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Giving ideas that won't get rejected: how personal identity relates to idea-taking in creative collaboration

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ABSTRACT

Through an inductive and qualitative field study of creative collaboration among R&D scientists, I examined how the personal identities of project leaders related to their willingness to accept (i.e., initially consider) versus reject the ideas of others during creative collaborations. I found that when project leaders self-defined as 'idealists' (i.e., they viewed themselves as artistic, independent, and unique in their creative approach) they were more likely to accept ideas given via a 'low-conviction' approach (i.e., presenting general and vague ideas with neutral emotion and a low degree of certainty in their viability). By contrast, I found that when project leaders self-defined as 'pragmatists' (i.e., they viewed themselves as practical, collaborative, and rational in their creative approach) they were more likely to accept ideas given via a 'high-conviction' approach (i.e., presenting rational, logical and specific ideas with passion and a high degree of certainty in their viability). Analyses suggest that these idea giving approaches were effective because they affirmed (versus threatened) the creative identities and expertise of idealists and pragmatists, respectively. These findings suggest that customizing idea-giving approaches to the personal identities of idea-takers may improve collaboration and synthesis in creative project work. They also help to explain why idealists may become increasingly resistant to idea-taking over time (i.e., because successful resistance to ideas given by others affirms their perceptions of the rightness of their original ideas).

Introduction

Improving creative output has become a priority for most organisations of the 21st century (Florida, 2004, 2005). Creating innovations that can be implemented successfully and quickly is a requirement for corporations in today's economy, where production cycles are increasingly short and consumers expect new versions of products in terms of weeks and months, rather than years. In particular, today's organisations demand 'breakthrough' creative ideas – i.e., those that are both highly novel and feasible (Harvey, 2014; Rietzschel, Nijstad, & Stroebe, 2010). In this paper, I examine how creative collaborators may improve their chances of producing high quality creative ideas.

Using creative collaboration to produce high-quality creative ideas

Recent theorising suggests that creative collaborations are most likely to produce high-quality or breakthrough creative ideas when members find ways to *connect and integrate their diverse thoughts* (Ellis, Mai, & Christian, 2013; Harvey, 2014). In this manner, Harvey (2014) suggests that diverse groups have an opportunity for breakthrough creative outputs because they start with a gap between different group members' conceptions of problems and solutions, which may allow for what she calls 'creative synthesis'. According to Harvey (2014, p. 325) creative synthesis results from 'an integration of group members' perspectives into a shared understanding that is unique to the collective'. Further, Harvey (2014, p. 328) notes that there is extensive evidence that creativity in group collaborations,

> ' … .occurs through a dialectic negotiation and integration of stakeholders' opinions and perspectives (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Long-Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Murnighan & Conlon, 1991; Sawyer, 2004).'

In a similar fashion, Ellis et al. (2013) discuss the benefits of goal faultlines (i.e., differences in group goals among members of a group) for developing creative solutions. These authors suggest that such faultlines improve creative outputs by motivating different group members to develop solutions that connect and combine disparate ideas:

> " … for creative tasks that require building on, combining, and critically improving group members' ideas through open interaction.(Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996) goal faultlines (distinct goals that split a group into subgroups) are beneficial … . because they stimulate reflective reframing, where each group member 'respectfully attends to and builds upon the comments and actions of others" (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006, p. 489)' "(Ellis et al., 2013, p. 948).

Together, these contemporary theoretical perspectives suggest that helping diverse group members to consider and incorporate each other's ideas into a creative project may be a key to producing high-quality creative ideas. Nevertheless, Harvey (2014) acknowledges that there is a 'need for research into the relatively unexamined question of what factors lead group members to engage with one another's ideas.' (Harvey, 2014, p. 338).

At the same time, recent empirical research suggests a potential path toward discovering some of the factors that lead group members to engage with each other's ideas, i.e., relating idea giving/taking to the personal identities of creative collaborators. Thus, research by Elsbach and Flynn (2013) and Elsbach (2009) show that a chief reason that creative collaborators resist accepting the ideas of others is because doing so threatens their personal identities. In turn, this research suggests that identifying idea-giving tactics that affirm (rather than threaten) the personal identities of creative collaborators may help to facilitate the process of creative synthesis.

