Building 'Bonds' and 'Bridges': Linking Tie Evolution and Network Identity in the Creative Industries

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Abstract

This paper presents a discussion of network identity in relation to the processes of network transformation in the creative industries. Employing the case of semi-permanent work patterns prevalent in creative projects, the paper suggests that repeated collaborations across projects result in volatile cultural and structural relations among network members. Transformations in patterns of relating are linked with shifts in network identity and members' perceived creative potential. Future work could empirically test whether an optimal mix or a pattern of affective bonding and anti-conformist bridging could be linked to creative potential in semi-permanent work teams.

Key Words: Creative Industries, Network Identity, Semi-Permanent Work Groups, Ties

Introduction

Social network research has predominantly been driven by studies on the quantitative aspects of network structure (Granovetter 1973; Burt 1992; Breiger 2004; Baer 2010) leaving 'open the question of the character and culture of social relations in which economic actors are embedded together' (Biggart and Delbridge 2004: 35). This question has been addressed by qualitative accounts of networking; for example, Jack (2005) and others (Ruef 2002; Ibarra et al. 2004; Sheely 2006; Elfring and Hulsink 2007; Fenwick 2007) have suggested that it is *how* a tie functions (the qualitative effects) that becomes the most important platform for theorising tie relations. Other approaches have attempted to focus on exchange motives, broadly categorising network ties as either communal or instrumental (for example Biggart and Delbridge 2004). However, these accounts of interpersonal networking have led to cross-sectional conceptualisations of tie relations with limited if any, space for the study of tie transformation processes and patterns of network evolution.

By proposing volatile and at times multiplex motives for collaboration, the paper provides a dynamic framework for the study of tie relations towards a 'process of network transformation'. Persistent semi-permanent work groups (Blair 2000) (hereafter SPWGs), we suggest, present us with a context in which we could longitudinally study activation, re-activation and termination of tie relations and as a result detect identity shifts that networks may experience over time and across projects. We will propose that within creative collaborative communities, the

processes of tie evolution (activation, re-activation and dissolution) that contribute to the 'logic for collaborative behaviour' (Grabher 2001a: 1330) cannot be studied by focusing on a single project; rather, motivation for collaboration is affected by previous experiences and also shaped by anticipations of probable future re-enactments (Grabher 2001b); thus tie evolution constitutes not only a structurally but also a culturally embedded process.

The paper focuses on the creative industries and studies networking as a cultural process (Jack 2005; Shalley and Perry-Smith 2008; Perry-Smith 2008) reciprocally linked with network identity formation and transformation. The context of the creative industries is employed for two reasons: a) interpersonal networks in the creative industries are driven by persistent ties (repeated interactions) and b) creative freelancers organise themselves through semi-permanent work arrangements that are responsible for the realisation of their creative activity (Blair 2000; Antcliff et al. 2007). We propose that creativity is not only situated in individual capabilities and talent (Department of Culture Media and Sports 2002) but is also a distributed and embedded cultural process. Creative collaborations have the capacity to change the market as well as organisations and individuals. This is why it is important to look at the boundary conditions of creativity and why the creative condition requires a clearer conceptualisation of social and cultural embeddedness of action.

This conceptualisation ought to value the agentic yet relational nature of creativity and its trans-formative capacity as well as its role in transgressing boundaries. That is, divergent thinking (Koestler 1975), trans-disciplinarity (Cox 2005), heterogeneous

knowledge production (Nowotny *et al* 2001), boundary-spanning, dialogue and reflexivity (Göranzon *et al.* 2006) and more importantly, emerging identities (Hatch and Schultz 2002) become very important areas in the study of creative practice. These aspects of creativity, we propose, call for a process-driven conceptualisation of social networks and creative work communities.

The following section discusses a few studies that have investigated the qualitative aspects of tie relations and sets the basis for this paper's framework. The discussion focuses on SPWGs and their function as a network 'microcosm' for the study of tie evolution, networking process and identity as interrelated. The second part of the paper discusses the concept of network identity in the context of the creative industries and evolving yet sustainable collaborative relationships. The discussion concludes proposing that creative networks are characterised by shifting boundary relations with negotiated and emergent identities: the need to balance affective bonding and anti-conformist bridging drives transformative creative practices and creative networking.

