Krallmann & Zeimann, 2001). Luhmann stresses that the sender does not release or lose *something* that the receiver receives. The whole idea of possessing, giving, and receiving is insufficient for an understanding of communication. Luhmann's concept can be summarized by the following citation: "Humans cannot communicate. Only communication can communicate" (Luhmann, 1990, p. 31; Gumbrecht & Pfeiffer, 1994, p. 371). The disentanglement of communication from the human being also speaks in favour of an understanding of creativity as a phenomenon that is not only defined by the participants involved, but also characterized by an interactive creative sphere with its various stimuli. In other words, I

suggest conceptualizing creativity as a phenomenon that is emancipated from the creative human being.

But let us come back to Luhmann's (1990) concept of the communicative act. Luhmann understands communication as a phenomenon that depends on the synthesis of three successive selections: the selection of information, the selection of message (in the true sense of the Latin word *communicare*), and the selection of a certain *understanding*. According to Luhmann (1984), one can only speak of communication when the "Ego" (the receiver) understands that the "Alter" (sender) has imparted a message in the direction of the "ego" (the receiver) (p. 193). In general, social sciences define the *ego* as the sender and the *alter* as the receiver. Luhmann, however, changes these definitions and emphasises the act of understanding by assigning the role of understanding to the *ego*.

The selection of an understanding, or *Verständnis*—to speak in Max Weber's (1922) terminology²—is essential for communication. Ego's understanding completes this particular communicative act, however, it can also initiate another communicative act and initiates a self-referential and autopoietic process. One can speak of the emergence of an autonomous system: Communication produces communication and, in accordance with Luhmann, solely communication. To conclude, Luhmann's notion of an autopoietic system, a genuine system requires another selection: the selection of a subsequent, non-communicative agency. Autopoiesis only functions when the Ego incorporates his or her understanding of the previous communicative act in a subsequent action. By this action the Ego can either accept or decline the mediated information of the Alter.³

² *Verständnis* is a declension of Max Weber's (1922) word *Verstehen*, meaningful understanding, a basic concept in sociology (Giddens, 1993).

³ For a further understanding of Luhmann's notion of a self-referential and autopoietic system with respect to the communicative interaction between social agents and their means of communication within a social system, I refer the reader to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and Karl Ludwig Pfeiffer's (1994) deliberations.

With Luhmann's concept in mind, I would like to explain briefly my interpretation of a type of communication that Erving Goffman (1962) introduced to the discipline of sociology, to wit, *interaction*. Interaction structures the social environment in which collaborative creativity takes place. Some scholars speak of *collaborative creativity* and some of creativity in small groups. I will elaborate in the next chapter on the difference between both terms and the approach that I decided to adopt. Presently, however, it is important to think about interaction as distinguished by mutual influences of individuals towards their actions while being at the same place at the same time (Luhmann, 1984).⁴

At this point, I would like to deviate from Goffman and Luhmann's understanding of interaction, which requires the physical presence of all involved in a particular communicative act. I propose that precisely the absence of some participants defines the interrelation within the creative sphere where small group communication takes place. The reader should not think of tool-mediated communication as a medium only to bridge the gap of space or time, e. g. teleconferences, communication via email or other written media. This is essential for an understanding of what I regard as the creative sphere and will be explained within the analysis chapters of my thesis. In summary, creative small group communication within a creative sphere focuses on mutual perception of the participants and an awareness of the creative process within the creative sphere. Some of the communicative acts occur within seconds, minutes and some are characterized by a longer intermittence (Luhmann, 1984); they all characterize communication in a creative sphere.

⁴ One could also agree with Luhmann's conclusion that these interactions constitute a simple but organic social system.

Creativity and creative small groups

Defining creativity is as difficult as it is to be creative. Nevertheless, a preliminary determination of the main characteristics of creativity is useful for the understanding of the role of communication in creative small groups. Generally, scholars are creative, especially when it comes to creating definitions and developing terminology. So what constitutes creativity? Here are some descriptions: “When what you do is new, different, and helpful, it is creative” (Goman, 2000, p. 12). “Creativity is going beyond the current boundaries of technology, knowledge, social norms or beliefs..., seeing and acting on new relationships, thereby bringing them to life” (Anderson, 1992, p. 41). “Creativity ... involves the power to originate, to break away from the existing ways of looking at things, move freely in the realm of imagination, to create ... new ideas and strong feelings” (Sachs, 1995, p. 241). Various definitions focus on different aspects of the notion of creativity. Currently, cognitive psychology, social psychology, organisational behaviour, as well as communication studies are the predominant disciplines that deal with the conception of creativity (Jarboe, 1999). Whether creativity has to be distinguished from other concepts, such as logical thinking, innovation, critical thinking or divergent and *associative thinking* (Jarboe, 1999) is beyond of the scope of this study. Yet, it is necessary to keep in mind the various concepts of creativity, how they coincide, and how to distinguish them from other similar notions, such as learning and innovation, because they influence the definition and understanding of creative small groups. Abran J. Salazar’s (2002) definition, acknowledges J. Richard Hackman’s (1995) deliberations:

Creativity is a communicatively constituted and emergent process through which a group produces novel and relevant ideas, responses, processes, or products. Creativity is concerned with the generation of unique ideas, responses, processes, or products; relatively little emphasis, except as it is

necessary to fulfil the relevance criterion, is placed on their evaluation and implementation.⁵ (p. 181)

When reading this definition over and over again, one might feel forced to contribute one's own definition of creativity, or at least, to redraft Salazar's definition. In particular, the word "ideas" prompts at least another question: What does he mean by ideas? Unfortunately, Salazar keeps the reader in the dark about his notion of "ideas." Furthermore he does not consider any environmental attributes or interrelations regarding a creative group working in collaboration.

Because of the multitudinous variety of definitions of creativity and its relationship to various communicative and environmental aspects, I introduce definitions that enhance the research perspective that emerged during my fieldwork, analysis and comprehension phases. Sorting out and choosing definitions that support one's own working definition also implies a consideration of the concepts and perspectives that constitute the respective definitions. So the selection of a definition is one part, applying its underlying conception another. The following deliberations on the concept of creativity foster a creative understanding that emphasizes the characteristics of the creative sphere I theorize in the conclusion of this project: Interaction, communication, and the social environment, which is comprised of the agents and agencies.

Throughout the beginnings of creativity research, scholars concentrated on the analysis of how the creative individual functions (Wallace & Gruber, 1989). Joy Paul Guilford (1950) introduced a psychometrical test method to observe creative people and their cognitive qualities. According to Guilford, "To the psychologist, the problem is as broad as the qualities that contribute significantly to creative productivity. In other words, the psychologist's problem is that of creative personality" (p. 444). Research interests that determined this perspective include

⁵ Within the discipline of creativity, the term *innovation* refers to a post-evaluation state in which a creative idea is implemented, i. e. idea executing, adaptation to the conditions of various social environments and, finally, acceptance by that social environment (Meusburger, Funke, & Wunder, 2009; Sonnenburg, 2004).

inquiries about (1) the relationship between creativity and intelligence, (2) personality characteristics, and (3) motivation factors (Sonnenburg, 2007). These psychological perspectives on creativity focused on experimental settings in order to monitor the process of ideation and its various attributes influencing the overall creative process. As is common in psychological research, manipulations and control characterized and still determine the, I would say, test set-up for the black box of human creativity. Others utilised a biographical method that focuses on single cases in order to arrive at an “evolving system” (Wallace & Gruber, 1999, p. 93). This approach denies categorizing human features of creativity and relies on characteristics based on an in-depth analysis of every single explored individual. These early attempts of human creativity emphasize either an “in-vitro” or “in-vivo” concept of creative individuals (Dunbar, 1995). In-vivo perspectives have been acknowledged gradually to meet the requirements of multidisciplinary research endeavours towards creativity research.

Trying to conceive the emerging phenomenon of creativity, researchers started to conceptualize models of the creative process. First, the focus was on cognitive models, which emphasized the mental process of individuals (Wallace, 1926; Hayes, 1989). Later, scholars such as Amabile (1988; 1996) and Csikszentmihalyi (1990) incorporated a social-cultural perspective to the understanding of creative processes. Although the models of creativity process have reached a complexity of diverse integral components, they are still grounded on a sequence of phases that define the overall creative process. Sophisticated phase models contain various feedback options and interrelations between the different attributes of creative processes, e.g. social, communicative and psychological, however, based on my experiences, creativity seems to elude the notion of sequential phases.

Graham Wallace (1926) already mentions the iterative character of each phase and Donald J. Treffinger (1995) explains the simultaneous and oscillatory nature of the creative

process. However, even assuming that a researcher is allowed to conceive and record any aspect of the various phases of a specific creative process that happens within a single location, this approach would still not provide an understanding for contextual characteristics of the collaborative process of creativity. The addressed procedure identifies the still persisting attempt to measure creativity, its attributes and outcomes and relies on an additive comprehension of the various attributes that constitute creativity.

I am still surprised that there is no intensive dispute about whether the phase models can sufficiently grasp the phenomenon of creativity, however, I agree that there is at least one phase: Ideation. In other words, the time span between not having an idea and the moment of arriving at a creative thought that entails enough potential for further creative elaboration. One can understand the drive for a knowledge that helps to enhance organisational group settings, especially when defining the research motivations of the disciplines of management and organisational behaviour. Yet, I suggest taking a step backwards and exploring the social world of collaborative creativity, the place where creativity happens each day. In the analysis part of this thesis I will return to the models of creative processes and also outline the specificities of each phase.

The social aspect of creativity has been the guiding principle for Amabile (1996) for the study of social-psychological attributes to an understanding of creativity. Her component theory considers the influence of potential cognitive, personal, motivational, and social attributes on the specific phases of the creative process. Amabile stresses an individual's knowledge, skills and talents related to a specific task or field of activity. Her four phases component model outlines influences on the creative process. These phases are: (1) problem or task identification, (2) preparation, (3) response generation, (4) response validation and communication, and (5) outcome. Motivation influences an individual's learning towards domain-relevant skills, initiates

the creative process and maintains the efforts towards a creative solution (Amabile, 1996, p. 113). Individuals will proceed with one of the subsequent phases unless feedback urges them to stay in a particular phase.

Stressing the social context of creativity, Amabile's socio-psychological perspective deserves credit, whereby she concentrates on the motivational aspects with regards to external social attributes to the creative process. However, her notion of impinging upon only the phases of "problem or task identification" and of "response generation" (p. 113) falls short. I contend that motivation also defines the phases of "preparation" and "response validation and communication" (p. 113). A creative idea demands communication skills, because creative people need to convince other group members in an organisational setting of their effective and useful idea. Furthermore, Amabile's chart of her concept does not indicate how the various components and phases are linked to each other. She argues: "Broken lines indicate the influence of particular factors on others. Wavy lines indicate the steps in the process" (p. 113). Unfortunately, lines are no explanation or indication for how a component of a model influences other components or phases of a creative process. I also see a problem with the linearity of the phases. As I will illustrate, some of the creative group members that I observed have very different ways of arriving at a creative solution to a challenge. So for instance, some participants already picture to themselves the implementation of a great idea. In Albert Einstein's words (as cited in Webster's, 2000): "Imagination is more important than knowledge."

Csikszentmihalyi (1996) incorporates the role of the creative individual within a social context and defines a system approach to creativity. He refers to creativity as a dynamic construct, an interrelation between a creative agent and her particular socio-cultural context. Csikszentmihalyi describes his concept in the following way:

The first question I ask of creativity is not *what* is it but *where* is it?

The answer that makes most sense is that creativity can be observed only in the interrelations of a system made up of three main parts. The first of these is the *domain*, which consists of a set of symbolic rules and procedures... The second component of creativity is the *field*, which includes all the individuals who act as gatekeepers to the domain. It is their job to decide whether a new idea or product should be included in the domain... Finally, the third component of the creative system is the individual *person*. Creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain... has a new idea or sees a new pattern, and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain... So the definition that follows from this perspective is: Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain, or that transforms an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. It is important to remember, however, that a domain cannot be changed without the explicit or implicit consent of a field responsible for it. (pp. 27-28) [emphasis in original].

Csikszentmihalyi utilised the qualitative biographic research method to conceptualize his model.

Whereas he acknowledges the notion of domain and field, Csikszentmihalyi still considers creativity as an individual act, even though he emphasises an individual's dependence on the knowledge of a domain for the process of ideation. The interrelation between an individual, the field, and the domain and the notion of "flow," which Csikszentmihalyi introduced to the research of creative individuals, however, speaks in favour of a concept of the creative sphere. According to Csikszentmihalyi (2001), the notion of flow refers to a subjective experience, similar to happiness but not the same.

Csikszentmihalyi's system approach detaches creativity from the individual and situates it within his component model, but does not reflect on the need to determine what specific domains and field of creativity one can utilise within a social system. A group perspective on creativity, however, demands a comprehensive understanding and observation of the interaction, communication between the participants and their interrelation with their social environment.

To conclude, I hope that by applying an ethnographic and qualitative approach to the study of collaborative creativity and a particular creative small group I can enhance and further

develop a comprehensive understanding of creativity in small groups. The attentive reader will have noticed that I speak either of the research of *creativity in small group* communication or of the research of communication in *creative small groups*. I suggest that both groups differ with respect to their profession. Whereas research on creativity in small groups concentrates on how creativity can be facilitated within day-to-day processes of product creation, e. g. space engineering or scientific research, creative small groups are defined by the act of ideation as such. For my study, I decided to explore the social environment of a creative communication agency that is concerned with matters similar to an advertising agency or interactive agency. Some of the participants of this agency emphasized the agency's desire to be constantly engaged in the field of creativity. This creative agency is a superb research site for the exploration of creative communicative interaction and I am convinced that my descriptions of how the creative environment, which will be developed into the concept of the creative sphere, can inspire other small groups to reassess their environment and how creativity can be an important aspect of their day-to-day operations.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND METHODOLOGY

How does communicative action characterize the creative process in small groups? What is the communicative action that is performed and how can we capture its essence? What, exactly, is the communicative action that takes place in the studied field? What performances do members of creative small groups display, how do they do it, and how do communicative actions change over time? Who are the “members” and how do they define themselves, the others, and their specific role? How do they evaluate what they do, how do they interpret the essence of their actions and what they mean to the others?

These are the pressing but also fascinating questions that qualitative communication researchers attempt to solve. And I would like to state right at the outset of this epistemological chapter that the following description will not deal in depth with the alleged schism between quantitative and qualitative methodology. Certainly, both research approaches have their place since they provide social researchers with various perspectives of how to perceive social phenomena. The notion of *mixed methods* is already an important step in the right direction, even though this process is still not pursued seriously enough in some disciplines where social research is undertaken by means of more traditional procedures.

This is not the right environment in which to discuss the ongoing debate as to whether the mixed methods approach is just another way of smuggling in qualitative approaches into a conservative social research community. That said, I would like to end this initial thought with a view that seems to characterize scholars of my own generation. Some of us are quite tired of discussing whether there is a need to generalize research findings or if qualitative approaches are the only ones that enable scholars to get to the essence of what is happening in a particular social environment. By contrast, both methodological attitudes provide us with different perspectives

and the question of whether both approaches should, or even can, be combined in a reasonable scientific way has to be answered by analysing the particular research endeavour.

This research project focuses on the role of communication in creative small groups. It explores the various means of communication used by the group and its members, and analyses how they characterise the overall creative process. Furthermore, I provide an inside view and an understanding of how communication serves to define the environment, in which small group creativity takes place.

This research project is a response to the call of so many small group communication scholars, who emphasize the need to explore the communicative action of creative small groups (Jarboe, 1999). Abran J. Salazar (2002) puts it this way:

Clearly, groups do produce novel and unique outcomes, but the processes that yield such outcomes are not clearly understood. Questions surrounding the study of group creativity abound: What conditions facilitate creativity in groups? What are the characteristics of creative groups? What role does communication play in fostering creativity in groups? (p. 180)

Because of the exploratory nature of the raised questions, I conceptualized a qualitative research design for investigating the social phenomena and answering the questions. While the findings might not be universally applicable, I am convinced that every social research project has to address its implications for future research and, in this case, makes possible the improvement of interaction in existing small groups. It is my hope that the presented research findings will help resolve communication problems occurring within some small groups in organisational environments. Hence, the study is fundamentally grounded on the ideas of pragmatism (Kuper & Kuper, 2004, p. 1019). Creswell (2009) points out that, instead of “focusing on methods, [pragmatist] researchers emphasise the research problem and use all approaches available to understand the problem” (p. 10). This assessment also reflects the philosophical foundation of pragmatism (Krotz, 2005). Ultimately, from my point of view, this leads pragmatists into a

vicious circle because they avail themselves of diverse epistemologies. Pragmatists are characterized by having a distinctive worldview, which does not accept a single worldview. In a way, the use of the term worldview does not make sense to a pragmatist.

I am convinced that a pluralistic approach to the research project provides the different lenses that will foster an overall understanding of the diverse facets of small group communication. This will also enable me, and other group communication scholars, to arrive at sensible solutions for potential communication problems of creative small groups.

Although there are diverse interpretations about what exactly the qualitative approach is, there are some commonalities about the deeper meaning, and belief how research should be implemented, and, finally, the contribution of a particular study. Qualitative research across all different theoreticians can be synthesized as the researchers' endeavour to understand and value individual interpretation, and to comprehend the construction of social behaviour and milieus (Lüders & Reichertz, 1986).

The following account will illustrate how the raised epistemological and methodological concepts and ideas inform the research methods, techniques and practices that are applied to my overall research questions (Chapter three). I am aware that my outline of the philosophical and theoretical foundations cannot consider every notion and assessment of qualitative research, however, I feel confident that I provide a justifiable classification of the addressed concepts that play a major role in qualitative communication research.

The Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research is a rich field of study – enthusiastic, electrifying, activating, and opening up new ways of perceiving and understanding the world in its infinite variations. Young

researchers especially are easily thrilled by the magic that springs from multifarious approaches to discover old social phenomena and to observe human endeavours in a new light.

On the one hand, the various empirical research methods ranging from disciplines such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, communication studies, pedagogy, economics, and law⁶ enhance qualitative scholars' cognitive toolkit; on the other hand, qualitative studies have developed into a confusing and elusive field and carry the risk of not seeing the forest for the academic trees.

One positive thought first—if I may—before I outline how I would like to define the qualitative worldview that constitutes the presented research project: For a qualitative researcher, empirical *Waldsterben* does not appear on the academic agenda; the last two decades are characterised by a burgeoning re-experience of qualitative research.⁷ Although the multifaceted epistemological and methodological perspectives and approaches of qualitative inquiry might be overwhelming when contextualizing initial research thoughts, the qualitative worldview allows scholars to wander mindlessly through the woods at the beginning: mindlessly and insouciantly, but not amorphously. In other words, qualitative research allows us to gradually approach and perceive a social phenomenon under investigation and to adapt our research methods to the presented *Lebenswelt* (Heine, 1836). By using the term *Lebenswelt*, Edmund Husserl (1950) conceptualises a way of experiencing and understanding a social environment that differs from a traditional and abstract way of explaining our society. Contrary to conceptualising a theoretical understanding of society based on numbers, formulas, and calculations, Husserl emphasises the importance of our own subjective experience for conceptualising a specific *Lebenswelt*. In order

⁶ With regards to the implementation of empirical research methods, legal scholars inquire especially ethical deliberations of qualitative research.

⁷ Even in Germany where social sciences are conducted in a more traditional way, recent years have shown a positive development of qualitative studies with a view towards interdisciplinary and cultural studies (Lamnek, 2005).

to explore a particular *Lebenswelt*, Husserl asks us to return “to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1950, p. 130) and to describe the things as they reveal themselves to the subjective observer. Sociology elaborates on Husserl’s philosophical thoughts and scholars point out the constructive character of our social life. By their actions, social agents co-construct, change, and maintain their *Lebenswelt*.

Alfred Schütz (1974) carries forward Husserl’s notion of the *Lebenswelt* and points out that a researcher has to explore the experiences and actions that constitute a specific social life-world. The “world of daily life” (Luckmann & Schütz, 1974, p. 311) defines the domain of our reality in which we pursue pragmatic motives, in which we act, operate, and work, in other words, a reality in which we create and change our environment. Most of all, the world of daily life is constituted of the various behavioural and communicative acts of the participants. Hubert A. Knoblauch (1996) points out that Schütz already understood the essence of communication for any *Lebenswelt*. With the notion of “gemeinsame kommunikative Umwelt” (mutual, communicative life-world) (Schütz cited in Knoblauch, 1996, p. 11), Schütz emphasises that a communicative *Lebenswelt*’s social structures are continuously co-constructed by our consistent communicative patterns. With regards to the particular *Lebenswelt* that I have explored, Schütz’s thought is important because it accentuates the importance of communication for the creative sphere in which any participants compares the meaningfulness of his or her world with the one of the other participants in order to achieve a mutual, social *Lebenswelt*. Communicative action allows us to exchange experiences and views, in other words, to mediate knowledge. By means of communication we also are able to understand the principals of the *Lebenswelt*, which has been there long before we were born. In a way, Schütz’s communicative conception of *Lebenswelt* does answer the question that Husserl struggled with: If *Lebenswelt* is only

constituted of our personal and subjective experiences, how can we perceive and finally understand the social phenomena that are beyond our sensation and experience?

Coming back to the way I understand the essence of qualitative and exploratory social research, there is no need to construct and layout an overall, fully-elaborated concept before even starting empirical inquiries, such as fieldwork or other ways of data collection. Rather, the qualitative perspective is characterized by the “principle of [theoretical] openness” (Hoffmann-Riem, 1980, p. 343). This, and other principles of qualitative research, have led to permanent criticism and preconceptions. Nonetheless, the qualitative paradigm has developed into an acknowledged and justified “normal science” (Kuhn, 1970, p. 10). Philipp Mayring (1993) notes a worldview, characterized by a “qualitative turn” (p. 1) and indicates a “profound change of social sciences in this century” (p. 4). Qualitative research comes to bear positively especially when its entrenched social *Lebenswelten* get more and more reorganized into new and more complicated lifestyles. Here, then, the strengths of qualitative inquiry come clearly to the fore by providing research strategies that offer initially precise and “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973, p. 7).⁸ The rather pejorative connotation and labelling of qualitative research as a fashion trend apparently seems to have become untenable.

Before discussing the various qualitative research methodologies and how they inform and legitimize communication studies and utilised research methods, I would like to elaborate on the characteristics, traditions, and key principles of the qualitative paradigm. Thereby, the all-embracing and widely used notion of the interpretive paradigm represents, at best, the theoretical background of qualitative social research.

⁸ Geertz derived the concept from the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1971).

The Interpretive Paradigm

The interpretive paradigm refers to a specific tradition of sociological theories. Thomas Wilson (1970) explicitly introduced the term in contrast to what he characterized and named the normative paradigm. The interpretive paradigm neither describes a specific form of an “Objekttheorie” (Lamnek, 2005, p. 34) nor can it be referred to as a specific epistemological position. The interpretive paradigm is best described as a position based on a theoretical foundation which assumes that all interaction is an interpretative process, in which the agents refer to each other (Matthes, 1976).

Thomas P. Wilson (1970) appeals to the concept of the paradigm, which Thomas Kuhn (1970) introduced to the epistemological discussion. A paradigm establishes maxims and foundations, which offer orientation to the academic practise of a discipline. Among other things, a paradigm defines the frame for admissible research methods.

In order to better understand the term “interpretive paradigm”, it appears helpful to me to briefly elaborate on the antonym presented by Wilson (1970). The order in which both paradigms are presented corresponds to their respective chronological developments.

According to Wilson (1970), the normative paradigm is characterized by two basic assumptions: “interaction is essentially rule governed, and sociological explanation should properly take the deductive form characteristic of natural science” (p. 59). The relationship between social rules and social action is understood as a unilateral and definite cause-effect correlation. Rules determine the action, distinguished by external and objective coercions (Mehan & Wood, 1975). The normative paradigm’s deductive-nomological methodology orientation is committed to the main idea of *Einheitswissenschaft*⁹ (Fiedler, 1971; Schulte, 1992). Alfred Schütz (1971) explicitly exhibits the distinctions between natural sciences and social sciences

⁹ Translation: unified science. I have taken the liberty of translating from German authors myself.

with respect to the constitution of objects. In contrast to natural scientists, advocates of social sciences have always proceeded on the assumption that the *Lebenswelt* is a pre-interpreted subject. However, social scientists, following the normative paradigm, have not embraced the opportunity to develop a specific methodology of social science.

The interpretive paradigm paraphrases a fundamental theoretical and philosophical position based on the assumption that all interaction is an interpretive process in which the actors relate to each other by utilising meaningful interpretation of the action or potential action of the others (Matthes, 1976). Akin to the phenomenological worldview, the interpretive paradigm holds the opinion of the existence of multiple realities originating from “intangible mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Social researchers applying an interpretive approach contemplate how agents make sense of their world. Whereas Michael Quinn Patton (1990) instances the *Verstehen* tradition, focussing on “the meaning of human behaviour, the context of social interaction, an empathetic understanding based on personal experience, and the connections between mental states and behaviour” (p. 57), Wilson (1973) mentions the interpretive approaches of symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology, stressing that any social order is based on agents’ interpretive capacity. Therefore, according to Wilson (1973), researchers need to draw on exactly those (ethno-) methods which Harold Garfinkel (1967) puts into context with the process of commonplace activities of daily life and which underlie the constitution of meaning.

Based on its conception of social reality, the interpretive paradigm draws a methodological consequence: If interpretation shapes the societal construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), then theory construction of this subject area also has to be seen as an interpretive process; in other words, as a reconstructive achievement. So qualitative research approaches can be recognized as a methodological complement of the interpretive paradigm’s

fundamental theoretical position. Since the relationship between fundamental theoretical positions and methodology is quite close, it seems difficult to think of qualitative research methodologies that are not associated with phenomenological *Lebensweltanalysen*, social constructivism, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. Whereas the traditions of phenomenology and symbolic interactionism tend to pursue subjective meanings and the attribution of individual sense, ethnomethodology and constructivism are more engaged with everyday routine and the construction of social reality. Although these differ in their theoretical assumptions and their approach to the object of inquiry, they still can be summarized as parts of the interpretive paradigm.

Now that I have outlined briefly the basic assumptions of the interpretive paradigm I would like to continue with the basic characteristics of qualitative research.

Key principles and assumptions of qualitative research

For the study of social relations and actions, the qualitative research approach emerged and aroused interest throughout the first part of the 20th century. In the 1940s, especially American based sociology (mainly through the influence of the Chicago School) applied research ideas and methods, such as case studies, descriptive methods and observational approaches, which were theoretically and terminologically developed further in the 1960s. Here, I just want to mention Wilhelm Wundt's (1912) achievements of combining experimental psychology with the notion of *Verstehen*, William Isaac Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's (1918-1920) study of rule life, and as a representative of the Chicago School, William F. Whyte's (1955) classical ethnographical studies and observational approach. Representative for the rediscovery of qualitative research paradigm, I would like to draw the reader's attention to relevant works of Aaron Cicourel (1964) and Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (1967). Certainly, one has to

be careful when declaring specific dates and scholars as being most relevant and leading in the development of social research; at the same time, an ambitious enumeration of influential scholars does not pretend to be complete. Therefore, I see the following illustration more as a representation of scholarly thought and work that supplies information for my research study and explains to my esteemed readers how I make sense of epistemological thought and the implemented research adventure.

In the course of a critical engagement with conventional methods, several principles have emerged that can be summarized as the purpose of qualitative social research. I will outline briefly the essential principles. The precise descriptions of Siegfried Lamnek (2005) and Uwe Flick (2008) will serve as an orientation and landmark in the thicket of numerous qualitative research features. Both scholars delineate, in a very structured and analytical way, how these key principles relate to each other. Of particular note is the general understanding that various methods can be assigned to different research approaches, selected on the basis of specific research inquiries and traditions. The following essential qualitative research features are derived from this principle.

One way to define academic disciplines is to illustrate the different methodological standards employed by the researchers. According to the specificity of a research question and its associated tradition, those standards also serve as a reference point for proving the suitability of one's ideas and findings of empirical investigations. Thus, for example, sociology utilises survey research whereas psychology carries out experiments as its key research method. Advocates of qualitative research suggest, however, that there are sometimes social phenomena that cannot be conceived by constricted research methods, such as surveys, experiments or other cause-effect data gathering tools (Cicourel, 1964; Girtler, 1981). Those scholars tend to refrain from studying those phenomena. For example, there might be variables that cannot be identified exactly and

consequently, or a clear relationship between isolated variables cannot be understood by referring to an experimental research design.

Another factor challenging conventional social research recognizably emerges when researchers consider understanding phenomena that can just be studied by analysing only a few cases or, what is more often a researcher's reality, a single case. Under these conditions, supporters of quantitative analysis will always critique the suspected difficulty to study these phenomena, for only a few cases would not be sufficient for a representative study with generalizable findings (Lamnek, 2005).

Qualitative research approaches, by contrast, emphasize that there is no single method to approach a phenomenon, but rather a myriad of research methods and strategies, which reflect researchers' inquiries and scholarly traditions. Until the very end of a particular qualitative endeavour, the research process is imbued by the researcher's possibility to introduce and apply new theoretical aspects, informing data collection and the analysis of the findings. In contrast to highly standardized survey techniques, this principle of openness¹⁰ (Hoffmann-Riem, 1980) represents a basic attitude towards (a) research participants and their particular personal traits, (b) the specificities of the research situation and setting, as well as (c) the actual employed research methods. According to the principle of openness, the emergence of hypotheses depends on an ongoing process where, contrary to quantitative research approaches, researchers do not enter the field with pre-structured hypotheses ready for scrutiny (Hoffmann-Riem, 1980).

¹⁰ Certainly, there is manifold terminology with regards to qualitative social research characteristics. Most of them refer to the same ideas of qualitative research. For example, the notion of *appropriateness of methods* refers to the development and adaption of specific research methods so those social researchers are enabled to conceive and understand an object of investigation. Thus, there is a similarity between the principle of openness and the notion of appropriateness of research methods. Both exemplify one of the main differences between the qualitative and quantitative approaches. Whereas in psychology, with its emphasis on experiments, everything that cannot be explored by a particular research method is excluded from the research, a flexible qualitative research approach welcomes the uncertainty and unknown.

Until here, my deliberations illustrate how the qualitative paradigm inspires researchers to orientate and adopt their methods in order to understand everyday knowledge of the research subject's social world. In order to do this, the role of the researcher is an essential part of the overall research process. Qualitative research emphasizes (a) the reflexivity of an object of research and its analysis and (b) the researchers' reflective capacity of processing, reviewing and considering their observations and behaviours during fieldwork. So it is not atypical for social researchers to be involved in the "processual character of research and subject matter" (Lamnek, 2005, p. 23). Furthermore, this approach is considered to be one of the main research characteristics in qualitative research and the researcher is considered to be an inherent resource of social discovery rather than a source of disturbance, as mentioned by advocates of an objective approach to scientific observations (Konegen & Sondergeld, 1985). Quantitative scholars overlook the meaningful function of researchers during their presence in the research setting and their interaction with the participants. However, interaction and communication between researchers and those under investigation are crucial and an inherent, constitutional part of any qualitative "research act" (Denzin, 1970). Thus, qualitative research by itself can be considered as a communication act between a researcher and the researched subjects. Schütze (1978) notes that the communicative researcher treats a member of society as an informant who is capable of interpreting its surroundings. The view of reality depends significantly on the perspective of the observer.

The remark that the communication act is an inherent aspect of the research process has far-reaching implications, for the process-oriented character also relates to the social phenomena itself. A central concern of qualitative research involves the process of reproduction, modification, and interpretation of action patterns. By virtue of these action patterns, social agents constitute (their) reality and therefore those patterns should be documented and

analytically reconstructed. The principle of process-driven research allows social researchers to scientifically grasp the development context (*Entstehungszusammenhang*) of social phenomena (Lamnek, 2005).

The examined social processes and phenomena are also characterized by the principle of reflexivity. This principle guides social research both with regards to the examined phenomena, as well as with regards to the relationship between researcher and the explored subject. The interpretive paradigm suggests that all products of human behaviour, such as linguistic or non-verbal acts, are reflexive. Symbols, gestures, speech acts, interpretations, etc. indicate a comprehensive set of rules (*indexicality*) and every meaning is determined by context. Because every meaning reflexively refers to the phenomenon as a whole, the interpretation of an action, behaviour or linguistic expression requires the observer to refer back to the symbolic or social context of the phenomenon in question. According to the *hermeneutic circularity* of the attribution and understanding of meaning, the understanding of an individual act depends on the understanding of the context (Gadamer, 1975). When considering qualitative research endeavours, the notion of reflexivity affects social researchers in three distinctive ways. Firstly, in contrast to quantitative, linear strategies, qualitative researchers are able to enter and start the qualitative analysis at any point. Secondly, the reflexivity of the chosen research method requires a reflective attitude of the researcher as well as the adaptability of the study instruments. Thirdly, the qualitative paradigm is characterized by a communicative and reflective relationship between researcher and the explored phenomena.

