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The symbolic meaning of creativity

Perceptions of routines and creativity in a contemporary office setting

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Abstract

Title: The symbolic meaning of creativity - perceptions of routines and creativity in a contemporary office setting

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Purpose: To gain greater understanding of creativity and routinized work in a contemporary office setting, where we emphasize on employee's perceptions of the issue from different roles in a work process.

Research question: How will routinized work processes affect the employees' perceptions of creativity in a contemporary office setting?

Methodology: We took an interpretative-critical perspective in order to achieve our purpose. Our case company is involved in fashion. The department we focused on, designing clothes under own brands and also conducts operational work. The work process is designed in teams where employees have specialized and routinized work tasks. We conducted a qualitative study where we made semi-structured interviews and observations on site.

Findings: Our main finding was that creativity could be understood as a symbolic. The perceptions of creativity can be contagious, when the routinized worker associates him or herself with the creative outcome of the team. For the employee the symbolic meaning might also work as a distraction from alienation and provide more meaning to performing routinized tasks. We also saw how routines can be perceived enabling to reach work efficiency and organizational goals. However, we found that from an individual perspective the same routines can be perceived differently, where the employee might be constrained from performing challenging tasks and creative work. Routines in our case company stem from commercial goals such as work efficiency. We found that a salient commercial focus in organizations might direct creativity to a reactive nature. Hence, in Fashion Inc. employees mostly perceived creativity as solving problems in a creative manner.

Keywords: Creativity, routines, symbolism, commercialization, alienation

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1. Introduction

We tend to think that we live in a knowledge economy, in which people want to see themselves as creative, knowledgeable and in control of their lives. It also appears to be that contemporary organizations have a demand for a more knowledgeable and flexible workforce, which would improve the use of creativity and generate novel ideas. However, the reality seems to be different where routinized work tasks prevail in the quest for commercial aspects as control and efficiency. The discourses around the knowledge and the creative economy sound promising, however there might be little substance behind them, there tends to be much talk about knowledge intensiveness and creative workers in order to boost status of certain occupational groups (Alvesson, 2013). In fact, the majority of the workforce is still in the service economy performing more routinized work (see for example Alvesson, 2004; Nolan & Wood, 2003; Thompson, Warhurst & Callaghan, 2001).

We can also observe a split between different types of work, for instance Legge (2007) argues that a polarization of jobs has happened. She makes a distinction between Macjobs, which are more knowledge intensive and Mcjobs, which are characterized by mostly standardized work. We also see that many jobs that fall in between the two poles are going towards the more standardized route, that of the Mcjobs, in order to gain efficiency, productivity and profit for the organization. This makes a big proportion of today's work in line with Tayloristic ideas, which involve routines and specialization of employees to conduct specific tasks in order to gain organizational efficiency (Schmidt, 2011; Peaucelle, 2000). Taylorism is usually associated with manufacturing work, such as car manufacturing, but we can see these ideas applied to office settings where white collar workers conduct computer work, which is organized in similar processes of routines and specialized tasks (Sennet, 1998). This indicates that we are in a post-Taylorist era, where the notion of Taylorism is present in new settings. By new settings we mean organizations that we tend to believe are more involved in creativity and innovation. For example, the fashion industry, which is regarded as creative because of the creative nature of work involved in clothes design. However, most of the people are not involved in creative tasks and instead work in specialized office work. These ideas of specialization are displayed in practice in routine work. Routines are the repetitive patterns of working that help achieve goals efficiently (Feldman & Pentland, 2003; Brown & Lewis, 2011), we assume this might clash with the interest of promoting creativity that organizations tend to talk about.

The clash between routines, stemming from commercial goals, and creativity can be seen as contradictory. Commercial goals, such as efficiency tend to lead towards bureaucratic forms of organizing, with routines and formalization, while creativity is more associated with organic forms of organizing (Adler & Chen, 2011). However, organizing for creativity does not have to be either way and scholars argue how bureaucratic forms of organizing work affects creativity; some studies show enabling effects, while other later studies have a more critical view. For instance, Adler & Chen (2011) and Adler & Borys (1996) argue that too much formal control will undermine motivation to engage in creative work and solving uncertain tasks. Furthermore, in the past, Taylorism was criticized for making workers narrow minded and alienated from the work tasks (Sennett, 1998). If workers are risking narrow mind-set, how will that effect creativity in contemporary organizations where routines and structures are salient? This directs us to investigate on the individual level, how workers perceive the relationship between creativity and routines. Even in standardized jobs people still need knowledge to conduct their job and in the service economy workers with creativity could be important (Thompson et al. 2001).

Most studies on creativity are done in organizations that are well known for creative outputs, such as companies with big R&D departments (Chen, 2012). We also experience that discussions about creativity in organizations in general often comes down to companies such as Google and Apple that are famous for their creative nature. Chen (2012) argues that more studies are needed on a bigger variety of organizations to investigate how creativity is conducted in everyday work. Our study will pick up this challenge and investigate how workers perceive creativity in everyday work and how routines and structures effect perceptions of creativity. Our case company is in the fashion industry that per se is associated with creativity (Busco, Frigo, Giovannoni & Maraghini, 2012). Our study focuses both on operational and design work. In our research we take an interpretative-critical standpoint, where we want to understand the meaning of routines and creativity for employees. From this perspective the creative nature of the fashion industry also provides us with an understanding of the symbolic nature of creativity and how it can be distributed to employees working with mostly routine tasks. Furthermore, when standardized work processes enter the contemporary office setting, it is interesting to see how that affects minds of the employees and meanings of creativity. In this paper we argue that creativity can have a symbolic

meaning and be contagious for other people in the teams that mostly are involved in routinized work. The contagious nature of creativity might aid in the development of a positive narrative in order to cope with negative effects of routinized work, such as alienation. We also see routines as enabling for goal accomplishment and that they can give more room for creativity. However, the routines and structures might direct creativity to become more reactive in nature, where employees might perceive creativity as problem solving.

1.1 Purpose and research question

Our purpose is to create understanding of creativity in routine work in a contemporary office setting. We want to understand how employees' perceptions of creativity will be affected in routine work. The research question is: *How will routinized work processes affect the employees' perceptions of creativity in a contemporary office setting?*

1.2 Layout

This paper is constructed in six chapters, where the first chapter is this introduction. In the second chapter we present relevant literature, where we introduce research about routines, creativity and about employees perceptions of the two concepts. We also introduce the two more critical concepts of alienation and functional stupidity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) in order to understand the issue from a more critical perspective. Third chapter is methodology where we present how our interpretative-critical perspective supports to gain greater understanding of our research question. We introduce the case company, Fashion Inc., and how we conducted interviews and observations on the site. In chapter four we present our empirical material by first describe the work design at Fashion Inc. in order for the reader to understand how work is designed. Furthermore, we emphasize on how employees perceive routines and creativity by talking about enabling routines, reactive nature of creativity and association with creativity. Chapter five is our discussion where we combine our findings with theory, this chapter is divided in three interlinked themes; the symbolic meaning of creativity, enabling routines and then we take a broader scope and talk about effects on creativity from the point of view of commercialization. Hence, commercialization is linked to perceptions of creativity in routinized work in our case company. Lastly, in chapter six, we conclude our arguments and suggest ideas for further research.

2. Literature review

To gain understanding and answer our research question we find it relevant to investigate the following theoretical background of our study. Additionally, we want to show the complexities around the relationship between routines and creativity. As mentioned above, we believe that commercialization drives organizations to standardize their work processes in order to gain efficiency and therefore profit. We believe that we need to investigate deeper into the theory of routines and creativity and other topics we find complementary from our interpretative-critical paradigm of research. We find that the interplay of these concepts will provide the reader with a broad overview to understand the research topic itself.

2.1 Routines

Routines are usually connected to streamlined and standardized work and are to be seen as a source for accomplishing organizational aims (Brown & Lewis, 2011; Kärreman, Alvesson & Wenglén, 2006). Howard-Grenville (2005) explains that routines are sources for both stability and change. She explains the traditional view on routines, as standard procedures that bring stability to the organizations and are slow to change. However, Feldman and Pentland (2003) take the understanding of routines even further and show that routines consist of repetition, patterns of action, multiple participants and interdependent actions. They divide the routine into two parts; the ostensive and the performative part. The ostensive part of the routine is the structure of the task itself, whereas the performative part is referred to a particular execution of the routine by different people, at different times and places. The best analogy to understand this is by thinking of the ostensive part as notes to a melody and the performative part as a musician playing it in his interpretation. Feldman and Pentland (2003, 94) argue that the ostensive aspect *“enables people to guide, account for, and refer to specific performances of a routine, and the performative aspect creates, maintains and modifies the ostensive aspect of the routine”*. Furthermore, the authors say that the relationship between the two aspects gives the possibility for variation, selection and retention of certain practices, which can lead to different outcomes within the routine. We believe that the balance kept between the two aspects can be enabling for the employee because the routine ostensive part gives the sense of stability and the performative gives the chance for variation and change, which can be experienced as motivating.

2.1.1 Enabling perceptions of routines

When people think of routines and other words such as standardization, formalization and bureaucracy, they tend to think about the negative sides of them. We feel that these concepts make people feel negative towards routinized work. However, we would like to shed some positive light on this topic. Adler and Borys (1996) argue that formalization is considered to reduce role conflict and role ambiguity. Several studies have shown that formalization of work tasks had a positive effect on commitment, job satisfaction and work exhaustion (Adler & Borys, 1996). Routines can also have enabling effects on time; routines save time and free up time for analytic work (Ohly, Sonnentag & Pluntke, 2006). Adler and Borys (1996) explain that formalization is actually something the employees will support if the formalized procedures are well designed and implemented. This is very important to consider when studying routines and the actors within.

2.1.2 Coercive perceptions of routines

Some scholars argue for the enabling sides of routines for workers, however there is also criticism of routinized work that highlights the problem of alienation. Alienation is about dis-identification from professional identity and the role in the process when workers have to conform to something they do not want to identify themselves with (Leidner, 1993:184). It might affect workers to be cynical and make the organization dysfunctional (Costas & Fleming, 2009). The ideas arose from Marx, who highlighted the problem for workers in a capitalist society (Costas & Fleming, 2009). There have been several studies of this phenomenon in different work places; for instance, Leidner (1993) at McDonalds, Kunda (1992) at a high tech company and Costa & Fleming (2009) at a management consultancy firm. We want to understand this concept in a different setting such as the contemporary office setting of white-collar workers.

Sennet (1998) highlights the alienation's effects on workers. He shares one example about a bakery in New York, where twenty years ago the baking process was primarily manual. The workers touched and felt the bread and pastries. From this sense the bakers were close to the outcome of the process and took pride in their profession. When Sennet revisited the bakery twenty-five years later the process was replaced by machines and IT, where the workers now controlled the process by clicking on buttons and determined quality by comparing the end product to pictures. Sennet (1998) argues that the bakers did not see themselves as bakers anymore and decoupled their minds from the baking process. Workers also talked about baking as a short-term occupation.

In other words, the workers got alienated. The example shows that the new process contributed to more efficiency, but less quality because the workers' engagement to the process was superficial. That resulted in higher waste and higher turnover when staff didn't see themselves as bakers and disconnected their minds from the organization's processes (Sennet, 1998). To sum up, alienation in routine work might create lack of understanding of the job and less quality of the standardized work process itself.

2.1.3 Functional stupidity

Routines can be seen both as enabling and coercive for individuals, nevertheless routinized work is still argued to be a source for organizational efficiency. As routinized work is thought to be a way to gain efficiency, we believe that it will eventually lead to what Alvesson and Spicer (2012) call "functional stupidity". Functional stupidity is *"organizationally supported lack of reflexivity, substantive reasoning and justification"* (p.1196). This can be also linked back to routines where Howard-Grenville (2005) explains negative effects of routines at an individual level; it can lead to *"mindlessness and consequent inattention to the task environment"* (p.620).