In Search of Motives: Tie Relations in SPWGs

Semi-Permanent Work Groups and the Creative Industries

Forming and maintaining a social network has been portrayed as a crucial stage in career development particularly with reference to the creative industries (DeFillippi and Arthur 1996; Jones 1996). For creative, project-based organisations, networks create a sense of security and foster co-operation, counteracting the fragmented and deregulated organisational structures and diverse contractual agreements (Blair 2000;

Blair et al. 2003; Antcliff et al. 2007). Furthermore, creative industries predominantly rely on informal patterns of interaction and processes both in the areas of recruitment and selection of project members and knowledge sharing. SPWGs, though often not tied together by formal employment contracts (between projects), tend to work together in a series of projects and thus establish strong relational ties and close-knit social networks (Blair 2000; Blair 2003; Antcliff et al. 2007). Through semi-permanent work relationships, network ties are often activated maintaining, shifting or re-adjusting their boundaries to account for learning and change as well as for social, cultural and economic reconfigurations in the industry (Daskalaki and Blair 2003).

However, the motives which bring a particular set of individuals together and the processes that preserve or terminate semi-permanent collaborative relations have received limited attention. By motives here we refer to the cultural aspects of tie relations that drive decisions of activation and re-activation of network ties as well as tie latency or dissolution. Accordingly, we propose a direction for the conceptual framing of network evolution (Brass 2010), starting from these qualitative features that drive tie activation and re-activation for the constitution of the semi-permanent work group in the creative industries. We pose the following questions: Do motives remain stable or change over time in repeated creative collaborations and what affects these changes? How does the process of enactment, re-enactment and termination of tie relations interact with the identity of the network and its perceived creative potential?

Qualitative Aspects of Tie Relations

Prior work on the structural features of social networks has focused on the strength of tie relations and suggested that strong ties develop between people who are similar (or share the same social circle) and connected via emotional, frequent and reciprocal exchanges (Granovetter 1973; Granovetter 1985; Burt 1992). On the other hand, maintaining or nurturing *weak* ties may lead to novel and innovative solutions (Perry-Smith and Shalley 2003:94). Recently, Zhou et al. (2009) suggested that there is a limit in the number of weak ties in a network that can prove beneficial since maintaining a large number of weak ties can actually negatively affect the network by hindering knowledge sharing and creativity.

However, studying structure and process as co-implicated could provide a dynamic description of network formation and transformation in both cultural and structural terms. Studies on 'industry cultures' and 'career patterns' have tried to embed somehow the network's structural features in more cultural levels of analysis; they proposed that in order to describe networks fully, the structure of a network has to be linked with networking processes (Barley 1990; Jones 1996; Weick 1996; Jones et al. 1998; Jack 2005; Uzzi et al. 2009) and structural has to be studied along with cultural embeddedness (Ruef 2002). This link is also highlighted in the 'path perspective': self-reinforcing processes and repeated sequences of projects facilitate the development of specific project paths or network specific niches (David 1985; Garud and Karnoe 2001; Kemp et al. 2001; Sydow and Manning 2004; Manning 2004). Other promising contributions (Carley 1991; Carley and Hill 2001; Mark 2003) have looked into how culture can be translated into social connections and how the

structure and culture of a network can be defined interdependently (Lizardo 2006; Carley and Hill 2001).

The aforementioned studies and particularly more recent developments (Uzzi et al. 2009; Brass 2010) propose the study of cultural connections and processes behind the formation of network ties in an attempt to formulate a framework for the study of tie evolution and networking. The remaining of the paper contributing to those studies discusses ties not as static exchanges but as cultural processes evolving through repeated re-enactments. We will suggest that the distribution of different types of ties reflects the team's identity features. Particularly, different patterns of bonding and bridging of social capital will be identified as responsible for driving collaborations and affecting network's creative potential.