The philosophical and methodological foundation of qualitative communication research

The *Lebenswelt*, which constitutes our existence, is colourful and multi-faceted. At least an enlightened person would agree with the concept that there is not only one way of conducting

life and that reality consists of various human characteristics. Qualitative research has committed itself to describing and, as far as possible, to understanding these *Lebenswelten* from the inside out (Flick, 2008), from the view of the actors. Thus, qualitative research contributes to a better understanding of social reality (realities), whilst endeavouring to expose processes, patterns and structures. In addition, members of particular *Lebenswelten* remain oblivious to their *Lebenswelt*, although – or perhaps precisely because – they are biased protagonists in the matter of the course of the daily grind. For the researcher, this presents an exciting challenge, particularly when he sets out on his journey of discovery and tries to take the first step within the relatively young field of active qualitative research. To a certain degree, my research undertaking presents just such an attempt. In the description of the theoretical background of creative small groups above, I have presented the current situation, based on the published literature. The mentioned authors all agree on the point that, especially regarding the interaction of small groups, the field research of natural small groups ought to render particularly relevant findings. Certainly, at this point, one can only say “ought to” because the investigation of the pressing questions in particular should and must shed light on the suppositions. On this note, I have decided to investigate the role of communication in creative small groups by implementing an explorative, ethnographic study.

I am referring to *an* ethnographic study and not to ethnography, as the term and its classification require a terminological clarification first. This refers not only to the term ethnography itself, which, in recent times, is being used as a synonym for participant observation (Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, J. Lofland & L. Lofland, 2007). In North America, the term Ethnography has become generally established (Lüder, 2008). However choosing *the right* term is not only a question of a change towards *the right* terminology. Instead, one can observe that the replacement of the original term is accompanied by modified conceptual emphases.

Based on *thick descriptions* (Geertz, 1973), the alien, or that which differs from the norm, and the unexpected, are to be used as realization and mirrors. It is this reflection, which makes it possible to recognize the unknown in the known and the known in the unknown (Schütz, 1944; 1971) as different and thus, to reach (self)-recognition. Ethnographic studies are suited perfectly to be used as a diving board into barely-researched social phenomena, and these studies present a large number of research methods. However, the term ethnography cannot be explained via applied research methods and techniques alone. Among other things, the supporters of ethnography are of the opinion – and I agree with them in this point – that ethnography is an independent research concept that operates in relation to the other research approaches and is both theoretically and historically deeply linked to the qualitative paradigm. The final definition of ethnography as an independent methodology or simply as a research method may, due to a number of ongoing differences in opinion within research literature, be put aside for a while. At this point, I would assert that ethnography represents more than a pure research method or technique. In their introduction to the *Handbook of Ethnography*, Atkins et al. (2001) elaborate:

The field is too broad and diffuse: it escapes the neat categorizations that are demanded by encyclopaedic treatments. Moreover, the intellectual terrain is normally contested: authority and traditions are constantly undermined. It is inevitable that the coverage will be complete, and that treatments of its subject matter will be matters of debate. Our topic – the conduct and conceptualization of ethnographic fieldwork – is especially subject to such constraints and contradictions. (p. 1)

Despite the categorical uncertainty of the term *ethnography*, I would like to suggest a general classification of the research concept. Certainly, and here I agree with Atkins et al. (2001), the reader may contradict my classification in various points. This comes with the territory when classifying difficult relationships. In the interest of my research project, I find it necessary to state the research approach. At this point, I pose the general and important question: how we are supposed to understand the colourful *Lebenswelt*, if we are not even able to agree upon the basic

epistemological and methodological questions? This is an important point, since the various ethnographic studies are intended to be contributions to understanding our *Lebenswelt*. Now, I could reach the classification of ethnography using the *subtracting method*, by listing everything not covered or represented by ethnography. Similar to the discipline and the term of communication, which is so difficult to define, one can criticize that this process will not lead to a clear theoretical classification. Ultimately, I have decided to proceed chronologically and to list the historical development of the philosophical theory. The following illustration will continue from my deliberations regarding the interpretive paradigm, and deals initially with the other fundamentals of qualitative social research. The introduced selection of fundamentals clearly follows the main question of this thesis – namely – the characterization of creative small group communication. Based on the philosophical fundamentals of qualitative methodology, to which the metatheoretical position of phenomenology, hermeneutics and the understanding of symbolic interactionism are assigned (Bryman, 1984), I will turn to ethnography. Some representatives of ethnography may see this research approach as clearly concluded and independent. Nevertheless, ethnography is based upon the scientifically theoretical and sociologically theoretical requirements which I will illustrate.

Epistemological foundation

A requirement of all sciences is to present fundamental statements regarding a research area that is to be examined. At the same time, scientific theories¹¹ provide the guidelines as to what is to be recognized as a scientific finding. Here, the rules and approaches of how to obtain a

¹¹ Here, there is an interesting reference, that the concepts of the scientific theories' basis alone also present linguistic differences. Thus, the term epistemology, (from Greek *πιστήμη* - *episteme*-, "knowledge, science" + *λόγος*, "logos") is to be translated or understood as follows: Theory of knowledge, scientific theory, or philosophy of science. Depending on the respective translation or understanding, these are the understood, and implied, ways of applying the various research methods and techniques.

scientific finding are defined. Normative, ontological, logical and epistemological criteria are to be kept so simple, in order to enable scientific theory to claim validity for all single disciplines. This applies to all natural sciences as well as social sciences, whereby it must be noted that the simplified scientific theory has to present a sufficient foundation for the development of clear and concrete instructions as to how to proceed within the scientific research processes (Bogumil & Immerfall, 1985).

Similar to the scientific theory in its requirements, is methodology; both are metatheories – i.e. theories about theories. However, a clear differentiation should be made between the terminologies and the contents of each of the differing concepts. Methodology should be perceived as being applied to the general scientific theory, and it examines the conditions under which scientific findings, relating to a certain finding area, can be obtained. For further illustration, the studies of Herbert Blumers (1969) should suffice. He deals with the relationship between methodology and methods, as well as the role of qualitative research itself.

Methodology refers to, or covers, the principles that underlie and guide the full process of studying the obdurate character of the given empirical world. There are three highly important points implied by this conception of methodology: (1) methodology embraces the entire scientific quest and not merely some selected portions or aspects of that quest; (2) each part of the scientific quest as well as the complete scientific act, itself, has to fit the obdurate character of the empirical world under study; therefore methods of study are subservient to that world and should be subject to test by it; and (3) the empirical world under study and not some model of scientific inquiry provides the ultimate and decisive answer to the test. (pp. 23-24)

Important to emphasize is that scientific theory is based on the theory of cognition. When dealing with a non-differentiated understanding of epistemology, it is easy to forget to point out the fundamental question, with which epistemology also deals, that “how human findings, regardless of whether scientific, pre-scientific or non-scientific, are at all possible. Scientific theory would therefore be a special case of the theory of cognition” (Lamnek, 1980, p. 4). Thus ensues the

following relationship, or rather, a ranking of the terminology within qualitative research: theory of cognition, epistemology, methodology, (research) methods and, finally, (research) techniques. The methods and techniques to be applied indicate the conceivable research approaches of obtaining and analysing data. Since we are assuming a scientific and empirical approach, it is consistent, and correct, to follow a systematic, empirical foundation of qualitative social research (Bryman, 1984). Further consistencies regarding epistemological decisions are difficult to identify, if it can be done at all. We will now deal with epistemological theories of phenomenology and, subsequently hermeneutics.

Phenomenology and hermeneutics

Phenomenology, according to Alfred Husserl (1950), is a strict philosophical method that acts as the foundation of all other sciences. I am paying attention to it because ultimately, through the application of Schütz's (1950) *mundane phenomenology*, it leads to social constructivism, which is one of the central foundations of qualitative social research.

Husserl refers to phenomenology as the principles of appearances. According to the literal translation, it deals with everything that is clearly before us. A distinguishing feature is that phenomenology in its original form deliberately excludes any statements regarding the *Sein* (existence) and *Wesen* (being) of the phenomenon. This means, that as far as the area of social research, and especially qualitative communication research are concerned, the researcher's aim is to be as unbiased as possible when conceiving the social reality. The objective of this philosophical approach is to understand the character of a subject using objective recognition, "ausklammern"¹² (Husserl & Biemel, 1958, p. xxvii), which is characterized by a generality and invariability. The phenomena are therefore observed as they are, independent of theories and

¹² Bracketing

previous knowledge of any sort. Ultimately, one of the main messages of phenomenology is: *zu den Sachen selbst* (to the things themselves) (Husserl & Biemel, 1950; Hitzler & Eberle, 2008).¹³ The specificity of phenomenology is, however, its method of reduction. Unfortunately, we cannot go into detail at this point. It should be sufficient here to illustrate that the aim of phenomenology is to achieve focus on the essence and to eliminate every distraction caused by the different phases of reduction. The different stages of reduction range from the *Epoche*, through the *eidetische Reduktion*¹⁴, as far as *transzendente Reduktion*¹⁵ (Husserl, 1950; Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, (1991).

In view of social scientific research, which deals with the understanding of that which really can be found and the composition of its being, we have to abstain from the philosophical understanding of the notion of transcendental reduction. As mentioned above, the objective is to reach as unbiased an attitude as possible regarding the phenomenon to be examined. Thus, the researcher must re-examine his role under careful self-observation during the entire research process. Self-awareness and self-criticism appear to be valuable, if the researcher re-thinks the favoured theories and research traditions she is applying. This subjective self-reflection allows the researcher to drop favoured theories and to use more appropriate instruments to understand the phenomenon at hand.

Self-recognition and self-criticism of the role of the respective researcher are manifold and exclude an all-embracing recital of all the possible aspects to be considered. However, I would like to point out one aspect that plays a particular role in my research project. Lamnek (2005) notes that even the language used already results in pre-conceived notions and, as a

¹³ A similarity to the principles of the Grounded Theory is clearly recognizable. Later on, I will come back to the Grounded Theory and its connection to the Chicago School and its representatives.

¹⁴ Eidetic reduction

¹⁵ Transcendental reduction

consequence, to prejudice regarding the world to be researched. One might, therefore, be inclined to state that one group ought to be labelled as *anomic*, although it does, in reality, exhibit group-specific norms and behavioural rules, which, only when in direct comparison with other groups or with a dominant culture, could be viewed as *anomic*. In contrast to Husserl's (1950) concept, one must state that it will probably never be possible to reach the matter itself, only the particular linguistic counterparts. Essentially, the researcher ought to be obliged to guarantee impartiality, even if this is to be viewed as fairly limited (Danner, 1979; 2006).

Particular guidelines pertaining to social scientific understanding, which are applied to field studies, are a result of the required impartiality (Diemer, Geldsetzer, & Rotter, 1971). The description of a phenomenon, which precedes analysis,¹⁶ understanding and explanation, therefore requires a) being viewed and described simply and b) being as unbiased, exact, simple and thorough as possible. In practice, phenomenology can be illustrated in four stages, whereby it is clear to me that any and all generalization regarding phenomenology is risky, because: (a) all elements and aspects of an object to be examined are gathered. Phenomenology observes only the phenomenon itself, although this presents itself in countless ways; (b) the gathered components of the object of research are then examined, to determine whether they are superfluous or variable; those of which are then excluded (as a result of the stages of reduction); (c) the remaining elements are, thus, those which are essential for the constitution of the object to be examined and which ought to be invariable; and, (d) the remaining characteristic elements form a developing structure. In the course of the research process the result is something generic, the essence of the object itself (Lamnek, 2005).

¹⁶ Phenomenology itself rejects any analyses and explanation of the phenomena to be examined that goes beyond the description.

Beyond this, Ilja Maso (2001) tries to describe a phenomenological ethnography, and I wish to note that, apart from using phenomenological terminology, he does not really reveal any new findings. Following on from Schütz (1973), who can be viewed as the mastermind of social phenomenology and social constructivism, Maso attempts to present applied phenomenological ethnography using two examples:

Imagine I am doing phenomenologically ethonography research on “being in love”. I start to study my own experiences of “being in love”. In the phenomenological *epoche* I refrain from wondering if I was really in love or how my infatuation came to be. I am not bothered about all possible scientific and other explanations and circumstances as to why, how and when I or other people fall in love, and I refrain from what I myself think being in love is. In other words, I bracket my knowledge of the phenomenon “being in love”... In this way I am able to keep my consciousness. (p. 140)

Maso (2001) recognises the difficulties of *total bracketing*, but still suggests this approach of phenomenological ethnography. It is his opinion, that Schütz’ idea of *anthropological destrangement and estrangement* ought to be developed in favour of phenomenological approaches, in order to reach a fully-fledged phenomenological ethnography. He indirectly reproaches Schütz for having failed to do this. I argue that Schütz recognized the problems of an applied phenomenological ethnography,¹⁷ which he mentions in his work *The Stranger* (Schütz, 1971), and was clever enough not to commit himself to just one method of application.

Phenomenology and its modern writings provide the researcher with new perspectives. However, there is also the other side of the coin – that today, there is a plethora of different phenomenological views and approaches. It seems to me that, in order to be able to evaluate the diverse studies, it is essential to combine and compare the various approaches to applied phenomenology. Nevertheless, I do see an insurmountable difficulty in solving this task clearly and satisfactorily. I am inclined to follow Girtler (1984), who is of the opinion that, as stated by

¹⁷ Schütz does not explicitly use the term phenomenological ethnography.

the saying “old ideas in new packages,” we are dealing with a terminology that presents too few findings. Ultimately, the aim is to bridge “from a theoretical world to an original world, the world of natural settings, as presented in the every day of an acting person” (Girtler, 1984, p. 18). It is particularly important to point out the tension between objectivity and subjectivity during participant observation. It is this consciousness, which phenomenology ought to sustain in each researcher. In conclusion, it remains to point out that in regards to an applied phenomenology, I have made use of the approaches mentioned above during my field studies. Now, I would like to say a few words concerning the arts science tradition of hermeneutics (Schleiermacher, 1959; Dilthey, 1957).

Like phenomenology, hermeneutics presents a further, significant, scientific theory foundation of qualitative research. It is the basic premise of, and leads to, the interpretive paradigm. The term hermeneutics is derived from the Greek “hermeneuein” (synonymous with to state, interpret, oversee) and refers to a science, which deals with interpretations, without, however, being limited to them. It is rather an art of understanding. The exception, that social processes and relationships are only relevant for sociology as meaningful and intended actions, is the origin of an approach which may be viewed as an alternative to a nomological attempt at explanation. The superficial appearance of reality must be breached in order to be able to make sensible social scientific statements (Esser, Klenovits, & Zehnpfennig, 1977). When applied practically, hermeneutics aids a higher understanding, and this is indicated by a circular or, rather, spirally formed movement. At this point, we must emphasise, that there is an abundance of hermeneutical approaches and therefore the hermeneutical rules are to be viewed as an aid for the interpretation of the research findings and overall research process. It is, by no means, appropriate to compare this approach with some kind of technique (Flick, 2008).

Sociological-theoretical requirements of qualitative communication research

In the following section, I will revisit the social theory requirements of qualitative research mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The integration of this in my examination as an ethnographic study makes it appear sensible to expand on symbolic interactionism and social constructivism at this point. As I have illustrated above, I tend to lean towards a pragmatic worldview: I am less a follower of the original understanding of pragmatism, as presented by Peirce, James, Mead, and Dewey. Rather, I ascribe to the interpretation of John W. Creswell (2009). When one understands pragmatism as being its own “philosophical basis for research” (Creswell, 2009, p. 10), it is possible to benefit from the views of phenomenological ethnography and the approach of an ethnographic fieldwork in the interactionist tradition at the same time. Concerning the question regarding the extent to which the researcher may or must identify himself with the group under examination, each of these philosophical views makes a different statement. A pragmatic world view and the demand for a reasonableness of object and method, flexibility, creativity and openness – which distinguish both the mentioned as well as the *grounded theory* – could possibly be reconciled in favour of ethnographic approaches to qualitative communication research. Such an attempt inherently presents the danger of artificially reaching units and generalizations, which do not do justice to any of the listed theories, nor pay them the respect they are due. On the other hand, a prudent pragmatic approach enables the premise to be able to meet the object meaningfulness more easily.

Symbolic interactionism and social constructivism

Symbolic interactionism (SI) provided a considerable contribution to the theory of interaction, initiated important empirical projects and assisted researchers in carrying them out

successfully. It is also responsible for a substantial portion of the construction of qualitative social research (Wagner, 2006). The philosophical background of symbolic interactionism is pragmatic social philosophy and social psychology. Similar to phenomenological approaches, symbolic interactionism rejects schemata used to ascertain objects that have been determined in advance. Symbolic interactionism, as opposed to the traditional social science approaches, places the emphasis differently when posing its questions. Where so far the primary questions have looked for the “why”, now, the “how” and “to what end” of the behaviour move into the foreground. The found structures of the phenomenon under examination are of more interest than the causes. Thus, communication theory approaches are in the spotlight of examination, resulting in the researcher concentrating her attention on the methodical examination of the relations, as opposed to single, more concrete variables.

Furthermore, symbolic interaction pursues the view that interpretative social research should, in a manner that can be reconstructed logically, “bring the object to speak for itself” (Wagner, 2006, p. 148). The objective therefore, is not only to express a criticism regarding the traditional philosophy of consciousness, but to push for a change from consciousness to action in the social sciences. In the continuation of the Chicago School, Blumer (1969) tried to create an empirical basis for symbolic interaction, which was theoretical for the fundamentals and logical for the research. His desire and demand for a tangible methodology was followed by countless interactionists. Unfortunately, a further illustration of the diversity of symbolic interaction cannot, as in the case of the mentioned theoretical foundations thus far, be carried out. Hence, I will elaborate in particular on the relationship between symbolic interaction, ethnography and qualitative communication research.

Even if one may be of the opinion that the term symbolic interaction, introduced by Blumer in 1937, is a rather unfortunate name for this direction of research, symbolic interaction

covers the key basic principles that characterize qualitative communication research in particular.

The term symbolic interaction linguistically establishes what it is all about.

Interactionism explicates the circumstance that agents do not act toward one another, but are engaged in dependent interaction with each other. *Symbolic* illuminates the linguistic basis of human group life. Symbolic interactionists emphasizes that the study and analysis of social phenomenon is pervaded by a continuously developing course of action of two or more agents. This interaction is characterized by an agency, also called *reflexivity*, which combines and unites the individual actions of each agent towards a joined action (Blumer 1969; Denzin, 1977).

Dedicating himself to the practical relevance, Blumer (1969) exposes two elements of his naturalistic methodology, namely, *exploration* and *inspection*. The basic assumption concerning explorative, qualitative social research has already been mentioned above, which is why I will now talk about inspection. Blumer (1969) endeavours to portray the task of analysis as an

intensive, focused examination of the empirical content of whatever analytical elements are used for purposes of analysis, and this same kind of examination of the empirical nature of the relations between such elements. (p. 43)

According to this, connections between empirical facts need to be established and discussed within the scope of scientific theories (Witzel, 1982). The phenomenon that is to be examined is observed from various perspectives, and these are confronted with varying questions.

Paying particular attention to the ethnographical approach of this study, I will, following Blumer (1969), present certain basic assumptions. Right at the beginning, Blumer (1969) points out that "human beings act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (p. 2). He emphasizes that the declared meanings of things, of physical and mental nature, emerge from the process of social interaction. The meanings are "handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters"

(Blumer, 1969, p. 2). He refers to a self-reflective individual, symbolically interacting with “one’s fellows” (p. 2). Through meanings characterized by interaction and reflexivity, agents construct the *Lebenswelten* of experiences in which they live. Reflexivity is “interwoven with social interaction and influences that social interaction” (Blumer, 1986, p. 53). The constant joined interaction is changing, combining various actions and therefore constitutes the “social life of a human society” (Blumer, 1986, p. 153) - a society that is comprised of social acts “which are formed and carried out by members” (p. 153).

Symbolic interactionism sees group life as a process in which people, as they meet in their different situations, indicate lines of action to each other and interpret the indications made by others. This means, obviously, that their respective lines of behavior have to be built up in the light of the lines of action of the others with whom they are interacting. (p. 52)

As a necessary consequence, this results in the attempt to methodically ascertain the behaviour of the agents using the meanings to which the agents make the association. Berger and Luckmann (1967) conclude:

What is “real” to a Tibetan monk may not be “real” to an American businessman. The “knowledge” of the criminal differs from the “knowledge” of the criminologist. It follows that specific agglomerations of “reality” and “knowledge” pertain to specific social contexts, and that these relationships will have to be included in an adequate sociological analysis of these contexts. (p. 3)

Furthermore, as a result of the features distinguishing it from other theories, symbolic interaction can be situated in its social order. The similarity to the ethnographical approaches becomes recognizable again because the aim is to uncover the meanings of social agents and the attached meanings to their actions.

Social interactionists deny the usefulness of general theories; they dislike the idea of totalizing and grand theories of the social order, as conceptualized by scholars such as Talcott Parson. Moreover, they agree with Paul-Michel Foucault, to name just one of the many post-

structuralist theorists who believed that social scientific writings should be local narratives about the “human group life” (Blumer 1969; Flick, 2008). Symbolic interactionists also do not advocate theories that do not take into account the biographies and lived experiences of interacting individuals.¹⁸ Instead, they appreciate the tradition of *Verstehen* and emphasize the need to uncover how people understand what they do and the meanings they attach to their social actions.

One demand of symbolic interactionists, therefore, is that researchers must dive into the world of their research subjects, as being neutral towards the participants does not put the researcher in the position to decode the system of the symbols.¹⁹ Blumer (1969) explicitly encourages social researchers to immerse themselves in the research field by utilising the participant observational approach. In doing so, the researcher is able to document how people align their behaviour based on shared meanings. It is intriguing to observe how relational rules of conduct and other social constraints have real force for group members and the group as a whole, especially for small group communication scholars. Although SI ideas have influenced investigations of small group and organisational communication as cultural phenomena (Bantz & Pepper, 1993; Frey, 2006), the potential of SI for studying communication and social research sites and events has not been exhausted (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Just as phenomenology impinged on subsequent social research concepts, SI has influenced the development of the constructivist and social constructivist approach to interpersonal communication (Delia, 1977).

¹⁸ Despite all the general similarities, it is at this point, that a very important point of conjecture regarding symbolic interaction can be noticed. The view over the entire object of the examined communication act and phenomenon is alien to ethnomethodology, which only wants to include the “clean” contents of ethno-methods as part of its understanding process. I will revisit the differences between ethnographical studies and a general understanding of ethnomethodology, in the sense meant by Garfinkel, at the end of this chapter.

¹⁹ This demand has already been mentioned above under phenomenological ethnography. I will discuss this in the research methods chapter, under the key term *going native*.

Social constructivists are convinced that the world we live in is not an objective reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1969). In the tradition of the interdisciplinary scholar Jean Piaget (1947), scholars refer to constructivism as the process of perceiving and recognizing the world and the knowledge around it.

Constructivism relates to various research approaches. All approaches theorize and expound the problems of the relationship between human beings and reality, while focusing on the constructive processes of experiencing this reality.

Constructivism has its roots in ancient Greek philosophy. The skeptics asked the question of how we can be sure that we know and understand a single thing or thought. Although the concept of modern social constructivism is related to ancient skepticism, it has a more positive approach of comprehending the world around us (Mikos & Wegener, 2005).

It is difficult to name the first or the most important constructivists, because the concept bridges different views and assumptions of “verstehen, was unsere Welt im Inneren zusammenhält” (Weber, 1985, p. 213).²⁰ Just to name one of them, such as Giambattista Vico (1668-1744, Italian philosopher and lawyer), does not adhere to an honest and appreciative approach to the academic work that has been done in the field of constructivism. However, Piaget (2000) developed a psychological method that opened the door for in-depth observations of research participants.

According to Schütz (1971), Berger and Luckmann (1969), and Kenneth Gergen (1994), social constructivism refers to social (e. g. cultural and historical) conventionalisation, which influences cognition and knowledge in everyday life. Social constructivists do not believe in an objective way of knowing, and deny the logical positivist view of an objective reality. In contrast,

²⁰ Translation into English: Perceive whatever holds the world together in its inmost folds. Undeniably, Max Weber was influenced by Goethe when using these lines, as they stem from Goethe's famous work Faust I.

they believe that the world in which we live is constructed by individuals, and that we make sense out of our observations. Consequently, social constructivism rejects traditional scientific research methods, believing that communication is not a static and mechanistic - but rather a social and creative - construction. James Arthur Anderson (1987) emphasizes this constructivist approach:

Material reality intersects but does not contain the world of meaning. That is not to say that there is no material existence outside of the human consciousness. It is to say that the way we make sense of that material existence is the product of our conscious efforts not of the structure of the universe. (p. 78)

He describes a contingent reality “where meaning is embedded in context, and behaviour must be interpreted within it” (p. 47).

However, there is more to the concept of only denying the existence of one true reality. Because individuals construct their own reality in accordance with personal experiences, social constructivists have to deal with complex and often multiple realities, taken from the observations of their research participants.

The outlined philosophical and theoretical foundations of qualitative communication research lead finally to research methods, techniques and practices. As interesting and fascinating as the preoccupation with social research’s theoretical background may be, one cannot capture the essence of our *Lebenswelt* without wisely selected and applied research methods. Therefore, I will delineate the ethnographic and participant observational approaches that characterize the presented study.

The terms ethnography and participant observation have caused many conceptual debates among qualitative scholars; and most arguments are still not settled. I will not deny that a lot of the debates in the field of qualitative research have provided important insights and facilitated the overall methodological evolution of how we approach scientific matters. That point

notwithstanding, a scholar has to come to a compromise when outlining the methodological foundation of a conducted research project.

The following deliberations will, on one hand, focus briefly on the notion of ethnography and participant observation and, on the other hand, will serve as a transition with a view to the applied research methods, techniques, and practices of the study. In the upcoming section I will also provide the reader with further remarks in relation to what I call *research practices*, namely, the specific ramifications of applied research methods and techniques. When it comes to qualitative research methods, most deliberations are general instructions for active research, however, they do not explicitly inform especially inexperienced social researchers about how to conduct research methods and how to act and behave during field research. Bronislaw Malinowski (1922) already stated this problem and urged researchers to give a full and detailed account of their research methods and the conditions and experiences by which they have come to their conclusions. With this part of my paper I also aim to offer my experience and advice for further research endeavours that hopefully will be undertaken by future scholars in the field.

Participant observation and ethnography

The more one reads about the conceptualization of ethnography and participant observation, the more complicated the integration of both notions into the qualitative research paradigm becomes. Some scholars provide straightforward statements of how we have to understand the relationship between those key terms of the qualitative paradigm.

Without further explanation, Karen O'Reily (2009) purposes an easy approach:

The term 'fieldwork' is often confused with participant observation and ethnography. As if they were all one and the same thing. To be clear: *ethnography* is a methodology, *participant observation* is a method, and *fieldwork* refers to the period of primary data collection that is conducted out of the office or library. (p. 2)

I struggle with so-called easy approaches because they involve the danger of unreflective implementation. When considering other languages and research approaches, the classification and integration of qualitative research approaches get even messier; so, for example, Girtler's (1981) book on participant observation is called "Methods of field research" (p. 1). Instead of pondering over the *right* definitions of ethnography, participant observation, fieldwork, and field research, we should take a look instead at the reasons why this academic disagreement exists. One reason might be the fact that social researchers have been informed and shaped by different educational backgrounds and research traditions. Scholars have been trained to look at specific social phenomena and adjust their research methods accordingly. They are used to applying certain terms to a specific way of conducting research. In German-speaking countries, the term *participant observation* was quite popular, and scholars using this term tried to separate themselves from the roots of British social anthropology because of its more or less ethnocentric attitude toward judging other cultures.

Lüders (2008) describes the relationship between participant observation and ethnography, with regards to their application to sociology, as a gradual transition:

A whole range of developments and factors were needed before an attempt could be made to promote aggressively the strengths of participant observation. What helped here was undoubtedly the insight that the original programme could not be fulfilled, because the large number of settings where participant observation was used were not subject to methodological control. The effort to formulate methodological rules independent of context was de facto rejected, because clearly it was mainly the situationally appropriate behaviour of the observer, his or her trained view and ability to condense heterogeneous material into a plausible description, that were decisive for the quality of a study. But precisely because countless studies insisted that this strategy could be used to produce interesting and important research results, researchers began, on the one hand, to live with a degree of vagueness in methodological questions. (pp. 388-389)

Hammersley (1990) points the way out and describes that social researchers started to interpret participant observation in a much broader sense, emphasizing the “primacy of research practice over ‘theory’ about how to do it” (p. 1). This more flexible and reflective approach has now been associated with the term ethnography. Whereas the term *participant observation* focuses, according to its etymological roots, on a researcher’s behaviour and role in the research field, the term *ethnography* also entails various means of data collection. Furthermore, quantitative methods could be included in ethnographic studies, such as demographic information. Scholars trained in the Chicago School tradition will claim that these various data collection methods are also an important part of their participant observational approach. But does one have to define the relationship between those two terms in order to escape an academic and methodological vicious circle? I propose that this is not the case, emphasizing again Lüders’ (2008) deliberations that “researchers began ... to live with a degree of vagueness in methodological questions (p. 389). Yet Denzin (1997) is of the opinion that ethnography should also serve as a term to summarize the whole area of qualitative social research. At this point I disagree with him, since it would lead to an imprecise determination of what ethnography is meant to be and is able to achieve. I also suggest that ethnography is not even a methodology as stated by so many scholars, such as O’Reilly (2009), because again, we lose the very notion and idea of ethnography, as being a description of small *Lebenswelten*.

Ethnographic studies explore in particular the perspectives and interpretation of participants, their knowledge creation, interaction, cultural practices and verbal discourses. They also focus on the particular realities that are constructed and produced in practical terms and try to figure out the means for situational productions of social phenomena, employed by specific individuals and groups. All these research interests and questions can

be affiliated to the epistemological and methodological deliberations described in length above. Clearly, there is no need to claim that ethnography is a methodology, as is, however, ethnography constitutes a research approach that is in historical and logical alignment with the above-stated foundations of qualitative social research and communication research, respectively. Maybe it is reasonable to state that ethnography refers to a specific way of conducting research, gathering and analysing data, which finally leads to a qualitative research outcome that could also be called a *research product*.

To conclude for the approach of this research study, I would like to state that I make use of an ethnographic approach by utilising, in particular, participant observation and other data collecting tools that will be introduced and explained in the following chapter.

RESEARCH METHODS

An effective and, I propose, the best way, to explore and understand the various co-constructed realities is for researchers to immerse themselves into the reality of the participants. Therefore, they have to interact with them in a profound and intense manner (Lüders & Reichertz, 1986).

This research project is conceptualised as an exploratory-interpretive study and therefore I have chosen the ethnographic study approach, based on a specific social environment. Ethnographic studies are effective data collection methods that allow for the documentation and analysis of observations, what Roland Girtler (1981) calls *ero-epic* (free) dialogues, and related documents, such as written documents, and various electronic documented means of communication. In the following in-depth illustration of the deployed research methods, I will also explain Girtler's (1981) approach to a dialogue with research participants instead of the more common (qualitative approach) practice of *interviewing* research participants.

These research procedures provided me with methods for engaging in the interaction of my participants and determining how they construct, individually and together, the nuances of the specific perception of their reality (Mikos & Wegener, 2005).

In addition, qualitative research methods worked to my advantage regarding a deeper analysis of the role of communication in small groups, because they enabled me to collect data in a way that differs from an experimental research set-up. Whereas an experiment is mainly an artificial and active strategy to gain insight into, and comprehension of, small group communication, my research project employs a more passive approach to data aggregation (Lüders, 2006).

With regards to the exploration of a specific *Lebenswelt*, the validity of experimental research settings is also limited because these studies cannot meaningfully capture the nuances of

a specific social reality. Thus, qualitative researchers agree that studying so-called *zero-history leaderless groups* is ineffectual, for they do not represent naturally occurring groups in our real-world settings. Even though those studies were useful for conditioning the field of research, their findings do not apply to other small groups; their results are too specific (Bormann, 1970; Frey, 1994; 2002).

I decided to explore the communication of a creative group in its natural setting, since research shows that findings of zero-history groups do not facilitate tackling the real problems of small groups in their natural environment (Girtler, 2001; Poole & Hirokawa, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, Putnam and Stohl (1990) called for naturalistic research settings, since the majority of *investigator-created zero-history laboratory groups* do not result in sufficient and convincing findings. F. N. Poole (1990) argues that “zero-history groups, such as those formed for research purposes and relied on in this research, are rare in natural group decision-making context” (p. 45). They also do not adequately represent the interactions of a small group with its natural and habitual environment. Since my study follows the exploratory-interpretive approach, the social environment of the participants is an important aspect of my qualitative study. If I had set up an experimental study, I would have had to consider a particular set-up of that specific research laboratory. However, exploring and analysing a social reality and understanding its relevance for the communicative acts of a small group is the very reason why Girtler (1981) and others urge us to go into the field. In other words, I cannot set up, in advance, the environment that I would like to explore and understand.