Personal identities and creative collaboration

According to both identity theorists (Stryker, 1987) and self-affirmation theorists (Steele, 1988), personal identities reflect individual attributes, expectations, and motives

(e.g., I'm a non-conformist and am motivated to push against pragmatic boundaries) that may or may not fall in line with social standards. When people identify at the personal level they derive feelings of self-worth from the evaluation of their personal traits or characteristics (e.g., 'I feel better about myself because I believe that I am good at math or an outstanding violinist'). They also make direct comparisons between themselves and their peers ('Am I relatively smarter than my colleagues?'), and they are primarily motivated to act on behalf of their own interests rather than on behalf of others' (Ellemers, De Gilder, & Haslam, 2004). Such personal identities contrast with social identities, which define a person based on his or her affiliations with social groups or organisations (e.g., 'I'm a Southerner' or 'I'm a Stanford University student').[1] Thus, Hewitt (1989, p. 179) defines personal identity as 'a sense of continuity, integration, identification, and differentiation constructed by the person, not in relation to a community and its culture, but in relation to the *self and its projects* [emphasis added].'

Extant research on creative workers shows that these individuals tend to define their personal identities according to two primary approaches to creative work: idealistic approaches and pragmatic approaches (Glück, Ernst, & Unger, 2002; Ivcevic & Mayer, 2006). Thus, creative workers with *idealistic* personal identities tend to perceive themselves as independent creators of unique outputs that embody personal, artistic visions (Feist, 1999; Fletcher, 1999). In turn, these 'idealists' (as I will refer to them) approach creative work from an idealistic point of view and affirm their identities by creating outputs that reflect their unique and independent visions (Elsbach & Caldwell-Wenman, 2015). The ultimate success of these outputs is less important to idealists than their reflection of the idealists' visions.

By contrast, creative workers who self-define as *pragmatists* tend to view their primary creative contributions as refining the ideas of others, adding expertise to a collaborative group, or helping to mold a creative idea into a marketable product (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013). Thus, 'pragmatists' approach creative work from a much more problem-solving stance than do idealists. Further, in contrast to idealists, pragmatists affirm their identities by being a part of a successful project, rather than by creating a unique project (that may be unsuccessful).

With regard to creative collaboration, Elsbach and Flynn (2013) showed, in a study of toy designers, that both idealists and pragmatists (what they called, 'artists' and 'problem solvers') demonstrated resistance to collaborative acts that threatened their creative identities. First, Elsbach and Flynn (2013) found that creative workers who self-defined as idealists were more likely to reject ideas that they perceived would undermine their unique and distinctive, creative stamp on a project (i.e., ideas that would change the core features of a project). This outcome may have been a consequence of the strong link between idealists' creative identities and their need for independent control over creative projects, as well as their use of creative projects to signify and affirm their unique creative styles and visions. That is, idealists perceived that the projects they were leading were a direct reflection their personal identities. In turn, considering and incorporating creative ideas from others, that would dilute or muddy that reflection, was perceived as a direct threat to their personal identities.

By contrast, Elsbach and Flynn (2013) found that creative workers who self-defined as pragmatists were, in general, much more willing to consider the ideas of others for projects that they were leading, especially if those ideas were seen as having the

potential to improve the feasibility of their projects. This outcome may have been a consequence of the links between the creative identities of pragmatists and a practical approach to project completion. Thus, for pragmatists, implementing an idea (given by a collaborator) that improved the practicality of the overall project and increased its chances of market success – even though it may have changed some core features of the project – was viewed affirming to their creative identities. By contrast, pragmatists were relatively more resistant to considering and incorporating others' ideas into their projects if they perceived those ideas were not practical or rational, and thus would hurt the overall viability of the project (e.g., the ideas would undermine the functionality of the product, or would cause the product to be unappealing to consumers), because such ideas were threatening to their personal identities.

These findings are supported by related research on *expertise affirmation* in collaborative groups (Grutterink et al, 2013; MacPhail, Roloff, & Edmondson, 2009). This research suggests that, when group members acknowledge the *unique expertise* (a dimension of personal identity) of other members, those members will feel affirmed and be more likely to contribute to team tasks. As Grutterink, Van der Vegt, Molleman, and Jehn (2013, p. 4) note:

> 'When all the members of a team believe that other members respect, value, and affirm their individual expertise, they believe that their contribution to the collective performance is recognised, which motivates them to contribute to the team task ... to openly discuss their potential contributions and to bring in their expertise in order to come up with better and more creative solutions to team tasks.'

These arguments suggest that ideas that are given in a ways that affirm the expertise of idealists (i.e., allow them to maintain control over creative projects) would lead those idealists to engage more in team tasks (which might include considering the ideas of others). Similarly, ideas that are given in ways that affirm the expertise of pragmatists (i. e., enhance the feasibility of a project in a logical way) would lead those pragmatists to engage more in team tasks.

As a whole, then, the above findings and arguments suggest that creative collaborators may be more likely to accept the ideas of others if those ideas affirm their personal identities. By contrast, creative collaborators will be most likely to reject the ideas of others if those ideas threaten their personal identities.