Identity Formation and Tie Relations in SPWGs

Participation in one or more social networks enhances the possibilities of becoming a member of SPWG (Blair 2000; Daskalaki and Blair 2003). This is because members of a SPWG are normally chosen from already formed and overlapping networks within which the SPWG is embedded. SPWGs may be temporarily dismantled after the end of a project, yet they remain embedded in the cultural-communicative (network) environments in which they operate. Due to their embeddedness to wider social and cultural networks and their interaction with network process and structure, their identity is in constant interplay with network identity. Hence we expect that ties that lead to the formation of a SPWG will affect the identity of the SPWG as well as the network in which the group is embedded.

Highlighting the interrelationship of identity, social capital and networking processes is an important contribution of the paper; relating studies on organisational and collective identity (for example Hatch and Schultz 2004; Seidl 2005) with literature on 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital (Patulney and Svendsen 2007) we suggest can offer an understanding of the underlying change processes that govern persistent creative collaborations. In particular, the decisions and patterns of mixing similarities ('bonds') and differences ('bridges') to drive network linkages becomes very important for the study of network transformation and creative potential. It is expected that inclusion, exclusion or termination strategies -that drive tie evolution- will be based on judgements of 'cultural taste' (what creatives call 'creative compatibility'); these judgements are expected to be linked with network identity formation and transformation. To this concept of network identity we now turn.

Flexible Network Identities and Creative Collaborations

Studies of identity and culture as interrelated proposed that unique values, beliefs and stories may help organizational members validate their identity claims and express their perceived uniqueness (Albert 1998; Albert and Whetten 1985). Accordingly, individuals of similar or diverse communities form a network bringing together cultural practices distinctive for that particular network. Similarly to organizational identity, network identity 'describes imagined as well as concrete communities, involves an act of perception and construction as well as the discovery of preexisting bonds, interests, and boundaries' (Polletta and Jasper 2001: 298). Like collective identity (Ashmore et al. 2004: 81), network identity also describes categorical

membership but without direct contact or interpersonal exchange required for the subjective judgment of inclusion or exclusion of a particular individual, group or community to be made.

Whereas however organizational identity has been theorized and researched involving situated organizational boundaries (Biggart 1977; Fombrun and Rindova 2000; Humphreys and Brown 2002), collective and, we propose, network identities could be explored in more unbounded, 'distributed' and dynamic contexts where dispersed activity of actors is highlighted (for example the work of Polleta and Jasper in 2001 on social movements). Network identity thus is the unique yet flexible configuration of cultural and structural relations among individual members that gives a network its distinctive qualities differentiating it from other network constellations. These relations are defined through qualitatively distinctive ties and patterns of tie evolution (and thus sets of norms, values and motives) that guide behaviours, interactions and choices.

Applying relational identity approaches (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Tajfel and Turner 1985) to creative collaborative networks, one would expect that either common or uncommon features or a mix of these would drive the formation of network identities. These features refer to the cultural descriptions which they socially share through membership, interaction and practice thus acquiring a cultural capital (Townley et al. 2009). This informs decisions of 'creative compatibility' and validates representations of a distinctive network identity. On the one hand, according to the 'identification' approach (Fireman and Gamson 1979), one would expect that sharing *similar* 'cultural

tastes' and values would highly be linked with inclusion decisions and formation of persistent tie relations. Concepts such as 'same eye', 'seeing things the same way', 'appreciating quality likewise' or affirming an individual 'signature style' (Elsbach 2009) refer to those socio-cultural features that primarily act as the selection mechanism for potential members of a network and guide choices when it comes to choosing a member as well as enacting or re-enacting collaborative relationships. Finding another professional who will be in the same creative wavelength has been described by 'creatives' such as Pollack (film director) as an 'emotional pleasure' (Jones and DeFillippi 1996: 97). On the other hand, according to the distinctiveness view (McGuire 1984; Mehra et al. 1998), 'identity is ambiguous, loosely defined and frequently perceived in terms of differences rather than similarities to others' (Carroll and Murphy 2003:3). Following that, creative compatibility decisions may be based on diverse yet complementary qualities that would enhance the creative potential of the network.