Although my exploratory study is similar to the case study approach, I would like to emphasise the ethnographic characteristics of my research methods. Understanding small group communication requires not only concentrating on the intra- and extra-group interactions of a single small group but also considering the impact of larger society on the small group as a

whole. Whereas scholars who analyse case studies tend to direct their attention to the interactions of individuals or small groups, ethnographic scholars are apt to investigate how interaction and communication in a cultural group are influenced by the larger society as a whole (Lüders & Reichertz, 1986). Similar to case studies, I also sought knowledge about phenomena by using multiple lenses. As an ethnographic researcher, however, I am aware of the fact that information gathered within the research setting, and the culture of specific participants, has a role and function on its own. Thus, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the researched phenomena, I tried delving into the world of my participants, and pursued becoming a part of the examined group (Mikos & Wegener, 2005). Initially, my participants were very aware of my presence and I recognised a lot of eyes focused on me and on the way that I behaved. After one-and-a-half weeks, most participants seemed to feel comfortable with me “hanging around all day.” At least, this is what they told me when I asked them. Becoming a part of the creative small group, however, did not occur as I had originally planned and hoped for. During my initial meeting with two gatekeepers of the research setting, I thought that I had communicated clearly enough that it is an important part of the study for me to be involved, as closely as possible, in the day-to-day work of the participants. One participant was open to the idea of my active participation, but the other one uttered vague objections: “I still don’t know yet how this can work out.” Unfortunately, I did not address this point again and thought that it would arise from my later presence in the field. Girtler (1981; 2001) states the difficulty of becoming an accepted member of a group in a work environment setting. He describes his participant observation of a police patrol and that certain regulations did not allow him to actually participate within this particular workplace. Nonetheless, Girtler points out that the more passive participant observational approach is still a way that allows a researcher to “take part” within a specific research setting. From my point of view, researchers have to accept certain limitations when

researching participants in their professional *Lebenswelten*. Otherwise, some participants and their worlds could not be subjected to social research.

Before I describe the research methods that underlie my study any further, I will first depict the social environment of the creative small group that I was allowed to explore.

Research setting

My field research took place in a creative communications agency, based in Atlantic Canada. Although I have to consider ethical research requirements of my university and have agreed with my participants not to portray the environment of the agency in detail, I will outline the specifics of this social environment that I think are essential for the following analysis and understanding of this particular *Lebenswelt*. Conducting ethnographic studies within a business environment is often a balancing act. On the one hand, I am interested in the nuances of the day-to-day interactions of the participants. On the other hand, the agency acts within a competitive market and tries to keep its internal interactions, behaviours and business philosophies and practices confidential, and these are major research features of my ethnographic study.

The communications agency mainly focuses on fulfilling the advertising, marketing and other communications needs of their business clients and other non-profit organisations that consult the agency. Although a lot of what the agency does on a day-to-day basis can be summarised to the simple formula of “getting the message across,” I have noticed that some participants are truthfully engaged in the very process of creativity and try to look beyond the usual techniques of applied communication art. For instance, one of the executive team members talked about his idea of planning a congress on creativity that does not only address the problems or practices of the communications or advertising industry at all, but rather the actual act of being

creative. During my fieldwork I occasionally observed participants absorbed in thoughts that had nothing to do with the specific business challenges of a client, but with the creative act per se.

The spatial set up of the agency is characterised by many areas that are not assigned to specific participants, departments or teams within the agency. All employees have their own space, however, there are a lot of locations that are available for meetings or for spontaneous team or group encounters. So for example, the various teams are located in large group rooms that provide spaces for impromptu meetings at any time. Any employee can address a question or problem and speak up to other members who are working in the same room. Other spaces allow the participants to escape from their day-to-day routines, such as ringing telephones, etc., that can inhibit a creative process or interrupt a group that is engaged in an important conversation. The available spaces are not just arranged within a specific area of the agency, but they can be found almost everywhere, so that there are many possibilities for participants to work undisturbed or make use of various environments and their stimuli. The role of space and group interactions is an important aspect of creative small groups and will be discussed in the analysis chapters.

As the description of the spatial organisation of the agency might have indicated already, the agency encourages its employees to work collaboratively. Yet, the employees are assigned to specific tasks, otherwise any organisation would not be able to work effectively. The agency employs, among others, so-called creatives, account managers, account planners, production managers, designers, an accountant, a controller, a personnel manager, and executive managers. The agency urges all of them to speak their ideas and to contribute to the overall creative process. Ten participants who I have asked regard the agency as “a whole big team working together towards the same goal.”

The following list depicts the gender and occupation of the 34 participants who worked for the communication agency during my fieldwork:

Administrative staff: three females and one male

Account managers: five females and five males

Senior account managers: one female and one male

Creatives: five males and one female

Production team: three females and four males

Co-associate directors: two males

Executive team: three males

Although all employees are encouraged to contribute to the process of collaborative creativity and my study explores the creative process of a creative small groups, I focused mainly on fifteen creative people who work together in teams and groups. A creative team consists of two people and the structure and composition of a creative small group depends on the task at hand, or on other factors that have nothing to do with the actual creative process at all. Although many agency members consider themselves as working together as uniform and entire group, I observed mainly the small group that consisted of the creatives of this agency. The reason for this decision is a practical one: One participant observer cannot be at all places at the same time and cannot focus on various group interactions when he or she is interested in an in-depth analysis and understanding of the *Lebenswelt* of a particular small group. Therefore, I had to decide what the focus of this particular research project would be. Sometimes, however, I also observed the interactions of the account managers and other employees, and how their tasks and performances influenced the actual work of the creative teams and the overall creative group.

Participant observation

My ethnographic research project strived for first-hand experience of the daily life of members of small groups, and I utilised one of the main methods of ethnographic studies: the

participant observational approach. I also relied on conversations with the participants and further data gathering methods throughout my study, however, participating in the daily life of the group and organisation helped me build confidence between my participants and me, as a researcher (Becker, 1958; Girtler, 1981). From my point of view, confidence-building behaviour is essential for any data gathering methods, and because trust requires a certain amount of time, a researcher needs to spend some time with the participants prior to any in-depth conversation about personal views and interpretations of their *Lebenswelt*.

To begin with, being a participant observer means being both a participant and an observer. This definitely sounds strange at first, and so O'Reilly (2009) speaks of the *participant observer oxymoron*: “a contradiction in terms; a concept with an inherent tension” (p. 157). Again, as in so many cases, but still neglected by so many social researchers, an understanding of the origin of the word *participant*, also called etymology, will unravel the participant observational *mystery*. The word participant stems from the Latin word *participare* and can be translated as *to be part in something* or *to attend*. Therefore observation does not exclude a researcher from participating in the research field in whatever way.

Before I get into more detail regarding the participant observational approach, I would like to outline the points that I will elaborate on in the following account. Participant observation is the main research approach in ethnography and is getting increasing attention of qualitative researchers in general. The voluminousness of this research area is astonishing, however, at the same time, it is hard to manage. For this research project report, I decided to first present the theoretical basis of participant observation that play an important role in this particular research project and, second, to follow a chronological approach during the analysis part of the research data and findings. My ethnographic research journey will be described chronologically with regards to my overall participation in the specific research setting and to the various situations

and problems I had to face, and still have to face, while writing this qualitative communication research thesis.

A qualitative approach to participant observation

Since Eduard C. Lindemann (1936) first elaborated the participant observational research approach, scholars who favoured this research tool have had to take a lot of criticism. Whereas this qualitative method is recognized in anthropology, advocates in sociology and related studies are still trying to entrench participant observation as a qualitative research procedure.

The most popular weak point, as identified especially by quantitative researchers, relates to the initial position of the observational approach: *Alltagswissen*²¹ and *Alltagsinteraction*.²² According to Lamnek (2005), critics question the difference between a day-by-day interaction and the interaction discovered through the participant observational approach. Girtler (2005), Lamnek (2005), Peter Atteslander (2003), Jürgen Friedrichs and Hartmut Lüdtke (1973) all avail Roger W. Heyns and Roland Lippitt's (1954) argumentation, and offer a solution to this problem of qualitative research. Participant observation refers to a scientific observation within a theoretical clarified purpose of research, which is planned and implemented systematically. Different from an "average citizen in his day-to-day interactions" (Heyns & Lippitt, 1954, p. 370), I planned on conducting focused and "precise observations during my field study" (p. 370). Although observing other people's actions and behaviours is an ability of most humans, I had to be focused at all times on the social environment and participants' performances. A complex understanding of social environments relies on in-depth observations. Merely picking out

²¹ A basis, inherent knowledge

²² Day-by-day interaction

participants for a singular interview or discussion on a topic will not yield a basic comprehension of the researched social phenomena.

Quantitative researchers, especially, disqualify the above-presented qualitative research approach and cite the terminology of quantitative research, such as reliability, validity, sample, operationalization, etc. (Lamnek, 2005; Girtler, 2001). The early Chicago School, especially Blumer (1986) asserts that it is “ridiculous” (p. 112) to think that the concept of operationalization is able to provide a satisfying illustration of reality. For Blumer (1986), this sociological research and theoretical approach to empirical inquiry is characterized by a science, which he called “socio philosophy” (p. 115).

William J. Filstead (1971) and Girtler (2001) respond to the critics that social research only ensures reliability and validity when scholars illustrate our social world and reality as perceived by the researched participants and not as theorized by scholars and researchers. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) agree by stating *validity* “derives from researchers’ having been there” (p. 135). Even though Girtler (1981) and Lindlof and Taylor (2002) accept that there are certain “attributes and skills” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 135) that enhance the chances of success in fieldwork, I agree with René König (1973) and Lamnek (2005) that any research purpose has to, in some way, adhere to some scientific rules and processes. That also means that qualitative researchers have to answer in part the questions and problems brought forward by quantitative research advocates. Even if qualitative scholars dislike the key terms of a quantitative tradition, I suggest that we try to understand their concerns and continue an open dialogue for a better mutual understanding of each other’s theoretical approaches to social research.

Scientific work insists on research outcomes that fulfil the requirements of *reliability*, *validity*, and *generalizability* (König, 1973). Whereas facts can be observed and tested in the just mentioned quantitative way, it seems quite impossible to apply the observational approach in

order to obtain a better *Verständnis* of particular contexts of meaning. At first glance, this seems to be a so-called delinquency of qualitative research, however, as we have seen and will see in the analysis of small group communication, this is also the strength and reason for conducting qualitative observational research. Before and during my actual field research, I planned and reconsidered how to scientifically observe the social phenomena in question. Initially, I considered writing personal and theoretical reports while in the field. The agency provided me with my own workspace, similar to the workspaces of the other employees. Then again, I noticed that some participants were wondering what I was “writing all the time.” Although I had my own workspace, I was not assigned to a specific task or client and, from my participants’ point of view, not really working on anything except my study. Thus, I decided to do my writing after I had left the field for the day. Still, I carried around a little notepad that allowed me to write down some quotes or observations that I considered to be noteworthy. Similar to my initial writing practise, my presence as such was interfering with the participants at the beginning of my field research. However, my participants got used to my presence and even systematic audio recording of events seemed to be less disturbing than permanently writing down reports at my workspace. My interpretation is that my initial writing habits might have had a negative connotation similar to a board of examiners who contentiously note down “something” during the examination of a candidate.

At other times, I also had to rethink my observational approach when I perceived that my presence was unpleasant for some participants. I decided to withdraw from some meetings or casual conversations when I had the feeling that I should leave. It is hard to describe how I came to my decisions with regards to the questions of “when am I the wrong guy at the wrong place at the wrong time.” For researchers it is always unfortunate when they are not able or allowed to gather all the information that is out there in a research setting. Then again, I prefer knowledge

gained from the research field that permits stating an interpretation and coming to conclusions about a particular social phenomenon. As qualitative researchers in search of reality, we have to admit that our particular distribution is just one piece of the puzzle called reality. With our findings, we offer a specific perspective of reality and hope that other scholars follow the lead.

From my point of view, we are not talking about limitations of qualitative research in the form of participant and nonparticipant observation, instead we are talking about challenges that we have to deal with every time we enter the field.

Characteristics of participant observation

Participant observation, as a research approach, has a long tradition. Accordingly, there are many definitions of what participant observation actually is. A closer look at one of those definitions will provide us with helpful initial thoughts on approaching the topic of participant observation. John J. Harder and Eduard C. Lindemann (1933) provided the academy with one of the earliest definitions:

Participant observation is based on the theory that an interpretation of an event can only be approximately correct when it is a composite of two points of view, the outside and the inside. Thus the view of the person who was a participant in the event, whose wishes and interests were in some way involved, and the view of the person who was not a participant but only an observer or analyst, coalesce in one final synthesis. (p. 148)

This definition points out a basic difficulty of the participant observational approach: the participant is both an objective observing researcher and a human being with feelings and thoughts, participating in the interactions of the research participants. As stated above, I do not come to the conclusion that this imposes an insoluble problem, as O'Reilly (2009) does with her definition of the "participant observer oxymoron" (p. 157). It does, however, call for creative,

spontaneous, and reflective adaptations when it comes to the role that a research is to play in different and diverse research fields and settings.

Furthermore, Harder and Lindemann stress the importance of considering “the inside and outside” of a social phenomenon for a consistent interpretation and sound reasoning of what has been observed. It is for this reason that I have chosen various data collection procedures such as participant observation, ero-epic dialogues and the analysis of qualitative documents that have been produced by the participants at work. Gathered knowledge from different perspectives allows me to come to conclusions that characterise the researched social environment and phenomena. For instance, some participants might have other views than their colleagues or might voice certain views but behave or interact in a contradictory way. My chosen research methods and data collection procedures enabled me to identify contradictions throughout my field research and to make sense of them.

The following presentation of the main characteristics of participant observation will take into account the above-mentioned definitions, as well as concentrate on aspects that are noteworthy with regards to my research study.

The object of observation

As I have described above, observation and other qualitative research methods, such as narrative interviews and ero-epic (free) dialogues²³ seek to explore the social world of specific individuals and groups. Nonetheless, they differ with respect to their approaches and what insights they can provide. Narrative interviews or ero-epic (free) dialogues investigate participants’ attitudes, preferences, opinions, feelings, beliefs, and behavioural expectations,

²³ I will illustrate the difference between interviews and Girtler’s (1981) approach of the ero-epic (free) dialogue later in this chapter.

while participant observation reveals interactional and behavioural patterns of individuals and groups. This distinction is important because I noticed that most participants were not able to convey and explain their actual behaviours and performances. Social research cannot just rely on individuals' and groups' utterances via personal dialogues and group discussions respectively. Therefore, in cases where one wants to work out social behaviour and interaction, participant observation will be a wise choice of social research methods. The very important advantage is that participant observation allows to perceive social interaction while it occurs. Thus, a researcher's observation is independent from participants' willingness or competence to describe their own behaviours and interactions (Lamnek, 2005). The combination of participant observation and dialogue provides valid data and results.

As with many research methods, the observational approach adheres to specific restrictions. Participant observation is linked to perception and is therefore limited with regards to what can be observed at the same time. So, for instance, the research setting and scene have to be chosen according to the researcher's observation opportunities and capabilities. Depending on resources and conditions, one has to limit the research on specific manageable and assessable small groups, which are characterized by a determined and defined location.

Participating in an interaction and observing groups' behaviour only delivers a snapshot of the reality under investigation. Even though I conducted my study carefully and extensively, I had to focus on one scene at a time. Practical participant observation is limited by time, and so I disregarded extending or interrupting a social event, since I would have co-constructed a sequence in a natural setting with research results similar to experimental, laboratory settings.

Due to time constraints, there are certain limitations of the participant observational method. I had to limit the observation to specific criteria, which arose from a variety of social interactions and behaviours. Qualitative research does not allow random reasoning, of course.

Therefore, I had to consider carefully what to observe, where and when. Only in this way would it be possible to draw conclusions about phases that I have not been able to observe in particular.

Finally, my observation had to be limited to phenomena that I was allowed to observe and, in fact, that were sensible and observable. This raises the broad socio-psychological theme of how researchers' sensations and observations are distorted and biased in general, how they interpret perceived social phenomena, and how our worldviews govern - directly or indirectly - a research process at large. There are no satisfactory answers to these questions and I suggest that one has to be aware of personal orientations and preferences, and state theoretical clarifications at the beginning of every study, for our objective inferences are subjective by nature.

Access to the field

Obtaining access to a research field is necessary for data collection and requires acute and accurate negotiations with potential research participants. Those negotiations are normally not even fully complete after the initial agreements on what the researcher is allowed to observe, report, and finally publish, are agreed upon. I was aware that the negotiation of my access to the world of my participants was a continuous process. Even if participants have agreed to specificities regarding a certain degree of access to their *Lebenswelten*, I kept in mind that some participants might change their minds during the actual research study. So, the often-used term *access* to a research site excludes this constantly evolving process, which asks for an honest and respectful exploratory spirit. And in many ways, maintaining a good relationship with all who are involved in the research project is a key aspect that cannot be emphasised enough; it is an issue that persists, to one degree or another, throughout the whole data gathering process and relies on "interpersonal resources and strategies that we all tend to develop in dealing with everyday life" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983, p. 54).

In addition, most participants were eager to know up front what I planned to report and publish as a final research document. Certainly, a researcher cannot be limited in the way she decides to publish her research findings. Then again, my participating small group and the representatives of the agency wanted to know what I intended to do with the findings in the end. There is a need for a subtle agreement; otherwise, it is unlikely that a researcher's request to access a field is going to be granted in the first place.

Many factors that will influence a qualitative research study start and continue with the so-called first step into the field. Certainly, making contact for the first time with potential participants and their reality poses basic considerations that have to be answered carefully by any researcher. I have identified communication as a methodological criterion of qualitative research. The essential relationship building process for fieldwork relies immensely on the communication between a researcher and the people who are involved in the research study. At first, I was a stranger, and even though I might have had a good reason for what I intended to do, my access to the agency relied in part on my verbal and non-verbal communication skills.

I provided the participants and the representatives of the agency with a brief explanation of the research and the reasons why it might be important and also interesting for them.

Much depends on a researcher's *presentation of the self*, to put it in Goffman's (1959) terms, and the current research situation in the field. Good ethnographic reports do support the reader with triumphs, discomfitures, failures, and other useful insights for further and future studies. I have decided to continue the tradition by providing my experiences and conclusions in the analysis part of this thesis.

The role of the researcher in the field

The participant observer plays various roles and has to adapt to different situations. Although most researchers initially try to blend in and to disturb the social environment and interaction as little as possible, we have to recognize that our presence already changes the concrete social situation and even leads to another co-constructed reality. In a way, we will never be able to observe the real situation.

Before I continue outlining my role as a participant observer I would like to emphasize that the notion of the researcher's role is not just about the methods and techniques of data collection.

As soon as we start building a relationship with our research participants, we have to fulfil a range of obligations and values that are expected of us. Some of them are covered by the more technical term *research ethics*, however, most of them involve the way in which we treat each other as human beings. Since qualitative research relies on the goodwill of our participants, it is essential to understand, tolerate, and respect their way of acting in their *Lebenswelten*. After all, their way of living and interpreting social life is the reason for our research endeavours.

Morris S. Schwartz and Charlotte Green Schwartz (1955) and Raymond L. Gold (1958) subdivide participant observation into four types, which are distinguished by the level and intensity of observation or participation, respectively: *the complete participant*; *participant as observer*; *observer as participant*; and *complete observer*. Of most interest are the differences between the two middle positions. Although I think that a too minute division of the various participant observational approaches limits the flexibility of this qualitative research procedure, it makes sense to briefly illustrate the different aims and purposes of the *participant as observer* and the *observer as participant* methods. Girtler (1981) and Kathy Charmaz (2006) argue that those researchers who try to understand a social phenomenon from being inside are more likely to

participate than observe. As Raymond L. Gold (1958) points out: “Because the observer-as-participant’s contact with an informant is so brief, and perhaps superficial, he is more likely than the other two to misunderstand the informant, and to be misunderstood by him” (p. 221). The researcher is quite remote from the interaction and I purport that this approach seems to be not very helpful from my understanding of a qualitative, ethnographic communications research process.²⁴

In practical terms, a researcher will switch deliberately - as well as unintentionally - from one role to the other; especially when he remains in the research field for a longer period of time. There are times, as we will see later in my analysis, where I had to play a more observational role than first intended and planned. Whereas I hoped to play a more active role in the day-to-day interactions of my participants, most participants made clear that they were happier with me playing a more passive role. Consequently, theoretical reflections on which role a researcher should play during a research project help us analyse a researcher’s findings and understand their limited significance. The actual research settings and the people involved will, however, determine the role of a researcher. In my particular case I had to simply accept the expectations of my participants if I wanted to continue my research.

The process and phases of tactical observation

Participant observation can be understood as a process in two ways. First, there is the process of a researcher who increasingly becomes a participant in the field. This process entails making first contact, gaining more and more access to the field and building relationships with the participants. It also involves the researcher’s role in adapting processes and his behaviour in

²⁴ Yet, advocates of an ethnomethodological research approach might favour the distant role of an observer-as-participant role, which only takes into account the recorded interaction of the participants without dwelling on the personal interpretation of the settings by the researcher.

the various research settings and situations (see above). Second, the process of observation is becoming increasingly concrete and concentrated on the specificities, which arise from the research study. James P. Spradely (1980) gives three phases of the participant observation:

1. *descriptive observation*, at the beginning, serves to provide the researcher with an orientation to the field under study. It provides nonspecific descriptions and is used to grasp the complexity of the field as far as possible and to develop (at the same time) more concrete research questions and lines of vision;
2. *focused observation*, narrows your perspective on those processes and problems, which are most essential for your research question (I would like to include research phenomena);
3. *selective observation*, towards the end or the data collection, is focused on finding further evidence and examples for the types of practices and processes, found in the second step. (p. 34)

These three phases do not have to occur in the above-stated chronological order. Especially during my actual research study, I had to learn that there were times when I had to switch from the *selective observation* back to the *focused observation* for a while.

The researcher's role in the field and his degree of participation is likely to change accordingly to the particular observational stages, namely, the *early stage*, *integration stage*, and *the stage of leaving the research field*.

Early stage

In the first few days, I tried to acclimatize myself within the field. I tried to be watchful, learn to develop a perspective from which I hoped to start making careful observations of communication acts, other behaviour of the participants, and the objects within the environment. Although I was assigned to a specific spot I sought out other possibilities where I could sit, stand, and move around in order to observe the interactions. For instance, I watched the regular movement of my participants in the creative team room. Very often, the task determined where a creative had to go, and not the actual hierarchical structure of the agency. So when one of the

associate creative directors had to discuss something with the members of a creative team, he moved to their workspace instead of ordering them to his office. At other times, a creative was interested if a client liked a creative solution to a problem and went to the account manager who was assigned to the particular clients. I often followed my participants in order to understand the communicative acts that are involved with the creative process. First, some participants were surprised that there was someone following all their steps throughout their professional workday. Therefore I decided to explain often, and in detail, the reason for my behaviour and that I really relied on their expertise and knowledge for the completion of my research project and thesis.

I consider this stage important. Because I was in contact with most participants for the first time, and they tended to scrutinize every move I made. Thus, this is the time when I relied on my interpersonal communication skills and ethical behaviour, in general, as they are key for relationship building within the research setting (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Again, and similar to the phase where I negotiated access to the world of the participants, I had to earn the trust of the other participants whom I had not met so far. I hoped to come across as an honest and interested researcher without appearing to be too curious. Certainly, I was quite nervous because, first and foremost, I was the one being observed for the first few days or even weeks. Nonetheless, I remembered the following the written advice of Leonard Schatzman and Anselm L. Strauss (1973) that I read during my field work preparation:

Novices in research worry too soon about developing salient categories for final analysis about developing brilliant concepts, and about establishing “patterns of interaction”; in short, they want quickly to prove to themselves and others that they are social scientists. Not so our model researcher; he is quite content, for a considerable time, to experience the ambience of the scene. He has great patience, as well as a tolerance for ambiguity and for his own immediate ignorance. Far from acting like a scientist and telling himself he is one, he is genuinely busy being a learner – indeed, a novice – and perhaps a participant. (p 54)

These first days were overwhelming because everything was new and I was remembering myself that I still needed to answer the questions “what’s going on” (Goffman, 1974, p. 119).

As stated above, the phase of continuous participant observation is related to the personal role of the researcher and his pursuit to become more and more a participant in the field. The early stage is full of questions regarding his behaviour and some of them can influence the whole research process that has just started. So, for example, it was of vital importance to know when and how it was appropriate for me to talk, when and how to act, and when to withdraw from a specific setting or scene. Over time, my daily participation broadened my “social horizon” (Girtler, 1981, p. 111) and helped me identify the various hierarchical structures of the agency, their terminologies and behavioural patterns. Lindlof and Taylor (2002) establish the following questions with regards to the communication function of participant observation in the initial stage. They served as an initial guideline for conceptualizing a preliminary structure of what I started to observe. These stages are as follows: (a) Who are the actors, (b) how is the scene set up, (c) how do initial interaction occur, (d) how do actors claim attention, (e) where and when do actors interact, and (f) which events are significant? (pp. 154-158). Whereas the first two and the last questions are quite typical with ethnographic studies, the other questions focus directly on the interaction between the participants among themselves and between the participants and the researcher. Of interest are, for example, the preferred styles and means of communication; who associates with whom and under what conditions?; and locations and timing of the interactions. All of these, and additional artefacts of communication, and what they mean for understanding their communicative function for small groups, will be described, analysed, and discussed in detail in the following chapter.

After a while, I felt comfortable just being around at the agency and started observing particular participants and their interactions. I gradually became familiar with most names of the

participants and their particular roles within the agency. It is at this moment where the actual in-depth data gathering begins and a researcher enters the next stage.

Integration stage

In this stage, the researcher has become familiar with the new social *Lebenswelt* and associates the participants with their diverse roles in their reality. In addition, the researcher increasingly starts to act accordingly to the field settings, and scenes and in ways that make sense to the participants. Perceiving social phenomena and gradually understanding the various realities of a setting, such as interpersonal conflicts, political power issues, and cultural beliefs, permit a researcher to interpret the *Lebenswelt* of the participants and help him adopt their perspectives.

This was also the time when I thought it was reasonable to start writing precise fieldnotes, and conducting dialogues and discussions with the participants. My fieldnotes were not purely descriptive anymore, and they started to differentiate the more relevant observations from the irrelevant. By means of a more *focused observation* (Spradley, 1980), I concentrated on factors of particular interest and specific types of activities or events, that I hoped would lead to the discovery of patterns or regularities in the behaviours of my participants (Girtler, 1981).

Although I gradually began to put together some of the puzzle pieces, I reminded myself to not lose focus on their significance in the larger context of the researched phenomena. After a while, I proceeded to the *selected phase* (Spradley, 1980), in order to explore only a number of selected factors in greater detail.

Spradley (1980) characterizes the procedure from *descriptive* to *selective* observation as analogous to a funnel; the researcher's attention becomes more and more focused, deepened and condensed. Indirectly, he implies a heuristic research process and states that "even as your observations become more focused, you will continue making general descriptive observations

until the end of your field study” (p. 33). It should be noted that, once again, scholars applying participant observation methods refuse to establish standardization and formalization of their research methods, and that “not all methodological approaches and concepts can claim validity without first providing themselves in research practise” (Lüders, 2004, p. 387). But one can also refer back to the strength of a flexible, methodologically diverse and context-related qualitative research approach, providing a plurality of perspectives of social phenomena.²⁵ With these considerations in mind, I motivated myself to look at what happened within the agency from a new perspective from time to time and tried to avoid reasoning and interpreting the communicative acts in a similar and continuous way.

Lindlof and Taylor (2002) refer to the communication researcher’s observational process and formulate superbly:

Recognizing significant events involves deciding that they count as an example of a higher order concept. Over time, observers will build up a supply of recorded motives, accounts, feelings, and actions that can be used to define these events and their properties. Among these properties are openings and closings for interaction, references to membership, sequences for taking turns, and conversational devices for keeping a topic on track. (p. 158)

By now, the observer is knowledgeable and competent enough to talk with the participants about their daily activities and circumstances. In fact, the more he gets involved in discussions, the more he will gain a better *Verständnis* of the *Lebenswelt*. Accumulated knowledge can be used, modified and facilitated. I also noticed that setting up a discussion group of two enhanced my understanding, because both participants started to discuss their points of view and broaden my horizon in a way that I assume would not have happened if I had talked to just one of participants alone.

²⁵ For many scholars, this circumstance might be one of the reasons to categorise the term participant observation under the hypernym ethnography.

Whereas the *early stage* is characterized more by observing the research setting, the *integration stage* allowed me to actually “participate” in and understand at least some of the research settings. Therefore, I tried to minimize the disturbance of the research setting caused by my presence, and focus on understanding the interaction of my research subjects. By doing so, I learned to take on the perspective of the creative group, socialized with the group, and hopefully appeared trustworthy to my participants. This process very often leads to a situation where one begins to identify with the participants in the field.

Scholars refer to the terms *going native*, *over-identification* or *overrapport* (Miller, 1952, p. 97) and they caution researchers against a too intensive immersion into the social reality and culture. Certainly this ongoing discussion is important for any ethnographic study, and it forces us to rethink the phenomenological approach to social research. On the one hand, it is crucial for producing convincing ethnographic research outcomes to achieve a substantial internal perspective on the social phenomena. On the other hand, one has to keep a crucial external perspective and to reconsider the originally planned research purpose. Michael Agar (1996) reminds us to maintain the distance of a “professional stranger” in order to proceed with a systematic observation. Other scholars state that over rapport will result in distorted and biased accounts and the necessary comparability with other researchers’ accounts will no longer be guaranteed.

So, how could we answer to this apparently irresolvable dispute over commitment on the one side and distance on the other? One easy answer could be that there is no such problem of *going native* because, as the term implies, only colonialist-informed anthropologists faced the momentum of saying goodbye to the world of the explored natives (O’Reilly, 2009). Girtler (1981) proposes a slightly more difficult answer but comes to the same conclusion. He seems to be one of the few social researchers who suggest risking “going native” (p. 79). Girtler replies to

the critical reviewers of his concept that the fact that more observers come to the same conclusion is not an evidence for the objectivity of observational outcomes. Rather, the observers might suffer from the same preconceptions and prejudices. He suggests to identify with one's participants and to become a member of the group. The moment a researcher honestly identifies himself with the research participants, he will also respect the participants. After all, it is their thinking and acting the research seeks to understand, instead of studying from a distance. By welcoming the principle of openness (see above), one prevents "wrong outcomes" of research studies and keeps the research receptive of much of the explored group. According to Girtler, objectivity can be achieved when approaching in depth the researched *Lebenswelt* of the relevant human beings. Unlike other scholars, Girtler considers "going native" as the only way to explore, immerse and understand the reality of the individuals and groups.

From my point of view, we should not spend too much time pondering about a situation where we might get too much immersed into our participants' worldviews. By contrast, most ethnographic accounts lack a substantial understanding and presentation of the explored *Lebenswelten*. Here we are certainly on thin methodological ice because there are some measures that will allow a decent representation of the studied social phenomena and still adhere to the principle of a "professional stranger" (Agar, 1980). For example, I made sure that I had enough time to write down detailed fieldnotes every day I was in the field, although it is very common for ethnographers to delay the write-up of fieldnotes to the very end of the study. Writing down fieldnotes regularly, however, reminds us of our research tasks and responsibilities to the academic research community. Fieldnotes also allowed me time to reflect what had happened the day and how my observation or dialogues might fit in my overall understanding of the researched environment. They also were an important part for planning what I wanted to focus on in the

coming days. This reflective process helped me focus on the research questions and the very reason I had planned the study in the first place.

Leaving the field

There are many reasons why a researcher decides to leave the field. Some of them are purely practical; others are based on the study process itself. A scholar might depend on sponsors of his research work, or he or she might be forced by other reasons of academia to end the data collection and to start the final ethnographic writing. Throughout the study, a researcher will spend a lot of time with the participants and possible friendships will more or less influence the process of leaving the field (de Laine, 2009). Leaving the field is therefore a personal stage during the research study, and each case is different. A researcher has to communicate to his participants that he will not leave just because he has gathered everything he needed; sometimes we have to offer vital help. In my particular case, where I observed creative small groups at the communications agency for about six weeks, I cannot conclude that I was in danger of neglecting a personal relationship to the participants. There are certainly ethnographic research studies where the participants were in great need and hoped for the help of a researcher as well. For example, Girtler (1981) explored the *Lebenswelt* of homeless people who regularly got in trouble with the law and asked him to “put in a good word for them” (pp. 130-133).

With regards to my research findings, I incorporated my fieldnotes, thoughts and interpretations in the dialogues with my participants. In some cases I learned what the researched individuals and group thought about my interpretation of their explored social world (Girtler, 1981). A reflective discussion with my participants about potential inaccuracies or misinterpretations of my interpretation of the data allowed me to review and correct the conclusions of my research data and findings. It also enabled me to share some parts of my work

with the participants and demonstrated the importance of their collaboration. This procedure enhances the chances that questions about the validity of my findings can be answered to some extent. Certainly, participants' comments and interpretation do not ensure that I have captured the *real* social phenomena, however, they constantly reminded me of the various perspective and interpretation of the *same* things we perceive and will guide further interpretation and research studies.

Field relations

Much can be said about the relationship between a researcher and the field. As a participant observer I try to be open to various personal traits and behaviours of individuals or groups. Respect for different perspectives and a curiosity toward various cultural *modi videndi* distinguish qualitative research. So, in a way, the relationship between my participants and me was defined before I started negotiating access to my research site for the first time. Girtler (1981) characterizes the role of a qualitative researcher as a true vocation, valuing other people's opinions, their lives and problems. Thus, he does not provide a separate chapter on the researcher's attitude and behaviour, but, rather, he addresses the topic wherever it seems to be useful.