However, functional stupidity is not to be exclusively related to something bad because of the negative connotation of the term. Positive outcomes of functional stupidity may include a sense of certainty; it can motivate people and keep organizational efficiency (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). Negative outcomes on the other hand lead to *"trapping individuals and organizations in problematic patterns of thinking, which engender the conditions for individual and organizational dissonance"* (p.1196). Such as the bakery example above, it is a routinized process that is functional due to its efficiency that benefits the organization. However, lack of reflexivity and pride expressed by the employees' quality might cause problems.

To sum up, routines are claimed to lead to both enabling and coercive perceptions for people in the work process. For instance, it can lead to clarity in roles and job satisfaction, but also dis-identifications and alienation from the organization. Furthermore, to help us answer our research question we would like to see how routines influence the creative potential of employees.

2.2 Creativity in organizations

Creativity is a well used concept with several meanings, for instance some see creativity as individual traits, while others put the concept in the context of interactions between

people (Chen, 2012). A commonly accepted view of creativity is Woodman's, Sawyer's, and Griffin's (1993) definition: "Creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system" (p.293). This definition touches upon the interplay between innovation and creativity that often are mentioned together. Normally, creativity is seen as generation of ideas when innovations turn ideas into action (Gurteen, 1998; Marks & Huzzard, 2008). Creativity is about inventing something new. However, how novel should the ideas be in order to be considered creative? Even if we tend to connect creativity to creative industries, Marks and Huzzard (2008) argue that to some extent "most jobs that include elements of problem solving can entail creative tasks" (p.228). Unsworth (2001) also mentions problem solving; creativity can also be about being aware of new or old problems in new ways. Creativity is ambiguous, but from our view creativity has some attributes of novelty that generate some kind of value.

Studies about creativity usually talk about three related aspects; (1) the individuals and their personalities in the organization, (2) the process of creative thinking and (3) the environmental factors that might enable or constrain creativity (Besset & Tidd, 2011:157). Especially the latter aspect of the environment is of our interest in this study; how factors as organizational culture, structure and routines might form employees' perceptions of creativity in the organization.

2.2.1 Proactive and reactive creativity

As we displayed above, creativity is a complicated concept. To tackle the ambiguities of it, we believe it will be beneficial to describe it further. Unsworth (2001) criticize the

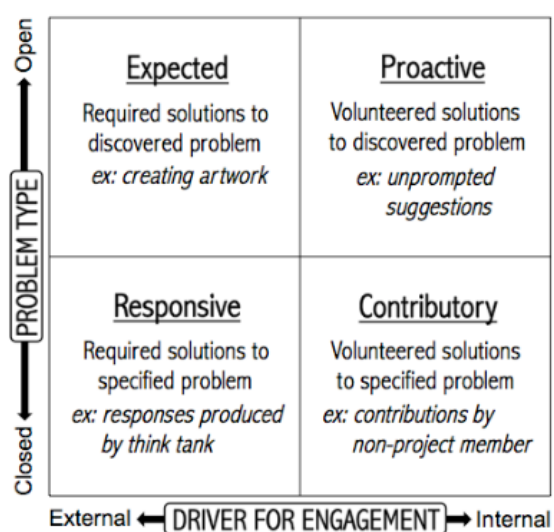


Figure 1. Unsworth's (2001;291) framework for different types of creativity based on the two dimensions of (1) how open the problem is and (2) what the motivation for creativity.

common perspective and claims that it is homogeneous and output oriented; the process does not just start with the idea and finish with the output. Unsworth (2001) argues that we need to understand why people engage in creative activities and the triggers behind to understand the "creative process". She has developed a framework (see figure 1) based on two aspects; (1) how open or closed the problem description is for the task and (2) what drives people to engage in

solving the tasks. From this we can see if the problem description is set in structures (closed problem) and motivation to engage in the problem comes from external triggers, then the creativity becomes responsive. On the other hand, when the task requirements are uncertain, people need to discover the problem by themselves, and the triggers are internally motivated to discover problems. From this perspective creativity becomes proactive in nature. Unsworth (2001) claims that proactive creativity is rare and lacks research about it. Furthermore, proactive creativity involves more scanning of the environment and is triggered by voluntary actions. We believe that routinized work and closed nature of problems will create challenges to engage in proactive creativity. However, the ambiguous nature of creativity and the constant balance between the nature of the problem and driver for engagement presents numerous challenges to understand creativity in organizations.

2.2.2 Creativity and routines

Structures and routines might contradict openness that the process of creativity stresses in general. Standardized processes can be seen as a way of management control; to get employees to conform to rational goals of the organization (Ouchi, 1979). At a collective level, routines can both be constraining when more creativity is needed, but also give sense of security in new and unfamiliar situations (Howard-Grenville, 2005). The research field disagrees how routines affects capabilities to be creative, some see that routines enable creativity while others are more critical (Adler & Chen, 2011). The discussions often come down to arguments between formal and informal ways of management control. Examples of formal controls are budgets, rules and routines with the aim to insure that strategies are carried out or modified in a suitable way. On the other hand, informal control targets the mind of people and can be more described as social control, for example, clan control or identity control (Busco et al., 2012). Adler and Chen (2011) highlight that control and coordination directs the focus to others, for instance co-workers on the routinized process, while *“creativity requires attention focused on the task rather than on others”* (p.66). Adler & Chen (2011) also suggest that formal control can be good when tasks are complex and consist of different types of interdependent problems, and creativity in itself is needed for uncertain tasks that require high focus.

Chen (2012) argues that there needs to be a balance in control; over and under organizing should be avoided. Stressing managerialism to foster efficiency and organizational stability, might depress creativity, for instance employees' ideas might

get strangled by bureaucratic forms of control, for example the ideas of Weber's "iron cage" of rationalism where he stresses bureaucracy (Chen, 2012:629). Adler and Chen (2011) highlight the idea that management control might undermine motivation to conduct creative work from the sense of solving uncertain tasks. However, on the other hand under organizing and too much freedom can also reduce creativity. For instance, where lack of control exists, normative aspects such as culture and informal politics might become salient. A strong culture might then marginalize diversity and different mind-sets that should had contributed to creativity (Chen, 2012). Another struggle is when the intentions of informal control, where workers should be empowered and part of decision-making, is not carried out in the organization. Vallas (2006) highlight the problem where managers have a hard time to let go of control, which limits possibilities for the workers to carry out their creativity.

However, the balance of formal and informal control is not necessary the universal answer. Joas (1996) argues that in all organizations, even organization strongly influenced from post-Tayloristic ideas about routinization, creativity is central to all actions. Chen (2012), conducted a conceptual study of the dilemma of control and creativity and argues to look more on internal aspects such as "*internal interactions among organizational members*" (p.624). This directs us to a more complex answer about how management control affects creativity; the answer might be present in other factors (Madjar, Greenberg & Chen, 2011).

2.2.3 Other aspects besides routines and creativity

Even if control is a central element when researching structures and routines impact on creativity, there are some other factors of importance. Unsworth and Clegg (2010) suggest that factors such as general work motivation, the job requirements, cultural aspects, time resources and autonomy are central to understand creativity. Their study was done in four teams that worked with design projects in large aerospace companies. Their findings might have been different in another setting, but nevertheless gives us food for thought. Unsworth and Clegg (2010) highlight that autonomy provides feelings of controlling your work. This can trigger motivation to be engaged in creativity and uncertain tasks. This is also inline with Adler and Borys (1996), who believe that formalization makes people less willing to involve themselves in uncertain tasks, such as creative work. This is also linked to time resources, which was a salient factor in their study. However, other studies argue for the opposite, that time shortage and stress will trigger creative solutions (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). In our research about perceptions

of routines and creativity we find, especially the two latter factors about time and autonomy interesting.

As we saw above there are two perspectives of how routines' effect creativity, one view being more pessimistic and the other more optimistic. However, to gain a better understanding of the relationship Madjar, Greenberg & Chen (2011) look at creativity from an interpretative perspective. The scholars argue that how the individual make sense of issues are of importance for creative motivation. Sensemaking can be described as an on-going process, where people make their own understandings and draw their own narratives based on past experience (Weick, 1995). The way employees will make sense of resources such as time and autonomy will depend on how they construct their narrative and how creative they can or should be (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). Madjar, Greenberg & Chen (2011) point out different aspect of how individuals make sense of creativity and how they trigger it. For instance, if workers that are doing more routinized work have workers of a more creative nature nearby, they can associate with the creative workers which triggers a more creative working culture. However, on the other side, workers with routine tasks that conform to the routines might instead focus on efficiency and quality of on-going work. From this perspective we see how individual workers construct meaning for themselves and their surroundings. This will in turn effect how workers see and act upon creativity.

Chen (2012) argues to look more on the aspect of relationships and how that is affecting the creative process. She argues that informal relationships that are not written in organizational documents might facilitate communication that can lead to creativity. Brusco et al (2012) studied creativity and routines in an Italian fashion company; the authors highlighted how informal activities as informal meetings can bridge communication over formal roles. Furthermore, Rennstam (2012) proposes an alternative way to see the process of creativity in organizations. Instead of seeing creativity as an outcome from workers integrating together, integrating with "the object" will give rise to ideas and trigger creativity. Rennstam (2012) conducted the study in a department of product development, where the engineers were interacting with the object, in this case an amplifier for cell-phones. This shows how the process of communication around the product is important to extract creativity. Furthermore, design of routines in an organization will affect how relationships and informal communication will take place.

2.3 Concluding thoughts

We believe that the topics presented above are relevant to our research question and we intend to base our findings on them. In our literature review we focused on the interplay between routines and creativity. We found that employees can perceive routines differently, for instance they can clarify roles, induce job satisfaction, but also be a source for alienation from the work processes. Routines can be experienced differently, depending on the individual worker's interpretations. We showed that creativity is of an ambiguous nature. To understand the phenomena in an organizational setting, it will be beneficial for us to look at different factors such as creativity depending on external or internal triggers and whether the problems are open or closed. The struggle between routines and creativity has long been linked to management control, more as a discussion on how formal or informal the control should be for both to be able to facilitate organizational efficiency and creativity. However, later research finds it more important to investigate individual sensemaking of different factors to understand the relationship between routines and creativity, which we intend to follow up on.

3. Methodology

In our study we focused on routinized work that is divided in specialized tasks. In the past, this kind of work process has been described as making workers narrow minded and alienated from work (Sennet, 1998). We have identified a clash between this type of routinized work and creativity in contemporary organizations. Therefore, we need to understand how employees in that kind of settings perceive routine work and it's affects on creativity. Our case company is a big retailer. We focused on a department that designs and trades clothes under private brands. Access the case company was granted because one of the researchers works at the site, which led to several biases to handle throughout the study. We took an interpretative-critical perspective to understand employees' perceptions and to challenge the understandings of relationship between routines and creativity. We conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with people from different positions in the working process. In the time we spent at the company we also made observations in form of informal mingle that provided a more holistic understanding of the work processes. In this section we will continue to outline our methodological standpoint and how that affected the research process.

3.1 Critical interpretation to understand a multiple world

Our study is conducted from an interpretative-critical perspective, where we focused on understanding employee's perceptions of creativity in routinized work. We also to challenged dominant assumptions of the routinized work processes themselves. From our perspective we see the world as socially constructed, where reality is formed by interactions and experiences. From this perspective the reality is subjective and can be interpreted in different ways (Burell & Morgan, 1979). For instance, one worker might experience routines as helpful, while another sees it as a harmful constraint. Furthermore, words, language and artifacts might have a strong impact and a symbolic meaning for how employees interpret events and construct their own narratives (Morgan, 1980; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). We will therefore treat our case company as dynamic where people's interpretations are socially negotiated and employee's actions are linked to their interpretations.