We propose that the 'sameness – otherness' dilemma represents a dualist modernist tradition that excludes boundary crossing experiences that could relate to transformation and change and lead to more process-based approaches to interpersonal networking. Individuals often enter and exit a network or are members of multiple networks and cultural communities that may or may not overlap and thus occupy a diverse kind of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993). Boundaryless careers (DeFillippi & Arthur 1994; 1996) and membership of creative network exemplify this kind of identity flexibility that is required for individuals who change work experiences, contexts and collaborators in almost every project. Other approaches

therefore that portray identity as an adaptable and relational construct (Margolis and Hansen 2002; Bouchikhi and Kimberly 2003; Hatch and Schultz 2004; Sluss and Ashforth 2007) are more relevant here: external triggers and reflections on cultural practices require flexible constructions of identity; shifts in identity may happen as members try to make sense of their experiences within work contexts (Albert and Whetten 1985; Gioia et al 2000; Humphreys and Brown 2002). These shifts are linked directly and indirectly with activation - re-activation (persistent ties) as well as latency and termination decisions and in effect with the patterns of network development and creative output.

The following section will describe some preliminary evidence of our ongoing project that, though still work in progress, suggests that balancing affective bonding and anti-conformist bridging of ties across projects involves constructing flexible network identities, evidence of inter-subjectivity, dynamism and diversity in the decisions that guide creative network enactments and re-enactments.

Patterns of Tie Evolution: 'Bonding and Bridging' of Ties

Affective Bonding

Although this is a conceptual paper that aims to lay the groundwork for future studies, some empirical illustrations are also included in this section of the paper as they have inspired and contributed to the central argument of this paper. The evidence included here is part of preliminary findings of an ongoing research project in the film industry. This longitudinal, qualitative project is set out to investigate the motives behind

sustainable 'creative ties' and the processes that create a pattern of tie relations linked with distinctive network identities and creative project teams.

To begin with, SPWGs 'construct' temporary boundaries around network potential and capabilities through member assignment to specific projects (Daskalaki and Blair 2003). Choice of potential collaborators for SPWGs is driven by highly particularistic tendencies that is, exchanges are driven by the parties' relation to each other. Particularly, ties that develop in SPWGs and the creative industries have predominantly been described as communal with an affective element driving collaboration across projects (Jones and DeFillippi 1996; Blair 2000; Blair 2003). However, according to other evidence, tie relations are multidimensional and include structural, affective and cognitive dimensions (Johannisson et al. 1994; Nahapiet and Ghoshal 1998; Tsai and Ghoshal 1998; Adler and Kwon 2002; Kang et al. 2007).

Nevertheless, in the case of repeated collaborations, every time a project team is re-assembled, different dimensions and processes may mobilise the network. Motives and hence tie quality may change with time: that is, different motives could account for different activation or re-activation incidents of the same tie connection. Some tie relations may be activated and then maintained by either instrumental or associative motives or a mixture of both. In our project, an American, female film director (recently arrived in the UK) described how she had achieved some communal tie relationships through instrumental and strategic networking: 'For me it was easier to enter the industry [the UK one] by joining a network of American women filmmakers. Becoming a member of these communities was a major step if I wanted to continue

my career in this country…now I have friends from this network - I have also worked with some of them'.

Characteristically, a script editor in our research also commented: 'well, I could not tell you whether these people [stable collaborators across projects] are my friends or just work colleagues… Our work, my work does not have these strict boundaries; my personal life and my working life'. This indicates dynamism in the nature of networking relations suggesting a negotiated and emerging network identity affected by participation (enactment and re-enactment of network ties) and action (membership of a SPWG).

Further preliminary findings indicate: an actress was invited to participate in a film (tie activation) due to her 'capacity to attract funds' (instrumental motive). However, during the collaborative experience, socio-emotive interactions led to stable links and affective ties to develop. Subsequent motives for re-activation of this particular tie were not driven by purely strategic instrumentalism but incorporated an affective element of social connection. During the creative process, emotive situations arise that can potentially link to very strong bonds that transcend traditional divisions between associative and expressive types of action (Russ 1993; Amabile et al. 2005; Fleming et al. 2007). Reinforcing that, a film director in our study commented on her network ties: 'it becomes a family… it is a very intimate process, you have the same vision […] creativity is intimacy'.