Right at the beginning, I made sure that I established a mutual relationship based on trust and understanding of one another. The quality of this relationship and the degree of access to various interaction phenomena will reflect the quality of the data collected. Although I tried to observe and participate wherever and whenever possible, it was important for me to respect certain norms of the researched social world and to answer specific expectations of the participants. From my experience, it is better to accept the wish of participants not to be present from time to time, instead of causing a negative development in the previously built relationship

with the individuals or groups. Accepting restricted access and individuals' preferences, not endangering the overall relationship to the social world under investigation requires the researcher to maintain a calm temper. It is wiser to acknowledge these circumstances and gain rapport as much as possible, for, in the end one relies on participants' co-operation and contributions. A patient scholar, "and open friendly demeanour, honesty, communicativeness, an easy smile" (O'Reilly, 2009, p. 175) - and time - will facilitate in many cases an illuminating insight into research group members' perspectives.

My role as a researcher also included explaining my intentions, the purpose and parameters of the study, such as how long the study will take place, my particular role, and what was, in some way, expected from my participants (Agrosino, 2007). I also did not want to be merely perceived as an academic data seeker. I tried to communicate clearly, listen carefully, be truthfully interested in individuals and groups' *Lebenswelt*.

With a view to the analysis of the research data, the relationship in the field is crucial to the final findings of any ethnographic study. We need to be aware of the fact that our presence as such will modify the explored social world and wrong behaviour will distort empirical results. Researchers who do not impose themselves too much on the participants can hope for beneficial outcomes by using the approach of participant observation.

Finally, a truthful relationship between participants and a researcher does not only influence the findings of a research study but also reflects the notion of ethical considerations outline superbly by Marlene de Laine (2001):

Now that the richness and power of ethnography and other kinds of qualitative research are confirmed in social science, practitioners work though the complications of fieldwork looking for less harmful possibilities for making sense of people's life. (p. 1)

I most warmly recommend the reader and qualitative adventurer to read de Laine's book on qualitative research ethics. Instead of providing another section on research ethics I hope that Girtler's (E-mail document provided by Girtler in 2009) illustration on a true ethical observer will inspire the reader as much as they still inspire myself. Girtler narrates:

1. Live according to the customs and rules which are important to the people among which you are doing research. This means respect for their rituals and their sacred periods of time, expressed in your manner of clothing, as well as during mealtimes and drinking. – *Si vivis Romae Romano vivito morae!*
2. Allow yourself to be generous and unprejudiced in order to be able to recognise values and to judge according to principles which are not your own. It is an obstacle if you suspect nastiness and cunning behind everything.
3. Never speak negatively about your hosts and people with whom you have shared a pint of beer, a glass of wine or a cup of tea.
4. Make yourself familiar with the history and the social conditions of the culture you are interested in. For this purpose first visit their graveyards, markets, pubs, churches or similar places.
5. Get a good idea of the geography of the squares and houses in which life is going on and where you want to do research. Walk around in the relevant area and climb up a church spire or a hill.
6. In order to distinguish yourself from the usual travelers carry your experience home and report with as little prejudice as possible. It is important, therefore, to have a research diary (next to other records) in which you enter each day's thoughts, your problems and joys of research, but also annoying experiences. This will stimulate honest reflections about yourself and your research, but also self-criticism.
7. Afford yourself the leisure of the "ero-epic (free) dialogue" (see explanation at bottom of page). That means people may not be regarded as mere informants. They are to be talked to in a way to make them feel respected. Introduce yourself as a human being and do not impose upon others. This is the only way to take down good records of dialogues and observations.
8. Make an effort to judge the person you are talking to. Otherwise it could happen that you are fooled or consciously lied to.
9. Don't act as though you were a missionary priest or a social worker. You are not in a position to "educate" the apparent "savages". You are not a judge but merely a witness.
10. You must be in good shape in order to be able to feel comfortable in a field, in a stuffy pub, in church, in posh restaurants, in the forest, in the stable, on a dusty road or anywhere else. For this purpose you should have the ability to eat, drink or sleep at any given time.

Time

Ethnographers agree on the assumption that reasonable analysis requires an extended participation. Goffman (1963) refers to the notion of “co-presence” (p. 1) to describe how a researcher relies on participants sharing their social world. Even extended conversation, dialogues, and lengthy narrative interviews have their limitations in facilitating an empirical understanding. A researcher’s interest in the insider’s perspective, and hoping that the strange may become familiar and the familiar strange (Schütz, 1944), necessitates residing in the field “by the lasting co-presence of an observer and events” (Hirschauer & Amann, 1997, p. 21).

As mentioned above, especially in the *early stage* of an exploratory study, I had to act and react with sensitivity to anything that occurred, and, to find my role in the field, I had to remain receptive to any aspects of the researched phenomena, and take advantage from a fresh and critical perspective. I also had to spend enough time in the field to overcome the initial information overload and to focus, in a step-by-step fashion, on the important peculiarities of the researched settings and scenes. At one point during my field research, I was a little bit worried of gradually losing the ability to focus on the participants’ interactions. I decided to take a break from field research for three days, and when I came back, I once again perceived a freshness and openness to my research adventure, similar to the very beginning of entering the research site.

Time is also an essential factor in the building of relationships. Participants need time to understand the purpose of the study, support the research methods, and over time they learn that they can trust the foreigner. This is especially true when one tries to explore the way organisations work and communicate in a highly competitive market. Here the researcher comes directly or indirectly into contact with sensitive material; in my case, the communication strategies of current clients. There seems to be a difference between researching social behaviour in common everyday life and exploring the interaction patterns of professionals or organisations.

The time spent in a research field is also a crucial factor in process of iterative-inductive reasoning (O'Reilly, 2009). Ethnographic studies start out with a “foreshadowed problem” (Malinowski, 1922, p. 9) or a research question, but without any further determination of the phenomena to be examined. Over time one follows interesting interactions in the various located research scenes, progressively constructing the research analysis. Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously and are characterized by iterative, inductive and deductive reasoning (see below). The iterative, inductive and deductive reasoning will ask a researcher to explore a range of interactive scenes and settings, commonly referred to as the notion of *sampling* (Lamnek, 2005) (see below).

One aspect of time that is not treated properly with regards to ethnography and research methods refers to the uniqueness of any interaction within the field setting. One has to be constantly attentive in order to ensure that the essence of any interaction that is important for the research question or phenomenon is perceived “appropriately”. Surely we might be able to video or audio record the occurrence, but we need to note that these recordings are an original research product of the event—at least from a constructivist perspective—and with the awareness of the researcher’s co-presence.²⁶

During every research endeavour a researcher needs to address the question: how much time is sufficient in order to obtain adequate research results? Charmaz (2006) gives the following answer:

Whatever methods you choose, plan to gather sufficient data to fit your task and to give you as full a picture of the topic as possible within the parameters of this task. Readers and reviewers will see your study as a serious effort and you will have a strong foundation from which to speak. (p. 18)

²⁶ Unfortunately, the highly interesting questions regarding whether we construct or re-construct a perceived phenomenon by means of various recording devices must be left open at this point. It will be addressed briefly below.

Although one might assume that the more time spent in a field the better, we have to ensure that we assign enough time to formulate and write down our research findings and conclusions. There is no point in conducting an in-depth study when there are no written and published results.

Now that I have outlined in detail the participant observational approach that I utilised for my study, I would like to turn toward another method of field research, namely, the *ero-epic (free) dialogue*, which emphasises in particular the spoken word of the participants and complements the more passive approach of observation.

Ero-epic (free) dialogue

Talk is all around us. Whenever sociologists, psychologists, socio-psychologists, or management scholars set out in the field exploring the meanings in everyday life, they rely on oral discourse. It seems to be unnecessary to name communication researchers as well, however, they might be more aware of the fact that speech, surely a form of interaction, takes place at every turn.

Ethnographic communication research denotes talking and listening, asking questions, participating and observing while pursuing the nuances of the social world under exploration. So, if participant observation is already characterized by focusing on interaction, verbal and non-verbal communication, the oral dialogues surrounding the research scenes, how do we distinguish between the various research methods or attitudes?²⁷ Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest the following answer:

So important is oral discourse to all the interpretivist traditions that it is hard to imagine any of them existing and prospering without a methodology designed to

²⁷ As noted above, I propose that participant observation and qualitative research, as such, are not only research methods or strategies, rather, they reflect the personal attitude of a curious person. Whether we label him or her a social scientist, interpretivist researcher or scholar, is immaterial.

study speaking subjects. Asking questions and listening to others tell what they know, feel, and believe are archetypal actions of the interview. (p. 170)

I have nothing to add to Lindlof and Taylor's remarks, however, would like to discuss in detail the addressed approach of the interview. Girtler (1981) suggests not using the technical term *interview* anymore. The notion interview, established around 1860 in the United States of America, comes from the journalistic discipline, which seeks timely information from politicians, artists and other important people (Mitzka & Kluge, 1963). In most cases, it does not rely on an established relationship with a research participant and is not interested in the interviewed persons as such. Nonetheless, the notion of the interview is well-established, although with some terminological adjustments. Instead of acknowledging that the word *interview* is not suitable for the actual purpose of conducting qualitative research with participants, many scholars modify the term or even try to redefine its etymological origin; e. g. we find the notion of *qualitative interview*, *narrative interview*, and the *ethnographic interview*. Kayle (1996) suggest the term *InterViews*, referring to an exchange or interconnection of views rather than a one-way flow of information. Michael Brenner, Jennifer Brown and David V. Canter (1985) explain that interviews "develop a *view* of something between (*inter*) people" (p. 148) sounds quite reasonable, but ignores the etymology of the term interview, which points to the component *inter* as meaning "with", "inside" or "within" (Mitzka & Kluge, 1963). The interview focuses on the insights of the interviewed persons. The term does not contain a reference to the relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee. Norman Denzin's (1978) statement can be understood as the general assumption of researchers applying the above- outlined interview strategy:

Thus the ultimate basis of any interview is "talk" and its social organization. Yet the talk which occurs is unlike everyday talk between friends, close acquaintances, spouses, or co-workers. It is talk that covers a wide range of topics, which are not selected by one of the talkers – the respondent. It is talk

that is organized so as to give one person (the interviewer) greater control over the other (the respondent). It is talk that is (typically) furnished for someone else's benefit. (p. 113)

What Denzin ignores is that we should at least try to respect the participant in the same way as our friends or spouses. Qualitative research does not allow for the researcher exerting pressure on researched individuals.

No matter how one looks at it, the term still has a negative connotation. Because of its historical background, it prompts researchers to focus on asking questions while having difficulties in acknowledging that a participant might not want to talk about a topic or might not want to answer a concrete line of questioning.

Girtler, uneasy about using the term *narrative interview*, coined the term *ero-epic (free) dialogue*. The following quote is taken from an E-mail that he kindly sent to me in December 2009. Girtler was so kind to translate a passage from his book (Girtler, 1981):

The term 'ero-epic dialogue' was developed by me in accordance with Homers 'Odyssey'. In the 'Odyssey' one always asks and the other speaks, each of the two are included in the dialogue – at the same time they drink and jest. I don't like the term interview, as it stems from the language of journalism. As a pupil of the monastery school of 'Kremsmünster' I studied classical Greek for six long years. I would like to mention that I define myself as a true philologist in the best sense of the word. In other words I found love (philos – friend, lover) for classical Greek, without necessarily having been a good pupil. Homer's writings, for example, gave me such pleasure then and now, that I used them as a source. After all, from the 'Odyssey', a cultural scientist can learn a lot about every day life in the ancient world. In the word 'ero-epic' you will find the following classical Greek words: erotan – to ask and eipon (epos) to talk, inform (narrative).

A researcher does not regard the participants as mere informants. Participants "are to be talked to in a way which makes them feel respected" (Girtler, 2001, p. 147). The researcher has to "introduce [him- or herself] as a human being and do not impose upon others. This is the only way to take down good records of dialogues and observation" (Girtler, 2001, p. 148).

From my point of view, it is not just a question of semantics and word choice. It seems to be reasonable to avoid the term *interview* or any adaption of it. Fritz Schütze (1977), who coined the term *narrative interview*, states that the first question the participant is meant to be put under pressure (*Zugzwang*). Girtler's (1981) approach follows Goffman's (1974) ideas, published in his famous work, called "Frame Analysis." Over the years, Goffman (1974) figured out that his insights depended less on his attention to the interaction itself than on the implicit rules that, by "defining the situation" (p. xiii), shaped the meaning generated within. By placing myself on the same level as my participants, I tried to ensure the free dialogue Girtler (1981) asks for. The participants should not have had the feeling that I asked them predesigned questions and that by posing these questions the dialogue was determined by a specific interrogation. Above all, it is the perspective of the participants that will characterize the overall research findings.

Girtler (1981) is certainly not the first to rethink the way of approaching communications research participants.

Some scholars have recognized the necessity utilising other terms that reflect, in a better way, the interpretive approach to qualitative social research. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) speak of "situational conversation" (p. 71), however, still emphasise the questioning character of the researcher-participant occurrence. On the other hand, ethnographers, such as O'Reilly (2009) refer to "in-depth conversation" (p. 125).

Although qualitative scholars do not agree on the term, the recent publications state similar approaches to *getting in touch and talking* with people. Thereby a researcher's individual experience impinges on the presentation of main features of conducting dialogues with the participants. Talks between me and the participants occurred spontaneously and evolved into longer dialogues. Sometimes we agreed on a timeline and planned an ero-epic dialogue in advance. I am thankful that many participants agreed to speak to me about my questions and

subjects whenever I wanted to ask them. Their openness to such unexpected occurrences led to interesting information that I might not have gathered, had I used a carefully staged dialogue situation. Whether an unexpected longer discussion arises from a brief chat also depended on the rapport between the participants and me, as well as on the time available for my curiosity and interest. All types of communication encounters helped me to understand the participants' social world that cannot be observed appropriately or obtained from other sources (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). In a way, ero-epic dialogues and participant observation complement each other and enabled me to gain a better understanding of the social mosaic. Good rapport with some of my participants induced them to share stories, give accounts and explanations about their experience, attitudes, beliefs, and revealed language forms, occurrences that happened in the past, and finally, how participants reflect about the social phenomena which interested me the most (Girtler, 1981).

So how do we conduct ero-epic dialogues? Girtler (1981) and O'Reilly (2009) insist on being brave, getting a feeling for the existing communicative situation and to "just let it happen" (Girtler, 1981, p. 149). I preferred an unstructured dialogue and continuously adapted to the current communication situation. A qualitative researcher, as I understand it, does not know what to expect: is this not the reason why we conduct research in a natural setting in the first place? As a field researcher, I needed to learn to be patient, modest, willing to be a true learner, and to acknowledge my participants as research partners who facilitated my insight in their *Lebenswelten* (Girtler, 1981). Although I was open to what participants had to say and how they wanted to share their experience, sometimes it was also necessary to lead them into a direction that I thought might facilitate the purpose of the study. The etymology of the term *ero-epic dialogue* refers to a situation where skilful, subtle questioning and commenting maintains a running conversation and elicits substantial information. In the tradition of Homer, the

combination of questioning, commenting and storytelling is an artful undertaking, not easy to conduct.

An ero-epic dialogue does not begin with addressing an initial question. That is one of the main differences that Girtler (1981) suggests. Instead, it gives the researcher an opportunity to express and explain the purpose of a study and his interests. First, I had to arouse interest in my ideas and research endeavour, in order to convey the real need for participants' involvement and contribution. This approach should not be confused with an initial statement that, for example, Lindlof and Taylor (2002, p. 191) suggest. Since we hope that participants will make time available for us and pay attention, we have to honestly address and detail our interests and, in a way, show real interest in the participants' lives. My participants were more inclined to share the complexities of their social life when I myself opened up and shared some of my personal stories as well.

The rest depends on a researcher's personality and tact towards individuals and groups, and his talent to realize the right moment at which to begin a good talk (Girtler, 1981).

Qualitative Documents

Qualitative documents of any kind, also called qualitative artefacts (Lamnek, 2005), are important means of communication. They are another source for understanding a social phenomenon. Written documents, such as emails, work memos, various internal and external documents of a communications agency, and visual images, express and influence individual small group communication. They document the current state of a project, illustrate the agency's philosophy, and exemplify the way people organize and record their work. When groups discuss ongoing work projects they refer to the documents; and the way they do it reveals intriguing information about the use of qualitative documents as a means of communication.

In my study, I collected as much as I was allowed to, however, made sure that I was not considered to be a document hunter. One has to explain that it makes sense to look into a document that entails internal information, such as the philosophy and identity of a small group. Most of the time, the participants provided me with all kinds of artefacts that I did not ask for in the first place. Sometimes I had to ask for a follow up document of a meeting, and I stated an honest interest and need for the specific written document. Honestly, I hoped to be more involved with regards to the electronic messaging between my participants. E-mails are an important communication tool, and participants' behaviour and verbal communicative acts often refer back to written E-mail messages.

I will come back to various artefacts in the analysis part of my thesis, and I will explain how they characterize a communication act or define a communicative situation. Introduce the following section.

Data collection and the process of interpretation

A research study extends over a long period, and because it is not possible to memorize everything that happened and how it happened, a researcher relies on data collection. Participant observation and ero-epic dialogue demand immense attention to the research field, scenes, and interaction of the participants. In my study I utilised three ways of collecting data: fieldnotes, digital audio recording, and gathering qualitative artefacts. Since I have briefly stated how I collected qualitative artefacts, I would like to further describe how I constructed fieldnotes and audio recorded various ero-epic dialogues.

The production of fieldnotes, firsthand accounts of the researcher, is perhaps the most prominent element of an ethnographer's participant observation. Patreece R. Boone's (2003) ethnographic studies included descriptions of the "setting and activity, the sequence of events,

descriptions of the participants and their verbal and nonverbal behaviours, descriptions of how the participants interacted with one another, and other personal interpretations and observations” (p. 218).

Participant observation relies especially on what Lincoln and Guba (1985) call the “human-as-instrument” (p. 198) approach. Whether one likes the somewhat contradictory term, it illustrates the unique role of qualitative researchers in the data collection procedure. To a large extent, good fieldnotes rely on researchers’ perception of their environment and the interactions that take place within it. Fieldnotes entail descriptions of settings, people, sounds, smell, activities, and everything else that a researcher feels the need to write down. Since it is difficult to write and observe at the same time, and also because participants’ behaviour might become influenced too much by an observer who is writing non-stop, there is a great deal of advice on how to conduct useful fieldnotes.

At this point, I want to state how I proceed when conducting qualitative research. Following Girtler’s (1981) advice, I always carry around a small notepad where I can briefly write down notes that serve as a memory aid for the time when extensive notes will be constructed. In this particular study, I was allowed to use one of the available workplaces in the creative room of the communications agency. The workplace also provided enough privacy so that I was able to write down extensive fieldnotes every day. It is important to keep the fieldnotes up-to-date since most people are not able to recall all of the observed details after a couple of days. I suggest not conducting fieldwork when there is no opportunity to write down detailed fieldnotes the same day, or the morning after. I also consulted the collected qualitative artefacts to visualize the perceived experience.

Following the tradition of so many scholars, such as Glasser and Strauss’ (1967), I also tend to write down methodological and theoretical notes in a separate document. ATLAS.ti is a

qualitative data analysis software tool that allows the combining of all notes taken, and the cross-referencing of the data in a meaningful way. ATLAS.ti also allows me to create different versions of my electronic documents and so guarantees an easy follow up of the changes during all the various stages of data interpretation.

The participants in my study were very open to the idea of audio recording. For this study I recorded brief chats, longer ero-epic dialogues, and small group meetings whenever I was allowed to participate and as long as I had the feeling that it would not distort the communicative situation too much or make people feel uncomfortable. There were times when I decided not to audio record meetings, especially when I noticed too much tension among participants. The researcher should try to keep the recording device out of sight and try not to touch it during the recording, because it will draw the group's attention to the device and interrupt the conversation.

Most scholars recommend transcribing audio recordings (Girtler, 1981). I transcribed some of the dialogues, however, decided not to transcribe every recording, because of two reasons. First, any transcriptions of audio recordings are incomplete and do not convey the subtle nuances of the recorded conversation. Daniel C. O'Connell and Sabine Kowal (2008) provide detailed advice on how to translate emotions, vocal expressions, and the group dynamic into the written medium of communication. Yet, this is also a problem of transcripts. Conveying vocal data into written data will, however detailed the transcript might be, result in data loss. Qualitative researchers tend to listen to the audio recordings while simultaneously reading the transcript. Since qualitative data analysis software, such as ATLAS.ti, allows researchers to create short fragments of the original audio file and link them to codes and memos, I suggest that we reconsider the purpose of totally transcribing audio files.

Data analysis and the process of interpretation

With ethnographic studies we try to explore various phenomena in the social world and we have a strong desire to make sense of it all. In other words, we are constantly driven by the idea of summarizing, sorting, and organizing our research data and translating it for the interested reader. In the end, it is the reader we have to communicate with, and therefore ethnographers have to provide an interesting, comprehensible, and meaningful account of an explored social world. Starting almost from a childlike perspective, one tries to make sense of words, pictures, and ideas, which have to be linked to emerging patterns. Exploring intensely, finding the not so obvious, rethinking initial relationships between social factors, and drawing conclusions, which might result in transferable findings and modest, theoretical generalizations, are the basic characteristics of any ethnographic analysis. By contrast to a more linear, traditional process, qualitative analysis is a reflexive process, evolving synchronously with the above-illustrated phases of qualitative field research. Ethnographic analysis arises from the interpretive paradigm, grounded in the phenomenological, hermeneutical, and *Verstehen* tradition (see above). Initial observations and ideas result in data, which in turn will stimulate the ongoing data collection process, inspire other ideas, raise questions about theoretical patterns, and lead to ethnographic writing. The common distinction between inductive and deductive approaches to social research did not do justice to the overall comprehension of qualitative research. Hence, based on the notion of abduction, coined by Charles Sanders Peirce (Hartshorne, Weiss, Burks, & Peirce, 1960, p. 56), qualitative scholars refer to a “sophisticated inductivism, ... iterative-inductive approach” (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 105) or to grounded theory as a research concept (Charmaz, 2009). Understanding emerging social phenomena and putting together the mosaic of participants’ *Lebenswelt* is a “spiral analysis process” (Girtler, 1981, p. 144). In other words, simultaneously collecting data and analysing it define the qualitative research process.

Undoubtedly, any researcher is guided by epistemology and starts out with some preconceived theories and ideas (see above); some call it “foreshadowed problems” (Malinowski, 1922, p. 9), some “sensitizing concepts” (Charmaz, 2009, p. 11). The following analysis process reflects the above-mentioned epistemological, philosophical and theoretical approaches to qualitative social research. It strives to understand the patterns, ideas, motivations, and beliefs that mirror individual and group interactions and social behaviours in creative small groups. The search for common-sense knowledge, striving to discover deeper patterns and increasingly sophisticated classifications, which Schütz (1972) calls *first-order categories* and *second-order categories* respectively, inspire researchers to continue their qualitative research adventures.

As with so many adventures, qualitative research and the analysis of our data may take time, and it can be tedious. We do not know what to expect and until the very end of our research endeavour, so we have to be open to new perspectives that might come up during the analysis process. Yet, is there anything more intriguing than exploring and understanding phenomena that we took for granted in the first place?

Whether one advocates for the use of the grounded theory approach or for basic procedures of ethnographic analysis, there seems to be similar main features within qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2009; O'Reilly, 2009). Many scholars suggest terms, which, on closer viewing, refer to similar strategic approaches to qualitative data analysis. I intend to utilise clear and comprehensible methodological vocabulary and focus on the main purpose of qualitative research: searching for patterns and making sense of it all. That is arduous enough.

The initial step in qualitative data analysis is to sort and label gathered research data. Charmaz, 2009) states:

Qualitative coding, the process of defining what the data are about, is our first analytic step. Coding means naming segments of data with label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data.

We aim to make an interpretive rendering that begins with coding and illuminated studied life. (p. 43)

Although *initial coding*, a first examination that allows for a large number of categories, is followed by *focused coding*, a more in-depth analysis of previously defined categories, our first coding session will already “show how we select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them (Charmaz, 2009, p. 45). Again, the beginning of qualitative analysis can already be reasonably compared with a “spiral analysis process” (Girtler, 1981, p. 144).

Right from the beginning of my field research, I continuously read through my fieldnotes and wrote additional comments in the margins. I also started typing the written notes into the ATLAS.ti software, since it allowed me to cross-reference all the notes and comments I already had made. Coding, and especially focused coding, of the electronic material got clearer because the software permitted me to rearrange codes and comments without changing the actual format of the electronic material.

The initial coding process was quite messy, and I wrote down codes that came spontaneously to my mind. Some codes focus on the actual process of communication, group communication or creativity. Here are some examples: brainstorming and open communication; chance and process; creative stagnation; coming up with ideas; idea generation; creative process; group cohesion, team synergy; mentoring creatives. These codes were named by me and assigned to single words or phrases that came up in my fieldnotes or audio-recorded dialogues. Other codes are so called in-vivo codes, which I found very interesting and describe by a single phrase or word the essential meaning of an extract of my fieldnotes or a dialogue.

Other codes refer to participants’ feelings or roles within the agency: being in a good mood; identity crisis; emotional communication; motivation for change; creative roles; relationship.

During the phase of focused coding I reconsidered, rearranged, and sometimes renamed the codes with regards to similarities and inconsistencies. For instance, in one focused coding session, I concentrated on the various means of communication that facilitate creativity. This coding session revealed that although there are various means of communication, participants' communicative acts mediated ideas towards the creative sphere and initiated or furthered the *eigendynamic*²⁸ and interrelations of a creative process.

Although I gradually started to merge codes that conveyed more or less similar meanings, and interpreted and developed the codes into main categories and subsequently main themes for the final research report, I forced myself to go back and start looking from a new perspective on the data gathered to date. Doing so facilitated the openness and spiral analysis process I talked about above.

From the beginning of the analysis process, I combined my methodological and theoretical notes, which I had been writing since the first few days of my study, with analytical memos. *Open and focused memos* led me from a more descriptive procedure into a stage of elaborating ideas, focusing on themes, and noticing links between disparate sets of ideas (O'Reilly, 2009). Reading over and over again through the pile of data, I started getting a fairly precise overview of, and good feeling for, my data, thereby learning to categorize all of the information. The longer I stayed in the field and gathered data, the more I took on a removed position toward my data. At the end of my study there was so much data in various forms that it seemed as if I was reading notes and comments written by someone else. In a way, I gradually approached my data as if another researcher wrote them. I am convinced that this procedure improved the veracity of my findings.

²⁸ Own (internal) dynamics.

Researchers have different ways of dealing with the “pile of data” (Girtler, 1981, p. 133). Some scholars refer to “data reduction” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 211), however, we do not reduce the data. Instead, we focus on the information that will validate our themes and assumptions about the social world under investigation. In a way, neglected data still defines our research findings because we once decided not to elaborate our analysis in every possible direction.

Conceptualizing categories bring together the defined codes and lead to recurrent patterns and relationships that emerge from the analysed data. It is this moment where data transforms into research findings, since we start to make sense of what we have gathered. Structuring the data constitutes the initial procedure of interpretation. For example, I noticed that participants regularly communicated their ideas to one another. Only the communicative acts mediate ideas and allow others to join in the creative process. After I had learned this basic but important aspect of my researched creative group, I started looking at the various means of communication that facilitate idea mediation and creativity development. I followed the creative process from the participants’ perspectives that were influencing this particular creative process. I identified structures, communicative and interactive routines and relationships, hoping to identify a framework that could result in an understanding similar to other ideation processes. In this context, I prefer not to speak of generalization of findings but to emphasise that as I uncovered information and insights with regards to the communicative occurrences, I developed an understanding of what I was observing. Revised assumption led to further and more focused observations and finally, social patterns emerged. It is very difficult to identify how one arrives at specific categories that lead to research themes that a researcher want so write about. My experience is that there are times when everything makes sense and I was fascinated and ready to

write about a specific subject that I thought would facilitate the reader's understanding of the *creative sphere* and how the creative small group developed their ideas.

Throughout the study we interpret what is going on, from the beginning until the very end. Our participants do the same, for we need to interpret the "other" in order to adapt our own behaviour. Many scholars seem to neglect the need to distinguish the process of analysing from interpreting the data, and there is certainly a gradual transition between the two. Nonetheless, it is important to point out the subtle differences between data analysis and interpretation. Data analysis enables us to become familiar with all of the researched information at a micro level and to start building up structures that combine the data set. The interpretation process, however, brings alive the world of the participants and allows us to read and learn what is really behind people's day-to-day interactions. The interpretive, phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions constitute the translation of first-order categories into second-order categories (see above).

Providing the reader with an account that "closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57) can be achieved by a rich, tightly-woven research report. This report should enable the reader to follow the process from data collection to data interpretation. The researcher should present the "voice of the participants" (Girtler, 1981, p. 164) and examples of how he interprets other data samples. My participants were open to audio recordings of many interactions and so I am able to go back to the occurrences as often as I like. As I have mentioned above, certainly the audio recording as such is a construction of reality and, furthermore, audio recordings do not convey what the people who were present perceived via the other five senses. But, at least, we can let the readers *hear* (it is more reading what has been said) for themselves what happened in a particular research scene and provide an "authentic" (Atkinson, 1990, p. 51) ethnographic account.

In the following chapters I will introduce the reader to the themes that emerged throughout my data analysis. I will refer back to other scholars' understandings of the creative and communicative process of creativity, and present my interpretation of the social environments and events that I observed, and which constitute a phenomenon that I call *the creative sphere*.

CREATIVITY AS A COMMUNICATION PROCESS

The emergence of creativity depends on group members' active participation in the process of communication. Therefore, their interplay distinguishes itself by particular types of communication media and certain processes, which are based on cognitive psychological stage models (Amabile, 1996; Wallas, 1926). As described above, contemporary research on creativity has modified those models to incorporate the collaborative aspect of the creative interactive process. In this chapter, I provide the description and analysis of various specific, repetitive communicative acts of the creative small group that I have observed throughout the creative process. I consider, in particular, creatives' modes of communication and spontaneous or purposeful interactions with one another, which constantly keep in motion the emerging phenomenon of creativity. Furthermore, I address how these communicative behaviours influence and reflect the various stages of the overall creative process.

Means of communication

The decision to focus on communication as a research discipline, with an aim toward gaining an understanding of the procedures of creative groups, is based on a very simple reason: However creative the idea may seem, it does not matter if it is not realized thoughtfully within a specific context. One step toward the realization of an idea is communicating the creative thought and, as a group, accompanying its development by interacting within the creative sphere.

Research refers constantly to the same types of communication that play a role in the process of creative small groups and emphasize the importance of a "small encounter" (Sonnenburg, 2004, p. 256) for the development potentialities of collaborative creativity (Paulus, Larey, & Dzindolet, 2001; Sawyer, 2003). Above all, the preference for a small number of creative people for the inquiry of emerging creativity is grounded in the knowledge that creativity

depends not on solitary efforts, but on the outcome of a group working collaboratively on the complexity of a creative challenge.

The favourite child of academia still seems to be the concept of brainstorming, which Osborn (1953) introduced to the study of collaborative creativity. I would like to state up front that I do not intend to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of brainstorming. There are several reasons for my decision not to do so.

First, there are too many studies, especially those conducted in a laboratory setting, which do not meet the previously established expectations. Most studies are based on the thought that we are able to physically measure the various stages of a creative outcome and to identify an individual's contribution to the creative process. This basic idea can be carried so far that the various ideas are counted in order to prognosticate the creative potential of a creative team in distinction of a so-called control group. That does not mean that I deny any reasonable exploration of what is going on in a brainstorming setting. However, various research endeavours change the rules for these experiments so often and arbitrarily that, in the end, we can no longer speak of a standardized method of brainstorming. There are certainly positive effects that can be ascribed to the process of brainstorming, such as the enhancement of the social environment of creativity. During my fieldwork, I watched how my participants were engaged in a procedure that they called "brainstorming", even though it did not follow the basic rules of brainstorming. From a group communication point of view, brainstorming can certainly be interpreted as a *creative brain starter*, however, effective brainstorming relies more on adhering to social attributes, and the relationship between the participants, than on communication rules. For instance, I regularly observed the same people contributing to the various brainstorming sessions I was allowed to attend. During two group discussions I noticed that the attendant executive members withheld their ideas or comments until everybody else had spoken their ideas. In doing so they laid the

foundation for plain-spoken, creative sessions, and tried to encourage everybody to contribute to the discussion. The problem that I observed is that some senior management staff did not follow the executives' communicative behaviour. Sometimes senior employees spoke for quite a while, addressed all the points they thought to be important for the ongoing or planned creative process, and so the discussion was more or less one-sided.

Second, because this ethnographic study relies on participant observation, I simply cannot analyse what does not seem to have played a major role in the collaborative process of creative small groups. My participants might disagree, and some actually told me that brainstorming is a key tool towards finding that creative idea. As we will see in the following analysis, those participants have a point, but in the case of brainstorming there seems to be a mismatch between what participants *think* will add value to a creative process and what a researcher can actually *observe* as being influential to creativity. For this reason, I think it is important to remind ourselves of two attributes of ethnographic research: illustrating different ways of interpreting the creative social sphere, and allowing the reader to come to his or her own conclusions.