In this socially constructed world, we see dominant assumptions and structures that affect how people construct their realities (Merriam, 2002), for instance power dynamics such as hierarchy or salient discourses of profit-driven organizations might

influence how workers make sense of work. Our aim was firstly, to comprehend peoples' perceptions of the situation at the case company by using an interpretative approach. Secondly, in order to create deeper understanding of routinized work processes and its effect on creativity, we took a critical approach. Our interest is inline with what Habermas (in Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009:155-156); mentions as emancipatory interest; to challenge and liberate from unnecessary control and dominant assumptions of the routinized work process. Alvesson & Sköldbberg (2009:138) argues that by negating assumptions we can see the world from different and more inspiring perspectives. In order to emancipate, we stress reflexivity throughout the study.

3.2 Reflexivity

We believe that it is important to be reflexive in qualitative research. We believe that we managed to achieve an appropriate level of reflexivity in our study. Being reflexive to some extent means investigating one's own biases and assumptions (Tracy, 2010). Tracy (2010:10) explains that self-reflexivity is considered "honesty and authenticity with one's self, one's research, and one's audience". The important issue in reflexivity is that the researchers need to show that their personal predispositions won't alter the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Thus, it was important to recognize our biases and assumptions in our research. In order to be more objective and coherent in our research we were sensitive to different views and perspectives that could have overturned our assumptions about the topic, in particular, when we were working with the data acquired from our research sample. Alvesson (2003:26) points to reflexivity as "challenging and reconsidering assumptions and beliefs of what data are all about". Our research was not simply testing a hypothesis, but creating understanding of particular phenomena.

3.2.1 Biases and assumptions

In order to be transparent and honest with the reader we decided to outline some of our biases and assumptions we had before the start of the research. Both of us researchers had negative perceptions of routines. Most of Shahnovskij's assumptions came from past work experiences, both at the case company and elsewhere. Shahnovskij held a more pessimistic view on the effects of routines. He found that routines have negative effects on the employees, such as leading to decreased motivation, alienation, higher employee turnover and loss of creativity. Dahl has also worked in a similar context as in the case company and also had quite negative experiences of standardized work processes. He felt that working in such an environment felt like you were trapped in routines and

alienated from the work process. Thus, we assumed that our respondents would have similar experiences of routines. We also thought that in the contemporary work setting, fueled by the need for flexibility, empowerment and knowledge-intensiveness, we believed that many of the tasks still remain standardized and that there is simply less room for creativity. Furthermore, we believed that cultivating functional stupidity, outlined before, is in the interest of the contemporary organizations in order to gain control over the employees and business processes.

We believe that one major issue that could have biased our research is that Shahnovskij has worked for the case company at the purchasing department for over a year. This fact could have had both negative and positive outcomes in our research. The negative side was that he has been subjected to the culture of the company and the routine work which was being studied and thus his assumptions could have been strongly effected by past experiences. The positive consequences of this fact were that he as an insider knew more details about the company and its processes than an outsider researcher, thus we had the chance to investigate deeper and beyond what an outsider sees. Shahnovskij also had a good work relationship with colleagues who were willing to share their experiences. However, the danger of having relationships with the sample could have lead to hesitance of the interviewees to share their honest experiences with us, since our research was commissioned by the managers of the department. Establishing trust between the employees and the researcher was important for overcoming this issue. Looking back on our research, we believe that we have benefited more from the fact of having an insider as a researcher because we were able to gain more depth in our research.

Another issue to bias our research was that our respondents might have framed their answers about their work in order to look better than what they actually experienced. Presenting themselves in a better light or identity boosting (Alvesson, 2003), is that employees might frame themselves as creative people rather than the standardized workers we assumed they were. Respondents can also try to display an image as an important person for the organization and not admit that the standardized process might control their work. Alvesson (2013) claims that in general people want to boost their work and the status of their profession. We did find some evidence of identity boosting; for instance some assistants describe their work as it should be more appreciated in the teams. On the other side to call assistants as identity boosters might

be equal to saying the assistant job is unimportant, which we do not mean. Instead we mean that assistants want to make themselves visible and stress their importance within the process. However, we find most of the respondents did seem sincere with us.

3.2.2 Managing biases and assumptions

We managed our biases and assumptions throughout the project by communicating openly between each other. We challenged our views by questioning each others opinions and beliefs we had. It was important to challenge both our own and the audience's biases and assumptions (Roulston, 2010), Instead of only presenting objective views in the study, we will display our subjective views and how they could have affected our project. We wanted to emphasize the transparency of our assumptions and biases (Roulston, 2010), and communicate them with rich descriptions throughout our thesis (Merriam, 2002). To overturn some of our assumptions, our aim was also to get a diverse sample in order to understand different perspectives of work process at the case company. All in all we believed that the best way to tackle our biases and assumptions was to challenge each other, being transparent in our research and open minded towards other opinions expressed by the respondents.

3.3 Method to collect empirical material

We undertook a qualitative research approach in order to create deeper understanding of how people make sense of their work (Burrell & Morgan, 1979; Merriam, 2002).It directed us to undertake interviews and observations where we got a chance to understand each employee's perception and also experience the context at the case company.

3.3.1 The case company

We chose our case company, referred to in our study as "Fashion Inc." because of ease of access and consequently it's suitability to our research area. We believed that Fashion Inc. could provide both elements for our research; routine work and creativity of which we want to understand the co-existence of. Two years ago Fashion Inc. launched the buying-planning organization process (BPO), which meant specialization of work tasks and routinization of work. However, the company is still in fashion with the element of design, which from our assumptions demands creativity. As Chen (2012) stated, there is more need for research in everyday organizational creativity. Fashion Inc. is mostly an operational unit, which makes our research about creativity in everyday work possible. The cooperation carried a positive note and communication was upheld all throughout the master's thesis writing process, via e-mail and phone. Our contact at Fashion Inc.

was willing and helpful as to organize a schedule and the facilities needed for the interviews. We were also provided our own keys so we were able to move around the office, which helped us with observations.

3.3.1 Interviews

We used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather information, see appendix 1 for our interview guide. As novice researchers we believed that the semi-structured interview method would help us discuss and draw most information around the research topic without omitting or forgetting anything we wanted to cover with the interviewee. We conducted 13 interviews in one workweek, two to three interviews per day. Each interview lasted for approximately 45 minutes to one hour. All interviews were recorded on the permission of the interviewee and transcribed after all interviews were completed. After each interview we sat down to reflect on what we had heard and put our ideas in a journal, to capture the essence of each interview and make further adjustments to the interview guide if necessary.

3.3.2 The Interview Sample

To acquire the relevant data, we used a purposive sample. We chose participants from the own brand-purchasing department. We picked participants from all of the members of the BPO: buyers, planners, planning and buying assistants, designers and garment technicians. We got two of each role as intended. In the buyers' case, we got three participants. Our contact at the company arranged an interview schedule and gave us his office for interviewing purposes while he was away for holiday. Our contact chose a diverse sample of volunteers who wanted to participate in our study. By interviewing all of the members of the BPO we acquired maximum coverage of the work perceptions of the employees. The sample size of 13 people accompanied by the observations we made gave us an adequate sample for richness and variation of experiences in the BPO-teams. Thus, we felt no need for further interviews.

3.3.4 Observations

In addition to face-to-face interviews, we were using observations, which took form of mingling with the office members. We talked to different people in a more informal setting, at coffee breaks and lunches. We intended to capture impressions of the work culture and it proved to be successful. At first, we wanted to attend weekly meetings of a BPO-team, however we could not get the opportunity. We believe that these methods provided deeper understanding when we had a chance to gather impressions of the work tasks conducted and employee perceptions of their work, the organization as a

whole and team dynamics in the BPO when we communicated with employees at Fashion Inc. in a more informal way. Each important observation was documented in a journal for further reference. The main aim of our observations was to capture the mood, feelings, how people communicated and integrate with each other. Without observations, the interviews would exist in a vacuum, independent of the context of the company. The observations provided richness and a background for our acquired empirical material. We believe this understanding of the context at Fashion Inc. helped throughout our analysis of the empirical material.

3.3.3 Setting at Fashion Inc.

As we entered Fashion Inc. headquarters in [name of town], we noticed the black grey white and silver décor that conveyed a mood of a serious company. As we stepped in the elevator and went to the sixth floor we were a bit nervous about what kind of reception we would get. However, the overall mood at the office was positive and the office members were curious and a bit excited about our presence. The office itself was grey and it had an open office layout, except for some private offices. There was a creative feel to the office, there were lots of clothes hanging on racks amidst the workspace, there were mannequins and garment technicians examining clothes and working with their fitting models. There were all kinds of different pictures of current, past and future trends on the walls, unopened sample packages occupying table space of the garment technicians. The fitting occasion was interesting to observe, where the designer was the fitting model and garment technician and buyer were helping with the product assessment. It was very hands on, with pinning extra fabric, thinking of sleeve length and pocket size.

The atmosphere was quite quiet, with some corridor conversation going on with occasional outburst of laughter. Most of the integration happened on an equal level, assistant to assistant, planner to planner etc. The employees were also cleaning their desks from old papers and other stuff because of the fact that Fashion Inc. will be moving to another building near by, tailored for the company. The people felt quite excited about that fact on the basis what we have heard and looking forward to sit more close to each other in the teams.

We sat down in the office which was assigned to us for the interviewing period by the divisional planning manager. The first two interviews however, were made in a neutral conference room. The office was nice and comfortable and we began to set up our

equipment. We sat down on both sides of the desk, letting the interviewee take a seat in a more comfortable armchair in the corner of the office. The idea was to give a more informal feel to the interview. All of the interviews went quite smoothly, with occasional switching to the Finnish language to give more detailed answers. Some of the respondents were a bit nervous, but we think it was more related to the use of the English language, rather than the subject matter of the interview. What was particularly interesting to observe was the way all of the respondents were taking more contact with the researcher that has not been working at the company. That researcher acted as a discussion leader and the other asked more detailed questions and asked questions more specific to the company and the environment it operates in. The insider researcher's role was also to assist the interviewee in understanding the interview questions and speak Finnish in order to get more information to avoid misunderstandings and misconceptions.

3.4 The process of analysis

We used a hermeneutic approach in our analysis; we believe it worked well in our interpretive-critical paradigm because it allowed for appropriate interpretation of the material. During time spent at Fashion Inc. we already started our analytic work by some interpretations when we gathered the data. However, after all the data was gathered and transcribed we went deeper in our empirical material. We did the first read by ourselves where we openly read the transcripts and made lots of comments in the form of codes. Secondly, in the search for salient themes we went through the interviews together and compared our notes. In this process we used what Ryan & Bernard (2003) calls scrutiny method; we look for repetitions, salient themes, contradictions and concepts that we think were missing. We used a big Excel sheet where we pointed down the most salient themes from each respondent so that we would get a holistic view of all interviews. In this phase, we started to make sense of the interviews. We used objective hermeneutics where we worked in a circular process to interpret the material in a reflexive manner; we moved between the parts of material from the interviews and the whole as in the context of the case company that we gathered from observations, the other respondents and the bigger social picture of organizational studies.