Nevertheless, we have limited empirical evidence that supports these suppositions. Further, we have no specific insight about how the *form* of idea-giving approaches (i.e., the specific tactics used to present ideas) might lead ideas to be seen as more or less affirming/threatening to idealists vs. pragmatists. These important gaps in understanding help define the research question for this paper.

Summary and research question

The goal in this paper is to uncover which idea-giving tactics are most likely to be accepted (i.e., initially considered)[2] and least likely to be rejected by pragmatists versus idealists, because they are most affirming and least threatening to their personal identities. More specifically, in this paper, I focus on understanding how pragmatists and idealists, who are *project leads* in creative work collaborations, respond to different

idea-giving tactics. I chose this focus because, based on personal identity theory (Hitlin, 2003), I anticipated that project leads would be most likely to have their personal identities linked to creative collaborations – as they are the designated and salient 'owners' of those collaborations. That is, while all team members might define their personal identities, in part, by their connection to creative work projects, project leads are most likely to feel personally linked to these projects and perceive these projects as a reflection of their personal identities. In turn, I argue that identifying the tactics that are more likely to lead to initial idea-consideration and least likely to lead to idea-rejection by such project leads should help both practitioners and scholars to better understand the process of creative synthesis in group collaborations. Thus, I offer the following research question:

Research Question: What idea-giving tactics are most likely to lead to initial idea-consideration and least likely to lead to initial idea-rejection by creative project leaders who are pragmatists vs. idealists?

I pursued an answer to this question through a study of creative collaborators, described next.

Methods

A research assistant and I collected and analysed all data for this study. Because our goal was to better understand a phenomenon (i.e., idea taking by creative collaborators) that has received scant attention (we could find no empirical studies on 'idea taking' in a search of Google Scholar or Web of Science), we chose a qualitative and inductive approach for our data collection and analysis (Walsh & Bartunek, 2016). Following Walsh and Bartunek's (2016) advice for studying novel phenomena through qualitative methods, we used a process that moved from identifying instances of the phenomena in which we were interested, to abducting initial insights about that phenomena, to collecting and analysing data that might shed additional light on these insights, to finally, trying on multiple provisional framings of our findings until we settled on one that best fit our data. We performed the first two stages of this process (i.e., identifying instances and abducting initial insights) through an analysis of archival data. We performed the second two stages of this process (collecting and analysing data to shed additional light on our phenomena of interest, and developing multiple provisional framings) through an analysis of interviews and field observations. We describe these two, major parts of our qualitative methods next.

Identifying instances of and abducting insights about idea-giving/idea-taking in creative collaborations

Archival data collection

We began this study by collecting archival data to gain insight about idea giving and idea taking in creative collaborations, and how idea-giving tactics were created to minimise initial idea rejection and maximise initial idea consideration by creative collaborators. To this end, we searched the website, *a-n: The Artists' Information Company*, through their

interview series, 'Artists Talking' to gain insight about idea-giving tactics that might improve collaborators' willingness to accept the ideas given into their creative projects. This British-run website, supported and funded by the Arts Council of England, ran weekly interviews and other stories about currently-practicing visual artists (i.e., painters, sculptors, dancers). The purpose of the website was to provide 'Alternative insights into the visual arts, with fast-paced news, comment, debate' (http://www.a-n.co.uk/news). We searched the archives of this website from 2010–2013 and collected 35 interviews with artists who talked about creative collaboration.

Analysis of archival data

In analysing our archival data, we searched the 35 published interviews from the 'Artists Talking' forum for stories related to idea giving and idea taking. We identified 64 stories described in these interviews related to these topics. We then, independently, coded these 64 stories in terms of common themes (i.e., What idea-giving tactics were used? What made a creative collaborator initially accepting vs. resistant to taking ideas? Why did creative collaborators reject some ideas and not others? Were there any indications that 'idealist' vs. 'pragmatist' identities related to openness to idea taking?). We discussed all themes until we agreed on the primary tactics used to give creative ideas. We also found patterns in the reasons why creative collaborators initially considered (versus rejected) ideas given. At the same time, we found that we could not identify the creative identities of the creative collaborators who were telling most stories. Thus, the tactics we identified were relevant to idea giving and idea taking by both idealists and pragmatists. Together, these findings provided a starting point for further investigating idea giving and idea taking in creative collaborations. In our next stage of data collection and analyses, we used interviews and field observations to gain more specific insight into the idea giving and idea taking of pragmatists and idealists.