Throughout my study I repeatedly observed two means of communication that I interpret as relevant to creative small group communication, to wit: face-to-face communication and tool-mediated communication.

Face-to-face communication

Face-to-face communication is characterized by participants' attendance in the communication process. According to Luhmann's understanding of communication, the presence of at least two participants depends on their mutual perceptions of one another as a communicating individual. This basic interaction model, which I have described above, refers to a social system that is determined by communication among all those present (Kieserling, 1999).

Being at the same place at the same time allows this process to happen. The intellectual interchange of ideas denotes communication. And this exchange can happen in fact at any time and place. I observed *planned* and *unplanned communicative* encounters that took place in the team rooms of the creative teams and account managers respectively, in corridors, in boardrooms and even in the communication agency's gym. Most of these communicative acts, and the respective topic at hand, determined the place for talks, discussions and chats. Additionally, the specific environment of these communication acts also influenced the way participants were engaged in interaction and communication. An in-depth analysis of the communicative features of the particular environment I explored, and further attributes that accentuate the relationship between small groups and the creative sphere, will follow in the subsequent chapter. A more-or-less isolated description of various means of communication and the overall creative process cannot be understood in its entirety, especially where I propose the notion of a creative sphere. For this reason, I pursue a step-by-step approach to the understanding of the creative small group that can be considered synonymous to the hermeneutic tradition.

The unplanned, creative communicative act

I distinguish between *planned* and *unplanned communicative acts* for two reasons. First of all, the notion of planned and unplanned communication induces us to focus our attention to communicative acts, such brief conversations or chats in passing, which are too easily overlooked when one is observing over a longer time span and pondering the big picture of social life. It reminds us of Schütz's (1944) notion of making the familiar unfamiliar. On the other hand, this distinction draws a researcher's attention toward examining potential patterns inherent in planned and even unplanned communicative acts. Throughout my study I attended structured *planned* communicative acts, such as group meetings, brainstorming sessions and the like, and

consequently also started looking into potential aspects underlying the *unplanned* communicative acts. By *unplanned* communicative acts I refer to verbal and non-verbal interactions that occur all of a sudden between two or more individuals at their workplace, in the corridor or while brewing a new cup of coffee in the agency's lounge. Unplanned communicative acts are even shorter than an intended or unintended brief chat or any other short communicative behaviour. Goffman (1967) does not actually determine the time span of these "small behaviors" (p. 1) but he also speaks of "behavioral materials [that] are the glances, gestures, positionings, and verbal statements that people continuously feed into the situation, whether intended or not" (p. 1). The *interaction rituals* which Goffman (1962) analyses seem to be longer than the unplanned communicative acts that I refer to, however, I assume that his rules regarding a "sociology of occasions" (p. 2) are superbly applicable here as well.

Unplanned communicative acts are daily occurrences and nothing unique to the social world of creative small groups. Those brief conversations happen in any organisational setting and determine any organisational work, for any organisational endeavour relies on interactive employees. The creative environment that I encountered, however, gives the creative actors a forum for presenting themselves (Goffman, 1959; 1963), in this case, communicating with each other. But let me first describe the "stage" of my creative participants. As said above, the environment, in particular the workspace and the organisational setting, is the basis for a separate analysis in the next chapter. Then again, I still need to describe, at this time, the basic layout and features of the location where communication and interaction took place.

At the beginning of my research project, I negotiated my overall access to the communications agency's world with two executive team members. Since I stated my interest in creative small groups, the agency's representatives suggested placing me at a desk in the creative team room. I happily accepted the offer since this agreement promised me potential day-to-day

access to the social world of specific creative small groups. All *creatives*—this is how some of the creative people whose primary task it is to come up with new ideas call themselves—work in the same room. Although the room is arranged as an open workspace, both creative teams of two work in a cubical-type setting. One of the creatives told me that this does not hinder his working style. On the contrary, the furniture that constitutes the workspace of two allows for some privacy and provides storage for an individual's private belongings.

My space was about six meters away from the two creative teams. This distance guaranteed them enough space to work without me hindering them. Certainly, my participants had to get used to the fact that I was among them all the time, observing their day-to-day actions. Then again, we all seemed to feel acclimatized to the new situation after one and a half weeks. I cannot be certain about this assumption, and have to trust their assertions.

In the middle of the creative room there is a separate area: an office with a glass door and a daylight window on the opposite side of the glass door. This is the office of the two associate creative directors who oversee the work of the creative teams. Most of the time, the door is open unless one of them decides to close it for a more private conversation between themselves or visitors. The members of one of the creative teams can look through the daylight window into the office of the associate creative directors, since it is located towards their workspace. This office structure also leaves enough privacy for the two associate creative directors; however, because their office has no ceiling and the door is mostly open all the time, everybody can communicate verbally with one another, if in the mood.

Now that I have briefly outlined some of the attributes of the creative room, which I consider to be meaningful for an understanding of unplanned, short communicative acts, I will provide one observational example. It elucidates occurrences that I studied throughout the entire

research project, and I suggest that it represents significant communicative pattern of this particular creative sphere.

Creative vocal outbursts. One type of unplanned communicative act can be specified as what I call short, vocal outbursts, e. g. outbursts of emotions, sudden outbursts of laughter, or even animal vocal outbursts. They can last for a split second or for a longer moment of several seconds. Interestingly, this kind of communicative act is not directed towards a specific individual; it also cannot be understood as a reaction towards a previous communicative act. Goffman (1967) refers to these as “small behaviors”:

One object in dealing with these data is to describe the natural units of interaction built up from them, beginning with the littlest –for example, the fleeting facial move an individual can make in the game of expressing his alignment to what is happening ...” (p. 1)

According to his initial statements of his analysis of interaction behaviour, Goffman describes a human act *towards* a communicative event, whereas I describe a communicative act, which is not a reaction towards a communicative situation or planned to open directly any interactive behaviour. One can certainly argue that any interaction ritual logically has to start off with an initial communicative behaviour, uttered with some intention. Goffman’s deliberations, however, are aimed to “uncover the normative order prevailing within and between these units, that is, the behavioral order found in all peopled places ...” (p. 2). The vocal outburst illustrated below cannot be understood as belonging to day-to-day behavioural rituals which, from Goffman’s point of view, structure human life and social agents have to comply with. If these outbursts were perceived in other creative environments, one could start arguing about a distinctive communicative pattern, which would claim a behavioural significance beyond my observational study of this particular creative place.

So far, I have noted that unplanned communicative acts are not directed *towards* a specific individual or communicative situation, rather, they are uttered aloud and are comprehensible for everyone in or near the creative team room. While going down the main hallway toward the creative team room, I once heard a loud vocal outburst that sounded very much like an ecstatic moan. It became louder and louder and disappeared after about four seconds. This sound was clearly perceivable outside the creative team room, however, I cannot say from how far away one was able to hear this particular vocal outburst. At other times, vocal outbursts were similar to short, single singing phrases or similar to expressions of joy or distress. Of course one will instinctively ask the question: What are the reasons for these interactive behaviours and why are they mentioned in this account of creative groups' ways of communicating? The last part of the question already contains the answer: simply because they exist. The first part refers to the overall approach to this study of exploring and understanding how creative small groups interact and communicate. So even though these vocal outbursts are not primarily directed to a particular individual, they still have a function in this creative environment because the individual who uttered a vocal outburst did so intentionally, however, did not consider starting a planned communicative act. Once expressed, the vocal outburst is located in the domain, which I call the creative sphere. It is intentionally directed to this sphere and everybody who is willing to perceive it as an articulated, creative emotion. It co-constructs the creative sphere for an indefinite time span. I did not approach the one individual who expressed the actual vocal outburst immediately because I felt certain that addressing his behaviour would change the momentum and distract other creatives from the current communicative situation. Yet my curiosity led me to address this communicative behaviour in some of my ero-epic dialogues. One of the creatives told me that it can be seen as an impulse to other individuals in the agency; not necessarily only to creative team members but to anyone who

is around. But in most cases it was creative team and group members who reacted to vocal outbursts. The impulse can be understood in many ways, as changing a more or less monotonous working day and inspiring other people around the creative room, as an expression of an individual's emotional state or excitement for an actual creative task, or as an articulation of a moment of creative frustration. Of course one can argue against the momentum of vocal outburst, especially when they happen on a more or less regular basis. Indeed, the outbursts I observed seemed to have no effect on the creative sphere at all. I agree to this potential line of thought insofar as interaction rituals can lose their potential effect on an environment, however, they still construct or, in this case, reconstruct, the environmental attributes of a particular social situation.

Reactions of other people around depend for the most part on the specific kind of vocal outburst that has been released before. The intensity of an outburst seems to be a predictor of reactions, whereby intensity does not only refer to an extreme sound level or to a behaviour that might be understood as offensive outside this particular creative sphere, e. g. I did not observe any of these vocal outbursts in a law office, except temper tantrums. Rather, the vocal outburst has to be a creative act as itself and consequently enrich the creative sphere. I watched how one vocal outburst initiated creative activity among a creative team and I personally felt the stimulation emanating from this unusual way of singing, whereby the singer articulated syllables and words in a very strange way. It is difficult to describe creative behaviour, which goes beyond our day-to-day experience of interactive rituals. The illustration of *sounds* by means of the *written* word, in particular, seems to be an even more difficult task to undertake.

Creative vocal outbursts enhanced the environment for more than a short time span, and seemed to have influenced the creative activities that happened on those particular days for quite a while. One of the creative teams seemed to get more vocal and interactive with the environment themselves. One creative answered the initial vocal outburst, while his team colleague laughed

directly at the person who uttered the vocal outburst. For a while this team also seemed to be inspired, quipping to one another while working on their actual creative task.

When describing human social behaviour and trying to interpret the creative outcome of various communicative acts, one should not pine for premature answers. Exploratory ethnography eschews following the traditional cause and effect explanation and avoids defining human behaviour as a variable of social processes. With the depiction of a distinctive communicative act in this particular creative environment, I hope to visualize a fascinating social framework and to “provide background understanding for events that incorporate the will, aim, and controlling effort of an intelligence, a live agency, the chief one being the human being” (Goffman, 1974, p. 22). This particular unplanned communicative act does not claim for itself to have directly enhanced the creative process of that day, however, as stated above, individuals’ interactions do stimulate other members of creative small groups and their environments. The creative sphere gets influenced by such communicative acts and seems to be an environment where a creative individual feels safe expressing such creative vocal outbursts. Although not every creative individual unleashes vocal outbursts, the possibility to articulate oneself in various forms allows each individual, and the group as a whole, to engage with one another freely in a creative and safe environment.

The planned, creative communicative act – the creative brain starter dialogue

Planned communicative acts are distinguished from unplanned communicative acts because they display an intention to communicate with a particular individual. Most of the time, the creative teams tackle a new creative challenge by delving into discussions. Different creative teams have different habits and procedures that they use to come up with a new “great idea,” and it also depends on the circumstances of the task at hand and how much leeway there is for a

creative idea and its potential implementation. These discussions also occur throughout the entire creative process, however, they differ with regards to their inherent logic and meaning. At the beginning of a creative process, the discussion is shaped by a very open way of communicating with each other. The topic of the discussion is rarely about the task or assignment. According to Creative Director One, the creatives try to activate their creative thinking and to prevent themselves from making a straightforward connection to the creative assignment.

In the first part of the project we just go and talk about whatever it is ... we just talk in random sorts of ways. We just discuss it ... not talk about ... what's a way of how to execute it. And then we get immersed in just the world of what it is we are dealing with. So one says: 'Yeah that is an interesting way to take on this particular subject' ... or 'I didn't know that about' ... what ever it is.

Later in the creative process, when those involved work on the realization of a creative idea (also called *innovation*), the discussions get more focused on *how* an idea can be executed successfully while meeting the strict guidelines of the client (see below).

Similar to any other conversation, communication between the two members of a creative team proceeds as a creative dialogue where both creatives respond directly to the contributions of one another. The communication process organizes and harmonizes an individual's creative thought, uttered within the context of the current creative task. Sonnenburg (2004) emphasizes the important point that creativity research should focus on the communication of the creative thought and not on the mental process, as such:

It is, for instance, problematic to speak about a 'collective mind' ... Whatever the single participant thinks of, it is irrelevant for the structural maintenance and the content of the collaboration... The contingent and unpredictable variety of single contributions and their communicative processing speed up new idea associations in the ongoing communication process. This is necessary to find a creative solution in collaboration. (p. 256)

But how do individuals' contributions and communicative processing, about which Sonnenburg speaks, actually occur? I suggest giving the floor to the two members of one creative team.

Creative One: For us, it usually starts with discussion and ...

Creative Two: ends with alcohol ...

Creative One: Yes, and ends with ALCOHOL ... whatever else but... I was working with one of the designers on a project and we were chatting for half a day and we couldn't do anything but just being offensive and ... to me it was interesting, looking what was happening. We were talking like ... we're just being incredibly rude.

Me: To each other, right?

Creative One: No ... just the ideas we were coming up with, were just totally inappropriate... like racist, sexist, ... as a joke, right, just like ... how absurd and ridiculous can we make this thing ... That's where our minds go ... and I ... finally ... the stuff that we do, you know, that stuff ... we seem to have to get out of our minds before we can have something that is presentable in public ... I don't know what it means but ...

Creative Two: It means that we're immature.

Creative One (laughing): It means we're immature but ... we go through like ... like ideas seem to get buried under this pile of stuff that we have to get cleared out first ... like you start writing and before you start writing you clean off your desk ... but if you look at my desk that is often not true... We start just diggin' at stuff ... and we go way far away from anything that has anything to do with what we're supposed to be doing ... a lot of the time something pops out of that, right?

What one of the creatives primarily describes is the planned process of uncertainty: Planned, because collaborative creative processes require an exchange of ideas; uncertain, because the path to a creative idea needs to be as open as it can be, considering the situation of a communications agency that has to operate like a business in a highly competitive market.

As the provided ero-epic dialogue excerpt illustrates, collaborative creativity can only emerge and develop if all creatives actively participate in the communication process. Whereas cognitive psychology relies on the analysis of the mental processes that creatives develop throughout ideation, I suggest that the focus on the mental processes as such does not lead to a sufficient understanding of collaborative processes in creative small groups, and teams,

respectively. The communicative act does not only allow one creative to mediate his thoughts to other creative people involved in a creative endeavour. The moment a thought is uttered, as ridiculous it might be, defines the creative sphere and allows the others to build upon this communicative momentum. In other words, the common concept of the sender-receiver communicative act does not come to a reasonable explanation of how communication functions in a creative environment. Luhmann's (1995) communicative system theory, grounded in the notion of an antipoetic and self-referential system, reminds us of the procedural character of creativity and the emergent character of communication. Communication, in Luhmann's sense, relies on the understanding of the present interactive agents that allow for an emerging communication process that is crucial to the success of creative teamwork (Harris & Sherblom, 2005).

An understanding of an uttered creative communicative act is contingent upon the existence of various environmental attributes and the synergy of creative small groups, which will be addressed in the following chapter. It seems to be reasonable, however, to note that the above-presented communication procedure during the initial creative communication dialogue of the two creatives exemplifies the need for open communication in the creative sphere. There has to be an unrestricted atmosphere in which a thought of a free, inspired mind can be voiced in any imaginable way. Communicating any thought that might be beneficial for a creative idea is a fundamental aspect of the creative process because, as one of the creatives says, "sometimes, you have no idea where the idea came from." This emergent idea-finding process within the initial creative dialogue relies on a trusting relationship within the creative group and especially within the creative team. To be able to communicate in unrestricted ways depends on a mutual understanding of what the other person just said and why he or she said it in this particular way. One creative director explained this flow of like-minded creative people:

Creative Director Two: Some teams fight with each other. Like my old partner and I used to bitch and moan at each other through the process. And then someone would finally say something where we both went a-ha (he snaps his fingers) that's it!

Me: So you were aware of the fact that this is the way you work, right?

Creative Director Two: Yeah, we were like an old married couple. We worked on and off for like ten years together ... so I mean we had a pretty good sense of how each other thought. And, I mean, that is a big part of the creative process, too. That's the reason we work in teams. Theoretically, you could have an art director who could write and do layouts and could do the whole thing by himself. But then they never had someone else to bounce stuff off ... or ideally, the teams complement each other ... so the copywriter might be a little straighter than the art director in terms of the craziness of the ideas. So the art director might say 'crazy shit' and that copywriter can go 'YEAH and if we just do THIS to it ... it makes perfect sense.' So you have that whole team dynamic plays into it, which is completely unique to each team. Fundamentally it is the same thing, like let's come up with ideas ... how they get there ... completely different.

Similar to the earlier presented ero-epic dialogue excerpt, both creatives describe a concept of synergy, which brings about a momentum where groups are able to produce more creative ideas than its members will do individually. John Fabian (1990) put it this way: "That is *group genius* is all about – individuals huddling together for synergy" (p. 235).

Describing what actually happens in creative small groups, as I have tried to do here, helps facilitators of creativity to develop techniques to provoke *group genius* in other small groups or work teams that normally do not deal with creativity as their main occupation. *Creative* small groups, in particular, do not restrict their interactions on creativity enhancing techniques, such as brainstorming, idea writing, trigger sessions, and the like.²⁹ They also do not follow specific communication rules that are required by the advocates of these alleged creativity enhancing techniques. Certainly, it seems to be helpful to start off somewhere in order to establish an awareness of other styles of communication within a small group. But techniques can

²⁹ For a complete list of the various creativity enhancing techniques I refer the reader to SunWolf's (1990) detailed presentation.

only foster group synergy and creative outcomes when the overall group climate and organisational culture support a communication change.

To this point, I have discussed, specifically, the means of communication that are characterised by a physical presence of the involved participants of the creative group. Although the addressed face to face communicative acts play a major role in the emerging process of creativity, I would like to focus the readers' attention to communication events that are defined by the absence of at least one of the involved communication partners.

Tool-mediated communication

Tool-mediated communication refers to the “absence of the participants so that the utterance of information and communicative understanding temporally disintegrate” (Sonnenburg, 2004, p. 257). Tool-mediated communication should not be confounded with tool-mediated interaction, which “imposes constraints on presence” (p. 257). Tool-mediated interaction tries to close that spatial gap where participants are not at the same place while a communicative act takes place. One can think of devices that allow for a mutual perception by telephone and videoconferences or by other types of written communication (e. g. computer-mediated chat communication).

Sonneburg (2004) delineates the difference between means of communication where all group members are not physically present in the same place at the same time, and specifies the main attributes to distinguish between tool-mediated interaction and communication respectively, to wit: status, time, place, form, and medium (p. 257). With respect to tool-mediated communication, Sonnenburg comes to the following conclusion: participants are absent (status), the communication is asynchronous (time), communication occurs in different places (place), and the medium is mainly a written document, e. g. mail, email, fax, or letter (form and medium).

Whereas I agree with Sonnenburg's analysis of tool-mediated interaction and the way of its practical application, I have another understanding of the essence of tool-mediated communication. Once again, the key to an understanding of tool-mediated communication lies in the interaction of a small group within a creative environment. I also agree that tool-mediated communication is constituted by an asynchronous communication process, which "can last for a few minutes or weeks" (Sonnenburg, 2004, p. 257), however, I have another view with regards to the attribution of *place* in tool-mediated communication. Since my participants were not always at the same place at the same time, mutual perceptions of their interaction did not take place. Therefore, the participants relied on other ways to mediate their messages and sense the messages from others. During my fieldwork I also noticed the use of tool-mediated communication as outlined by Sonnenburg. For instance, emails that travelled throughout the cyber space back and forth between the employees of the agency's two branch offices. In addition, I observed another aspect of tool-mediated communication that occurred in the same *place* within the communication agency, namely, on *creative message boards*.

Throughout a creative process, some participants used to hang up notes, pictures, and other documentation of a particular idea's current state. Others used the creative message board to hang up any other physical document that they found interesting enough to warrant sharing with the others working in the agency. But instead of providing an abstract description, I would like to give a few detailed depictions of how people interacted with the creative message board.

On one occasion, the board was cleared, so no writing or documents were present. One morning when I arrived at the agency I noticed a sequence of coloured pictures, which were captioned with the words "Street Art /Nocturne." Further notes on the board were written down with markers. Some pictures had additional headlines matching the content of the particular picture: "Toronto Nuit Blanche ... Mock Alien invasion ..." Other writings described or

explained the content of the pictures: “Pillow fights ... dropped thousands of paper planes off building ... NY to London ‘telescope’ ... ‘It’s a cloud’ People draw clouds, and it gets projected onto the ceiling.” When I asked the person who had initially hung up the pictures his reason for doing so, he responded: “I thought they were interesting. It shows how people interact with art or other exhibits.” The writings did not originate from the same person, and soon the comments of several people started relating to one another. A few hours later, I noticed someone else hanging up a similar picture of the same event. When approached, he said: “I just thought it fits.”

In this particular case, the creative message board served as an idea exchange forum. The pictures prompted others to join the interpretation of what was presented. Some were inspired to add pictures that they thought would broaden the range of the art that was hung up on the board so far.

Another time, a newspaper article that was attached to the creative message board prompted an ongoing discussion about the agency’s strategic communication direction. The newspaper article, “Power of social media,” is surrounded by comments, which deal with the question whether or not the communication agency should be concerned with the issue of social media. Again, the creative message board functioned as an idea exchange forum: “Should *(agency’s name)* be doing this?” Answer: “Yes, we should do this. We could demonstrate how we’re expert in Brand + Consumer Interaction.” Other messages continued the message sequence and referred to the advantages and disadvantages of dealing with social media as an interactive communication agency.

The last example that I would like to present at this point once again illustrates the correlative characteristics of the interactive and creative message board. One of the creatives was working on a communication campaign devised to target women. The campaign involved showing a half-naked woman in a bathroom. The photos showed her wearing a towel covering

more of her body than is common by today's advertising standards. The photos for this particular campaign had already been taken and the responsible creative placed some of them on the creative message board. He intended to get responses from the people at the agency especially from the women, whether this advertising campaign would be suited for addressing women. The creative told me his intentions later on, but did not voice them to the women in advance, and only mentioned on the board that the pictures were taken for the campaign. Pretty soon, all the pictures were marked with statements: "She looks natural & happy... I like this one – makes me want to have a bath ... without side boob ... women won't identify with these (HOT though)." One person wrote as a headline for all those pictures: "feels like these are all from a guy's perspective."

Although the pictures of the half naked woman did not show a lot of skin, the last comment illustrates the possible different ways of depicting a half naked woman in a bathroom setting. The participant who wrote the comment obviously did not identify with the woman as a generalisation or stereotype for women. Although another participant had interpreted the woman "looks natural & happy," I cannot deny a certain erotic undertone that the photos conveyed. At least, this is the way I interpret the participant's comment.

This comment does not only refer to the actual photographs that were presented on the creative board. It also prompted me to think about the different roles that women and men play within the creative business. Even though I can only rely on the experience that I have had within this particular creative agency, and my report might not be representative in this regard, I would like to mention that only a few women are involved in the creative process at all. The actual creative teams consist of men. There are women involved when it comes to executing the creative ideas of the creative teams, but the actual process of coming up with new ideas seems to be a task carried out by men. I have to be very careful with deeper interpretation in this regard, and I

suggest that more research has to be done in relation to gender studies and creativity. Then again, I think that this observation is interesting and important enough to be delineated within my research report.

All of these examples show how some of the members of this particular creative communication agency engage with their peers. Similar to the above-analysed *creative vocal outbursts*, one individual releases a communicative act in order to inspire others to act upon his or her utterances. As Sonnenburg (2004) stresses, tool-mediated communicative acts occur in the absence of most people and are characterized by asynchronous communication. My participants kept the above-illustrated idea exchange process alive for quite a while, sometimes for days, sometimes for a whole week. Changing the content of the creative message board also depended on the urge of someone else to communicate new ideas, or sometimes it was cleared simply in order to get a cleared board for a cleared mind. However, as also stated above, I propose that the place of the communicative interaction can take place at the *same* location. The creative message board does not try to compensate the absence of other people. By contrast, its functionality relies on the absence of the others for various reasons. There is, on the one hand, the need for some individuals to express their voice in a fairly undisturbed environment (also I have to remind the reader that these message boards are located on the main hallway of the agency). On the other hand, the board allows the ideas or messages to come alive, develop over time, and get transformed throughout the interactive process.

The interplay between the message, the environment, and the involved creative people (at this point, *creative* refers to an individual's attitude rather than his or her profession) depict a momentum that is fundamental for the creative communicative acts discussed above. It illustrates what Luhmann (1990) emphasizes in his theory of autopoietic and self-referential systems. It also exemplifies communication as an emergent phenomenon that has to be interpreted as autonomous

of the individual -the human being - taking into account the various attributes of communicative processing. Luhmann's (1992) two following statements conceptualize the placing of the creative sphere: "Human beings cannot communicate, not even brains can communicate, not even consciousness can communicate. Only communication can communicate" (p. 884). With regards to a sociological approach to creative collaboration (in small groups), and to the phenomenon of communication as the driving force behind creative endeavours, Luhmann explains that "one realizes that consciousness is not only concerned with words and vague word and propositional ideas but also and preeminently with perception and with the imaginative depiction and effacement of images" (p. 258).

The analysed means of communication are one piece of the social mosaic of collaborative creativity. Putting them into the overall creative process, from ideation to creative innovation will be the next step in this study.

The collaborative process of creativity

Providing and following some kind of organisational structure and procedure have stood the test of time when working in teams or groups; this is also true for creative teams. Certainly, organisational structures and procedures are more transparent in larger organisations with distinct, vertical and horizontal managerial hierarchies. It would be incorrect to assume that creatives work without any professional procedures. The creatives are aware of the economic aspect of their work and role in a communication agency, which is grounded in selling creative ideas and solutions to clients of any kind, e. g. large business corporations, government agencies, and non-profit organisations.

As many other business organisations, this creative communication agency divides and coordinates the different stages of a creative task. Ideation and the role of the creative team are

only two criteria in the process of implementing a creative solution. Other people help in reaching this creative goal, and combined efforts need to be structured for a prosperous creative outcome. The creative collaboration starts with a business challenge and, hopefully, ends with an appropriate creative solution. This process takes place between both temporal coordinates and the duration, depending on the complexity of the creative challenge and implementation of the creative solution. Before I begin introducing the most important features of the creative process, which continues to define the creative sphere, let me highlight the difficulties arising from the application of process models to any existing creative process in a natural setting.

Each creative process is a synthesis of many social attributes and only the conjunction of these attributes will result in a better understanding of collaboration in a creative sphere. Moreover, there is not a specific and standardized sequence of emerging ideas and there are variations because every creative process develops an *eigendynamic*. For an adequate analysis and potential transferability of my findings, a transparent overview of creative processes provides a useful guideline. By describing the normalities of a mechanism, one can easily point to its unusual and distinctive features.

The creative process has been an important field of creativity research. Research has favoured theoretical deliberations on, and practical applications of, stage models for analysing the creative process (Amabile, 1996; Wallas, 1926). Coming from a cognitive psychological perspective and a managerial approach to the enhancement of the creative individual, researchers' interest in creative processes concentrated on the mental sequences. In this study, however, I analyse the process of creative collaboration from an interdisciplinary perspective, to be more precise, using the lens of communication studies. Simon Taggar (2002) spotlights this approach by suggesting that a poor group performance will neutralize individuals' creative skills

throughout a creative process. He continues to argue that, by contrast, the impact of individuals' creative attributes depends on a social environment and group processes conducive to creativity.

For an in-depth analysis of the creative process, I would like to mention two stage models: The *operative phase model* and the *thematic stage model*, which incorporate various stage model approaches of scholars, such as Amabile (1996), Goran Ekvall (1997), Dorothy Leonard-Barton and Walter C. Swap (1999), Michael D. Mumford, Jack M. Feldman, Michael B. Hein, and Dennis J. Nagao (2001), Sonnenburg (2004), and Wallas (1926). Some readers might also think of Tuckman's (1965) *structural stage model* of groups that refers to the stages "Forming", "Storming", "Norming", and "Performing" (p. 396). However, in this study I will only utilise Tuckman's ideas on the storming stage when addressing the relationship between the various roles of work colleagues and the organisational environment of the creative sphere.

All these stage models seem to further an understanding of the creative process quite well. Sonnenburg (2004), however, emphasizes the disadvantages of the stage model and notes: "In reality, the course of performance is not an assembly-line process but rather distinguished by co-occurrences, interrelations and feedback loops" (p. 158). I would like to add an observational outcome of my study to Sonnenburg's remarks. Because creativity is characterized by interaction, one has to answer the question: How can one, as the human observer, conceptualize the constantly changing phenomenon of creativity?

By means of psychological and communicative reflection, participants and the researcher are able to "freeze" creativity for a reflective moment. With respect to Luhmann's (1984) notion of "communicative reflection" (p. 210), I suggest that a conglomerate of communicating participants and researchers will facilitate at least some nuances of the overall creative process. This interpretive approach to creativity will, by means of further studies, lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon. The following common rules can also be applied here: those

that do not thematise creativity, cannot influence, control or even foster it. Sonnenburg (2004) provides a superb analogy: The totality of creativity is similar to a horizon. Once we try to focus on a specific spot, the horizon draws back one step. Consequently, our psychological and communicative reflections of creativity can only allow us to *feel* the reification of some traits of creativity; and creativity can only be determined in a specific situation. Nonetheless, an interpretive observational approach to the creativity models, namely, the *operative phase model* and the *thematic stage model*, and the nuances of creativity seems to be the only way to foster creative processes in small groups.

The operational phase model of creativity

The communicative process in the agency is determined by phases of interaction and communication intermittence. Interaction phases are characterized by creative dialogue as I have described above. I observed a high degree of direct communication, spontaneity and intensity throughout the initial creative dialogues. The participants concentrate on the collaborative development of a current creative challenge. It seems to be helpful to not overwhelm the participants with too much information so that they can focus the development of the creative themes. For example, the client provides a lot of information about a current creative communicative challenge. Although the account managers try to filter out information that is not necessary for the development of a creative communicative approach to a specific business challenge, sometimes, too many facts bury the “vital spark” for creativity. Throughout the interaction phase, participants do not have the time for psychological reflection, and have to focus on the process of group interaction, which can be idea shaping or idea reflecting.

During the communication intermittence phase, the creatives make use of tool-mediated communication, such as the creative boards, that are also located at some workspaces of the

creative teams but also near other participants in the agency. Creatives also tend to rethink and reflect quietly the current thematic stages of a creative idea. They are also engaged in knowledge collection towards the creative process and in seeking out new ways of looking at things. Creatives listen to music, surf on the World Wide Web, and get other inspiration by the environment within, and outside, the agency. I also observed that both interaction and intermittence are interchange quite fluidly. Creatives elaborate on ideas on their own, then suddenly face each other and work together on the development of an idea, then, once again, they return to solitary reflection. In this model, communication functions as a way to integrate various aspects of an emerging creative solution. Communication amalgamates the outcomes of intermittence and fosters the ensuing interaction phase. The operational phase model of creativity defines intergroup communication and collaboration within every stage of the *thematic stage model* that will be applied to the analysis of this particular creative sphere.

The thematic stage model of creativity

All established creative process models are grounded in the cognitive psychological assumption that creativity is an individual phenomenon. Wallas' (1926) basic model has been adopted by notable scholars, such as Amabile (1996), Ekvall (1997), Leonard and Swap (1999), and Mumford, Feldman, Hein, and Nagao (2001). Those models, however, emphasize the same process-oriented aspects and ignore other essential attributes to an understanding of creative processes. Sonnenburg (2004; 2007) integrates current creative process models and applies them to a more collaborative perspective of creativity. He defines the various stages of the process, however, does not provide examples for interested readers. With this analysis, I hope to provide examples and nuances of how the various thematic stages can be described, and how they interrelate. It is this kind of ethnographic analysis that brings life to dry theory—theory that can

inform creative day-to-day practice when described and defined by applied communication research.

Sonnenburg (2004) enumerates the following thematic stages of a creative process: “problem finding, problem acceptance, preparation, incubation, illumination, verification, modification and solution” (pp. 258-259). With a view to external factors determining the creative process he also mentions “important post stages” (p. 258), namely, “implementation (with possible revision) and social acceptance of the product in the relevant domain. This process is often described as the innovation process” (p. 258).

I would like to structure Sonnenburg’s thematic stages in three major phases: (1) Defining and developing the creative challenge with the client, (2) the creative internal process, and (3) the implementation of the creative solution with the client. Certainly, the correlation between the agency and the client happens throughout the process. But again, one has to create some categories in order to analyse and observe the overall fluid process. Sonnenburg (2004) refers to “co-occurrences, interrelations, feedback-loops”, which I identify with external and internal communication processes during the process of finding a creative solution. Whereas Sonnenburg determines post-stages where he mentions possible revisions, I experienced consistent interaction between the agency and the client. As one creative puts it: “Coming up with creative ... coming up with storytelling ... is hard... But selling it so somebody... and keeping it sold is even harder. Ideas aren’t the hardest thing we do.” So throughout the creative process the external effects influence the initial creative process right away. How much creatives think about the client’s specific taste with respect to creative ideas depends on the duration of the relationship between agency and client, as well as on whether that creative team works again or repeatedly on creative challenges for the same client.