Furthermore, after extracting the first stage of themes we emphasize more on the alethic hermeneutics where we challenged our pre-understandings, biases and assumptions as outlined above, to develop new understandings. For example, we did assume assistants

would be alienated because of routinized work, however most of them conformed to the efficiency of the work process. Initially we wanted to study how routine work affects employees, as in role clarifications and alienation. However, we found that creativity was a salient theme in our material, which turned out to be an interesting theme to develop and juxtapose it to routinized work. Additionally, we decided to analyze the material through the lens of commercialization. Commercialization seemed to be at heart of Fashion Inc. and the profit orientation of this big organization was driven to routinization of work tasks and roles.

To make this study trustworthy we tried to spend enough time in the field in order to understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). We spent one full week where we intensively mingled with employees and soaked up the setting. We think we got a broad understanding of Fashion Inc. because in the end of the week, similar discoveries started to repeat both in interviews and observations. Furthermore, one of our researchers worked in the case company, which provided further understanding of the company in more detail. We think we made our points trustworthy because we emphasize transparency and reflexivity throughout our study (Creswell, 2003). We believe it is important for other scholars to understand our process and be able to make a similar study in a different setting. Since we see the world as socially constructed, we see knowledge as being created by people in the specific context (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). From this perspective we did not create knowledge as a “best-approach solution”. Our aim was to look for complexity of views between members of the BPO-teams. We used a rich descriptive-approach to “*transport readers to the setting*” (Creswell, 2003:196), so practitioners can translate our findings into their own organizational context.

3.5 Concluding thoughts

To sum up, our methodology is based on a qualitative foundation and we find this approach to be suitable for understanding employees’ perceptions of creativity in routine work. Using interviews and observations helped us understand the phenomena we set out to research. We took an interpretative-critical perspective because we wanted to understand the relationship between routinized work and creativity as well as emancipate from the dominant assumptions around the research topic. Our research is about intellectual work where we interpreted the material and stressed reflexivity (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009). From this sense there could be different interpretations of the material. For instance, from a more functionalist perspective alternative interpretations would be more about how the routines help individuals and the

company to be efficient in its processes. To understand how we interpret the material, we stress transparency and also show our findings by using thick descriptions in order to help the reader to interpret the material in their own way.

4. Findings

In this section we will present our research findings based on our interviews and observations. Firstly, we will begin by presenting the case company Fashion Inc. and the purchasing department we worked with. Secondly, we will briefly explain the process of creating clothes at the case company. Thirdly, we will present the perceptions of routines, reactive creativity and challenges of being proactive and finally the symbolic meaning of creativity.

4.1 The Case Company

Our research focused on the Fashion Inc.'s own brands purchasing department. The department designs and purchases clothes, while the production function is outsourced. The in-house design makes the setting more creative and complex. There are longer lead times and the purchasing function is more complicated due to the design element, which is absent in Fashion Inc.'s other purchasing department that trades with established globally and locally known fashion brands. The "brand" focused department can react to market fluctuations more quickly than the own brand department because of shorter lead times and no design element. There are numerous clothes brands operating under the Fashion Inc.'s own brand department, which caters for a wide variety of customers, men, women and children, offering different items ranging from outerwear to women's accessories. The department we researched has 52 employees including three managers.

The purchasing department is divided into different teams, each responsible for purchasing functions of different brands. Each Buying and Planning Organization (BPO) team consists of six members: buyer, planner, buying and planning assistants, designer and garment technician. Each of the members has distinct standardized tasks and responsibilities. These will be described in detail further in the paper.

4.1.1 The Buying Planning Organization (BPO)

As mentioned earlier the BPO includes different team members and involves different tasks and responsibilities. We think at this point it is important to explain what each member of the BPO does. The BPO does not only concern the own brands department, but also the departments that purchase brand clothes for Fashion Inc. The BPO was introduced in Fashion Inc. a couple of years ago to improve efficiency of the purchasing process. Currently, the BPO went through a re-launch for the employees of the own brand purchasing department. The re-launch was seen necessary because of the differences in the purchasing practices of the own brand department compared to the rest of Fashion Inc. The own brands department therefore needed to tailor the BPO processes to fit their needs. Nowadays, the BPO is team oriented and responsibility for performance of each brand is shared among the team. There was a new addition to the team, the planning function, which before was done by the buyer. The buyer was considered to be central in the team, however today the planner has equal importance and influence in the team. According to our observations of informal talk the BPO was considered to be a radical change and it was difficult for some people to readjust to present practices. Today however, people are more positive and see it as something that changes continuously towards something better.

In the BPO everyone has their own responsibilities in the process, which make the tasks specialized and tailored to each member of the BPO. The brand manager is responsible for purchasing and placing orders for clothes, for the brand image, communication with suppliers and the design of the collection in tight cooperation with the designer. The Planner on the other hand is responsible for budgeting, forecasting sales, planning clearing sales campaigns, sales analysis and tracking warehouse inventory. The designer in contrast is responsible for the major creative input of the team. Designers' tasks include things such as identifying major trends, going on idea trips, planning the collection and making sketches. The garment technician works closely with the designer and as the name suggests is responsible for practicalities related to the garments. The garment technician is responsible for the sizing scales, approving clothes samples from suppliers and assessing quality. The assistants have more operative roles. The planning assistant is responsible for tracking and tracing, checking shipping schedules for goods, asking for invoices, taking different sales reports, replenishment settings for goods, allocation of good in stores, creating clearing sales and other problem solving related to goods and the computer systems in use. The buying assistant is responsible for

processing purchasing orders in the computer system, item creation in the computer system, checking the correctness of invoices, inputting loyal customer campaigns, keeping contact with marketing department and price ticket ordering. Generally speaking, all of the members have distinct and separate tasks to work on, which make division of labor noticeable in the BPO-process and to certain extent quite routinized.

4.1.2 The process of creating clothes

The BPO can be also viewed as a process with the goal to create clothes and sell them in the stores. The process starts with the designers and buyers going on idea trips to get the grip on current fashion trends. Before that, the planner analyses the previous sales to help the buyer and designer focus on commercial items to consider on their trip. After the trip the designer, buyer and planner sit down to plan their collection. After the approval of the collection by the management, the designer starts to make sketches of the designs for the future collection. The designer always works a year ahead of for example the planner. The sketches come to life when they are sent to the supplier who makes a preliminary sample of the item. The sample is then approved or adjusted as needed by the garment technician. Parallel to this process the buyer has negotiated the price and the quantities to be ordered. The buyer then enters the orders into the system and the buying assistant creates the items and the order in the computer system as well as orders the price tags for the clothes. The planning assistant is the last person involved with the process, planning assistants tracks the order and solves the problems with delay and transportation problems that may arrive. The planning assistant also establishes replenishment parameters for the goods and allocates the items into the stores. After the item has been sold in the stores the planner analyses the sales and the stock left in the warehouse. Then possible clearing campaigns are planned to get the product out of the warehouse and the stores. Everyone in the BPO process has their particular part in it and each member has a different relationship with the end product. Each member also works in a different point in time, for example the designer works in the future (one year ahead) and the planner works with the data acquired about the past performance. We believe basic understanding of the BPO will bring more sense to the reader when going through our findings.

4.2 Perceptions of routines at Fashion Inc.

During the interviews it was interesting to see how well embedded are some of the values of Fashion Inc. in our respondents, such as profit orientation, customer orientation and efficiency. When the respondents were asked a question “What does the

team want to accomplish?” the most common answers were good sales, good volume and good quality goods at a reasonable price. We believe that this way of thinking governs the way each of the BPO member works. High profit orientation is at the centre of the BPO teams and each member gives their share of effort to contribute to the profit. In our understanding it seems that commercialization; the striving for profit and efficiency has made Fashion Inc. launch the BPO process in the organization, which is governed by routinized procedures and specialized tasks. Below we will describe BPO-member’s routines and perceptions of them.

4.2.1 Perceptions of routines

Generally speaking most of the respondents did not experience their routine work as something negative. Routine tasks were mostly defined as something obligatory, or governed by the basic work processes. On a general level, routine tasks included responding to e-mails, inputting information in the computer systems, planning sales, taking reports, attending weekly meetings, inspecting clothing samples and other tasks depending on the time of the year. Some parts of the year can be very busy for different team members, for example the time around campaigns is busy for assistants and the time around collection planning is busy for the design team.

The year itself consists of two seasons, the spring-summer season and the fall-winter season. The year is also divided into 12 “drops” or months. The collection is designed and planned for each season at a time, with different items falling into separate drops. However, special campaigns and loyal customer offers are designed and followed separately. The design part of the team usually works a year ahead, while the planning side of the team works with data showing past performance in order to analyze and forecast sales and make budgets for different brands of clothing.

The buyers seem to be happy with their routine work because they have a good balance of standardized work and creative work. The buyers try to keep a balance between the creative and commercial side. The buyers’ routine tasks involve, e-mail correspondence, planning campaigns, checking sales, making orders, negotiating on prices and volumes and making store visits when they have time. Other tasks connected to the yearly cycle, may include idea trips and factory visits, however these are much less frequent. Buyers said that they have a lot of variation in their work:

“Everyday is different, there are problems that need to be solved fast, or problems in the stores.”

In general buyers are positive about routine work but they are also saying that some of the mechanical tasks could be delegated to the assistants to handle. Buyers are more interested in networking and acquiring new information that can be beneficial for improvements of their products. A buyer pointed out that:

“I am more interested in going to shops and see what’s selling now, I am also interested in selling. When we have [name] campaign I go there for two days and sell. You always get some new ideas when you go work there, like how fitting can be improved.”

The buyers tend to enjoy some freedom in their work, it was expressed that buyers have “free hands” on how to do things in the frame of the planned budget. Buyers tend to be in the driving seat of the team, however they acknowledge that and want to give more power to the planners. It was stressed that decisions are always made in a team. The buyers may feel in the centre because they are act as a mediator between the design side and the planning side and they need to find the right balance between the creative and commercial side of business as stated before.

The planners we interviewed seemed to be happy with their work, even though they also had their fair share of routine work such as taking and analyzing reports, making budgets and analyzing stock figures. Planners also think they keep the balance between the creative and commercial side of business, as was expressed by the buyers above. As one planner said “My role is to keep the balance between the fashion and the economics”. The planners did not experience that they have too many routines or that they were constraining. It was expressed that there are many specific tasks involved around busy times, such as collection creation period, where the planners attend many collection meetings and campaign periods. The work was more perceived as problem solving rather than clear-cut routine. There were certain tasks that had to be done, but the execution of the tasks, the timeframe and best practice methods were not specified. One of the planners also stressed the importance of the communication in the team, specifically with the buyer and the designer. This was to avoid miscommunication

The garment technicians experience routines positively, they have a specific education for a specific job that might prepare them for a specialized job. The garment technician's routines were identified as to making sizing scales, examining samples, commenting on the quality and adjusting sizing. They find routines as positive, although their tasks are quite routinized they can use a creative approach to make the clothes better, they get satisfaction when the clothes fit the customer.

The designers' perception of routines is a bit different from others. It is more about answering emails, commenting, meeting with the buyer and fitting sessions. The rest of the time is spent on sketching – the process of creation. The routines are constraining for designers' time for creative job. Routines take away time for sketching of coming styles and the yearly cycle puts time pressure that governs the creative work. One designer commented, *"There is a little bit too much meetings sometimes and we do not have so much time for that"*. The other designer commented, *"The sketching timetable is really tight at Fashion Inc. It is a little problem because I do not have time to think about the details"*. The designers' creative process can also be seen as a routine, even though there is no standardized process or tasks involved, they are still expected to come up with sketches for the collections. When designer's talk about constrains it's more about time resources and brand image that they have to follow.