Thus, we expect to find that creative teams, regardless of the initial motive that guides tie formation and activation, tend to move towards more affective relationships and emotive connections as their collaborative activities are sustained across a period of time (affective bonding). Here, we support prior findings (Jones and DeFillippi 1996; Feist 1999; Blair 2003) that propose affective drivers behind sustainable creative collaborations. However, we add to that by proposing that these affective dimensions of ties are embedded in a constantly negotiated network identity and thus are not stable features of the network but instead processes that are linked with network formation and transformation. Furthermore, we suggest that affective bonding does not necessarily secure tie activation and re-activation in a network. Tie dissolution could also be linked with affective network relationships and ties may break up during SPWG practice: '...well, if one of the crew proves destructing in emotional and relationships level, no matter how good they are at their work the tension is going to ruin the intimacy and destroy the creativity …' (Respondent C).

Proposition 1: Activation, re-activation, latency or dissolution decisions in sustainable creative collaborations are linked with strong (yet not always positive) affective conditions.

Anti-conformist bridging of ties

For SPWG and project-based working relations in the creative industries, it is the goal of the activity (for example, film, in the case of the film industry) that dictates fluidity and dynamism during group formation. Maintaining creativity while at the same time securing reciprocity, trust and compatibility, is paramount for the creative sectors. The

interdependence of tasks (director of photography with film director, for example) dictates stable links that may ensure smooth collaboration, minimise risk but also affirm the creative identity of an individual or group (Elsbach 2009). At the same time, however, the need for novelty, creativity and innovativeness push towards fluid and flexible identity structures that embrace diversity, openness and change and hence more heterogeneous and flexible network relations. This dual capacity has to be embedded in creative network identities and tie relations that need to reflect openness and dynamism as well as stability and flexibility if SPWGs are to remain creative and competitive.

Although 'bonds' have to be formed to ensure security and minimize risky 'new' ties, 'bridges' also need to be built to enhance outward outlook of networks and thus facilitate the enrichment of creative spaces. Occupying heterophilous networks may require an 'adaptation' identity process and adoption of different discourses in order to achieve consistency with the network structure (Santos and Barrett 2005). Yet, whereas 'adaptation' or acculturation will signal high levels of conformity, not being constrained by dominant existing norms and exploring alternative creative states could lead to entrepreneurial forms of creative and innovative action: Social networks with heterogeneous ties encourage innovation (Ruef 2002) and individuals will only capitalise on the 'strength of weak ties' if they have low levels of conformity (Feist 1999; Zhou et al. 2009). Although network identity may have a formative role on individual identities that is, assimilation of 'external' or weak identities (preservation of a stable creative relationship), anti-conformist bridging of weak ties may lead to transformation of network identity: new patterns of relating or tie formations will

affect both the identity of the network and the creative output of the temporarily constituted team.

In our research, an established and successful director replied when asked about putting together a team for a hypothetical project: 'I would like to bring together independent and talented people that I have not worked with in the past; it may be risky but it may become one of my most creative moments….I am ready for a challenge, I want to push my creativity to its limits…'. Following that up, the same director later added: 'Of course, one or two people have always worked with me…I would take them to the challenge project; they have become part of what I do; they are the sound and the eyes of my work'. Here, what we see is bridging weak ties with relatively low number of re-enactments (if any) - encouraging anti-conformist (independent) groups - while at the same time supporting these 'bridges' with a strong affective 'bond'. This process of bridging and bonding may result in a pattern of ties which by breaking established identity relationships exposes members to what creatives in our research have referred to as the 'creative spark'. We suggest that flexible definitions of identity are found in creative networks reflecting relational and symbolic forms of identification that lead to distinctive patterns of tie evolution for sustainable and arguably effective collaborative networks.

Proposition 2: Creative network members balance affective bonding and anti-conformist bridging of ties in an attempt to maximise their creative potential.