The *problem finding stage* depends on the particular situation of a client. Some clients know where their problems lie, some assign that task to the agency and both client and agency try to identify the business problem that has to be tackled by a creative solution. Various meetings and brainstorming sessions take place, but the ones that I was allowed to observe did not utilise the subtle mechanism of brainstorming. Rather, the participants were engaged in a general discussion in order to find out a client's needs. I cannot really generalise the role of the client with regards to the agency-clients meetings because I was only allowed to attend one agency-client meeting. The relationship between the client and the agency is vital for any communication agency, and the presence of a researcher in one of those meetings might raise concerns for the clients, such as: Why is this person in the room and what is his or her actual profession or reason to attend this confidential agency-client meeting? Even the one meeting that I observed did not offer the opportunity to audio-record the conversation. My fieldnotes, however, convey my observation and interpretation of this meeting as being very disorganised with regards to the way a classic brainstorming session should be developed. From my point of view, it seems to be important to focus on the various creative ideas and to omit distracting information, or wait to hold discussions after the actual brainstorming session has begun. Interfering contributions interrupted creative ideas from the participants and also distracted others from either rethinking their own contributions or connecting their contribution with the ideas provided by their colleagues.

The *problem acceptance stage* refers to participants' state of having shared the necessary knowledge that is needed for ideation. Sonnenburg is not really clear on this particular point and I have a problem with the word *acceptance* in my particular researched environment, since the agency has to accept a creative challenge and come up with a solution: It is their profession. If the

agency does not accept the terms or the instructions by the clients or does not satisfy a client's need to some extent, the client will likely give its business to another agency.

The *preparation stage* blends the two aforementioned stages together and requires conducting research related to the creative challenge. Relevant information is gathered, and a strategy of finding a sufficient creative solution has to be coordinated with the client. The client and the agency agree on the further process and write down their mutual consent in a document, which is called the *creative brief*. This document is important for any creative work, and guides anyone who is involved throughout a creative process. According to Creative One:

We get a brief, which is part of the process, and at a higher level, the management will be involved, deciding what they think the best strategic and creative opportunity is for that brand for that particular project. And by the time it gets to us it hopefully has gone through enough of these filters and enough people have done a proper research that there is a single thought there that we can latch onto and explore all the areas to communicate that idea ... with research that backs it up so that we just don't go on some crazy tension ... like making ad with pink elephants that has nothing to do with the client... which would happen. Because initial in the process there are so many that might fire to your brain right away.

The creative brief is an important document within the initial process of creativity. The Creative Executive explains that it can be, for instance, a piece of paper but can assume any shape or form in order to “inspire the creative team to bigger and better ideas.” It captures and communicates the essence of what needs to be accomplished while, at the same time, allowing creatives to come up with a solution to the creative challenge. The project management team plays a vital role in the creation of the brief and has to be inspired as well when instructing the creative team. The agency's process guide conveys the following:

Bring in a speaker. Show as video. Paint a picture somehow. Show them the brief, don't tell them. Let them try the product. Let them try the competition's product. Take them on a field trip. Do not give them a piece of paper and ask them for comment. Provoke a reaction. Deliver more and expect more.

Although official organisational documents, such as this guideline, have a restricting undertone, I would say that this document actually inspires employees to try out new approaches to inform the other creatives within the agency. When I read the document for the first time I was instantly motivated to think about other ways to mediate the essence of a client's business problems. For example, for a moment, I thought that using only paper for a creative brief is quite boring and not something that you would expect from a creative agency.

The creative brief restricts the direction of the creative process, but, at the same time, it has to inspire creatives to find that creative solution. The Creative Executive talks about the difficulties of a creative brief that allows for an open creative process while functioning as a clear guideline at the same time:

The creative brief is the device we use to get clarity on what we're doing. But we've rewritten that brief, the format of that brief probably four times. This might be the fifth time actually. Just because when you are looking for information you only are gonna get answers that are as good as the questions. So I can ask the question: What are we advertising and I get a response. Well this is what we're advertising. Or I can say: What's the problem we're trying to solve? And you are getting a very different response to that... a different answer and that'll inform what you do. But now we changed it again ... to even be a little bit simpler. By saying what's the challenge? ... it gives you a broader sense of what we have to do.

Simple but inspiring, fulfilling processual requirements while being artful, enabling creativity and focusing on a client's needs at once: the creative brief - a balancing act. Ideation already starts with the creative brief:

Creative Director Two: Good ideas come from good briefs. If you have a well written brief that's concise and smart and has a really good insight build into it ... even a half OK creative team will be able to make something out of that that'll be good.

Me: What do you mean with 'even a half OK team'?

Creative Director Two: Well even a shitty team with a good insight ... the strength of the insight will probably carry the creative.

Once the creative team is briefed, they start working on the project sooner or later. As outlined above, the team engages in a creative dialogue, which is not restricted by a specific time span. Certainly, the business aspect of the agency forces creative teams to find that creative solution within a week or two; but sometimes the team has even more time.

Sonnenburg (2004) cites the *incubation stage*, which “is predominant in absence (in private study). Ideas are elaborated alternatively between preparation and incubation until the best solution is found. This occurrence mostly takes place in a stage which may be called collaborative illumination” (p. 258). Here, I would like to refer again to the notion of the creative sphere, which elucidates that Sonnenburg’s adopted stage model of creative collaboration still relies on a step-by-step approach to the understanding of an emerging creative process. As noted above, he mentions the circumstance of feedback-loops and interrelations during the creative process. In doing so, he clarifies the fluid character of the preparation, incubation, and illumination stage. This model outlines the essential sequence of getting to the final creative solution; briefing and preparing a creative team before it can find the creative solution certainly follows a logical and chronological order. The cited model does not describe or analyse, however, the actual process of collaborative ideation in a creative team or small group. One creative told me that the process of ideation is “the only part of this business that still seems to be kind of magical.” His statement gives credit to my assumption that one cannot measure creativity or determine which attributes will lead to an assured creative solution. Yet, one can try to describe what has been observed and attempt to find processual patterns of a creative process. My dialogue partners in the next ero-epic dialogue excerpt will illustrate how one of the creative teams approaches the process of creativity. Once again I rely on one of the ero-epic dialogues that a creative team and I conducted in one of the “war rooms,” as they are called internally, which gives the teams a place to hide away and work on an initial creative idea. The effective approach

of a relaxed chat becomes apparent by the following passage. For this particular dialogue I tried to speak with both members of a creative team at the same time, which gave me an impression of their way of working together and the opportunity to experience the emerging team synergy. In this particular dialogue the participants decided to talk about the actual process of creativity and how they work together as a team within the overall collaborative effort of creativity. Instead of focusing on a questionnaire, I followed Girtler's advice of letting the participants decide where to start and to go with the conversation.

Creative One: Creative process ...

Creative Two: Is there one (laughing).

Creative One: I don't think there is a process. There is a process ... on paper I suppose but like ... It's like trying to say ... there is certain way of painting, you know. You can learn techniques and stuff that will help you become a better painter but there is no way of saying ... this is the only way to do it and if you don't do it this way that you're not great.

Creative One: I think for us ...

Creative Two: I wish there was a process ...

Creative One: Yeah, like follow these steps ... I think for us it's more about keeping things open. What just happened here with our rebrand briefing process – I was thinking about this last night actually – it's a little more open ... in terms of ... what it's asking us to do. Our previous briefs had a lot more information in them and a little bit more direction, like here is what we want you to do. What happens now is ... it's opened up and there is no more 'here is what we want you to do.' It's 'here is the idea we want you to convey' ... and that's it. And here is the point to back that up.

This dialogue suggests that ideation is defined by only *one* stage, or in other words, a fluid process. As we have seen before, the team sees the process as follows:

Creative One: For us, it usually starts with discussion and ...

Creative Two: ends with alcohol ...

Creative One: Yes, and ends with ALCOHOL ... whatever else...

Once the creatives experienced the *collaborative flow* (Sawyer, 2003) and found a creative solution, they present their ideas to one of the associate creative directors. He tries to apply a more objective perspective of judging the communicative function of the creative solution: Does the idea convey the central message that has been identified within the *problem finding* and *preparation stage*? Usually the creative group discusses the creative proposals of the creative team, however, it is the creative director's final call regarding which proposal should be elaborated upon in detail. Once the creative ideas have been discussed with the project management team and all have agreed that the proposed ideas comply with the creative brief, the idea has to be sold to the client. This is another important aspect of the creative process because a great idea is only the one that can be implemented; otherwise, according to one creative: "it is a shitty" idea.

The role of the client and the agency-client relationship are two influential factors that determine the day-to-day process of creativity and will be discussed in the following section.

The role of the client and the collaborative process of creativity

Although I was not allowed to observe all of the meetings with the agency's clients, I picked up participants' comments about their views and interpretation of the client's role throughout the creative process. Thus, the following account displays my participants' stories and my interpretation of the agency-client relationship.

Basically, when the agency works directly on a client's task, the client informs the agency about the business challenges they have to face. The agency assembles a group that will primarily work on this particular assignment, and other employees will be brought in throughout the creative process if their expertise could be useful. The open-space concept that I outlined above facilitates the fluent character of the creative group. Knowing when to bring in the right people at

the right time throughout the creative process is difficult and subtle task. Thus, for a creative group being together in a room, but not permanently thinking collaboratively, still makes everybody aware where the others are working. Certainly, participants have to be talented at multi-tasking throughout the creative process while being able to concentrate on the task at hand.

Once the client and the agency come to an agreement about what has to be achieved by both sides and they have signed off on the expectations that are noted on the creative brief, the creative group starts working on the actual creative task for the client. When the creative group is convinced that they are ready to present their ideas, they schedule a meeting with the client.

Even though the creative ideas have gone through various “filters” within the agency, the client has to accept and agree with the creative approach. Creative Director One describes this process and how a particular creative idea gets chosen:

Even though the client is paying for our expertise, they still turn it down. They're humans and they are subjective ...or they just feel like the need to make one change because that's their role as the client ...or they just feel that they know better ...or that they think that what we're proposing is a little bit outside their comfort level. So there are a number of reasons.

Relying on the expertise of others seems to be difficult for a client because delegating a task to someone else requires a trusting relationship between the client and the agency. Even though clients hire professional communicators, they still want to have the last word within the process of finding a solution to their business challenge. I assume that when a representative of the client hires external professionals, he or she has to admit indirectly not being able to come up with a creative solution themselves. External expertise costs a business extra money and the representative has to convince his or her superiors that this extra money is spent wisely and that the representative still controls the creative process that has been assigned to an external group. This interpretation of the agency-client relationship might enhance our understanding of why a

client, or its representative, still wants to have a word within the creative process, even though they are seeking the expertise of the creative agency.

A trusting relationship relies on the important factor of time. Pleased clients maintain their business relationship with the agency and enhance an effective creative process. Creative

Director One:

You know we have a couple of great clients that totally trust us. And that puts on our responsibility on that we make sure we don't misuse that trust... that everything that we do is still strategic and there is a reason behind what we do.

A good relationship with a client not only “makes things easier as you go along,” a long and trusting relationship also encourages the agency to try out new ideas that might facilitate the client's position within its competitive market. On the other hand, the client learns to trust the new perspectives that the agency tries to develop and implement. Still, as Creative Director One emphasises, an effective and creative communication strategy relies on “our part of the job and in some ways the most difficult part of our job ... is selling that idea and keeping it sold.” He continues by stressing the economic factor that finally influences the agency-client relationship:

Because most clients, and I can understand when a client spends a substantial amount... they're second-guessing 'am I making the right investment ... am I doing everything right?' So when people are getting in that mode of second guessing ... they are more apt to make sort of random changes or question everything rather [than] going 'oh no these guys ... this is what they do for living'.

From a professional point of view, a client commissions the agency in order to find a creative solution to its business problems. The agency's expertise is grounded on years of experience of finding and executing the ideas that clients cannot come up with on their own. One might assume then that if the agency suggests a specific creative solution and its implementation, the client would agree to this solution and trust the agency's expertise. Furthermore, the agency is interested in implementing a successful creative solution because it relies on a long and

trustworthy relationship with its business partners in order to survive within a competitive market. In other words, both partners should be interested in the same outcome. Nonetheless the relationship between the agency and the clients is quite complex. Creative One and Two describe one occasion where they finally learned that a client had a different mentality:

Creative One: Here (*refers to the agency*) everybody is on the same page. We all have the same ...

Creative Two: Goals

Creative One: Right, goals. Client might hopefully have the same goals than us 'cause they agreed on them before we started working ... but things change over time for them especially.

Creative Two: The difference ... I think our goal as an agency is we wanna do great work. Clients want to do work there're are

Creative One: Comfortable with

Creative Two: Right like, we presented our ideas the other day to one of our clients that I don't think were... that ...bizarre... but they made them very uncomfortable and they were excited about it because of that. And this is very interesting. We presented them one concept because we had something like three days to do it and it had to be produced pretty much now. And they were little nervous about that idea like ... it is a really simple change to what they do already and it was interesting just to go through their way of thinking. They wanted to give stuff away for free ... we wanna give you the chance to win ... come down to the store ... you have the chance to win a free TV. And one of the clients said: 'Well, if we don't win ... they gonna be disappointed' ... And I said 'Well ... Yeah ... that's how things work you know. But people understand that.' They (*referring to the client*) have these ideas in their mind and forget that people are just people right.

Creative Two: You know, some clients are fabulous... other ones need a little bit more of coaching to get them to where we wanna go. And it's not a purely selfish thing. The better the idea ... the more happier we make the client the more happier they're gonna make us by giving us more money to do more creative things for them, right. So it's in both our best interests to make sure what we have is an end product that is the best thing possible. But there are a lot of filters in their way preventing that.

Both, the agency and client's perspectives determine the overall creative process. As stated above, a great idea needs to be communicated effectively to all people that are involved and

afterwards, realized, or it does not matter at all. The role of the client is interpreted here as a more practical one in terms of the agency's commission for the needs of a client. Nonetheless the agency-client relationship influences the collaborative process of creativity and has to be considered within the processes of the creative sphere.

To conclude, the emergence of collaborative creativity relies on various means of communication constituting the creative sphere in which the process of creativity takes place. I elaborated on *unplanned communicative acts*, to wit, spontaneous *creative vocal outbursts*, which influence the creative group members and consequently co-construct the creative sphere. By describing *planned, creative communicative acts* I emphasised the need for an open communicative behaviour during a collaborative creative act. Participants organise and harmonise their individual creative thoughts and ideas, and benefit from synergy effects that evolve from the process of collaborative creativity. Luhmann's (1995) communicative system theory advanced our understanding that uttered ideas define the creative sphere and allow others to build upon this communicative momentum. His notion of antipoetic and self-referential systems provides the basis for understanding that the common sender-message-receiver model cannot explain sufficiently creative, collaborative interaction.

With regards to the illustrated *tool-mediated communicative acts*, I explained why asynchronous communication, different from Sonnenburg's (2004) view, actually happens at the same place and does not merely function as a communicative compromise for bypassing the absence of some of the creative group members. For instance, the analysis of the *creative message boards* depicts how asynchronous communication initiated and facilitated creative processes while most participants were not continuously around the creative message boards.

An understanding of the various means of communication within the particular observed creative sphere also furthered our understanding of the collaborative process of creativity. I

pointed out that even though the *operative phase model* and the *thematic stage model* help us observe the various stages of the creative process, they do not account for the character of co-concurrence during any creative process. Every creative process develops an *eigendynamic* and embodies a synthesis of many social attributes. Acknowledging the inter-related attributes of the creative sphere will enhance our abilities to interpret collaborative creativity.

Finally, I referred to the client's role within the creative process and how a particular agency-client relationship influences the process of creativity and idea implementation. The role of the client and how external aspects influence the implementation of the creative idea also refers to environmental and social features that impinge on the creative process as a whole. It constitutes the phenomenon of the creative sphere, which is defined by the various means of communication of an emerging creative process and the particular environment, the space where creativity takes place (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Throughout the following chapter I will illustrate and interpret the environmental features of the creative sphere, such as space and time.

Environmental attributes of the creative sphere: space, time, and organisational culture

The communicative aspect of group creativity, how groups collaborate throughout the creative process, has been discussed so far. I tried to exemplify specific ways and means of communication that define the fluid phases of the creative process that I observed during my fieldwork, and regard as characteristic for this particular creative place. Yet, a sufficient understanding of any creative sphere necessitates addressing all attributes that can be considered as impulses for creative advancement. I prefer to speak of impulses or stimuli rather than inputs or variables, as is common in the research discipline of creativity. The creative sphere is more than just the sum of the added inputs, however creative they might be. My choice of terminology also emphasizes the communicative character of creativity, because any impulse has to be conceived, understood and merged by others within the creative sphere.

Creativity research has either cultivated the interaction of individuals and how group work influences the creative individual (Amabile, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) or the *social dimension* of individual creativity (Meusburger, 2009; Paulus & Nijstad, 2003). Thus far, I have shown that creativity cannot be solely understood as a mental process in creative individuals, but rather as a collaborative process within a communicative, emerging creative sphere. Sawyer (2003) points out the notion of *synergy*, which he identified as essential for an apprehension of creative groups in theatre and music. He conceptualized how both *synchronic* and *diachronic* communication facilitate the artistic process. Playing together simultaneously in a group does stimulate the other players and, over time, the people produce a creative masterpiece that shapes the ongoing creative artistic exchange. Artistic, collaborative events happen almost everywhere when creative people come together and carry out the skilful crafts. But they do not work and play in a social and cultural vacuum. Creatives get inspired by their social environment and are also challenged or even hindered by adverse societal and organisational structures (Meuseburger,

2009). For artists and scientists it is not surprising that some places attract creative people more than others. Creative places set our minds free, define an aura even though some of the creative people have already left a specific creative place or passed away. For example, jazz clubs, such as New York's finest *Blue Note* or *Ronnie Scott's* in London still inspire any musician who stands on the same stages as Miles Davis, Sarah Vaughan, and Chick Corea, just to mention a few. One can still perceive the spirit of great academic figures at their place of activity. As much as a creative place might be attractive to creative people, one has to stress the fact that a creative place and creative people by themselves will not produce an outstanding performance or product. Essential are the interactions, interrelations and mutual modifications, which socially co-construct the creative sphere. Meusburger, Funke, and Wunder (2009) illustrate the various impulses and stimuli of the creative sphere and emphasize the communicative aspects of creative places:

A creative milieu or environment represents a certain potentiality that must be activated through human communication and interaction. What makes a location attractive is its possible or imagined advantages, not the realized ones. It is the potential to communicate with other highly creative persons that attracts artists and scientists from elsewhere. The creative environment acts like a magnet for other creative people and thus enhances the attractiveness of a place. (p. 4)

The environmental attributes, such as space, time, and organisational culture that embody the particular creative sphere I have observed throughout my fieldwork will be covered below. I will concentrate on the unique features of the place and how communication functions act as the driving force of the creative sphere. I would like to mention beforehand that I will not elaborate on circumstances which impede their creative endeavours. Research has focused on various “group-level barriers” (Jarboe, 2002, p. 345) and I have also noticed the negative affects based on “conformity to group norms” or an “unwillingness to collaborate” (p. 346). However, I prefer to concentrate on the positive attributes that stimulate collaborative creative work. A description of this unique creative sphere might also encourage other researchers to consider the interrelation of

individuals, small groups, and their creative space, rather than only attempting to address “environmental variables” (Meuseburger et al. 2009, p. 3) as they impact on the individual’s contribution to creativity. Creativity is a complex social phenomenon, and an understanding of the creative sphere requires a sociological perspective; a perspective that takes into account all the stimuli and attributes, function, effects and ramifications that the researcher is able observe, and subsequently tries to understand.

Every creative place is unique and every organisational environment exhibits unusual or exceptional features; one just has to look carefully enough to see them. The description of my research site will potentially allow some readers to pinpoint the communication agency where my research took place. Ethical research regulations try to avoid this from happening, however, it is almost impossible to describe and analyse the role of an organisational environment without mentioning the manifestations of a place.

As outlined in one of the preceding chapters, the creative sphere is a phenomenon that is defined by collaborate interactions and communication, the interrelations between locations and interacting people, and, finally, by agents that grasp the opportunity and engage in creative adventures. Although it may seem that I propose that the creative sphere is almost anywhere, at least, the centre of any creative sphere can be localized. Human geographer and social scientist Nigel Thrift (1988), a scholar of space and time, defines a locale as a: “meeting place of social structure and human agency, substantive enough to be the generator and conductor of structure, but still intimate enough to ensure that the ‘creature-like aspects’ of human beings are not lost” (p. 38). As indicated in the quote, collaborate efforts require some sort of organisation and structure. Creativity and organisational structure seem to be mutually exclusive, yet, as I have concluded above, creativity depends on collaboration, which again, necessitates organizing how people work together towards a shared objective. The notion of organisation does not refer to a

system of strict and rigid structure to which everyone must adapt. Rather, the organisation has to be a system that facilitates the needs of a creative process and welcomes creativity-enhancing changes. Consistent with the concept of the creative sphere, I suggest considering an organisation as a specific type of communication system, which enables creative interchange and fosters the parameters for the fluid process of change; change that influences collaborative creativity while at the same time is defined by the creative sphere.

Creativity and Space

Space can be considered in terms of a geographical and as a mental phenomenon. In a geographical sense, space is defined by the location where interactive collaboration takes place, primarily in the organisation environment for which the participants work. Within the organisation there are various places a creative team can go and work intensely and undisturbed on a specific creative task for a while. I also observed that participants left the organisational space to get inspired by a specific place, or just because they wanted to work outside of the organisational environment. One executive member explained to me that the creatives need this freedom because “wasting time” pays off in the long run. He said that some just wander around the office and amble along downtown or wherever they like. I did not observe such behaviour, but was present during an initial brainstorming and briefing session that took place in the environment of a particular client.

As described above, the creative teams work in one large room with a high ceiling. The room is arranged as an open workspace and both creative teams work in a cubical-type setting. In the middle of the room, there is a lot space to just move around, stand in front of the creative boards, and look what others are doing or to gather for regular group meetings and discussions.

Participants are allowed to change and “beautify” their personal workspace. I cannot go so far as to concur with the suggestion that a personal workspace reflects the personality of that person, however, most workspaces at the agency are unique. One creative likes to collect and exhibit little theme toys and action figures. Another one hangs up posters of movies or musicians. Most creatives have pictures or proverbs around their workspaces. They can change their personal environment but they don’t have to.

Although I cannot describe in detail all features of the workspace at the agency due to ethical considerations, I hope that the few lines illustrate the spatial freedom of any participant working at this communication agency. Understanding space as a mental phenomenon and the opportunity to interact with other team and group members through that space, is crucial to collaborative, creative development. Participants get inspired by the way they use the organisational space and stimulate there by others to make use of the space and interact freely. Certainly, creative interrelations between participants and the organisational space have to meet the necessities of an organisation that operates like any other business. One creative explains that even though they are at liberty to create their personal workspace they still are part of a business office:

If we were just allowed to be creative (laughing) you know ... I am sure this place would be a lot different. There’d be weird, wacky shit in one part of the office and they’d treat us like children ... but we’re responsible business people as well, right ... you have to wear a lot of hats.

Organisational space only plays an essential role in a creative sphere if one can feel it and perceive it as a safe place for interaction and idea exchange, and finally be encouraged to change it. Some creatives use a scooter to get “from A to B” neither because one really has to cover a long distance between the different places in the office, nor because one has to behave in a weird and unusual way to really be considered as a creative person. I cannot determine whether those

who used the scooter that day were more creative than others or less creative on other days when they did not use the scooter. Creativity and its manifestations are unquantifiable. Nonetheless, the scooter can be considered as a symbol of the free interrelation between the “floating participant,” the space and the scooter itself. I looked at the scooter quite often and thought how it might feel to actually use it and dash through the agency. It took me almost three weeks to have the courage to use the scooter. On the one hand, I thought that I had to display the behaviour of a social researcher, a more or less passive observer of the momentum. On the other hand, to some degree, one needs to feel the acceptance of the group before behaving in an unusual way; although I do not assume that using a scooter is so unusual in this creative environment.

Another way to initialize an interaction within the creative sphere is by utilising the creative message boards that I described earlier. They provide a space for almost any form of creative collaboration, and are located in most rooms of the agency. Some are used for documenting the various stages and ideas of a running project; others are used to inform the group of changes that have been made with regards to the overall approach to the creative process, e. g. strategic changes of the creative brief. Although there are no specific rules of how these creative boards should be used, some boards look different than others. The ones that are frequented by the most people seem to be most attractive for idea exchange. The creative board, which is situated in the main hallway changes regularly. One of the reasons for the permanent content change might be that it is not the “property” of one special group, e. g. creative team or project management team or production team, and so more people have influence on its content. Another reason might be the simple fact that its location in the hallway arouses the interest of anyone who passes by. In other words, the omnipresence of the hallway’s creative boards speaks to the argument of the communicative quality of this particular creative sphere.

Most spaces at the agency are “used” and changed in the true sense of the word. There are partition walls that are suddenly converted to creative boards. Other rooms that previously functioned as neat executive offices were rearranged and turned into “war rooms”, to serve as rooms for ideation. They allow space for thinking and space for detachment from the day-to-day processes that hinder ideation.

Creative One: When we started using these war rooms, the first project we did, we were in this room (*the creative refers to the room where we were talking*) like for a week almost.

Creative Two: We were truly living here.

Creative One: It was dirty, there were faces on the plants, there was a lot of other stuff on the walls (*both laugh*) ... Having this room as opposed to our desks ... Because when we're at our desk we're interrupted every five minutes ... constantly. There's people coming by with little twigs for projects ... you can't build any momentum on an idea. You can't really brainstorm on something if every five you're being pulled away to do something else. So these rooms made a big difference for us.

The concept of open spaces, and the way the creative boards work, stimulate various communication patterns, which foster collaboration. Open and dialogic communication is shaped by patterns that evolve throughout the creative process; some patterns are already installed and imposed onto the participants, e. g. organisational “philosophies.” These “maps of communication between participants” (Mabry & Barnes, 1980, p. 16) define the effective flow of communication, to wit, who speaks with whom and who is allowed to speak to whom (Bavelas, 1950; Leavitt, 1951). Communication patterns that are distinguished by open communication, and which display a high degree of decentralization, contribute to a creative sphere in which each participant has the same chance to be conducive to the creative solution. Although decentralized communication patterns foster creative communication, they become practised and unalterable patterns that over the time can endanger the processes within the creative sphere. For instance people are able to talk to one another but still one can notice that mostly the same people talk to

each other. Consequently, the communication patterns have to be varied in order to keep stable the intensity of collaborative communication, e. g. varying “boundary-spanner[s]” (Conway, 1997, p. 227) change the way how groups interact and communicate and also enable others to gain experience in keeping up the communication within the creative group, and the agency as a whole. For example, both creative directors walk through the agency picking up the mood of the other employees and reviewing the ongoing creative process. They do not only speak to the senior account managers, but also to the new members of the agency. One creative director explained to me that he wants to communicate that both creative directors are approachable for any matter and need to get feedback about problems addressed by the clients. Although every participant is encouraged to contribute to the overall creative process, I observed that most of the time the same people initialize the communication between the participants of the agency, which I define as a creative group in its entirety. This has to do with the organisational structure and the different roles in any organisation. Senior organisational roles require more communication and coordination activities, such as boundary spanning. Yet, it is the management’s obligation to facilitate and set an example for open and free communication throughout the creative process. The significance of the various roles in a creative agency and the quality of leadership in establishing a well-functioning creative sphere is one of the challenges that will be addressed in the following section.

All creativity researchers stress the importance of facilitation, especially with the new and young voices within a creative process (Sonnenburg, 2007). New ideas require new ways of thinking that divert from the usual day-to-day practise (Salazar, 2002). If there is one thing that hinders creativity, then, it is management’s ignorance of creativity as being a progressive and continuously changing and reinventing process. I observed that especially some members of the senior staff made sure that newer employees “know what it’s all about” in this business.

Certainly, employees should benefit from other experienced employees, however, there should be a way to first listen to new ideas and be open to new approaches. I am aware of the competitive situation of any agency working in this business environment. Then again, as Salazar (2002) points out, finding new ideas necessitates striking new paths.

To conclude, a creative space that inspires people to engage in discussions with any topic is vital for collaborative creativity. In the words of one of the participants: “You have to have this alertness. And that’s why we have this organic nature, that’s why this space is open, ‘cause you just hear stuff and anything can start an idea.”

Creativity and time

Processes are defined by chronology. That is also true for creative processes, because a creative challenge must arise before it can be resolved. Throughout my description of the creative process, I point out that each single creative process is individual and situational, and the stages of the creative process should be considered as interrelating phases. Generally, the models of creative processes and problem solving address the notion of time under the keyword incubation period. Jarboe (2002) and others emphasize the need for a time for “silence, incubation, and quite reflections on one’s own ... designed to arouse interest and increase motivation” (p. 354).

Applying a cognitive psychological perspective, researchers of group processes base their inquiries on the mental and individual processes and question the significance of having time to develop a “sleep on it idea” (Jarboe, 2002, p. 354). From my point of view, the process of creativity is too complex for any research approach utilising a laboratory setting at all. The reasons for my assumption are multiple: As illustrated above, the particular space that defines the creative sphere emerges and develops over time. The relationship between the participants of a creative small group and the agency, defined as a creative group, consumes time. These

interrelations do not happen in any laboratory setting and by extending the laboratory experiment over a long time span one would, in fact, create a consistent environment for creativity, that is, the creative sphere. The expression “sleep on it idea” illustrates a fallacious mindset towards the phenomenon of time. Time is a variable that distinguishes the stages of a process or defines phases, e. g. the incubation or illumination period, however, notably, a certain period of time also exists between defining a creative challenge and finding a sufficient creative solution.

Interpreted as a physical property, the principle of time is quite simple: We know how time goes by and how it *sounds*: “Tick ... Tock ... Tick ... Tock.” Everything has its place and, although most watches and clocks are not, time is precise, an unchangeable physical variable. But from a sociological perspective time is different: it is subjective; it is beneficial for some, oppressive for others; it is a multifaceted and contradictory phenomenon. Some utterances by my participants will explain what I am trying to argue. According to Creative Director One:

I think from a creative process, and this is because this is a business, not having time to really play with an idea or play with a subject matter ... is a limitation. But if you get too much time, you kinda spin your wheels: you procrastinate and old human nature comes into that.

Here is another excerpt of an ero-epic dialogue that I had with the Creative Executive:

I often find that we do our worst work when we have the most time. ‘Cause you need a little pressure. Although then ... you never know. I find the creativity aspect of this business very similar to the music business. You know when you get bands that come with their first album ... it is their best album ever... because they had their whole life to write it... you know and everything after that sucks.

These two excerpts embody the sociological perspective of time that needs to be the focus for explaining the relationship between space and time within the creative sphere. Scott Cawelti, Alfred Rappaport, and B. Wood (1992) note statements of various artists who value walking away from a project and take some time in the creative process. Getting inspired by an

environment and re-creating a space in a collaborative way does not happen within usual business hours or within the chronology of a problem solving process. In fact, some creatives told me that they are constantly contemplating some of the ideas on which they are currently working.

Ideating is not a phenomenon where you can decide when things happen: “It’s not like an on and off switch, it’s on and constantly on. Things just come out.” Cautiously, I would like to note that it seems as if time cannot only be seen as a positive attribute of a creative process. Although people need time to work creatively in collaboration, some of them seem to have a hard time distancing themselves from being creative; creativity is not merely a work tool, but rather an attitude towards getting the job done.

We live in a time where we are able to communicate continuously with each other and exchange ideas within seconds from one end of the world to the other. One participant describes the situation of keeping abreast with the pace of the information age and the expectations of our external environment:

Creative One: Everybody is caught up in the whole idea that information is shared so much more quickly now, like email and everything else on the Internet, you have Internet access to everything but ... ideas still take the same amount of time. It is almost so there’s expectations now, from a client’s standpoint: I can get in touch with you instantly, so why can’t we have this turned around in two days? Well you know, ideas take time to incubate, they don’t hatch over night. Well, sometimes they do, sometimes the first idea you have it ... you have it in five minutes.

Creative Two: But like we said, how do you know that that’s the best if you don’t explore the other options? And when do you know you’re done? You know, you never do ... you never know when you’re done. There is always more, you just know when you have to stop.

Creative One: Back in the old days, campaigns would take two years. Sometimes you had just six months to think about ideas and develop the concepts. If we have two weeks here ... that’s a luxury. Like two weeks for us is a long time.

Creative Two: And we still waste most of the time. We need to get our junk out of your way. We need to get our curse words out first. [laughs.]

Whereas the project management team knows how the process of ideation takes place and tries to explain the creative process to the client, the creative management facilitates the time-consuming approach to creativity. The Creative Executive points out:

One of the things that I think is very difficult to do in this business is to let something become something. And part of the reason is clients. Can you imagine saying to a client: Well we haven't figured that out yet, but I think it's gonna evolve. They'll be like: "No no no no ... you have to figure that out. So what we like to do is, well what I like to do anyway, is to try to be open to the ideas improving as you go.

Being open to evolving ideas takes time and allows bringing in other perspectives. In other words, time fosters processual collaboration. It is the interrelation between space, time, and participants that constitutes the creative sphere within a creative organisation.