The assistants are involved mostly in routinized work of the members of the BPO. They are mostly involved with inputting data into the computer. For example buying assistant creates sales items in the computer system, create orders, order price tickets for clothes, and create loyal customer sales campaigns in the system. The planning assistants tend to follow up on the goods, track when the goods are in stores, create store replenishment settings, make goods allocations, take different sales reports and make sizing analysis.

Both the planning and the buying assistants seemed to be satisfied with their job, however they felt that they are not challenged enough and sometimes find the work monotonous. The assistants would like to use their cognitive capacities more. As two assistant pointed out: *"I would like to use my brain more"* and *"They (routines) are not stressful, they are too easy"*. Some of the assistants expected more use of their analytical skills and to be more involved with fashion in their work, since some of the respondents had a background in fashion related studies. Some of the assistants wanted to be closer to the end product itself, but did not really know how they would benefit from that in

their day-to-day work. One assistant told that being close to the product is not really necessary in the type of work she does.

The assistants were the ones least satisfied with their routines because they had too much routine work and not so many opportunities use their analytical skills. Their discontent was also flavored with the problems with the new computer system, which makes the execution of their routine work much more problematic, since the computer system is not completely tailored. Other members of the BPO don't have to face the problems with the clumsiness of computer system themselves, which makes the assistants frustrated with their routine work. However, planners also experienced frustration while working with the slow and inaccurate reporting system and lack of analytical tools. Both the assistants and the planners are not frustrated with the routine work itself, but with the lack of efficiency to perform their basic work tasks. This suggests that both of them see routines as enabling for executing operational work efficiently.

Drawing from the empirical material we believe that the closer the employee was to the product itself, the less routinized or structured work s/he was involved in. The designer tends to be closest to the product and the assistants being the furthest. We think that the closeness to or the intimate relationship with the product helps employees handle the mundane daily routines better and make the work more satisfactory. The buyers talked about the importance of knowing the product you are working with and the assistants felt that they get satisfaction from being more close to the product.

4.2.2 Clear cut responsibilities

It was said that routines give employees structure to their work and as one assistant pointed out that the BPO "is much better than it was before". Numerous respondents talked about clarity of work tasks. Clarity was seen as a theme which repeatedly came up. Employees seem to like the clear-cut responsibilities. One of the assistants mentioned: "*The BPO is much better then before and much clearer with responsibilities*". Also the buyer side agrees and one buyer mentions:

"I think we have a quite well working organization now. Our bosses are also quite clear who is responsible for what. I think that is the most

important thing, what is expected from you, and when you also have the support from the bosses”.

However, we are not sure whether the importance of role clarity in the BPO came up in the interviews because of a recent divisional meeting about the BPO or because of the fact that the respondents sincerely considered it as important. Nevertheless, it was considered important, almost everyone tried to describe their role and responsibilities as diligently as possible. Some of the respondents brought policy documents explaining what each member should be doing; this shows how clear-cut and specialized the jobs are supposed to be. We think some of the reasons for importance of clarity of work tasks are division of responsibility and promotion of effectiveness. One planner pointed out that their team is focusing on making the task more clear for everyone and ensuring that everyone knows what they should be doing to make the work process more efficient.

We believe that routines are enabling for most members of the BPO, excluding the designers, from a perspective of efficiency. The clarity of responsibilities gives employees the feel of control over their area. It is also easy for team members to control each other and see whether the work has been done properly and on time. Clarity is particularly important because the BPO is still being adjusted to make it better and more efficient.

4.3 Reactive creativity and challenges of being proactive

Employees at Fashion Inc. perceive routines and structures in work differently, which also can affect how creativity in the BPO-process is understood. From our material we identified mainly two different ways the respondents talked about creativity: creativity related to the clothes designing and creativity related to problem solving. The first is linked to the process of creating new clothes, while the latter one refers to solving situations that come up along the way in the work processes. Each member of the BPO experienced his or her own role in creativity differently; however everyone experienced problem solving as one major aspect of creativity. Furthermore, identified two types of creativity, reactive and proactive creativity, which is in line with Unsworth's (2001) framework. Reactive creativity was associated with routines and problem solving, while proactive creativity was associated with opportunities in designing clothes and searching for new opportunities on the market.

Before our empirical research we assumed that the assistants would not be that creative and that proved to be true to a certain extent. Their creativity carried a reactive nature to triggers around them because of the closed nature of the problem. We also assumed that especially designers would be very creative and opportunistic, behaving very proactively in their creative process. However, we found that they are constrained by different issues making them engage in reactive creativity, although they were striving towards proactive behavior, opportunity seeking and introduction of new ideas.

4.3.1 Reactive creativity

The assistants have all replied that their work is not really creative. Given the routinized nature of their work, it is not surprising. Mostly all of assistants work revolves around routines, relatively far away from the creation of the end product. They feel that creativity has a nature of problem solving – a rather reactive approach to creativity. As a reaction to something that happened caused by the BPO, one assistant pointed out:

“Creativity comes in when we have a problem and we have to figure out a creative way to solve the problem. It’s a new problem and nobody knows how to solve it, that’s the creativity.”

It was also mentioned that there does not necessarily need to be creativity at the assistant level because it takes time from actual work the assistant needs to accomplish. For example:

“I can find some things that could be better in a way. I like it, but I should focus on the daily tasks I have been given and not improve the processes.”

Creativity as problem solving was not only present in assistant level, but also planners and garment technicians. The planners think that creativity is used to tackle problems in their work, for example:

“I think there is a great deal of creativity because of the problems in the systems and you have to find new way of finding out numbers, how to forecast and there are no tools for forecasting, so you have to figure it out by yourself.”

Planners seemed to be interested in problem solving probably because of the challenges they face give them satisfaction unlike in the case of the assistants. As another planner pointed out that creativity and numbers don't really go together, it seems that the nature of planner is more being systematic. However, creativity can be seen in improving analytical skills and learning more about how numbers behave and how can they be influenced. The creative side of the business was left to the buyers and the designers.

The garment technicians however, perceive their work as more creative because it affects the end product itself, how it feels, fits and looks. The garment technician is in close contact with the designer who is the creator of the garment itself. There is no right approach to the garment technicians' problem, as one garment technician stated "Everyday I learn something new". We believe that learning is part of creativity. Creativity stems from experience or reacting to past experiences and creating something new. Creativity through learning was also inline with the planner's thoughts shown above.

4.3.2 Challenges of proactive creativity in the BPO

By proactive behavior we mean that the employee needs to hold the initiative to identify the problem and present possible solutions. Being proactive is being able to see into the future and proactive creativity also needs to flow from within the person. We saw that the proactive creativity is more for the designers, and to some extent the buyers. They are the most creative people in the team. They are the ones that create trends, collections and the clothes themselves.

However, we believe that the designers are not truly proactive; they are constrained by different things such as the brand image, commercialisation, management's ideas and time. All of these things combined limit what the designer can create. The designer has to operate in certain frames and sometimes it can be very challenging. A couple of our respondents pointed out that they would not like to be designers. They stressed that it is very hard work and that you have to please the managers.

"The designer makes the collection and then the bosses come and say that you need to change this and that and that and this...I think the bosses need to trust us more, the BM and the designer"

Some members from the design team pointed out that the designer needs to put a lot of energy into “selling” the collection to the managers, while that time can be put to better use, such as creative work. The designer is the one that should be in the driving seat when it comes to design. One designer explicitly pointed out that there need to be more creativity involved in the work because the collections stems from the designer.

“I make the trends, I am telling what to do...the collection is the thing we are going to sell, so it is very important. I think the designers have a lot to say.”

The conservative nature of the Fashion Inc. brand itself was also mentioned on the interviews, it is also something that limits the designer. The brand image is something the designer needs to follow, they can't change very fast, it is a creative process of evolution rather than evolution. As on designer pointed out:

“We are missing, you know, contemporary collection... in a way we are going towards that direction. We can't change it so much, so it is difficult, it should be casual and yet contemporary.”

Too much outside influence might choke the designer's creative potential, especially if the limitations come from all different direction and there is too little time to think in order to please every party. We believe that creativity also believing in oneself and taking risks as one buyer pointed out.

The time issue was also identified, one designer said that previously he was working with two brands and did not have time for the creative work. We believe that creativity may suffer from lack of time. Now that he's working on one brand, he finds that there is enough time for creative work:

“I had so little time for design, I just had to come up with something really quickly. For example to create something I did not have enough time. I think the workload is much easier to handle now”

The designers are quite autonomous and it seemed that they seem to be less involved in the BPO itself: *“The BPO-thing is not too familiar to me...I don't have any idea what to*

change". They do work closely with the buyer and planner, but it seems as if they are a bit detached from the whole team. That is not necessarily a bad thing since they seemed extremely busy and emphasized the fact that they need time to make sketches – the creative part of their work. The designers seem to aim for proactive creativity, by expressing new ideas and identifying new opportunities together with the buyer and planner, but there are different things listed above to consider in creative work.

The buyers' felt that they are very creative in their work, they can be "*as creative as we want*". Buyers do not have too many routines that would constrain them and they have the time left for designing the future collection together with the planner and the designer. The buyers find their work very creative:

"That (creativity) is an important part of this. What you need to be as a buyer is creative because we need to as well think about the trends and colors. Even if the designer makes the sketches, there is a lot of work to do with color cards, themes and trends."

As we showed above employees perceive creativity differently depending on their position in the BPO and the closeness to the product. Designer and the buyers are the ones closest to the product and enjoy the less routinized work, which consequently frees up time for creative work. The assistants are mostly distant to the product and involved in routinized work and numerical data, perceiving creativity as problem solving, thus capping their creative potential. Additionally it can be said that the more routine work the employees did the less involved they were in creativity. In Fashion Inc. we see that a creative approach to routine work could actually hinder the employee's involvement with more routine tasks. And the opposite, the more creative the work has to be, the less routines govern that type of work. The designers and the buyers said that they could be very creative; however, their creativity carries a great deal of reactive nature. Lastly, in the setting of Fashion Inc. we found that the more closer you are to the product the more creativity you can feel, which bring us to the next section of our findings.

4.4 Teamwork and distribution of creativity

Under this paragraph we will explain our findings related to perceptions of working in teams, it was a salient theme under our research that the respondents constantly returned to. The team-theme is also related to perceptions of routine work, where we

found how workers conform to their role in the routinized work process and the rational goals of efficiency of the organization. For instance, the assistants want more task diversity and challenges, but not on the cost of the efficiency and goals of the team. One of the assistants talked about how she wants more challenges in work and more cooperation within the team, but she also mentioned *"It cannot be done on the price that I do not do the part of my work well"*. From our empirical study we found that the sense of belonging to a team provides meaning to the single worker, and that the creative output of the team provides positive narratives even for the more routinized workers. Associating with creative work and taking pride in the products and outcomes, might evoke positive feelings to experience routinized work as more meaningful. To describe this finding at Fashion Inc. we will present it in three parts for the reader to understand the whole picture; firstly, how the commercial focus is central in the teams. Secondly, how the teamwork is fragmented because of the BPO and its routines and thirdly, talk about how most of the workers still associate with the creative process of making clothes.

4.4.1 Teams with focus on commercialism

As we mentioned before, we found that commercialization lies in the heart of our case company. We believe that commercialization will affect how the employees perceive routines and creativity. The fact that the team emphasizes the importance of commercialization will effect how team members relate themselves to creativity. We find that the emphasis on commercialization influences how routines are designed and how teamwork is organized in different teams.