Collecting and analysing data, and developing provisional frameworks

We next collected and analysed original data on idea giving and idea taking in creative collaborations from interviews and observations of informants working at two divisions of the same multinational food corporation, which we refer to by the pseudonym 'Zeusbrands'. At the time of the study, Zeusbrands was over 100 years old and sold its popular brand of food products globally under 100+ brand and product names, and generated over $30 Billion in annual revenue. Interviews and observations were performed onsite and via Skype with personnel at worldwide plants and R&D headquarters.

Informants

Through an iterative process (i.e., adding informants until we determined that no new insights were gained), we identified 34 informants in total who were scientists, analysts and engineers from Zeusbrands who worked in Research and Development (R&D) of new products and processes (12 women, 22 men, average age of 41.5 years, average tenure with company of 10.2 years). These informants considered their work to be creative in a broad sense (i.e., they were tasked with coming up with creative ideas for solving product and process problems). All informants indicated that they had engaged in past creative

collaborations involving colleagues who they perceived as both 'idealists' and 'pragmatists.' Further, all of these informants had played the role of idea givers and idea takers in past creative collaborations. Thus, we were able to gain insights about both idea giving and idea taking by both idealists and pragmatists in our interviews with these informants.

Primary interviews

First, to determine the creative personal identities of informants (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013), we asked an initial set of 28 informants that we interviewed to describe their personal approaches to creative work, including what they thought about when they first encountered a creative problem, what their goals were in tackling creative projects, how they thought about and interacted with team members during creative projects, and what outcomes they found most satisfying and dissatisfying in creative projects. We followed up these descriptions with clarifying questions about the importance of this approach to their self-definitions and whether or not colleagues would agree with their self-definitions. Based on this data, we concluded that 8 of these employees self-identified as 'idealists' in their creative personal identities (i.e., they took an independent approach with the goal of creating a unique, artistic vision in their projects), while 20 self-defined as 'pragmatists' (i.e., they took more of a collaborative approach with the goal of solving a creative problem in a practical manner).

Second, using the findings from our archival data, we devised an interview protocol that asked informants about two types of interactions during recent (e.g., within the last year) creative collaborations: (1) interactions in which they were in the role of idea taker as a project lead, and (2) interactions in which they were in the role of idea giver and someone else was a project lead to whom they gave ideas. For each collaboration, we asked informants to describe the creative project and its major players (including who was the project lead), and to give detailed descriptions of specific idea-giving/idea-taking events that occurred during the preceding year. An idea-giving/idea-taking event comprised an instance where a creative collaborator gave or received ideas relevant to a specific creative project, and where they could recall, in detail, how the project lead initially responded to the idea given.

Based on this definition, we identified 63 total idea-giving/idea-taking events from these interviews. For each idea-giving/idea-taking event, we asked who was giving and who was taking ideas, perceptions of the creative personal identities of other actors in the interaction (i.e., since we already had the personal creative identities of the primary informants, we only asked about the personal creative identities of the other actors – who were either idea givers or idea takers – in the interactions), what the idea-giver and idea-taker said about the event, whether or not the idea was initially accepted or rejected by the project lead, and why they thought this initial reaction to the idea occurred. To determine the creative personal identities of the other actors in the interactions, we used the same set of questions (see above) that we used to determine the personal identities of the primary informants. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

Observations and follow-up interviews

To complement our interviews and provide a more dynamic view of idea-giving and taking, we observed 6 'project team meetings', which were team meetings involving a broader group of people who were interested and involved in a given project (e.g.,

supervisors, other project leads involved in related projects). These meetings occurred about once a month and lasted approximately 2 hours each. At each meeting, a single project lead presented problems and asked for input from 8–10 other participants.

We took detailed field notes during observations of these meetings and focused on idea-giving and idea-taking behaviors and comments by all meeting participants. We also tape-recorded these meetings. We identified a total of 19 idea-giving/idea-taking events during these 6 meetings and wrote detailed descriptions of the idea-giving and idea-taking behaviors observed for each event.

Finally, we followed project team meetings with one on one interviews with the 6 project leads who ran each meeting. In these interviews, we asked about specific idea-giving/idea-taking events we observed in project team meetings. We asked project leaders about ideas they received in these meetings, how they felt about ideas given and why they felt that way. We used our earlier-developed set of questions to determine the personal creative identities of the project leads in these meetings. We found that 3 of the project leads were idealists, while 3 were pragmatists.

Summary of data

Adding the informants from our follow-up observations/interviews to those from our primary interviews resulted in a total of 34 informants interviewed: 23 pragmatists and 11 idealists. From these informants, we collected information on a total of 82 idea-giving/idea-taking events (our unit of analysis). Of these 82 events, 28 involved high-conviction idea-giving (described later) to pragmatists, 25 involved high-conviction idea-giving to idealists, 14 involved low-conviction idea-giving (described later) to pragmatists, and 15 involved low-conviction idea-giving to idealists.