Although participants, and especially the creative management, might not consider all the impulses and qualities of an organisational environment as constituents of a creative sphere they do, however, see the necessity of providing structures that facilitate creative collaboration. Providing space, time, and resources is one component of creative success, but leading others and inspiring them to make use of, and co-construct, the creative sphere is another.

A creative organisational culture, creative leadership and the need for change

Interdisciplinary research on the nature of organisations is quite confusing. Unsurprisingly, the definition of organisational culture depends on the specific perspective of the scholar who is engaged with the subject matter. With respect to the spatial and communicative qualities of the creative sphere, I quote Meusburger's (2009) attempt to define the organisation:

Organizations are the spatial mesoscale on which creative processes are greatly influenced. An Organization is a goal-oriented and information-processing social system that perceives, scans, interprets, and diagnoses information from the environment and from its own elements in order to remain competitive and adapt its goals and structures to new challenges. (p. 118)

The addressed factors determine whether creative peoples' ideation is fostered or hindered. Meusburger's definition addresses first the importance of space within an organisation. By means of observational accounts and ero-epic dialogue excerpts, I have already illustrated the relationship between collaborative creativity in small groups and space and time respectively. The second part of the definition refers to an organisation's ability to identify problems and to change its structures towards new challenges accordingly. Mary Ann Glynn (1996) speaks of "organisational intelligence," which allows an organisation to learn and memorize various approaches to a culture of change: "Organisational intelligence is an organisation's capability to process, interpret, encode, manipulate, and access information in a purposeful, goal-directed manner, so it can increase its adaptive potential in the environment in which it operates" (p. 1088). Whereas this requires an organisation to be creative with regards to its structures and organisational senses, this observation applies especially to creative organisations whose profession is to develop creative solutions. On the one hand, they have to maintain and foster a culture of creativity and on the other hand adapt to structures similar to any organisation.

Creative organisations, in particular, are exposed to a permanent state of flux, a dynamic that has increased throughout the last decades. Above all, that is because the environment has changed based on varying market rules, technological advancements, and globalization, which forces creative organisations to transform their culture and processes according to a progressing environment. In order to maintain and expand its competitive business position, an organisation has to be flexible, adaptable and able to react towards particular developments that involve the organisation within a specific business setting (Gassmann, 2001). Creative organisations that are based on controlling and fossil management structures cannot react to external and internal changes. In a lot of cases, rigid management structures result in inflexibility and stagnation. When creative organisations do not refine their management practises, they experience

difficulties to survive in their market. From a business perspective they also endanger their right to exist.

All the above-described qualities of a well-functioning creative organisation rely on organisational structures that facilitate creativity and on group members who influence and amplify the collaborative interaction of the creative process. Meusburger (2009) enumerates organisational structures that are important for creative processes. Some of them are:

The design of work setting; the architecture or arrangement of formal communication, decision-making, and authority within the organization; the degree of centralization or decentralization of decision-making; the span of control at various hierarchical levels; the degree of autonomy that different levels of organization enjoy; the organization's ability to respond to opportunities and risks of the environment; and the formalized structure of communication with the environment. (p. 119)

Organisational structures allow group members to work creatively in collaboration, however, as the lists implies, they rely on visionary guidance and facilitation of the entire creative group. How effective the structures of creative organisations and the overall social climate of the creative environment are, depends on the leadership of that creative organisation:

The group leader facilitates, supports, and at times, guides a process. His [sic] skills in building a safe environment, nurturing relationships and fostering communication create the milieu in which group members organize themselves. In a literal sense, the leader "creates the space" in which the group works. (McClure, 2005, p. 99)

Whereas Bud A. McClure's definition describes the skills of *a* group leader, the agency's management considers themselves as a team. There are management teams that deal with the day-to-day creative process and there is an "executive team" which tackles and develops the overall creative and cultural identity of the agency. Surely, the agency as an entity of all its members defines the organisational culture, however, the executive team understands its role as nurturing the creative process, e. g. by finding the right people for the creative process, and

enabling the creative group to be creative. What applies to the creative team or the creative organisations is also true for the management: collaboration is key. One executive team member describes his dream of a creative place and management's role in providing a creative environment:

My dream for a place like (*Agency's name*) is to have a culture that fosters and thrives on curiosity, discovery, and mutual enlightenment, where people are helping each other, learning as they go along. So a culture of collaboration where the best idea wins and people are building up that best idea and everyone's working towards the same goal. And, in order to have a culture like that you need people who're confident, open-minded, and fairness, if this is the right word? ... My definition of common sense is the ability to recognize the best idea even if it's not yours. So you can take that idea and make it even better. And I think the smartest people we have and these are the people we try to find and foster. It's about the best solution, it's about the best answer and finding the best way to do it ... and this can come, truly come, from anywhere.

Providing the organisational environment that might allow the dream of a culture of creative collaboration come true, and inspiring the group to work and live towards that goal, is the role of the executive team. Surely, the executive team can be engaged with the day-to-day creative process, however, I perceived a more passive role of the team towards the everyday process, which allows the group to work autonomously towards a creative solution. The presence of the executive team members still plays an essential role within the daily creative process. Their doors are open most of the time for consultation and inspiring conversations. Executive members also join strategy meetings and are open for a democratic way of finding that creative solution to day-to-day or organisational challenges. As one member of the executive team explains:

We are in a creative business but in terms of how I run the business and my role on the operational side ... I don't have the answer to every question there as well. So the question how we structure the departments ... I need input from a whole bunch of different sources to find the solution that is going to be right for us. What I can offer in that whole process though, in my position, is as much clarity, vision, and destination as I can. So the work that we do for a client and the collaborative group creativity that we have is only as good as the destination we're giving you. If we're giving you some fuzzy, vague place to go you're not gonna have as sharp a focus on the root that you can use to get there.

A creative collaborative process, according to the leader quoted above, has to be focused and needs some “checkpoints and marks that you have to hit frees you up to be creative and be a little bit more loose in between.” In general, my observations are in accordance with this statement. However, I noticed that, especially when the creative group is pressed for time, the creative directors set the agenda for the next few days because there seems to be an agreement that there is no time to “try things out,” as one of the creative directors stated.

Whereas the executive team provides and stimulates the whole group towards an open-minded creative process, mainly the project and creative management team have to ensure the executive team’s vision is carried out on a day-to-day basis. Although the concept of the creative sphere requires describing and analysing all manifestations of how organisational structures and leadership influence the creative process, I will concentrate on the leadership style that characterizes the processes within the creative group. This approach certainly contravenes the belief that an idea can come from anywhere and is influenced by anyone who is involved throughout the creative process. Yet, I can only base my assumption on the processes and behaviours that I was able to observe. Even though I was allowed to move around in the agency for almost six weeks, the agency suggested that I be placed in the room of the creative group. Initially this suggestion made sense to me, since I planned to observe interaction and communication in creative small groups. I also relied on the assessment of the agency’s management because I thought they would know where creativity takes place. Furthermore, one has to be careful within the first days in the field and should not discuss the specificities of a study too much. For instance, I could have asked for two different placements in the agency, but was happy that the agency made available an extra spot for me. There is still a difference between having a place that is our “own” or moving around, arriving and leaving a setting, and so, interrupting and disturbing the participants. In retrospect, and while analysing my research data, I

have to come to the conclusion that the description and analysis of only some particular leadership aspects is a limitation with regards to an overall understanding of leadership within the creative sphere. Then again, I provide my perspective of the hierarchical conditions that define this particular creative group.

The leadership role within the creative group is performed by two co-associate creative directors. They consider themselves as a team, work together, discuss current projects, and mentor the creative teams. Sometimes they handle a specific creative project together when the team is overworked or too busy. Usually, a creative director will work on a project, together with a creative team. Both creative directors allow the team substantial freedom in the way they come up with creative ideas and unusual solutions to the assigned challenges. Creative Director One describes his relationship to the creative teams as follows:

Part of my process ... is to identify those bright, little sparks that are coming from the teams and to be able to mentor those bright, little sparks, to develop them or help the team to develop them. So when it comes to communicating that thought ... it is something that I've developed over the time, the skills to quickly identify where those little treasures are... but then communicate it in a way the team understands what I am suggesting... a way to develop it. So it all depends on communication skills in general ... and that is really to communicate clearly and also succinctly what we want to do.

The creative directors guide the teams through the creative process and provide the autonomy, which is necessary so that creativity has the space and time to emerge.

As I have explained above, the creative space is defined by its spatial and mental qualities respectively. With regards to the mental attribute of the creative space I would like to mention an example that illustrates the differences between what participants say and how they actually interact and behave.

A researcher is highly interested in those inconsistencies since they indicate where to look and hopefully provide “the chance to learn [I would like to add: a piece of] the truth” (Girtler,

2001, p. 164; Schütz, 1971) of a particular social world. The creatives of this particular agency, the members of the creative teams of two as well as the creative directors, have a blunt and very direct, sometimes offensive, way of communicating. I already provided some examples of their unique humour throughout my analysis of different means of communication within the creative sphere. Creatives do not only display their way of communicating during conversation with one another, but they also use other media to unleash their humour. I would like to refer to an occurrence where one creative made use of one of the creative boards that is located in the creative team room. The creative board is installed on one of the walls that constitute the office of both co-associate creative directors. Let me first describe what was on the wall: I noticed the writings on the creative board on the first day of my field study. I cannot provide the full content of this particular creative board since it would indicate the communication agency where I conducted my research study. The creative board showed a list whose contents remained quite consistent throughout my six weeks of fieldwork. One of the creative directors added an item to the list on only two occasions. Here is the content that I can provide:

House Rules – and yes, this is a dictatorship

Only (*name of one of the creative directors*) may use the tube of truth

No Celtic music

No Van Morrison

No Gypsy Kings (this is a firing offence)

NO COMING UP BEHIND ME WITH HIGH-HEELS

Anything featuring Irish Step dancing is worse than The Gypsy Kings

Now, one can agree with some of the rules and there is some irony about the House Rules. I did not perceive any kind of legal force or validity associated with these rules. Surely, one can interpret these rules as an indirect artefact of a power structure within the agency or as a symbol

of self-confidence. People might feel constrained with regards to the music they are allowed to hear during office hours. I did not notice any negative effects caused by these House Rules, however, creativity is a phenomenon which is beyond any measurement in the traditional sense. The rules might have defined the creative sphere or not. Then again, the House Rules demonstrate the open and free space that can be utilised by any participant in whatever way or form.

Most House Rules demonstrate a certain aversion to a particular kind of music. House Rule number six, however, focuses on a different situation. “NO COMING UP BEHIND ME WITH HIGH-HEELS” certainly addresses the women working within the agency and demonstrates an exact order. I have to note that only one woman works in the creative team room, however, she did not wear high heels when I was present. This rule might be directed towards members of the project management team, which includes many women wearing high heels from time to time. Yet, I did not notice any so called gender issues during my stay in the field. At this point, I have to be careful and should not jump to any conclusions since (1) I have not established any close relationship with any woman within the agency, (2) I am a male researcher and do not anticipate women discussing gender issues with me, and (3) even though a researcher is present all day for a long time does not mean he or she will pick up all issues at the research site, and especially the sensitive ones.

I touch upon this particular House Rule because of one occurrence that happened during my fieldwork. It exemplifies how an initial unsuspecting and unreflecting interaction can be redefined by situational circumstances within an organisational environment. I first noticed a difference on a Monday and did not reflect on my particular feelings because I learned that Mondays were “different” at the agency anyway; people needed some time to start the week and some might not have been happy about the fact of having to work again. I resided in the creative

team room since the creative group usually hold “Monday status meetings” between 9:15 am and 10:00 am. During that morning I had the feeling that some members of the project management team did not happily enter the creative team room. I was not able to describe or analyse my assertion; as I said, it was “just a feeling”. I had this feeling for a couple of days and felt some tension between some of the participants. A couple of days later, the creative group meeting dealt with the relationship between members of the project management team and the creative team. The creative directors pointed out that one should talk to each other instead of writing “mean emails that would just make everything worse.” Furthermore it was said that everyone should address their problems in a calm manner and “help each other out.” Creatives were reminded that not everyone understands their way of humour and that creatives do not take their own blunt statements so seriously. The creatives were also asked to be aware of their intimidating behaviour towards new or insecure members of the agency. With respect to ethical considerations, I cannot state more details of this conflict here and they also do not matter with regards to the point that I am trying to make. Crucial for an understanding of the overall situation, however, is my observation of the disappearance of the House Rule “NO COMING UP BEHIND ME WITH HIGH-HEELS.” Shortly after the meeting, one of the creative team members erased the rule. This example can either be interpreted as a way of how careless remarks that are constantly present on a message board can define the work environment or signify the uncertainty with regards to the question of how far a creative person can actually act out his or her creativity within the creative sphere.

Assuming that a creative team has enough time to work on a specific challenge, the members of the team are free to decide how to tackle the challenge, and also where. I have observed the teams working autonomously, especially in the initial stages of a project. One of the

creative directors describes how he provides guidance without dictating the *right* direction for a creative solution when teams are unable to begin initial ideation process:

Creative Director One: I try to make the team find that solution. If they can't or just don't feel they're getting anywhere, or aren't getting anywhere, I either bring in another team ... not necessarily take it away from them but maybe just bring in more people talking about it. Just talking about the general thought of it might spurs in new direction the team haven't taken on.

Guiding creative teams during the creative process necessitates a couple of things at the same time. Sometimes, a team needs further mentoring towards a solution. Then again, the creative group has to comply with the requirements of a specific task or needs of a client and find that creative solution. In the end the creative group has to play its role within the agency, which is a creative business. A creative director has to develop team members' skills while at the same time keeping the creative groups productive on a professional level. One of the creative directors explains: "With creatives there is a pride of ownership in regards to coming up with ideas. So I don't like to take things away from creatives, I like to hopefully create an environment where they will eventually find a solution." There is a tension throughout a creative process where it is important to gain mutual trust between the members of the creative group. The leaders of that creative group have to understand how to interact with people in general, but there seems to be a specific characteristic that defines creative people:

Creative Director One: When you're dealing with creatives: Don't start with a negative. Even if there might be things that are wrong there. There is a way that you make sure that you're fostering the right creative spirit which comes down to knowing how to deal with people and how to make sure you are clear in your communication. The reason is: Most creatives are insecure a little bit when they are presenting their work ... You will get a lot of bravado and ego but most creatives are kind of... 'Is it OK?'

This quotation addresses the responsibilities and abilities of creative leaders within a creative group, which are in line with various requirements that researchers quote as essential for creative outcomes, e. g. group autonomy, creative mentorship, being open for feedback, open and

effective communication, and collaboration. Jarboe (2002), Talbot (1993) and many more describe how important democratic structures are for the creative process and disaffirm overriding a team decision. I can only agree to this to a point; who would not agree to collaborative and democratic structures throughout a creative process? But listing advantageous qualities of collaborative ideation, and implementing them on a day-to-day business situation, are two different things. Demanding democratic structures, that is to say, allowing anyone to contribute to the overall creative process and letting others' opinions be heard seems to be difficult to accomplish. On the one hand, creative collaboration does not take place in a social vacuum. A creative business has to comply with the nature of an organisation that is acting within a competitive market. Decisions have to be made and decision makers are required to shoulder the responsibility of decisions that are often crucial for an organisation's survival. That is also true for decisions with regards to creative solution, because in the end, the creative solutions determine the way in which the agency's clients will perceive the abilities of an agency to come up with innovative ideas. On the other hand, a truly democratic creative process, which is characterized by collaboration within the whole agency, depends on the understanding of one's role as well as on the roles of others who are involved in creative collaboration. During my participant observation, I heard and noticed some inconsistent statements and behaviour with regards to the questions of how ideation takes place, e. g. where ideas come from, when collaboration is preferred and when it is hindering the creative process. Let me begin to illustrate by quoting the ideas of the Creative Executive:

Let's use a sandwich as an analogy: If you've got the guy on the one side who makes the bread and the guy on the other side who makes the meat ... that works ... but imagine if they got together he said: 'Hey if I made bread this way and you made meat this way ... maybe it could be even better.'

Later in our conversation he returns to the analogy and explains the value of adding more ideas and participants to the creative process:

What I like to do is to try to be open to the ideas improving as you go. So when you do a TV commercial for example, when we hire directors or when we cast directors, I like someone to come to the table with some other ideas. So a lot of directors will come back to you and say: 'Oh I love what you've done, here's what I'll do with it, this is how I'll treat it'... Some directors come back and go: 'I love what you've done, in fact I've got a couple of other thoughts that I think will make this even better. What if we did this or what if we did that?' I love that because then, everybody is adding value, you know, and the more people are getting involved, the more valuable it becomes. You know, it's like the meat guy and the bread guy getting' together with the mayonnaise guy ... and then you bring a pickle guy ...

These conversation excerpts do not only demonstrate an openness to democratize structures throughout the creative process, but put also emphasise the need for diverse stimulation from many people with different expertise. But in order to implement a strategy of a truly creative collaborative culture there is more needed than only lip service. I quote another creative voice within the agency:

I am a big believer the less voices in the process of developing something in the creative field ... the better. Committee work or the more voices you have ... makes the process more arduous because everybody's got an opinion. And it's not that those opinions are necessarily wrong but lots of opinions don't necessarily help the product get better. The way that I look at it, is we start quite wide out here and we narrow and narrow and narrow through process of elimination. Now at various stages of that there might be other people that come in to check against some certain things, so like from a strategy point of view or from a media deliverability so that we're working to the right media. But when it comes to the creative product and telling that story ... I think that ... the less voices the better.

The quoted creative emphasises that the creative teams do not work in total isolation and are certainly open to be inspired. However, he notes that in the end the teams should "hear it from one voice" and get direction towards how to develop a particular product or idea. He points out: "And that's my role to be that one voice ... to represent that creative direction for the agency in that project." From his point of view, trying to take in too many opinions will lead the creative idea to be "a little bit all over the place." Interestingly enough and later in the conversation, the

creative said: “If I looked at all the really successful work that this agency has done ... it couldn’t be pinpointed to one or two people in particular. It really is a collaborative effort ...” He paused and added with a smile that this statement was in contrast with what he was saying before. Finally, he explained: “Maybe it is collaboration at the right time. At the beginning, where it’s really general conversations.”

From my point of view, the phrase “collaboration at the right time” entails various determinants that are crucial to answer the question of whether or not there will be a collaborative process of creativity. Most people will agree to the positive effects of group creativity and the synergy that emerges from collaborative efforts. However, ensuring a communication process is defined by an equal and open way of collaborative communication and interaction is a difficult undertaking. Although the participants work together in teams and groups, they all have personal needs and ideas of how things should work out for them personally. Most people will admit they have ambitious goals and want to progress throughout their personal careers. On the other hand, an organisation needs to ensure it has working conditions that allow it to survive in a competitive business market. In the end, someone has to have the last word and to be responsible for business decisions. Therefore, this particular agency has set up its organisational structures to make sure that the agency is able to come up with creative ideas and solutions for its clients. So for example, the creative group is set up with a hierarchy where one of the creative directors has the last word on how to proceed throughout a creative process. That does not only affect the overall creative process, but also the specific direction that the creative team assigned to a project has to pursue. So, in the end, the question of when there is the right time for collaboration is not a decision of the creative group as such, but rather of a few individuals at the top end of the hierarchy. This procedure is somewhat contradictory to my earlier point regarding the importance of a truthful and open process of collaborative creativity (Sonnenburg, 2007).

I spoke with most people in the agency whose official “job it is to come up with ideas.” They all emphasize the nature of the agency as being “a whole creative team.” Some stated this opinion upfront and some creatives pointed this out when I made use of so called “leading questions” (taken from a conversation with Girtler in late July, 2010). Girtler makes clear that these leading questions are necessary since they can unleash comments or stimulate participants elaborating on another topic that was missed out so far. With regards to ethical considerations, Girtlers notes that scholars are at odds with the notion of leading questions. I suggest to be careful and to decide from time to time if a leading question can yield information that is essential to a research study. In the case of whether a creative process benefits from many or fewer voices, from collaborative efforts coming from anywhere within the agency, I propose that it is illuminating to describe and subsequently understand the inconsequent utterances by members of the creative team. Again, I want to point out that there is a common willingness to collaborate creatively. But how can we understand the inconsequent opinions about working together in a creative sphere? How can we learn at least one part of the truth, understand the reality of this specific creative sphere?

At this point, I would like to include a brief excursus and go into the matter of how research can make sense out of participants’ utterances and behaviours, which often are defined by contradictions. In the final stages my fieldwork, I got more into longer conversations with my participants. Talking repeatedly about a specific topic will help a researcher find the inconsistencies, which help construct an understanding of a social reality. A researcher gets cautious about statements, scrutinizes his or her initial social *Verständnis* and states the similar questions to the same participants. It takes more time to build that relationship between a researcher and her other participants, which eventually result in comments that are more critical and allow a research to look behind the day-to-day interactions within a business. Girtler (2001)

is successful with the participant observational approach and also with the ero-epic dialogue, however, I have to note that the success of these methods also rely on the specificities of a research field, e. g. the situation of the participants and their surroundings. Observing a rural culture and talking to its members may be easier than trying to observe how a business unit works, because utterances of a participant might have negative consequences for his job situation. I did not notice that this was an issue during my fieldwork however one cannot be sure about what people say. Therefore, the combination of conversations and observation is so critical for an understanding of a social phenomenon: Often people's behaviour and utterances differ, and sometimes they even do not notice the inconsistencies. One answer with respect to the inconsistencies might be the way in which creatives interpret their roles and other participants' roles within the creative sphere of the agency. One creative says it clearly: "The onus eventually will fall on us, because without the creative there's nothing ... there is nothing left." Creative Director One:

What I like trying to make sure is that people are bringing creativity into their role... and understanding what as an agency we want to do ... produce really an interesting creative product and have a belief that creativity is a really effective business tool. So asking yourself: What you're gonna do within this agency to help to promote that.

Creatives' interpretation of their role, that is, being mainly responsible for creative ideas or, at least, feeling that one has to come up with ideas and subsequently execute the creative thought might be one reason for their inconsistent statements. In addition, their understanding of the notion of collaboration within the creative process illuminates to some extent the relationship between the creative group and other participant within the agency. Some emphasize that the process is defined by a collaborate effort by anyone within the agency: Some are engaged in the process of ideation as such; others foster the creative process. But ultimately, the collaborative creative process is not defined by a joint process of ideation on a day-to-day basis. Still, the

Creative Executive states the importance of a closer relationship of the various disciplines within the agency and envisions:

The way to look at it would be that the creative people ... yes, it is everyone's job to be creative ... the creatives' job is to execute on ideas... so bringing the ideas to life. The account people's job is to facilitate ideas. So make sure they have the right information, make sure that they're inspiring the team with that information, make sure that they're strategically sound in terms of: This is a good idea and here are all the business reasons why that's a good idea. They support the client in terms of what they want to get done, they support the agency in terms of what the agency wants to get done. This is a very different discipline. ... But now the two disciplines are kinda coming together a lot more. For example, I expect the creative senior people to have a very business-minded focus on what we're doing. I expect the account people to have a creative minded focus on what we're doing.

My dialogue partner describes a transition towards a new understanding of collaborative thinking and working. When I first visited the creative agency to discuss a potential research study I noticed a different approach to collaborative work within the agency. Members of the executive team explained to me that they were in a process of change with regards to how teams should be constituted and how they should tackle the creative challenges. As with any other organisation this particular creative agency started going through a process of transition again. Sonnenburg (2007) even goes a step further and states that there is a constant evolution of especially creative agencies since they need to find novel and creative solutions that are beyond a day-to-day implementation of idea variations. He contends that creativity is endangered because of an organisation's natural evolution and cites growth and success as adverse effects on creative collaboration. Organisational growth ultimately changes process structures and involves more people throughout the creative process. Successful organisations are also less motivated to change a winning strategy and consequently ignore new opportunities. As Karl Albrecht and Stephen Albrecht (1987) cite Galbraith who states: "The organization that's right for doing something a millionth time is exactly the wrong organization for doing something the first time"

(p. 19). Albrecht and Albrecht say it more unspectacularly than his colleague within the management discipline: “In many ways a commitment to performance, perfection, and efficiency is a stand against innovation” (p. 19). My dialogue partner explains the situation that the agency had to approach and why they felt they had to reconsider the very reason for their existence:

I think as an agency we were kind of ... lazy. So we weren't pushing ourselves so hard anymore, we didn't have the competitive fire anymore that we used to have. I think we were reading our own press ... what that means is ... I think we thought we were good ... so we didn't have to try really hard. We didn't have to ... you know, we were always gonna win lots of awards, we were always gonna do the better work. But the truth was, it was one day we looked up and went ... we're not the best, we're by far from the best now, your work is not getting any better, you know, we had a horrible year at the awards shows that year, we just had a poor year. So that was a wake up call ... So we just re-evaluated everything.

Participants' overestimation of their current business state also resulted in the disability to notice essential social changes in their business environment. As the Creative Executive notes:

Finally, the other motivation was: Just the industry is changing. There are just so many things to do and so many different ways to do it ... and we weren't prepared for that. We weren't internally talking about it, we weren't training people on how to adapt, we did not talk with clients about adapting. So all of that just came together at once. And we went: Wow ... we need to completely re-evaluate how we're running this business and what we're here to do.

Sonnenburg (2007) describes the constant force for change that creative businesses are exposed to. He emphasises that creative businesses “have to face a dialectic of order and chaos” (p. 186) and that the competition in the world of creative businesses is more and more “determined on the basis of creativity” (p. 187). Research with regards to the area of tension, in other words, the relationship between the poles of order and chaos, is still in its infancy. Salazar (2002) refers to the notion of “self-organizing” groups and to the “complexity perspectives of group creativity” (p. 179). However, he states within his conclusion that there is still a need for developing sound research methods with regards to an understanding of the different stages of “stability and chaos” (p. 196). As fascinating as Salazar's (2002) adaption of the complexity theory sounds, I have an

issue with the practicality of this concept with regards to creativity. According to Salazar, a “self-organisation in a system may be said to occur when a system seemingly spontaneously develops new structural features and a new order after having progressed through a disruption” (p. 184). Similar to the chaos theories of scholars such as Edward N. Lorenz, Salazar pinpoints “spontaneous” developments. With respect to interaction within creative small groups I am still not convinced of that spontaneous behaviour. Already the terminology that the quoted scholars introduce is inconsistent. How can the organisation of a larger unit, such as a creative group, be spontaneous? The word organisation as such implies a certain degree of stability throughout a group’s undertakings. Although Salazar (2009) does not go into detail in this regard, it could mean that the “self-organization” sets the structure for initial and spontaneous ideas that can be executed by newly developed concepts or processes. Understanding the term organisation in this way would require an organisation to allow its work groups to courageously try out new approaches to collaborate creativity.

There is no agreement of how an “intervention for change” has to be conducted (Jarboe, 1999, p. 350) and some deny speaking of “managing creativity” (Kao, 1991, p. 19). Here, I would like to conclude this section with the story of my participant. Unfortunately, I did not observe the actual changing process to the way that the agency is running now, however, I did notice the different interpretation of that process towards a new arrangement of collaborative creativity. The Creative Executive points out how they approached their sense of “something is going wrong”:

What we decided to do, we went ... to ... and visit companies that seem to be running their business very well... I think what happened was ... just doing that allowed us to see past what was going on here and I kept saying: The flood gate opened that day because after that day we could see what we needed to do... You know ... my problem, just for me individually was, I had trouble envisioning what else it could be like, I just couldn’t get past the day here. And once you took yourself out of it and you went and could see what else was going on, ... and all of the sudden ... We restructured and it’s been great ever since ... I mean better ... for sure.

We talked a couple of times about change, structures, and how he envisions the creative agency to be. Clay Carr (1994) asks: “Building a new kind of organization, one that maintains its frame flexibility, encourages diversity, and deals openly with conflict – is it really worth all this just for an organization to be creative?” (p. 161). My answer to this question is: yes! And, I am sure my often-quoted dialogue partner and the other welcoming participants of the agency, to whom I am very grateful for letting me into his social world, would agree.

Within this chapter I interpreted the environmental attributes, namely, space, time, and organisational culture, that constitute the particular creative sphere. I have illustrated that the various components that I have observed cannot be understood as additive factors within the creative sphere, but rather should be seen as stimuli that influence collaborative creativity.

Creatives do not work in a social or cultural vacuum, and so their communicative acts constitute the creative sphere while, at the same time, are influenced by the social components within the agency. For instance, space, understood as a geographical and as a mental phenomenon, plays an essential role in a creative sphere and an organisation that can provide its employees with a safe place for creative and collaborative interaction.

Whereas clients urge the agency to shorten the time frame for the process of ideation, creativity requires “the time to really play with an idea.” I have outlined why the generally-used notion of incubation does not really address the mental and communicative phases of creatives within the creative process, and that we need to start interpreting the phenomenon of time from a different perspective.

Although social attributes such as organisational space and communicative phenomenon, for example the creative boards, facilitate collaborative creativity, I explained why organisational leadership and mentorship play an important role throughout creative collaboration. Only by setting an example and making sure that other senior management team members follow it,

executive leaders can foster open and free communication that allows creatives to strive for exceptional and creative work.

THE CREATIVE SPHERE - A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

From the very beginning of my research endeavour I was quite uncertain as to whether I would find something new. My supervisor and the thesis committee members always stressed the multiplicity and richness of the social world that would wait for me out there: and they were right.

The conclusion of my thesis will reflect on the applied research methods, its relevance for this study, and serve as a conflation of the theoretical frameworks that were introduced in the first half of my thesis, and the interpreted findings of the analysis chapters.

The theoretical framework considers the various interactive and communicative acts, and the various environmental attributes that constitute the creative sphere. Similar to the overlapping character of the pieces of a kaleidoscope, the interactions within the creative sphere provide colourful interrelations between its social elements. The theoretical framework further develops an understanding of creativity that regards only the relationship between creative individuals and their social environment by stressing the importance of the collaborative aspect of creativity. Thus, I refer to communication as the driving force of the emergent phenomenon of collaborative creativity.

The qualitative paradigm defines this research study and allowed me to explore the *Lebenswelt* of a creative small group without a specific framework in mind. Throughout my field research and the phases of my data analysis, this provided a *Verständnis* of the perspective of *the other*, and the consideration of complex relationships, rather than explanation by isolation of single relationships, facilitated the beginnings of constructing a theoretical framework of the *creative sphere*.

Going “to the things themselves” (Husserl, 1950, p. 130), describing the things as they reveal themselves to me as a communication researcher, and understanding the constructive

character of the “world of daily life” (Luckmann & Schütz, 1974, p. 311) of my participants are essential for my understanding of an exploratory-interpretive study that calls for an immersion into the reality of my participants and an interaction with them in a profound and intense manner.

The ethnographic approach evolved as an excellent way of gathering first-hand experience of the daily life of members of my particular creative small group. Participating in the daily life of the group and organisation helped build confidence between my participants and me, as a researcher and, from my point of view, and turned out to be crucial for the conversations about my participants’ personal views and interpretations of their *Lebenswelt*.

Whereas I applied the concept of participant observation in a more or less traditional way, I followed Girtler’s (1981; 2001) deliberations on conversing with research participants. At this point, I would like to review his subtle research strategy and explain its relevance for my research study.

Girtler (1981) suggests not using the technical term *interview* anymore, and introduced the term *ero-epic (free) dialogue*. Many scholars have modified the term or even tried to redefine its etymological origin, however, no matter how we look at it, the *InterViews* (Kayle, 1996) focus on the insights of the interviewed persons and do not imply a relationship between an interviewer and the interviewee. Sometimes, telling my story encouraged my participants to join in and also made me feel comfortable in *their* space. While ignoring the term interview right at the beginning of my research endeavour, I focused on the evolving relationship between my participants and me. I learned throughout the field research to get a feeling for the right time to initiate a conversation or to join in and to “just let it happen” (Girtler, 1981, p. 149). I am convinced that waiting for the right momentum for an emerging, in-depth conversation not only facilitated my research data, but rather, was crucial for getting a bit closer to the *Lebenswelt* of my participants.

I explicated that the research of creativity in small groups and research of creative small groups differs with regards to the profession of the respective groups. With my choice of a professional creative small group within its natural working environment, I observed creative processes on a day-to-day basis.³⁰ Observing a small group that is engaged in particular with the very act of creativity revealed specifics of a creative sphere and approaches of creative humans that can be transferred to other small groups in an organisational environment. From a pragmatic point of view, the personalities of people and how they approach their work differ; however, being open to other peoples' way of solving a problem creatively will enrich every group's knowledge and experience.

Although I regard my work as an exploratory-interpretive study that applies an ethnographic approach, I would like to put together the theoretical and empirical pieces towards a theoretical framework of creativity in small groups.

Throughout my research report I did not present an in-depth theoretical subsumption of creative small groups and asked the reader to wait until the final conclusion. The various aspects of the creative sphere that I observed have been described, analysed and interpreted. The linearity of language forces us to apply a step-by-step approach to the descriptions of our thought, even though it does not always suit illustrating an emerging and ubiquitous phenomenon such as the creative sphere.

In the following pages, I will conceptualise the phenomenon that I call the creative sphere. First, let us look at another description of creativity for the very last time. Mounuori and Purse (1999) urge us to recognize that:

³⁰ All creatives pointed out that to be constantly exposed to creative thoughts; creativity does not stop at night. I looked into that phenomenon and did not seriously consider even asking participants to meet with me when having a creative idea or thought. In the end, there are no perfect circumstances or research conditions and one has to accept some limitations.