Every week the whole BPO-team gathers for a short meeting. The planners are responsible for the meetings, which they direct. The meetings focus on numerical performance because of the nature of the planning position. The meetings are appreciated by all members and are carried out in an informal style. One of the planning assistants comment: *"[name of the planner] will present the numbers, but I think we talk really freely. Everyone is allowed to comment on the sales and things they want to say"*. Meetings are considered helpful from all the team members and can open up discussions to understand certain issues or numbers. As one of the planners mentioned, *"Then maybe the assistant remembers that something was flown in late. Then the picture completes and we know what's happening"*. One of the buyers also had a positive sense of the meetings: *"We discuss many things there, we discuss sales, deliveries and problems we had, is everything on time, holiday issues and how we arrange things"*. The weekly

meeting is the only time of the week when the whole group gathers and discusses the sales performance and other issues that seem important.

The planner positions were introduced with the launch of the BPO. Before the team was primarily lead by the buyer, but now the planners has increasingly gained power in the team. Planners have also become involved in the creative process of fashion. The new structure has led to different power dynamic in the teams and has directed the focus more towards numerical data of past performance. One of the planners described how he nestled in to the design process with the buyer and the designer:

“I was not involved in those meetings [trend meetings] in the beginning, but now I told them I have to be there, that they make time reservations so I know I have time to attend. There we can see the styles which we have had already, and if the numbers were bad we are not having them again, or far less”

As we have seen above the BPO emphasizes commercial aspects of business, which overshadow creativity. There is a clear focus on efficiency and specialization of the routine tasks. From this sense the commercialization guides the creative process in the teams.

4.4.2 Teamwork at Fashion Inc.

The discourse of teamwork is salient at Fashion Inc. and employees in the routinized BPO-process like to talk about how they enjoy teamwork. When we looked deeper into the empirical material, the teams seemed to be quite fragmented, doing mostly independent work or working in pairs. This might stand against the conventional take on teamwork, where the group works more together in a creative manner. Furthermore, team fragmentation seems to decrease involvement in the creative process of creating clothes from certain members of the BPO-teams, for instance assistants.

There are some team members of the BPO that work more frequently with each other and others are left out. The three positions of buyer, planner and designer are having most say and sometimes it seems that teams mostly consist of this trio, while the other three members (garment technician, buying assistant and planning assistant) are more supportive. One of the planners is talking about work in pairs as team oriented: *“Me and my buyer, we are talking about things like what style and color we are going to make.*

There it is very teamwork oriented". One of the buyers also describe some of the teamwork with a small part of the team when leaving out the assistants from important parts of the teamwork: "...then we get samples of items and we check the content of those together with the designer. And then at the same time we also plan the next season together with the planner all the time, we have meetings for that now".

The assistants and the garment technician are more of an extension that supports the more powerful trio. One of the garment technicians say: *"It is the buyer and the designer who I discuss the most with. Not so much with the planning assistant, quite seldom".* Further, some respondents at the assistant level for example have said that they are alone with their problems because other team members either can't help them or don't understand the problem in the first place, for instance:

"Sometimes I feel that when we have problems you are all alone with your problem, another assistant might be able to help you but other people of the team don't understand the problem and don't know how to solve it".

"I am alone next to a wall...I don't have a close team. If the team would be next to me I would hear more about the numbers, the collection and the problems".

The fragmentation in the teams is also present in other ways, our observations at the office shows little evidence that people from different positions have informal relations. It is more about socializing with people from the same role in the BPO, as assistants with assistants. The interviews also show on unawareness of other members in some BPO-teams. Several people do not know what the others are doing, which we believe confirms the fragmentation of the teams. However, luckily there is progress in the teams and coming team-meetings will focus on understanding of each other's work. One of the designers refers to a meeting last week:

"We had a big meeting about the BPO, it was the first time I saw the whole picture of this. When you come here the induction was really bad, only two hours"

It was surprising for us to find fragmentations inside the teams, which is not inline with the traditional notion of teamwork where people sit and solve tasks together. We believe that fragmentation in the teams is an obstacle for people to be involved in the creative process of creating clothes. Our findings show that commercialization is what the teams are focused on where routines and specializations of work tasks leads to exclusion from the creative nature of fashion.

Assistants – as being excluded from the creative process of fashion

The creative process of making clothes seems to be for a smaller part of the team; designers, buyers and planners. The garment technicians are also involved in the clothes because of the nature of the profession, but the assistants are more supporting the others with commercial duties and seems excluded from the creative fashion process, hence the team meetings are more about numbers.

Commercial facts, as numbers and sales, are constantly distributed in the teams, for instance the designers and the garment technicians are happy to be included in the commercial aspects. However, the creative facts of fashion are more limited to a smaller group. Most explicitly the assistants are excluded from the creative work. One of the planners embraces the hierarchy of the routinized process and talks about roles in the team:

“To be in those collection meetings is a matter of time as well. They [assistants] have a lot of daily tasks that have to be done, and also prepare input in to the system”.

One of the assistants describes the cooperation: *“I also do some things for and work with planners but with studio (designer & garment technician) not so much. When I attend weekly meetings they show me some trends, but there is not so much”.* One of the buying assistants agrees with the picture of getting excluded from the big events, such as idea trips: *“I’m not sure when they are going to Shanghai or NY, what they are doing there I’m not sure”.*

Including assistants in the creative process of fashion

Even if the meetings have a commercial focus, the creative process of designing clothes is sometimes involved by distributing information of the collections and trends. One of the buyers exemplifies: *“When new prints are arriving I ask everyone, is this good or not. I*

think then the people, they believe the brand more if they know more and can give their opinion. That is very simple information". The designers can be considered as the drivers for the creative process. The designers gave examples on how they sometimes show samples and new trends and admit that there can be more of that. For instance one of the designers mention:

"Of course we try to give some information of things we've seen on trips to New York or something like that. And of course we try to show them new trends a couple times a season. But it could be much more of course, and that's partly because we have not enough time. It's always quite difficult."

The weekly meetings is a chance for the designer to share their information about the trends and the collections. The weekly meetings provide a forum for communication about important issues in the team, where any member can state their opinion. Sometimes the assistants also get included in the creative process when the designers, garment technicians or buyers ask assistants for quick opinions on colors, styles and fabric spontaneously. To what extents the assistants are included in the fashion process varies between teams and is up to individual traits and team atmosphere. It is more about how team members share information and socialize on an informal basis. We however, do not think that this is enough to involve the assistants in the creative process and whether it is necessary for the team and the organization.

The norms at Fashion Inc. is to embrace your role, which in the case for assistants are to do routines work and sometimes get information about the products, we believe that there is more to work with in this aspect. Our empirical material shows the prospects of sharing information about the fashion process. One of the assistants mentioned: *"We would be more inspired if we could make it more different every time, so that we would not look at the numbers more strictly. Maybe some presentations from designers."* After a while in the interview the assistant returned to the topic and started talking about being involved with a team and getting a sense of fashion:

"Now we have a very good team so that we are interested in what we sell. Today one designer said, would it be interesting for me to see all the samples they bought from New York. Of course I like to see them, she will

show them in the team meeting. Only the number won't tell anything to me”.

Another assistant agreed when we talked about getting involved with the products together with the team: *“Well, yes. For example today we got new samples from [name of supplier] and we were all in our room and this looks really good. So maybe yes. Always when we get new samples and they are great, we always talk about them”.*

Evidently, some employees in the BPO are included more than others in the creative process. The ones more included, such as designers, buyers and planners, are happy with that, but the assistants are expressing more thoughts of isolations from the creative process. However, the fragmented nature of the teams and exclusion from the creative side of fashion caused by routinized work and task specialization does not spoil feelings of belonging to a team.

Experiences of good atmosphere in teams

The intentions of the BPO were to gain efficiency by clear division of labor, however it brought a sense of teamwork. The sense of belonging to a team brings good effects for individuals, many of the responders are positive about the atmosphere and how that lights up the day. For instance the assistants are aware of their quite routinized days of work, but the sense of belonging somewhere and the social aspects bring meaning. One of the assistants tells: *“I come here in the morning... I like that we have nice and fun people here. I like to be involved with people and here people are my co-workers”.* Another assistant agrees that the social aspects make the routinized side of work easier: *“You can tell about your own life and your personal life her, but business life is kind of hard.”* Designers that are more individual workers also express the positive sides of team atmosphere. One of the designers mentioned a story and emphasized on working for a common goal: *“I noticed that we have a very good atmosphere here and it is really easy to work with my planner and buyer. We all like to have the same goal and it has to be clear to everyone.”* One of the garment technicians shares the experience of common goals: *“It is a joint decision with other team members. I think I have an important role, but this teamwork is not just me, it is helping other team members”.*

Evidently, the BPO provides the sense of a positive team atmosphere, but there are also some criticisms of how the teams are constructed. One of the buyers suggests that recruitments can be done more from the sense of building a team:

“In this company they hire the people without thinking about the team members. When they build the teams they did not care about which type of people are working together”.

This suggests that the positive effects from team atmosphere are not intended from management because their focus is to fill roles in a routinized process. So, even if the BPO provides a sense of teamwork the teams are still fragmented and the teamwork is still done mostly in sequential processes. However, even if the assistants are excluded from the creative process due to routinized work, information and a sense of belonging to the team provides value of meaning. Most people in the BPO still associate themselves with the process of making clothes, which from our findings can be positive for the individuals.

4.4.3 Associations with the creative process

Involvement in the creative process of making clothes is not really for everyone, in a team the designer is the driver together with the buyer and the planner. The garment technician is supporting them while the assistants are left to the operational routine work that is far from the creative fashion process. How it should be, is another question, what we found of greater interest it that some of the workers actually associate their own narratives to the creative process even with the knowledge of their operational work.

The group of designers, buyers and planners, but also the garment technician, see themselves close to the process of making clothes and enjoy the creative nature of their work. One of the planners says *“it is nice because we have the creativity, the design in the same team”*. One of the buyers agrees:

“It's good to have the combination and to have the theoretical point of view and the creative side. It's really interesting to see what we have to sell and what we should do to get to this target. Start thinking about the products, really interesting”.

It is nice to be in and associate with a creative team, also the group of more excluded workers of assistants also seems to draw their position to the creative process of making clothes. We are interested in the fact that they see themselves as machines far away

from the creative process but still associate themselves with the creative symbolism the fashion industry provides. Generally, to handle, buy and design clothes can be considered as quite creative. One of the assistants that has aspirations to work with fashion describes how she felt about her work: *"I like it because we are making our own collections and its not so common in Finland, it is also high quality even though some people might think it is not"*. She studied commercial fashion in university that we think affects her eagerness to associate with the creative process: *"I like it, because that is what I always studied, so, it is important to me that I am working in the place where clothes are produced"*. Another assistant also liked the fact that the team is designing clothes:

"I think it is really great because when I studied I did not even know that we had own brands, now I really see our designers sitting here. I think it is great and I had told all my friends that lives in [area in Finland], "did you know we have our own brands and that I'm working there, and it's really high quality, buy them", I think it's really great because we are making good things".

A third assistant has similar stories and is proud about the products. Also the fact that it is private labels helps to draw a positive narrative because it fits with her values:

"The own brands were one of the reasons I applied here. I've been always interested in own brands and like the concepts... I like the idea that you're not buying the brand but you buy the goods. We are actually trying to make good quality on them, in some cases there can be an expensive brand item, which is made in poorer conditions than our goods, or same conditions but it costs three times more than our goods"

"It is not just buying goods from supplier, we are creating it and in a way have the possibility to influence the goods. For instance, if we get feedback from customers, for instance if the pant legs are too long we can make them shorter".

Alienation from the creative process

Association with the creative process is not always salient, another assistant has a different view. She also perceives her work as routinized with lack of challenges as the

other assistants, but she can also be described as alienated from work. She has a cynical attitude to the work and we believe this is due to her little interest of the clothes, *"I can see them, but I won't so much, I have the numbers and the delivery. I don't need to see them, I am not so interested"*. What the alienated position from work can depend on is hard to say, but from our view the sense of belonging to the team and association to the creative process is not there for this person. Work for her is *"I am just doing what everyone else is saying"* and from that perspective the sense of creative teamwork is lacking.