Although we did not have an equal number events where of idea-takers were idealists vs. pragmatists, and idea-giving tactics were high-conviction vs. low-conviction, our analysis (described below) indicated that we had enough events with each type of idea-taker and each type of idea giving tactic to have confidence in our interpretations (i.e., additional informants did not result in new insights).

Analysis of data

Our next step was to analyse our data and develop some 'provisional frameworks' that organised our findings. We first examined the 63 idea-giving/idea-taking events identified our initial interviews. We identified if these events were described from the perspective of the idea giver or idea taker, and the identities of both idea givers and idea takers (from interview notes). Next, we read all of these stories independently and searched for common themes, from the perspective of idea givers or idea takers, about what led idealists and pragmatists to be initially accepting vs. resistant to ideas given. We discussed our findings and reconciled all discrepancies and questions. We then compared these themes to those identified in our archival data, and found overlap with several of the themes identified in that study. In particular, we found overlap in several of the idea-giving tactics identified in our archival data.

We then went back to the idea-giving/idea-taking events identified in our primary interviews and coded each according to idea-giving tactics we had defined (i.e., were these tactics present and salient in each of the events? To what degree?). We then separated the events according to whether the ideas were initially considered versus

rejected, and according to the personal identity of the idea taker and idea giver (i.e., idealists vs. pragmatists). We then independently looked for trends in the types of tactics that led to ideas being initially considered (vs. rejected) by project leads who self-defined as idealists vs. pragmatists, and for evidence that indicated why ideas were initially considered or rejected, in line with extant theory and other logical arguments (e.g., they were threatening or affirming to personal identities, they appeared difficult or easy to incorporate, or something else). We compared our independent coding and discussed and resolved all discrepancies. As noted earlier, we interviewed additional informants until we found that no new insights were gained through these interviews.

We next examined the 19 idea-giving/idea-taking events identified in our meeting observations and follow up interviews. We examined these events to determine which idea-giving tactics were most accepted or rejected by idea takers. We had identified (from interview notes) the personal creative identities of all idea takers (i.e., project leads) in these meetings, so could determine how pragmatists versus idealists responded to different idea-giving tactics. We compared these findings to those of our initial interviews. In this way, we used the observation and follow-up interview data as form of reliability check about the use of specific idea-giving tactics and their success when idea takers were idealists vs. pragmatists. We found that all instances of idea taking and idea rejection by idealists, identified from this data, fit with the patterns we had identified in our initial interviews.

At the same time, we found additional insights about idea-taking by pragmatists in some of the project team meetings. In particular, we found a few new details about the types of idea-giving tactics that led to idea rejection by pragmatists. We discussed this new data and resolved all discrepancies in our analyses.

Development of provisional frameworks

Throughout our data analyses, we examined how our findings fit with extant frameworks of creative collaboration and identity. In early iterations, this involved comparing our findings with recent findings about the effects identity affirmation and identity threat on collaboration in groups in general (e.g., Edmondson, 1999, 2003), and in creative groups in particular (e.g., Elsbach & Flynn, 2013; Polzer, Milton, & Swarm, 2002). In later iterations, we examined how our data fit with work on recent work on 'expertise affirmation' in creative groups (Grutterink et al., 2013; MacPhail et al., 2009). Based on these comparisons, we developed provisional frameworks relating idea-giving tactics to idea taking and idea rejecton by creative project leads. We iterated between these provisional frameworks and our data until we felt we had explained our data in a parsimonious way, and further analyses produced no new insights.

Trustworthiness check of provisional frameworks

The author performed a 'trustworthiness' checks with 3 new informants from Zeusbrand, who we had not interviewed previously (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to examine the provisional frameworks identified in our qualitative analyses. All of these informants, who were long-time employees who had worked in a variety of creative settings at Zeusbrands. The author explained the frameworks about idea giving and idea taking in creative collaborations to these informants. All three informants agreed that the final framework presented in our findings

represented an accurate representation of what they had personally observed at Zeusbrands in creative collaborations.

Findings

With regard to the research question, the current findings offer three primary insights. First, both idealists and pragmatists appeared to use a specific set of idea-giving tactics that were part of general idea-giving approach understood by these creative collaborators. This approach involved: (1) presenting particular types of ideas to be considered for incorporation in a pre-existing project, (2) expressing emotion related to the ideas given, and (3) indicating a degree of readiness and urgency for incorporating the ideas. While all of these tactics were typically enacted during each idea-giving event, they were not presented in a regular order and some tactics could be repeated during a given, idea-giving event.