If creativity is viewed as nothing but a factor of personality, or nothing but a factor of cognition or genetic forces, or, for that matter, nothing but the product of historical forces, then we are failing victims to a kind of reductionism (whether genetic, psychological, or sociological) that severely restricts and impoverishes our understanding of creativity. (p. 19)

I would like to abstain from a distinct working definition of creativity for a moment and recapitulate briefly my perspective gained through participant observation of a creative group.

Most creative interactions occur in a complex context. As pointed out above, many creative accomplishments are not grounded on solitary endeavours, but rather on humans working together. Whereas research speaks of individual, group, and team creativity, contemplating in each case on a specific social system or unit of analysis, I concentrated my deliberations on the collaborative aspect of creativity. Sonnenburg (2007) defines collaborative creativity as “the contextual potential for meaningful novelty” (p. 89), which develops throughout situational cooperation. The *situation* of creative interaction draws our attention again to Csizsentmihalyi’s (1990) prudent considerations of the social aspect of creativity. He emphasises the correlation between individuals, their fields and domains respectively, however, I consider the *social dimension* of creativity to be more than just individuals’ interrelations with their environment. Collaborative creativity cannot be simply reduced to a situational incidence of working together towards a common goal. Focusing only on *the* creative situation and the social factors that impinge on a particular interaction ignores how groups co-construct, and are influenced by the *creative sphere*. For instance, the initial process of ideation can occur during a dialogue of a creative team or small group. The development of that creative thought, however, relies on the utterances of ideas and the intellectual exchange of creative humans within a specific, creativity-promoting environment. This correlation defines the emergent process of creativity within a creative sphere.

Thus, I suggest that communication is the key to an understanding of any creative sphere; communication that can be thought of as the animating spirit or, in other terminology, as the “dynamis” a phenomenon that Paul Weiss (1992) calls the “primary pulsating ground” (p. 4) which humans exploit for their creative endeavours.

More often than not, defining broad concepts that are looked upon from a new perspective only results in vague promises, especially in an exploratory stage of a study. Throughout my research study I have identified, described and analysed the characteristics of a particular creative sphere, which I constantly observed during a brief span of six weeks, to wit, the interplay of various means of communication, the specificities of the creative process and the communicative acts that are involved, the environmental attributes of the creative sphere such as space, time and organisational culture, and finally the phenomenon of organisational change that is mandatory for any creative undertaking. These characteristics determine the structure of the previous analysis chapters. Life overlaps, and so do the addressed themes. Nonetheless, I hope that I have provided an interesting account of a work environment that is distinguished by a seminal creative context.

Even though the concept of the creative sphere refers to a complex social phenomenon, I will try to synthesise my deliberations and suggest a definition of creativity that furthers conceptualising the social construct of the creative sphere. Thereby I consider the above-addressed social and communicative main constituents of collaborative creativity.

Thus, creativity refers to a contextual capability for meaningful novelty or novel ideas, which emerge from interaction.

The notion of *capability* refers to the ability, power, and potential of the group as such and also to the creative sphere as the phenomenon within creativity emerges. *Meaningful novelty* refers to the

appropriateness of the creative artefact that has to fulfil a reasonable purpose. The ideation should also result in a product, idea or other creation that is beneficial for our society. Certainly, this might be a judgment call in a lot of cases and directs us to the stiff subject of evaluation creativity, creations and ideas. The notion of *contextual* refers to all attributes that have been discussed throughout the theoretical and analysis chapters. Especially the incorporation of group interaction, collaborative communicative acts, and group creativity is essential for conceptualising the creative sphere. The aim of the following synthesis is to explain the basic assumption that creativity cannot be assigned to any of the attributes or parameters in isolation, e. g. creativity and interaction, creativity and the social environment, creativity and small groups. I propose that creativity emerges as a result of the interplay of the social elements within a creative sphere. Although Luhmann (1992) understands communication as an emergent phenomenon that is beyond the scope of the participants of a particular communicative act, creativity requires human agency. Finally, the notion of interaction refers to an understanding of creativity as an emergent performance. In contrast to many cognitive psychological theories of creativity, a communicative perspective of creativity articulates the need to utter an idea before it can be realized. Even when working in more or less isolation, individuals need to express the essence of their ideas or creations; otherwise they do not matter, they do not exist. Thus, creativity can be characterised as the interrelation of human involvement and the multi-contextuality of the social.

The suggested definition of creativity and its interpretation emphasise the social function and significance of collaborate creativity. Necessary knowledge for the development of complex products requires humans working collaboratively in communicative meeting places, namely, creative spheres. Throughout their creative procedures, humans, with various personalities and different traits, facilitate a mutual learning process and are inclined enticing their creative potentials.

Whereas Csikszentmihalyi's (1990a; 1990b) regards the creative individual confronted with experts and institutions that dominate the creative *field* and Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996) interprets the *field* as a socially constant phenomena, which is structured autonomously and objectively, and provides specific rules, Kurt Lewin's (1982) understanding of a field is characterised by a psychologically determined living environment, which entails the individual, and its perceived environment. In contrast to Bourdieu's conception of the objectively given social field, Lewin stresses the co-constructive and experiential character of the field. In other words, the emergence and development of a creative potential does not only rely on social structures but also on humans' interactive, collaborative development of a social environment. Nonetheless, all addressed approaches to the phenomenon of the field facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the here-proposed creative sphere.

Throughout my study I have constantly noticed creative humans' ability to adapt to socio-cultural environments and change them into a creative sphere or bring into being new creative spheres. In so doing, they establish their personal preferences, traits and ideas. These features of creative humans are important for any further development of existing creative spheres or the creation of new ones because creativity, as defined above, requires a continual process of change and adaption. By creative collaboration, the creative individuals bring into play their individual habitats and perspectives of creativity. Similar to the function of a kaleidoscope, the collaboration of creative individuals and their overlapping habitats and perspectives within the creative sphere result in previously undiscovered and unexploited varieties that provide new areas of creative pursuits. Although one can look at the particular coloured pieces of the kaleidoscope individually, it only exploits its full potential when moving it around and observing the pieces as they interact. It is this playful approach to the phenomenon of creativity that provides new structures of and colourful perspectives on the creative sphere.

This ethnographic study explored the properties of the *creative sphere*. I argue that creativity cannot be characterised as a stable process of isolated creative individuals but rather as an emergent, dynamic communicative process. Individuals do not possess a certain amount of creativity, however contribute to and take part in a creative process that is determined by collaboration within a creative (small) group. Furthermore, I have described the social constituents that define the creative sphere, namely, the various means of communication, the creative process, the members of the creative group, and, finally, environmental attributes, such as space, time, leadership, and organisational change. The interrelation of the components of the creative sphere stands in contrast to Csikszentmihalyi's additive conceptualisation of creativity and displays the communicative character of collaborative creativity. In other words: without communication there is no collaborative creativity in creative small groups.

I outlined environmental attributes of the creative sphere beneficial to the process of creativity, e. g. space and time for collaborative creativity, a culture of open communication, creative leadership that identifies the needs of creative small groups and mentors the group as well as the creative individual, and the willingness to manage creativity which often entails reviewing and rearranging ineffective organisational structures.

Through my ethnographic study I intended to enhance our understanding of the communicative process of collaborative creativity in creative small groups. The study provides potential for further studies either of theoretical or exploratory-interpretive nature. My close observation and interpretation of a creative small group allows us to apply my findings to other small groups that work creatively in collaboration. The notion of the creative sphere and the conceptualisation of collaborative creativity are of vital importance for organisations because they require collaboration throughout the highly complex processes of production. I hope that my

account informs the reader about creative collaboration and motivates practitioners to review their approaches to day-to-day collaborative efforts.

Theoretical deliberations might consider the addressed theoretical understandings of the phenomenon *field* that this exploratory study only briefly touched on. Similar to the social phenomenon creativity the various understandings of the field of scholars such as Csikszentmihalyi's (1990a; 1990b), Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996), and Kurt Lewin's (1982) might not be inconsistent with one another. I propose that they provide different perspectives of observing, identifying, and understanding a complex, social world.

Further qualitative studies might explore the *Lebenswelt* of other creative small groups or compare potential differences between creative small groups and small groups working creatively in collaboration. In doing so, these studies yield knowledge that enhances the theoretical approach that I have started to develop. What is true for the phenomenon of creativity is also true for exploring creativity. I cannot do it alone - I also rely on other people's work.

REFERENCES

- Agar, M. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Albrecht, S., & Albrecht, K. (1987). *The creative corporation*. Homewood, Ill: D. Jones-Irwin.
- Amabile, T. M. (1988). A model of creativity and innovation in organization. In B. M. Saw & L. L. Cummings (Eds.), *Research in organizational behavior*, 10, 123-167.
- Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Hirschauer, S., & Amann, K. (1997). *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur: Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Anderson J. A. (1987). *Communication research: Issues and methods*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Anderson, J. V. (1992). Weirder than fiction: The reality and myths of creativity. *Academy of management Executive*, 6, 40-47.
- Atkinson, P. (1990). In *The ethnographic imagination: Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Atteslander, P. (2003). *Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*. Berlin: de Gruyter.
- Bantz, C. R., & Pepper, G. L. (1993). *Understanding organizations: Interpreting organizational communication cultures*. Studies in communication processes. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press.
- Basadur, M. (1997). Organizational development interventions for enhancing creativity in the workplace. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 31, 59-72.

- Bavelas, A. (1950). *Communication patterns in task oriented groups*. The Bobbs Merrill reprint series in the social sciences. Indianapolis, Ind: Bobbs Merrill.
- Becker, H. S. (1958). Problems of interference and proof in participant observation. *American Sociological Review*, 23, 652-660.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1967). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday.
- Berger, P., & Luckmann, T. (1969). *Die gesellschaftliche Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit. Eine Theorie der Wissenssoziologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Blumer, H. (1986). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bogumil, J., & Immerfall, S. (1985). *Wahrnehmungsweisen empirischer Sozialforschung: Zum (Selbst-)Verständnis des sozialwissenschaftlichen Erfahrungsprozesses*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Boone, P. R. (2003). When the “Amen Corner” comes to class: An Examination of the Pedagogical and Cultural Impact of Call-Response Communication in the Black College Classroom. *Communication Education*, 52, 212-229.
- Bormann, E. (1970). The paradox and promise of small group research. *Communication Monographs*, 37, 211-217.
- Bormann, E. G. (1996). Symbolic convergence theory and communication in group decision making. In R. Y. Hirokawa & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and group decision making* (pp. 81-111).

- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. J. D. (1996). *Reflexive Anthropologie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Burkart, R. (2002). *Kommunikationswissenschaft. Grundlagen und Problemfelder*. Böhlau: Wien.
- Brenner, M., Brown, J., & Canter, D. V. (1985). *The Research interview, uses and approaches*. London: Academic Press.
- Bryman, A. (1984). The Debate about Quantitative and Qualitative Research: A Question of Method or Epistemology? *British Journal of Sociology*, 35, 75-92.
- Carr, C. (1994). *The competitive power of constant creativity*. New York: AMACOM.
- Cawelti, S., Rappaport, A., & Wood, B. (1992). Modeling Artistic Creativity: An Empirical Study. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 26, 83.
- Charmaz, K. (2006). In *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. London: Sage.
- Cicourel, A. V. (1964). *Methods and measurement in sociology*. New York: Free Press.
- Conway, S. (1997). Strategic Personal Links in Successful Innovation: Link-pins, Bridges, and Liaisons. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 6, 226.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990a). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990b). . In The domain of creativityRunco, M. A., & Albert, R. S. *Theories of creativity*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Danner, H. (1979). *Methoden geisteswissenschaftlicher Pädagogik: Einf. in Hermeneutik, Phänomenologie u. Dialektik*. München: E. Reinhardt.
- Danner, H. (2006). *Methoden geisteswissenschaftlicher Pädagogik Einführung in Hermeneutik*,

- Phänomenologie und Dialektik; mit ausführlichen Textbeispielen.* München: UTB.
- Delia, J. G. (1977). Constructivism and the Study of Human Communication. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 63, 66-83.
- Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The research act; A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Chicago: Aldine Pub.
- Denzin, N. K. (1978). *The research act; A theoretical introduction to sociological methods*. Chicago: Aldine Pub.
- Denzin, K. (2003). *Performance ethnography. Critical pedagogy and the politics of culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Diemer, A., Geldsetzer, L., Rotter, F., Universität Düsseldorf., & Methoden- und Theorienpluralismus. (1971). *Der Methoden- und Theorienpluralismus in den Wissenschaften. Vorträge und Diskussionen [sic] des 5. wissenschaftstheoretischen Kolloquiums 1969 und des 6. wissenschaftstheoretischen Kolloquiums 1970 [of the Philosophisches Institut, Universität Düsseldorf], herausgegeben von A. Diemer in Zusammenarbeit mit L. Geldsetzer und F. Rotter*. Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain.
- Dilthey, W. (1996 [1957]). Die Entstehung der Hermeneutik. In *Gesammelte Schriften V*, Stuttgart, Göttingen.
- Dunbar, K. (1995). How scientists really reason: Scientific reasoning in real-world laboratories. In R. J. Sternberg & J. E. Davidson (Eds.), *The nature of insight* (pp. 365-396).
- Ekvall, G. (1997). Organizational Conditions and Levels of Creativity. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 6, 195-205.
- Esser, H., Klenovits, K., & Zehnpfennig, H. (1977). *Wissenschaftstheorie: I*. Stuttgart: Teubner.
- Elias, N. (1970). *Was ist Soziologie*. München: Juventa.
- Fabian, J. (1990). *Creative thinking & problem solving*. Chelsea, Mich: Lewis Publishers.

- Feldman, J. M., Hein, M. B., Nagao, D. J., & Mumford, M. D. Tradeoffs between Ideas and Structure: Individual versus Group Performance in Creative Problem Solving. *Journal of Creative Behavior*, 35, 1-23.
- Fiedler, F. (1971). *Einheitswissenschaft oder Einheit der Wissenschaft*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- Filstead, W. J. (1971). *Qualitative methodology: First hand involvement with the social world*. Chicago: Markham.
- Fisher, B. A., (1976). *Small group decision making communication and the group process*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Flick, U. (2008). *Handbuch qualitative Sozialforschung: Grundlagen, Konzepte, Methoden und Anwendungen*. Weinheim: Beltz, Psychologie-Verl.-Union.
- Flick, U., Kardorff, E., & Steinke, I. (2007). *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt.
- Frey, L. R. (1994). Introduction. The Call of the field: Studying communication in natural groups. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *Group communication in context* (pp. ix-xiv).
- Frey, L. R. (2002). Introduction. New directions in group communication. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. ix-xviii). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Frey, L. R. (2006). *Facilitating group communication in context: Innovations and applications with natural groups*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Frey, L. R., Botan, C. H., & Kreps, G. L. (2000). *Investigating communication: an introduction to research methods*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Friedrichs, J., & Lüdtke, H. (1973). *Teilnehmende Beobachtung. Einführung in die sozialwissenschaftliche Feldforschung*. Lansberg: Beltz. Retrieved March 23, 2010, from <http://www.sub.uni-hamburg.de/ebook/ebook.php>

- Gadamer, H.-G. (1975). *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik*.
Tübingen: Mohr.
- Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies of ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Gassmann, O. (2001). Multicultural Teams: Increasing Creativity and Innovation by Diversity.
Creativity and Innovation Management, 10, 88-95.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, K. (1994). *Realities and relationships. Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge:
Harvard University Press.
- Giddens, A. (1993). *Sociology*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Girtler, R. (1981). *Methoden der Feldforschung*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Girtler, R. (2001). *Methoden der Feldforschung*. Wien: Böhlau Verlag.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory; Strategies for
qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine Pub.
- Glaser, B. G. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory*.
Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (2001). *The grounded theory perspective: Conceptualization contrasted with
description*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Glaserfeld, E. v. (1996). Radikaler Konstruktivismus: Vico, Berkeley, Piaget. In Rusch,
Gebhard, Schmidt, & Siegfried (Eds.), *Konstruktivismus: Geschichte und Anwendung* (pp.
20-33). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Glynn, M. A. (1996). Innovative Genius: A Framework for Relating Individual and
Organizational Intelligences to Innovation. *Academy of Management Review*, 21, 1081-1111.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.

- Goffman, E. (1962). *Interaction ritual: Essays on face-to-face behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). In *Behavior in public places: Notes on the social organization of gatherings*. New York: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis. An essay on the organization of experience*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in Sociological Field Observations. *Social Forces*, 36, 217-223.
- Goman, C. K. (2000). *Creativity in business: A practical guide for creative thinking*. Menlo Park, CA: Crisp Publication.
- Grasskamp, W. (2004). *Das Cover von Sgt. Pepper: Eine Momentaufnahme der Popkultur*. Berlin: Wagenbach.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Guilford, J. P. (1950). Creativity. *The American Psychologist*, 5, 444-54.
- Gumbrecht, H. U., & Pfeiffer, K. L. (1994). *Materialities of communication*. Writing science. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Hackman, J. R. (1990). *Groups that work (and those that don't): Creating conditions for effective teamwork*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1989 [1983]). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- Hammersley, M. (1990). *Reading ethnographic research: A critical guide*. Aspects of modern sociology. London: Longman.
- Hammond, M., Howarth, J., & Keat, R. (1991). *Understanding phenomenology*. Oxford, UK: B. Blackwell.

- Harris, T. E.; Sherblom, J. C. (2005). *Small group and team communication*. Boston: Pearson.
- Hartshorne, C., Weiss, P., Burks, A. W., & Peirce, C. S. (1960). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Hawes (1978). The reflexivity of communication research. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 42, 12-20.
- Heine, H. (2001). *Sämtliche Werke*. Düsseldorf: Artemis und Winkler.
- Heyns, R. W., & Lippitt, R. (1954). Systematic observational techniques. *The journal of social issues*, 1, 370-404. Retrieved March 23, 2010, from <http://www.sub.uni-hamburg.de/ebook/ebook.php>
- Hill, K. G. & Amabile, T. M. (1993). A social psychological perspective on creativity: Intrinsic motivation and creativity in the classroom and workplace. In. S. G. Isaken, M. C. Murdock, R. L. Firestein, & D. J. Treffinger (Eds.), *Understanding and recognizing creativity: the emergence of a discipline* (pp. 400-453).
- Hiltz, S. R., Johnson, K., & Turoff, M. (1986). Experiments in group decision making: Communication process and outcome in face-to-face versus computerized conferences. *Human Communication Research*, 13, 225-252.
- Hirschauer, S., & Amann, K. (1997). *Die Befremdung der eigenen Kultur: Zur ethnographischen Herausforderung soziologischer Empirie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Hirokawa, R. Y., Cathcart, R. S., Samovar, L. A., & Henman, L. D. (2003). The nature of groups. In R. Y. Hirokawa, R. S. Cathcart, L. A. Samovar, & L. D. Henman (Eds.), *Small group communication. Theory & practice* (pp. 1-2). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Hitzler, R., & Eberle, T. S. (2008) In U. Flick, E. V. Kardorff, I. & Steinke (Eds.). *Qualitative Forschung: Ein Handbuch*. Reinbek: Rowohlt.

- Hoffman-Riem, C. (1980). Die Sozialforschung einer interpretativen Soziologie: Der Datengewinn. *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, 32, 339-372.
- Hollingshead, A. B., & McGrath, J. E. (1995). Commuter-assisted group: A Critical review of the empirical research. In R. Guzzo & E. Salas (Eds.), *Team effectiveness and decision making in organizations* (pp. 46-78).
- Homans, G. C. (1950). *The human group*. New York: Harcourt, World, and Brace. Retrieved March 23, 2010, from (<http://www.questia.com>).
- Husserl, E. (1950a). *Gesammelte Werke; auf Grund des Nachlasses veröffentlicht vom Husserl-Archiv (Louvain) unter leitung von H.L. van Breda*. Husserliana, Bd. 17. Haag: M. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E., & Biemel, W. (1950b). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Husserliana, Bd. 3-5. Haag: M. Nijhoff.
- Husserl, E., & Biemel, W. (1958). *Die Idee der Phänomenologie: Fünf Vorlesungen*. Husserliana, Bd. 2. Haag: M. Nijhoff.
- Isaksen, S. G., Murdock, M. C., Firestien, R. L., & Treffinger, D. J. (Eds.). 1993. *Understanding and recognizing creativity: The emergence of a dicipline*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Jarboe, S. (1996). Procedures for enhancing group decision making. In R. Y. Hirokawa & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *Communication and group decision making* (pp. 345-383).
- Jarboe, S. (1999). Group communication and creativity processes. In L. R. Frey, D. S. Gouran, & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *The handbook of group communication theory & research* (pp. 335-368).
- Jorgensen, D. L. (1989). *Participant observation. A methodology for human studies*. London & New Dehli: Newbury Park.
- Kao, J. (1997). Jamming: The Art and Discipline of Business Creativity. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 17, 96.

- Kieserling, A. (1999). *Kommunikation unter Anwesenden: Studien über Interaktionssystem*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Knoblauch, H. A. (1996). *Kommunikative Lebenswelten: Zur Ethnographie einer geschwätzigen Gesellschaft*. Konstanz: Universitätsverlag Konstanz.
- König, R. (1973). *Handbuch der empirischen Sozialforschung*. Stuttgart: Enke.
- Kohler, R. (2008). *Jean Piaget*. Zürich: Haupt Berne.
- Konegen, N., & Sondergeld, K. (1985). *Wissenschaftstheorie für Sozialwissenschaftler: Eine problemorientierte Einführung*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Kowal, S., & O'Connell, D. C. (2008). *Communicating with one another: Toward a psychology of spontaneous spoken discourse*. New York: Springer.
- Krallmann, D., & Ziemann, A. (2001). *Grundkurs Kommunikationswissenschaft: Mit einem Hypertext-Vertiefungsprogramm im Internet*. Studienbücher Literatur und Medien. München: W. Fink.
- Krotz, F. (2005). Einleitung. In L. Mikos, & C. Wegener (Eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung*. Konstanz 2005: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.
- Kuhn, T. (1970). *The structure of scientific revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kuper, A. & Kuper, J. (Eds.). (2004). *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (Vol. 1). New York: Routledge. Retrieved February 26, 2010, from Questia database:
<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=109436999>
- Kuper, A. & Kuper, J. (Eds.). (2004). *The Social Science Encyclopedia* (Vol. 2). New York: Routledge. Retrieved February 26, 2010, from Questia database:
<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=109434937>
- Kurtzberg, T. R., & Amabile, T. M. (2000). From Guilford to Creative Synergy: Opening the Black Box of Team-Level Creativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 13, 285.

- Laine, M. d. (2000). *Fieldwork, participation and practice: Ethics and dilemmas in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lamnek, S. (1980). *Sozialwissenschaftliche Arbeitsmethoden: Für Mediziner, Soziologen, Psychologen*. Weinheim: Edition Medizin.
- Lamnek, S. (2005). *Qualitative Sozialforschung: Lehrbuch*. Weinheim: Beltz, PVU.
- Leavitt, H. J. (1951). Some effects of certain communication patterns on group performance. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 46, 38-50.
- Leonard-Barton, D., & Swap, W. C. (1999). *When sparks fly: Igniting creativity in groups*. Boston, Mass: Harvard Business School Press.
- Lewin, K. (1982). *Kurt-Lewin-Werkausgabe, Band 4: Feldtheorien*. Bern: H. Huber.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Lindemann, E. C. (1936). *Social Discovery*. New York: Republic.
- Lindeman, E., & Hader, J. J. (1933). In *Dynamic social research*. International library of psychology, philosophy, and scientific method. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Lindlof, T. R., & Taylor, B. C. (2002). *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Luckmann, T., & Schütz, A. (1974). *The structures of life-world*. London: Heinemann.
- Luhmann, N. (1975). *Soziologische Aufklärung. Vol.2*. Opladen.
- Luhmann, N. (1992 [1990]). *Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Luhmann, N. (1993 [1984]). *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Luhmann, N. (2000). *Organisation und Entscheidung*. Opladen: Westdt. Verl.
- Lüders, C. (2006). Teilnehmende Beobachtung. In R. Bohnsack, W. Marotzki, & M. Meuer (Eds.), *Hauptbegriffe Qualitativer Sozialforschung* (pp.151-153).

- Lüders, C. (2008). Beobachten im Feld und Ethnographie. In U. Flick, E. von Kardorff, & I. Steines (Eds.). *Qualitative Forschung. Ein Handbuch*. (pp. 384-401). Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Lüders, C., & Reichertz, J. (1986). Wissenschaftliche Praxis ist, wenn alles funktioniert und keiner weiß warum. Bemerkungen zur Entwicklung qualitativer Sozialforschung. *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literaturreisenschau*, 12, 90-102.
- Mabry, E. A., & Barnes, R. E. (1980). *The dynamics of small group communication*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Maso, I. (2001). Phenomenology and ethnography. In Atkinson, P., Coffey, A., Delamont, S., Lofland, J., & Lofland, L. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of ethnography*. London: Sage.
- Handbook of Ethnography*.
- Matthes, J. (1976). Einführung in das Studium der Soziologie. Reinbek: Rowohlt.
- Maletzke, G. (1963). *Psychology der Massenmedien*. Hamburg: Juventa.
- Malinowski, B. (1966 [1922]). *Argonauts of the western Pacific; An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge & Sons.
- Mayring, P. (1993). *Einführung in die qualitative Sozialforschung: Eine Anleitung zu qualitativem Denken*. Weinheim: Beltz.
- McClure, B. A. (2005). *Putting a new spin on groups: The science of chaos*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mensch, G. O. (1993). A Managerial Tool for Diagnosing Structural Readiness for Breakthrough Innovations in Large Bureaucracies (Technocracies). In R. L. Kuhn: *Generating creativity and innovation in large bureaucracies*. (pp. 257-282). Westport, Conn: Quorum Books.
- Miller, S. M. (1952). The Participant Observer and "Over-Rapport". *American Sociological Review*, 17, 97-99.

- Mitzka, W., & Kluge, F. (1963). *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*. Berlin: De Gruyter.
- McClure, B. A. (2005). *Putting a new spin on groups: The science of chaos*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mehan, H., & Wood, H. (1975). *The reality of ethnomethodology*. New York: Wiley.
- Meusburger, P., Funke, J., Wunder, E. (2009). *Milieus of creativity: An interdisciplinary approach to spatiality of creativity*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Mikos, L., Wegener, C. (2005). Einleitung. In L. Mikos, & C. Wegener (Eds.), *Qualitative Medienforschung*. (pp. 5-39)Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH.
- Miller, S. M. (1952). The Participant Observer and "Over-Rapport". *American Sociological Review*, 17, 97-99.
- Nemiro, J. E. (2002). The Creative Process in Virtual Teams. *Creativity Research Journal*, 14, 69-83.
- O'Keefe, B. J.; Delia, J. G.; & O'Keefe, D. J. (1980). Interaction analysis and the analysis of interaction organization. *Studies of Symbolic Interaction*, 3, 25-57.
- O'Reilly, K. (2009). *Key concepts in ethnography*. SAGE key concepts. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Osborn, A. F. (1963 [1950]). *Applied imagination: Principles and procedures of creative problem-solving*. 3rd rev ed. New York: Charles Scribners Sons.
- Paulus, P. B., Laurey, T. S., Dzindolet M. T. (2001). Creativity in groups and teams. In M. E. Turner *Groups at work: Theory and research. Applied social research*. Mahwah, N. J: L. Erlbaum.
- Paulus, P. B., & Nijstad, B. A. (2003). *Group creativity: Innovation through collaboration*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Piaget, J. (2000 [1947]). *Psychologie der Intelligenz*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta GmbH.
- Poole, M. S. (1990). Do we have any theories of group communication? *Communication studies*, 41, 45-55.
- Poole, M. S., Hirokawa, R. Y. (1996). *Communication and group decision making*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Poole, M. S.; Keyton, J.; Frey, L. R. (1999). Group communication methodology. In L. R. Frey, D. S. Gouran, & M. S. Poole (Eds.), *The handbook of group communication theory & research* (pp. 92-112).
- Putnam, L. L., & Stohl, C. (1990). Bona fide groups: A reconceptualization of groups in context. *Communication studies* 41, 248-265.
- Florida, R. L. (2002). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ryle, G. (1970). *Collected Papers Vol. 2*. London: Hutchinson.
- Sachs, O. (1995). *An anthropologist on mars*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking for Conversation. *Language*, 50, 696-735.
- Salazar, A. J. (1995). Understanding the synergistic effects of communication in small groups: Making the most out of group member abilities. *Small Group Research*. 26, 169-199.
- Salazar, A. J. (1996). An Analysis of the Development and Evolution of Roles in the Small Group. *Small Group Research*, 4, 475-503
- Salazar, A. J. (1997). Communication Effects on Small Group Decision-Making: Homogeneity and Task as Moderators of the Communication-Performance Relationship. *Western Journal of Communication*, 61, 35-65.

- Salazar, A. J. (2002). Self-Organizing and Complexity Perspectives of Group Creativity. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. 179-199)
- Sawyer, R. K. (2003). *Group creativity: Music, theater, collaboration*. Mahwah, N.J: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Schatzman, L., & Strauss, A. L. (1973). *Field research; strategies for a natural sociology*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.
- Schleiermacher, F. (1959). *Hermeneutik*. Herausgegeben von H. Kimmerle. Heidelberg.1
- Schulte, J. (1992) *Einheitswissenschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- SunWolf. (2002). Getting to "GroupAha!": provoking creative processes in task groups. . In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. 203-217)
- Schütz, A. (1944). The Stranger: An Essay in Social Psychology. *American Journal of Sociology*, 49, (pp. 499-507)
- Schütz, A. (1971). *Gesammelte Aufsätze, Bd. 1: Das Problem der sozialen Wirklichkeit*. Den Haag: Nijhoff.
- Schütz, A. (1974). *Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Schütze, F. (1978). Was ist "kommunikative Sozialforschung"? In Adrian Gärtner & Sabine Hering (Hrsg.), *Modellversuch "Soziale Studiengänge an der GhK, Materialien 12: Regionale Sozialforschung* (pp.117-131). Kassel: Gesamthochschulbibliothek.
- Schwartz, C. G., & Schwartz, M. S. (1955). Problems in Participant Observation. *American Journal of Sociology*, 60, 343-353.
- Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1949). *The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Simonton, D. K. (1997). Creativity in personality, developmental, and social psychology: Any links with cognitive psychology? In T. B. Ward, S. M. Smith, J. Vaid (Eds), *Creative*

- thought: An investigation of conceptual structures and processes*. Washington, DC : American Psychological Association.
- Sonnenburg, S. (2004). Creativity in Communication: A Theoretical Framework for Collaborative Product Creation. *Creativity and Innovation Management*, 13, 254-262.
- Sonnenburg, S. (2007). *Kooperative Kreativität: Theoretische Basisentwürfe und organisationale Erfolgsfaktoren*. Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Sunwolf, (2002). Getting to “GroupAha!” Provoking creative process in talk groups. In L. R. Frey (Ed.), *New directions in group communication* (pp. 203-217). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Taggar, S. (2002). Individual Creativity and Group Ability to Utilize Individual Creative Resources: A Multilevel Model. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45, 315-330.
- Talbot, R. J. (1993). Creativity in the organizational context: Implications for training. In S C Isaksen; M. C. Murdock; R. L. Firestien; D. J. Treffinger (Eds), *International Networking Conference on Creativity and Innovation, & Conference on Creativity Research. Nurturing and developing creativity*. Creativity research. Norwood, N.J: Ablex.
- Thrift, N. J. (1983). On the determination of social action in space and time" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 1, 23-57.
- Treffinger, D. J. (1995). Creative Problem Solving: Overview and Educational Implications. *Educational Psychology Review*, 7, 301.
- Tuckmann, B. W. (1965). Developmental sequences in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin*, 63, 384-99.

- Wagner, H.-J. (2006). Symbolischer Interaktionismus. In R. Bohnsack, W. Marotzki, & M. Meuser. *Hauptbegriffe qualitative Sozialforschung: Ein Wörterbuch*. (pp. 148-150). Opladen: Leske + Budrich.
- Wallas, G. (1945 [1926]). *The art of thought*. London: Watts.
- Wallace, D. B., & Gruber, H. E. (1989). *Creative people at work: Twelve cognitive case studies*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Watzlawick, P.; Beavin, J. H.; Jackson, Don D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes*. New York: Norton.
- Watzlawick, P.; Beavin, J. H.; Jackson, Don D. (1996): *Menschliche Kommunikation. Formen, störungen, Paradoxien*. Bern: Huber Hans.
- Weber, M. (1985 [1922]). *Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.
- Weber, M. (1988 [1922]). *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Weiss, P. (1992). *Creative ventures*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Webster's new explorer dictionary of quotations (2000). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster.
- White, W. F. (1955 [1996]). *Street corner society: the social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wilson, T. P. (1970). Conceptions of Interaction and Forms of Sociological Explanation. *American Sociological Review*. 35, 697-710.
- Witzel, A. (1982). *Verfahren der qualitativen Sozialforschung: Überblick und Alternativen*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag.
- Wundt, W. M. (1912). *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie: Grundlinien einer psychologischen Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit*. Leipzig: Kröner.