4.5 Concluding thoughts

From the interviews and time spent at Fashion Inc. we gained a lot of insight of the purchasing department and how employees perceive routines and creativity. As presented in the findings we saw that the routines of the BPO were perceived positively, especially when employees talked about role clarification and how the BPO provided efficiency in their daily tasks. When it comes to creativity we saw that the employees talked about creativity as problem solving. We also saw that the more the routinized job is the further away from the product the employees were. Employees also perceive the BPO as a source for team belonging and positive work atmosphere. However, given the fragmented nature of the team, we found it interesting that team members still find comfort in thinking about their team in a positive light and associate with the creative nature of the team. This is some of our findings that we will address below in our discussion.

5. Discussion

One of our main discoveries was the fact that creativity in routinized work can have a symbolic meaning for employees, where the perception of creativity can be contagious. By contagious, we mean that perceptions of creativity can spread inside the team and make routinized work more meaningful. Additionally, we also saw that routines can be perceived as enabling, where structures help employees gain efficiency in their own role and for the organization. However, in our case company the routinization that stems from commercial goals might challenge creativity, novel thinking and reflexivity. Therefore, we question how enabling routines can be for both the individual and the organization, if creativity is taken into the equation. Below we will elaborate on our findings and the implications for the research field.

5.1 Symbolic meaning of creativity

In the routinized work setting, we discovered a new understanding of how employees perceive creativity. Our empirical material showed that employees saw symbolic value in creativity. By symbolism we mean the way that a person makes sense of their perceptions of surroundings, such as work, socialization and culture. Alvesson (2013) has a more critical view on symbolism; he talks about symbolism as people looking good in the eyes of themselves and others:

“All human action is in a sense symbolic. However, I am after something different here: actions with very little “substance” or material referent, which are not clearly communicated or recognized as being “purely” symbolic (like baptisms, weddings and other ceremonies).” (p.22)

Our findings showed how employees involved in mostly routinized work associated themselves with the creative process at the case company. For example, most of the assistants talked about how they took pride in being involved in clothes production. They talked about how they liked to interact with clothes, by touching, feeling and also getting information about them. However, creativity around planning and designing clothes is limited to only a few member of the BPO-team, such as designer and buyer. The rest of the members associated with the creative process on a symbolic level, which helps them to draw a positive narrative of themselves and their work. For instance, being associated with the fashion industry and making clothes is in line with some

individual goals of assistants in the case company. Some of the assistants have aspirations to work in the fashion industry and like to be associated with that.

We believe that the perceptions of creativity can be contagious in a team, such as laughter and a good mood. Our findings fit with Madjar, Greenberg & Chen (2011) that highlighted how workers with more operational routinized tasks associate with more creative workers and start thinking more creatively themselves. Feelings of creativity can move from the most creative persons outwards. However, the employees involved in routine work i.e. assistants and planners; can express their interest in the creative members of the team and their work. A good example of this was the planner who got engaged in the collection meetings, however the assistants do not have a chance to attend those meetings. The sharing of perceptions of creativity takes form in explicit interaction with the creative members of the team. As mentioned earlier, the assistants get feelings of the creativity from interactions with other team members, when they get information about fashion trends and clothes styles. The extent to which the perception of creativity spreads depends on the nature of the team, informal relationships and team dynamics. Madjar, Greenberg & Chen (2011) see the contagiousness as people getting more creative themselves, when they are around creative workers. As we showed in the findings, assistants got happier when they got involved with the actual product. The team discussed about samples, fabrics, colors and ideas for future collections. The assistants felt indirectly included in the creative nature of fashion, even though their role in the BPO is dealing with routines in operational work.

From Alvesson's (2013) perspective of symbolic meaning, the symbolic perception of creativity might lack substance. Laughter, as is the perception of creativity can also be contagious, but it might not make someone actually happier. What we mean is that finding symbolic meaning in creativity won't necessarily make a particular employee creative per se. Alvesson (2013) also mentions some negative effects when people start painting nicer pictures of ones self. Not fulfilling those unrealistic ambitions might lead to not only bad self-esteem, but also cynicism towards the organization. In our study we did not see these negative affects that Alvesson (2013) highlights. It might be because of time limit we had in our study that made it hard to identify long term negative effects, thus we suggest more research on this issue.

Our material indicates that the symbolic distribution of creativity might be positive for employee's perceptions of routine work. We started our research with fairly negative assumptions of routinized work and that it would foster alienation in the organization. However, after conducting our empirical study we were surprised of the lack of alienation from routinized work. In particular we were positively surprised that the assistants were talking positively about routines of the BPO, as it helped to accomplish the goals of the team. Most of the assistants also took pride in the creative work of fashion and the output of the team. Our finding that symbolic value of creativity has positive effects on routinized work are supported by one assistant's alienation, as what Sennet (1998) describes as dis-identification with the work and products in his bakery example presented earlier. We believe that in the assistant's case alienation happened because she could not extract the same positive symbolic meaning. She did not associate herself with the creative atmosphere of the team, as the other assistants did. Perhaps she was not introduced to the creative nature of the work in the team, thus she was unable to gain interest in her job. We believe that the symbolic meaning of creativity can be a distraction from alienation. However, we would also like to point out that without this distraction she might have the most realistic view of her job and about what is going on in the case company.

From our perspective alienation is something both the individual and the organization want to avoid. In order to avoid this and put some more substance in the symbolic meaning of creativity in fashion, team belonging could be the key. For instance the whole team could be more involved in the fashion process and promote intimacy with the products. The weekly meetings provide a good base for this, however there could be more discussion about the garment styles themselves. Members with challenging tasks, such as buyer and planner, could let their assistants be more involved in their work also, unleashing their analytical skills, creative potential and diluting their routine work.

We argue that symbolic sense of creativity is contagious from in team; we believe interaction and conversations around the product is a facilitator for this. At Fashion Inc. most of the employees associate with the creative work, but one of the assistants does not. We believe that this phenomenon depends on the sensemaking of a single worker. If we go back to Unsworth's & Clegg's (2010) research about motivation for creative work, we can see that they highlight how interpretation of factors such as culture, time and autonomy effects motivation to engage in creativity. Based on our research we would

like to add the factor of intimacy to the product to Unsworth's & Clegg's (2010) study. We found that employees got positive feelings from interacting with the products and how that fostered association with creativity. This is also in line with what Rennstam (2012) argues; that socialization with the product has an important role in the creative process. For example, as we observed in Fashion Inc. we saw designer, GT and buyer gather around a jacket, where socialization extracted creative ideas. As Rennstam (2012) argues, socialization is a part of the creative process of product development. When socialization around the products is thought as a part of the creative process, we argue that people involved in socialization will feel more creative.

Our findings reveal that the closer you are to the product the more creative you are, such as the designer is closest to the product and most creative while assistants are on the opposite side of the scale. We also found that the amount of routinized work takes away time from socialization that happens around the product. This evidently decreases the creative feel in for example assistants. The more routine you have the less time to talk with co-workers and the less intimate you are with the product, which certainly leads detachment from creativity. The team can provide a feeling of the creative process by communicating about the products and letting people with more routinized work be involved in the socialization around the product. The socialization around the product provides a base for dissemination of the feelings of creativity to all members of the team.

5.2 Enabling routines

Routine work occupies a big part of our study and therefore we will discuss the importance of routines and their effects on creativity. We found that well-crafted routines are enabling for the employees in Fashion Inc. because they want to execute their tasks effectively and with minimal obstacles and stress. We assume that this brings job satisfaction, reduces alienation, role conflict and ambiguity as outlined by Adler and Borys (1996). However, individuals might have other interest and would like more challenging tasks, in and this sense we can question how routines are enabling. Keeping employees satisfied with routine work is in the organizations interests because it gives the opportunity to make operations more efficient, time and cost effective. Furthermore as Ohly et al. (2006) explain routines might free up time that can be used for more cognitive work.

When the goals of the company overlap with the goals of the individual employee, the routine tasks are more likely be supported to gain efficiency (Adler & Borys, 1996). For

instance some of the assistants in our case company seem to be driven by efficiency in order to be seen as good assistants and therefore find the routine tasks as enabling. When something is disturbing their routine work, such as the new computer system related problems, which required out of the ordinary solutions, the assistants experienced frustration and felt that they fell behind in their tasks. If the routines are perceived as dysfunctional from the perspective of the employees' goal, it might also lead to loss of control over employees' area of work. However, the goals of the employees might be dual where for instance assistants aim for both efficiency and challenging tasks. From this point of view, too much efficiency focus in the routines might not be enabling for the individual that also want challenging tasks. In general, at Fashion Inc., we believe that routines are perceived as enabling for the employees, when they serve their interests of work efficiency, but not enabling for living out their creative potential. From the management perspective, we need to understand both the organizational and employee goals in order to talk about routines being enabling or coercive.

We have found that the routines are in the employees' interest also from another perspective; it reduces uncertainty (Alder & Chen, 2011) and from our perspective provides instant feedback on the task accomplished. The employees that are involved in more routine work are more likely to get more instant satisfaction than the designers who work with creativity and have more ambiguous and long term goals. For example, designers plan a year ahead and might not see the outcome of their work until the clothes start selling in the stores. The so-called instant satisfaction from goal accomplishments is difficult to gain in less routine work because of the difficulty of measuring the outcomes and ambiguous nature of design work. In highly routinized work, some satisfaction comes from effective job completion, however due to the continuous nature of routine work the employee might become trapped in a hamster wheel – eventually leading to low motivation and in worse case scenarios to alienation. This shows the ambiguous nature of routines, same structures can provide both satisfaction and dis-pleasure.

We believe that there is a strong link between routines and creativity. If we look at design work as a routine for designers, the ostensive and performative sides of the routine presented by Feldman & Pentland (2003) become interesting to examine. To remind, the ostensive part of the routine simply means the rules or the script for the

routine and the performative part of the routine means, as the name suggests the way in which the routine is executed. At our case company the design process seemed to be quite routinized; beginning with idea trips, sampling, making trends, planning the general collection with the buyer and planner and finally ending with drawing sketches on the computer for separate “drops” and seasons. This would be the ostensive part of routine design work. The performative aspect of the designer’s routine becomes more ambiguous because every designer has their own approach on how to execute the design. This suggests that the performative part of the routines gives the chance for the employee to express him or herself. However, we noticed that the performative aspect of the design routine is still controlled by the brand image, managers, buyers, planners opinions, fashion trends and consumer demands. The challenge of the designer is to stay within these set margins when performing their routine design tasks. Although the limitations seem to be harsh and controlling the designer’s performative aspect of the routine, the designer can still exert creativity. If we would compare two different designers working on the same task separately, with the same limitations, we would probably see different outcomes of the design. We suppose that routines and creativity can co-exist, however we find that creativity is constrained in a routinized setting.

We believe that commercialization brings the routines into design work, hence the name commercial design. For example, some garment technicians and buyers said that they do not envy the designers work due to the complexities involved in it:

“I see everyday what designing is for this kind of company, and it is quite hard”; “The designer’s job is not easy, I would not want to be a designer, the bosses they like to influence...”