Second the tactics that comprised this approach were enacted differently in successful collaborations (i.e., where ideas were initially considered and not rejected) where idea-takers (i.e., project leaders) were idealists vs. pragmatists. These different enactments appeared to reflect the distinct ways in which idea-giving tactics both affirmed and threatened the personal identities of idealists vs. pragmatists.

Accordingly, idea-giving tactics successful with pragmatists were those that demonstrated a practical approach to improving a pre-existing idea via detailed suggestions that could be implemented quickly, and were passionately supported. This approach was affirming (and not threatening) to the personal identities of pragmatists because, in line with extant research (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013), it demonstrated the importance of rational mind-set and required a pragmatist's practical approach to assess the value of ideas given. Further, in line with recent research on expertise affirmation (Grutterink et al., 2013; MacPhail et al., 2009), this idea-giving approach affirmed the specific expertise of pragmatists (e.g., practical problem solving), which was central to their personal identities. I define this approach as a *high-conviction approach* to idea-giving.

In contrast, idea-giving tactics successful with idea takers who self-defined as idealists demonstrated an appreciation for the idealist's pre-existing vision and unique artistic approach via general and vague suggestions that need not be implemented quickly, and were presented in a dispassionate manner. This approach was affirming (and not threatening) to the personal identities of idealists because, in line with extant research (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013), it indicated that the idealist was still in charge of the project and idea, and that ideas given need not be incorporated, and if used, would not undermine the unique vision of the idealist. Also, this idea-giving approach appeared to affirm the specific expertise of idealists (e.g., original idea conception), which was central to their personal identities. I define this approach as *a low-conviction approach* to idea-giving.

Conversely, I found that high-conviction idea-giving approaches were threatening to the personal identities of idealists, while low-conviction idea-giving approaches were threatening to the personal identities of pragmatists. In other words, the idea-giving approaches that were affirming to idealists were threatening to pragmatists, and vice-versa. This is because these two personal identities seemed to be defined by opposing dimensions. Interestingly, however, idea givers who were both pragmatists and idealists

were able to use both high and low conviction idea giving approaches. That is, the (self-identified) personal identities of idea givers did not prevent them from using either a high- or low-conviction approach to idea giving.

I illustrate these two approaches to idea giving (i.e., high-conviction and low-conviction approaches) in Tables 1 and 2. I discuss them in more detail, including describing how idea takers responded to them, in the following sections.

High-conviction idea-giving approaches

High-conviction idea-giving approaches involved presenting specific and detailed ideas for improving a project, showing enthusiasm for ideas given related to their potential for increasing the feasibility of the project, and conveying a sense of urgency in incorporating these ideas as a means of taking advantage of their potential and practicality. I describe each of these components and their effects on idea takers who were pragmatists and idealists in the next sections.

High-conviction idea-giving approaches with pragmatists

A first component of high-conviction idea-giving approaches was **presenting very specific, detailed, and rational ideas** to project leads. This component worked well with pragmatist project leads because these idea takers sought to assess the feasibility of creative ideas, and needed detailed information in order to make that assessment. As a result, this component affirmed the personal identities of pragmatics because it contained detailed specifications of the idea, as well as rational support for the idea from credible third parties or from empirical or scientific evidence.

For example, in a project team meeting that focused on improving the consistency of a confection, the following exchange took place between an idea giver and an idea taker (who later self-identified as a pragmatist). As this exchange illustrates, the logical presentation of the idea given helped the project lead to more readily take the idea:

Idea Giver:	Maybe the sugar starts to crystallise at higher sugar concentration and this is what makes the elasticity go lower and weaken. You start to make fudge.
Idea Taker (pragmatist project lead):	Yeah, you would start to make fudge at a higher sugar content, yep.
Idea Giver:	It looks like, as you increase the concentration, the sucrose will start to crystallise at very low moisture content.
Idea Taker (pragmatist project lead):	Yep. I can see that. I'll pick up with you on this, I think, separately in the interest of time. But yeah, it's definitely a possibility – please give me your remarks on what we need to do to test this idea and we'll follow up."

In a later interview with the project lead, I asked about this episode and what was central to her acceptance of it. Her response indicated that the logical rationale behind the suggestion was important to her. As she put it:

Table 1. Low-Conviction and High-Conviction Approaches to Idea Giving: Interview Evidence.