As discussed, prior work has already suggested affective and/or anti-conformist ties responsible for the formation of a creative network (Arthur and DeFillippi, 1996; Feist 1999; Blair 2003; Zhou et al. 2009). The paper confirms that and moves on to highlight the need to study not just the type of ties but also the distinctive patterns of tie evolution that sustain, change or dismantle collaborative networks. That is, we propose the exploration of tie evolution across projects in order to identify possible patterns of collaboration that are linked with network sustainability, identity and creative output. We propose that tie patterns will be evolving towards strong emotive dimensions (Proposition 1) and will be combining creative anti-conformist tie formations possibly to an optimal balance (Proposition 2).

However affective, anti-conformist or other ties (that future research findings may reveal) ought to be examined not as static but constantly re-defined and flexible social formations embedded to a process of network identity trans-formation. In other words, our propositions ought to be interpreted as part of a qualitative and longitudinal theoretical framework that emphasises the processes and evolving patterns of tie trans-formation that bring creative individuals together across projects. More importantly, one should not read these propositions independently of the central argument of the paper that it is in the shifts of flexible network identities that we can identify those patterns and theorise about tie quality and function.

Discussion

Though more empirical support for this is required, we suggest that tie processes in the creative sectors involves the negotiation of affective bonding and anti-conformist bridging, a process that re-defines network identity and arguably affects the creative potential for the networks. A different combination of motives for each re-enactment (different motives will apply for different ties) would lead to flexible constructions of network identity through relational categorisations of social judgment and interaction (Elsbach and Kramer 2003). This flexibility may be positively associated with network's creative potential. Possibly the capacity to frequently re-adjust identity features and change your network structurally and culturally may be linked with creative initiatives such as breakthroughs or novel ideas. The patterns of tie transformation, outcome of collaborative decisions over time, and the evolution of network identity could be associated with transformative creative experiences for both individual and groups.

Promising contributions (Elfring and Hulsink 2007) examine tie formation processes in relation to the entrepreneurial process. They focus on the various stages in the entrepreneurial process and individual strategic decisions that affect tie evolution particularly with regard to shifts from weak ties to strong ones or tie terminations. This and other similar studies (Hite and Hesterly 2001) encourage future work on the way tie formation processes affect network development patterns. We have tried to contribute to that by linking motives for tie activation, reactivation or dissolution, individual attributes and network identity.

In the film sector, where the research that guides and informs this paper comes from, persistent relationships take the form of SPWGs, informal temporary work groups that are embedded within a broader social network or networks. Predominantly, these groups have a rather stable 'core' and a more flexible periphery. SPWGs embody the 'memory' of networks constructed through prior experiences of members as collaborators of a project team. This memory is crucial and determines the re-enactment potential of a tie (strong or weak) and the sustainability of a network. Affective qualities were discussed as the key driver of tie evolution in creative collaborations strategically though enriched by anti-conformist relations that challenge set network practices and identities, invite diversity and push the creative boundaries of the teams.

The fact that SPWGs reinforce a particular socio-cultural context that differentiates this group from others and tends to keep its identity distinctive does not mean that structural and cultural shifts are automatically excluded. Despite homophilous tendencies (Newman and Dale 2007) and affective relations (Blair 2000), SPWGs, bridging social capital, re-assemble with new members (weak ties of their open or close network), re-inventing their identity. The trans-formed ties that develop between 'old', core members and 'new' entries affect the identity of the work group and in consequence the identity of the network. This is because new practices and discourses are introduced through new social formations that alter the experiences of all group members, affect the quality of ties between both 'old' and 'new' collaborators, their creative potential and their relation to the networks in which they are embedded both in terms of structure and culture.

Hence, on the one hand, structural changes during re-enacted collaborative relationships link with changes in the identity and creative potential of the network. On the other hand, praxis in SPWG during a project execution could affect network membership and structure (for example, tie dissolution) as well as type of tie (tendency towards affective bonding) and hence network identity. The 'historical experiences of workers in intentional networks qualitatively change the way they behave towards one another in their networks in future interactions' (Nardi et al. 2002:228). Thus, networks 'do not depend on one relationship, or on the social space in which people meet. Rather, the *process* of creating relationships and embedding oneself onto the social structure is pertinent to the success of social networks' (Vivian and Sudweeks 2003:1435, emphasis added).