The designer needs to follow all kinds of different rules and guidelines, work in tight schedules, listen to opinions and understand the pressure of commercial goals. In a commercial setting the design element becomes routine, without commercialization and routines design leans towards high fashion, which has its own challenges. The factors listed above influence the design routine forcing the designer constantly adjust along the way when performing the routine. We assume that this can make the routine experience frustrating. However, we believe that routine work in design reduces the ambiguous nature of design work, where the outcome is easier to predict and control. One designer said *“It is good to have some kind of guidelines; then it becomes easier.”*

In highly routine work, such as assistants inputting data into the computer, the performative aspect of the routine becomes less prevalent because of the low degree of required creativity and clear task outcome. The performative aspect of the routine work can be used as a motivator to flavor the routine. The employee could be allowed to perform the task in their own way one sees fit, in order to give some sort of variation to the daily mundane routine, in the attempt to increase job satisfaction. As we showed above intimacy to the product can act as a motivator for employees with routinized tasks. However, we believe there is only little the assistants can do to the performative element of their routine. We believe that employees at Fashion Inc. talk about routines as enabling because of the performative part of the routine outlined by Feldman and Pentland (2003). At Fashion Inc. the performative part of the routine gives the employees the chance to execute the routine in their own way and develop it over time. We believe that this also helps to stay away from Webers Iron cage of control (Chen, 2012). However, the performative element of the routine can be enjoyed more if the routine task has many paths towards the outcome – as we saw in the case of the design routine.

As mentioned before, we found how routines can be enabling to accomplish goals of the organization, but we would also like to discuss some coercive effects for different employees, especially from the perspective of being creative. Our material shows us that time is an important factor that effects possibilities for creativity. The literature is also unsure how time effects motivation for creativity, some claim that stress occurred by time limitations extracts creative outcomes, while others argue that people need time resources for the creative process (Unsworth & Clegg, 2010). This can be seen inline with our empirical material that shows how assistants have lack of time for creative work, due to highly routinized work tasks. The designers also felt that there is a lack of time due to routine tasks, excluding designing. These “must do” routine tasks took away time from the actual creative work the designers do. The stress from the lack of time limited the designers’ creative process; this might have resulted in hasty design outcomes. We believe that diving into the creative process takes time because one needs to make sense of all the uncertainties involved in commercial design as explained before.

5.3 The reactive-creative organization

We would like to broaden our discussion by talking about commercialization’s effect on creativity, which sets the background for routinized work in the context of a

contemporary office setting. From our research we found two types of creativity; people in the case company talked about creativity as designing clothes and creativity as solving problems. This is in line with normal definitions such as, creating something novel and seeing old problems from a new perspective (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffins, 1993; Marks & Huzzard, 2008). At first we thought that the two different perceptions of creativity we found had two different characteristics that are interesting to examine from the perspective of commercialization. Firstly, we believed that creativity involved in clothes design might entail a *proactive* approach, where new idea generation is seen important. Secondly, on the other hand, we assumed that creative problem solving carried a *reactive* nature towards tackling existing challenges. However, after deeper analysis we came across challenges to describe designing and making clothes as proactive creativity because of commercially set boundaries. We deduced that creativity in commercial clothes design limits, but does not exclude proactive behavior.

Unsworth (2001) talks about proactive creativity as voluntary, for example she argues: “*Volunteered suggestions for improving the manufacturing process by shop floor workers and unprompted proposals for new products*” (p.292). In Fashion Inc. we see that creativity is not about what Unsworth describes as proactive; for instance designers’ work and suggestions are voluntary to a certain extent, but they are stemming from external forces, such as demands from management to actually perform design work. Going back to Unsworth’s matrix, we argue that commercialization forces creativity down to the responsive nature (see figure 2), as we see in Fashion Inc. As stated in the findings, the planner and the buyer make the *problem type* closed for the designer by setting boundaries based on data from past experiences – commercialization from this

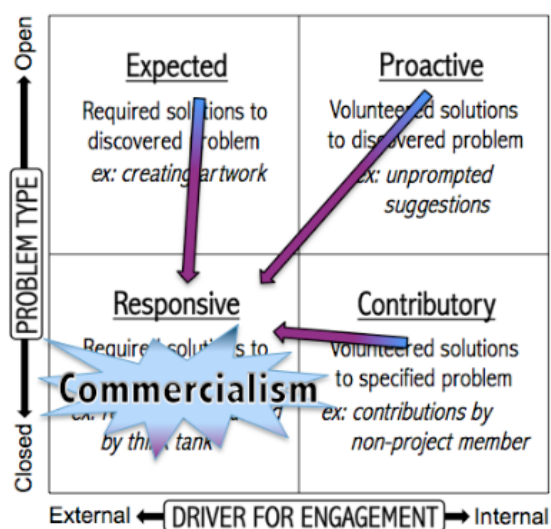


Figure 2. Rework version of Unsworth's (2001;291) framework where we show commercialisations effects on creativity.

perspective is closing the problem type by setting limitations to what should be done to achieve a certain goal. The designers should also operate in the dimensions set by the case company’s brand, own brand’s image and the clothes’ brand image. Commercialization also focuses on external factors as *drivers for engagement* in creativity. Additionally, the team members and managers might decline the “voluntary suggestions” of the designers. Judging from that, the activity of the

commercial designer cannot be fully proactive. The other workers at Fashion Inc. are also involved in responsive creativity; for instance assistants describe their creativity as problem solving because of the nature of closed problems they solve. Additionally, Unsworth (2001) says proactive creativity has not been studied and we like to address the problem by highlighting that proactive creativity is down played in commercial organizations. As stated before the commercial designer faces a lot of challenges.

It might be assumed that in the fashion industry people are proactive and generate new ideas, but this is not really the case as we mentioned above. We believe that the concept of functional stupidity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012) can provide us the understanding of the reactive nature in commercially focused organizations. We think that functional stupidity is highly linked to commercialization, routinization and decreasing amount of proactive creativity in organizations. The lack of reflexivity, Alvesson & Spicer (2012) talk about, could be seen as beneficial for the organization in attempt to gain efficiency, obedience and control. The routines in the BPO we discussed earlier are a mean to gain commercial goals. From a skeptical perspective, our case company is engaged in fostering functional stupidity to a certain extent. The assistants are engaged in operational routines, designers are involved in reactive designing and the rest of the team seems to be involved in problem solving. However, we do not agree that stupid is the right word to describe employees and their work in Fashion Inc. Instead we see how routines limit possibilities for reflexivity, such as designer's proactive behavior and assistants' capabilities to use their cognitive capacities. However, as Alvesson & Spicer (2012) mention, this phenomenon can be functional for the organization in total, which makes designing of routinized work into a balance between organizational and individual goals.

5.4 Concluding thoughts

Above we have discussed our findings in relevance to existing theory in the field to gain deeper understanding of routine and creativity at Fashion Inc. We argue that there is a symbolic value of creativity. Additionally, we found that perceptions of creativity can be contagious in the teams and can act as a distraction from alienation in routinized work. The implication of our findings can have different effects; it might bring meaning to the individual, but on the other hand, according to Alvesson (2013) this type of symbolism can have little substance. To put substance in the symbolic meaning we argue that employees can be more intimate with the products of the team, which in our case were clothes. The BPO focused on the division of labor and streamlining work processes in

order to gain efficiency and achieve commercial goals. We challenged the assumptions that routines are present just for gaining efficiency and catering organizational goals. We are aware of the fact that the routines can be perceived as enabling for the employee, however, in our case company we believe that the goals for efficiency and commercial success are overpowering. We suggest a shift towards the focus on individual aims such as, personal development and more challenging work instead of routinized tasks. We believe this will enable people to live up their creative potential, which can also be seen as beneficial for the organization. Furthermore, the BPO-routines stress efficiency, the more work one can do in less time the better it is for the organization. To sum up, we believe that aiming for efficiency might eventually limit creativity, resulting in a bland outcome and in turn loss of profit.

6. Conclusion

In order to answer our research question *“How will routinized work processes affect the employees’ perceptions of creativity in a contemporary office setting?”* we took an interpretative-critical approach in our study. We saw that routines, creativity and the relationship between the two are ambiguous concepts and are loaded with different meanings depending on which perspective you look from. We spent a week at our case company Fashion Inc., where we conducted 13 qualitative interviews and made field observations. Our case company is involved in clothes design, with outsourced manufacturing. We focused on the purchasing department of own brands. The purchasing department consists of BPO-teams that have a clear division of labor and responsibilities.

We believe we shed light on the concept of creativity by suggesting that it carries a symbolic meaning. We argue that perception of creativity is contagious and it can spread inside the team. Workers involved in routinized work can associate themselves with the creativity existing in the team, which might bring meaning to routinized work and act as a shield from alienation. Associating with creativity is supported by intimacy with the product. Intimacy provides employees the sense of pride of their work and the creative outcome of the team. Furthermore, to facilitate these perceptions we believe socialization around the product is of importance. From a critical point of view we argue that it is particularly important to include all members of the team in order to get substance in the symbolic value of creativity and avoid alienation in the long run.

We see routines as enabling for employees when they are aimed to reach organizational goals. Routines give a sense of control, role clarity and to some extent job satisfaction for the employees. We also argue that well-crafted routines can be enabling for individual goals, for example open up time for other activities, such as engagement in creative work, and socializing together in the team, as well as getting intimate with the product. We believe this might trigger creativity even in routinized tasks.

We identified that routines are closely linked with commercialization, in the context of a contemporary office setting; commercial goals such as efficiency and profit are the drivers for routinized work. We believe that commercialization hinders proactive creativity and makes it gain a reactive nature. Additionally, we believe that the lack of

proactivity can lead to organizations mimicking each other to a certain extent. This kind of attitude of organizations might lead to a shallow, short term, profit driven ways of innovation and creation of new solutions where creativity only lies on past successes. This will result in similar outcomes of different organizations and in the future we might, instead of the knowledge society, talk about the mundane society.

For further research, we believe our key finding of the symbolic meaning of creativity will benefit from more examination and scrutiny in order to develop deeper understanding of this phenomenon. This can be studied in other settings, such as in the service sector, where the product is intangible. One might research for example: “How will association to creativity and its outcome of the organization help workers find meaning in and cope with routinized work in the service sector?”. This could be researched in the IT-companies, where software design and coding coexist.

7. References

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Appendix 1. Interview guide

Your own work tasks

1. Can you describe your work tasks?
 - What are you expected to do/responsibilities?
2. What is a normal workday?
3. How much variation do you have throughout your work?
4. How long have you been working here?
 - What were your expectations before you started?
 - How are your expectations in line with what you are doing now?

Teamwork

1. What does your team do, or want to accomplish?
2. How is the work divided in the team?
3. What is your role in the team? *(Mean to be similar to q1 in "your own work tasks", but we want to uncover a relationship perspective in the team)*
4. How do you work together in your team?
 - How do you communicate?
5. How do you cooperate with other departments, for instance logistics?

Routines and creativity

1. How much influence do you have in your daily work?
 - How much influence do you have in your team? *(We ask to see how important the person sees themselves to the process of the team)*
2. How much creativity is involved in your work
 - Do you feel limited?

Engagement, feelings, intimacy

1. What do you feel about working for Fashion Inc.'s Own Brands?
 - How do you feel about being involved in production of your own clothes?
 - In your daily tasks, how much do you think about the actual products you are handling?
2. How close are you to the end product?
3. What do you feel when you come to work each morning and leave in the evening?

Identity

1. What are your career aspirations? (In Fashion Inc. or outside)
2. What type of job would you like to do?
3. In your work tasks, what would you like to change? *(We mean to go back to the work process and talk quite openly about work)*
 - Would you like to change something in the BPO structure/ work processes/ organization/ IT systems to make your work better? Or effective, fun, satisfying?
 - In your team, what would you change to make more functional?
4. Besides Stockmann, what do you else like to do? *(We ask to see how the person position themselves to their job)*