	Low Conviction Approach:	High Conviction Approach:
Level of Detail and Logic in Presented Ideas	Present broad ideas that serve as general inspiration rather than highly logical & finished plans	Present specific and detailed ideas that have logical application
Number of instances of component*	25	33
Examples	So, what I try to do is bring [ideas] up as, 'Wouldn't it be interesting if we did something like X..?' Then the next time I see them, I might say, 'I've been thinking about this a bit more, have you heard about Y?'	'I would rather ask 5 questions before I buy in, so that I can be confident that you really know what you're talking about in detail. Then I'm much more likely to accept someone else's idea.'
Express Emotion about Ideas	Present ideas in neutral tone	Present ideas with enthusiasm and passion
Number of instances of component	18	26
Examples	'I try to think "what would make Him believe in this idea?" I know it's not because I'm excited about it. That makes him even more skeptical, because he thinks I want to take over his project. I can't get too excited.'	'I think it's good to get her excited about the idea and then it spreads through the group. I need to show a lot of passion for her to believe that I've done my homework and that this could work'
Express Degree of Urgency for Implementing Ideas and Certainty About the Value of Ideas	Suggest an open-ended timeline for implementation, with no urgency and low certainty about the value of ideas	Suggest a very short timeline for implementation with some urgency and high certainty about the value of ideas
Number of instances of component	12	17
Examples	'Sometimes stepping away from the situation, allowing them to think about what you've told them, . . . give them time to think. They'll often come back to you and either have a build on it, or have a way to make it fit with their original idea.' suggesting.	"I try to get them to see how this idea can help them to quickly achieve their goals. Like, 'Wouldn't it be great to get this launched on time and have it work?' If they see that I think we can do this right away, I think that gives them confidence in what I'm
Total # of *events* in initial interviews:	25	38

* Number of instances of this *component* of idea-giving among the 63 idea-giving *events* collected from initial interviews. Note: all idea-giving events had multiple components included in them.

Table 2. Idea Giving and Idea Taking Approaches: Observation Evidence.

Idea Giving Approach (count)*	Initial Idea Taking Response by Pragmatist	Examples:
Low Conviction Approach: Vague suggestion, low passion, low urgency (2)	Lots of questions, pushing back on idea	**Idea Giver:** "We know that there is space in the aisle [for product X] and especially at Walmart. So, we want to get working on what that solution could be in an aisle, for [product X]. Like, maybe a stand up pouch, so we can take the flavors that we're moving forward with and put those in a pouch, in aisle. " **Idea Taker:** " So its like kind of like gum in a pouch? But typically – I always assumed that the bag of gum was to refill another container, not to eat out of the bag like a snack. Are people eating it right out of the bag?. **Idea Giver:** ' Well your insight is true. You could still take that pouch and refill another container' **Idea Taker:** 'Wait, wait, but time out. My assumption was that you were taking the snackable option, then you eat it as a snack out of the pouch. Would this work for [product X]?'
High Conviction Approach: Highly detailed and logical argument, some passion, some degree of urgency (8)	Agreement with underlying logic, and then follow-up questions	**Idea Giver:** All right, so artificial color reduction. We've talked about this one before …..We would recommend going forward on a core product like [X] and figuring out how much we could take the color out without affecting consumer perceptions ….. Because we're going to have to take all these artificial colors out anyway in couple of years ….. So it will be easier later if we work on that now.' **Idea Taker:** "When you put it in that perspective it makes me feel better …. I love the principle of, 'Hey, you're going to have to get out eventually, so let's get ahead of it and do it smart on how we exit. ….. Do you want to do this all at one time or have step changes?'
Low Conviction Approach: Vague suggestion, low passion, low urgency (2)	Open to ideas and willing to try out as a concept	**Idea Giver:** ' You might try some experiments where you look at some product on shelf for different periods of time to see how flavor changes.' **Idea Taker:** ' So like, maybe do a 1 month, 2 month, 3 month check again fresh?' **Idea Giver:** ' Yeah, something like that. You could figure out how you want to time the tests.' **Idea Taker:** 'OK, I think that's a good idea I could work on.'
High Conviction Approach: Highly detailed and logical argument, some passion, some degree of urgency (7)	Highly resistant to ideas and argumentative	**Idea Giver:** 'So I'd like to talk about some new ideas for a line of "Product Y". We have some solutions for getting the color right now. We want to try it again in our Russian plant because we've got an opportunity to try it in a new market that we haven't tried it in before.' **Idea Taker:** ' No, no,no! It's bad for the factory, bad for the environment. There are so many "watch outs" with this product. The product is not tested, the sweetener is not tested, it will be a headache for the product changeovers.' **Idea Giver:** Well, how about if we review the new product formulation that 'Gina' has developed? **Idea Taker:** 'No, we can't review it without her here. We've learned that it doesn't work in the U.S., so why do we want to try it in Russia?'

* number of events using this idea-giving approach among the 19 events identified in project meeting observations.

'[X – the idea giver] is always quite clear when he makes suggestions. He doesn't talk that much, but when he does he always presents a well-formed point. He explains not only what he thinks, but why. It's this supporting logic that helps make his point.'