High risk projects, as the ones often characterising the creative sectors, are normally also associated with highly ambiguous and emotive relationships. Individuals adjusting their identities form strong affective relations within communities of practice namely, SPWGs (network as formative of individual identities). Yet, unbounded conceptualisations of creativity invite difference, dialogue and ambiguity (Long Lingo and O'Mahony 2009), reinforcing the formation of permeable boundaries of semi-permanent social formations. The distribution of different types of links reflects the team's underlying diversity and creativity. 'New' ties (within or outside the network that feeds SPWGs) with low levels of conformity (Zhou et al 2009) or high levels of 'deviancy' (Chaharbaghi and Crisp 2007) will change the structure of a group/network and as a result affect its symbolic capital and identity. These changes

relate to the creative potential of the team or at least its perceived capacity of achieving a creative outcome.

We suggest that the process of balancing bonding and bridging of ties leads to the formation of persistent yet flexible network boundaries and identities that are constantly re-adjusted; it is this process that we ought to focus upon. Thus we encourage the study of the transformation processes through which these network identities emerge and change and the evolving patterns of tie relations that affect this transformation process. Identity transformation as a dynamic process entails change through collective action not only on an individual but also on group and network level. Studies on identity and networks (Nohria and Eccles 1992; Ibarra et al. 2005) stress the co-evolution of networks and social identity and particularly on the role of individual cognitions in constructing and re-constructing networks. Building upon this, network transformation can be studied by focusing primarily on semi-permanent tie relations and the motives behind their formation, activation, re-activation or dissolution. The study of 'flexible' creative work groups (held together by distinctive pattern of ties, some of them activated, some terminated and others altered) presents us with a situated context to study how individual agency, network structure and collective network identity co-evolve as they are enacted during dynamic and enduring collaborations.

Thus our paper suggests that the field of organization studies could be benefited by a) exploring further the link between creativity and networking through process-driven methodologies; b) relating the type of ties and the motives that drive creative

collaborations on the tie patterns or optimal mix of individual attributes (such as affect and conformity) and c) linking the literature on network analysis, cultural embeddedness with studies on individual and collective identity.

Conclusion

As the ephemeral, the temporary, the fragmented and the distributed have come to characterise personal and professional relationships and identities (Carroll and Murphy 2003; Pescosolido and Rubin 2000), traditional notions of networks and creativity have to be revised to account for multiple enactments of network relationships, through sustainable collaborative patterns, not only within traditional intra- and inter-firm contexts but also flexible, semi-permanent and boundaryless work settings. The study of network identity transformation brings content and process to the centre of network studies by requiring a developmental exploration of networking relations and the ways that they are formed and change through practice.

We suggested that despite the tendency of creative networks towards affective bonding, creative projects are also mediated by bridging of anti-conformist tie relations. Weak or 'new' ties capable of transforming the identity of the network are also activated (or formed) to participate in semi-permanent work groups thus affecting the group's creative potential. We focused on an individual characteristic of these 'bridges' and particularly on the levels of conformity in relation to creativity. We re-affirmed that low levels of conformity (or as future evidence may reveal other attributes) will be linked to heterogeneity and difference in SPWGs necessary components of emergent creative practice. We contributed to this literature by

suggesting that empirical studies could explore patterns or the possible existence of an 'optimal mix' of tie relations and process linked with breaks in creative practices or creative fields. These breaks or 'sparks' may be described as breakthroughs, changes in 'signature styles' (Elsbach 2009), discoveries or innovations and entrepreneurial behaviour all studied in project teams with a lengthy collaborating history.

Thus, the two propositions of the paper initiate more thorough empirical research on the study of identity construction, transformation and networking process. In the current business environment where flexibility and mobility characterise collaborative relations and exchanges, network identity becomes rather fluid and dispersed. Motivation for collaboration in this context cannot be fully attributed to trust, reputation or centrality of ties and certainly cannot be explained via cross-sectional maps of interconnected 'nodes'. The study of networks identities assists in seeing 'nodes' as individuals and 'connecting lines' as socio-emotive transformative relationships. Interpersonal relationships are indeed complex, dynamic and heterogeneous. Starting with the empirical support for our propositions, future studies could expand our line of work by focusing on evolving tie relations and patterns of network change linked with distinctive creative identities and creative potential..

Nevertheless, the concepts of creative potential and compatibility have to be specified for each empirical project. Creatives themselves differently define creativity and several authors (for a rather comprehensive account see Sternberg 1999) have tried to reach an encompassing definition of the term. Although defining creativity and assessing creative potential goes beyond the purposes of this paper, we proposed

definitions of creativity that challenge discipline-bounded conceptualisations in favour of a social and dialogical creativity framework. This we suggest reflects the distributed nature of creativity, embedded in evolving network ties. Future work, however, could provide a more comprehensive account and definitions of creative potential and link assessments of creative compatibility criteria or 'cues' (Elsbach and Kramer 2003) with tie evolution and networked praxis.

Furthermore, the paper is based on preliminary findings for proposition formulation. Additional supporting evidence is needed for clarifying and refining the propositions and the conceptual framing of network dynamics. Prior work in the field (Mehra et al. 2001; Zhou et al. 2009) and our own initial findings indicate that personality variables (individual agency) and identity affect and are affected by networking processes and structures. Confirming the literature findings (Feist 1999; Blair 2003; Zhou et al. 2009), we proposed that tie relations evolve towards a balance of affective and anti-conformist tie relations, a pattern that appears to guide choices for enactment and re-enactment of creative collaborative relationships across projects. Taking that further, we suggested that there must be an optimal mix or a certain pattern of relating these two that results in transformative creativity breaks (e.g. breakthroughs). Yet, patterns of other attributes, motives and endogenous or exogenous network features may also be correlated to creative re-enactments and sustained creative outcomes. For example, the role of brokers (producers in the music industry) in the creative process has recently been explored (Long Lingo and O'Mahoney 2009; Brass 2009). Future research could explore what the highly creative tie patterns are and whether there is an

'optimal mix' of other ties and attributes (besides affective and anti-conformist) or a 'prototype' of tie evolution process that is linked with creative potential..

We addressed the motives that drive collaborative relationships seeing them as one of the forces that drive the formation of ties. Clearly, the concept of 'motives' and 'motivation' refer here to both individual and collective frames of reference that drive choices and decision making in a SPWG. In the present paper, we did not theorise on the power relations and structures that establish some motives as the dominant ones and thus the ones that drive cultural tastes and symbolic capital towards a specific direction. One would expect that there will be some prevailing 'tastes' in the network trying to maintain a specific network identity or 'choose' the creative identity of the network. Future work on identity and the networking process could focus on the underlying mechanisms that govern the establishment or the substitution (diversion or subversion) of the dominant network identity. Finally, the type of the creative sector and the nature of the task we predict to be significantly associated with the network members' capacity to organize their flexible, relational tie patterns. External environment, culture, degree of regulation of the sector and formalization of industry processes and structures are expected to affect these tendencies. Further, sector and task as well as culture and technology (e.g. internet-based social networking sites) are also thought to influence the tie patterns that develop (both cultural and structural aspects) and the identity transformation processes linked with creative outcome. Future work is encouraged to incorporate these variables and factors into the discussion initiated in this paper.

To conclude, the study of social networks in conjunction with identity could enhance our understanding in several research areas such as career progression, transformation, creativity, diversity and experiences of minorities in the workplace (in terms of exclusion and inclusion dynamics) as well as the creative process and knowledge generation and transfer across project teams. More research is needed on identity in the context of social networks, linking individual and collective identities as they form and are transformed by qualitatively altered and structurally transformed exchanges across time. Future empirical studies can refine the propositions offered in this paper and explore in depth the patterns of tie evolution and the processes of network identity trans-formation in relation to creativity. Such studies can enrich network and creativity theory and provide practical guidance for professionals in the creative economy.

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