Further, comments from this informant suggested that this type of logic was affirming to her identity as a pragmatist. As she reported:

'I think I'm more accepting of ideas if they are given with good logic. It's not just that I understand the ideas better, but it makes me feel they get that I'm a scientist and they value that enough to think about how to give me ideas that would make sense to a scientist.'

Another informant, who self-identified as a pragmatist, made a similar comment about her need for rational arguments that supported ideas given to her. As she put it:

'It's always the rational persuasion that works with me. So, for the team members whose ideas I've supported, it's kind of doing their research, saying here's what we know, and here's what we don't know but this is our idea in terms of kind of closing that gap. That's what helps me feel like their idea is going to improve my project.'

Interestingly, these examples also appeared especially affirming to the identities of pragmatists because they discussed ideas in technical and scientific terms. This may have signaled that the idea giver understood and valued the *expertise* of the pragmatist, which, as noted earlier, has been shown to be important to encouraging team member contributions to a tasks, especially tasks that are creative (MacPhail et al., 2009).

A second component of high-conviction idea-giving approaches found in the current study was ***expressing passionate emotion for ideas given***. I found that presenting ideas with enthusiasm and even passion was recognised by pragmatists as a sign of confidence in one's ideas, based on careful thinking, and willingness to work hard on them to bring them to light. When this type of emotion was expressed, pragmatists were more accepting of ideas given. For example, one informant recounted how he was successful using passion when giving ideas to a pragmatist who was leading a project:

'I had an idea, so what I did was I actually drew it and prototyped it … and then created some excitement around it in the way I presented it. I was very energetic and excited. And he was like, "What's this? This is different … I'm used to seeing all this, but this one's new [pointing to part of the drawing]." He was like, "Yeah, I could see this. I could see it coming to light." '

In another example, a pragmatist talked about how she was willing to take the idea to the next level after seeing the idea givers' enthusiasm. In this case, she said she felt that his emotions said that he had really thought it through was willing to do whatever it took to get the idea incorporated. As she recalled:

'He [the idea giver] was so excited about it and when I saw his enthusiasm, I'm like, "Huh." I believe in people's passion. So, if someone's excited it gives me pause. I think, "They must have really thought about this, and are willing to see it through." So then, I said, "OK, let's lay out some scenarios." '

A final component of high-conviction idea-giving found in the current study was ***indicating a degree of urgency for incorporating ideas given.*** In successful collaborations with pragmatists, I found that the indication of a relatively high degree of urgency

often led to the initial consideration of the idea. This appeared to follow from pragmatists' concerns about meeting project deadlines as a component of feasibility, and the notion that if an idea could be implemented quickly, that was a strong indication that is was feasible. Thus, pragmatist project leaders reacted positively to suggestions that an idea could (and should) be implemented quickly and would provide minimal disruption to an on-going project. As one informant noted about working with a specific pragmatist:

> 'So, if he's [the pragmatist's] leading a project, and I have an idea about how it can be produced a little bit better, I might say "Hey, maybe if we did some tweaks this week on the sequence of how [do production], that would give us this benefit right away. I could try it pretty quickly and see if it works." If I suggest a change like that, then he's going to be much more willing to go along.'

In another case, an idea giver described how she approached a 'seasoned' project leader who was highly pragmatic in his creative approach. In this case, the idea giver described how he had to think ahead about how the idea would fit with the pre-existing schedule, and make sure her suggestions did not compromise that schedule to a great degree. As she explained:

> 'So the project lead was a seasoned person. He felt like he knew the formulation cold and he was very logical about what could and couldn't be done. So I had to convey that the new formulation I was suggesting was going to address what they needed without adding much to the timeline. I also had to make it sound like it was something that we needed to do right away to see the benefit … . .So, this worked and he was willing to try out the new formulation.'

Further, this idea giver noted that the urgency she expressed not only indicated that she had thought ahead about the feasibility of the idea, but also, that she understood the pragmatist's expertise in managing a project schedule and understanding what changes could be made without disrupting that schedule. As the idea giver recounted in discussing this instance:

> 'I also think it was important that [the project lead] felt that I recognised his track record in running projects and getting them out on time. He liked that I took into consideration his timeline and his overall thinking about the product, and that I had thought about that before approaching him with this idea.'

Together, the above illustrations suggest that the idea-giving tactics effective with project leads who self-identified as pragmatists were those that fit into the pragmatic and rational approach these individuals took when working on a creative project, as well as recognised their expertise in practical problem-solving and project management. Such idea-giving tactics appeared to be effective because they affirmed the personal identities of pragmatists. These findings fit with extant research that has shown that identity-affirming information is more accepted by individuals than is information that is identity-threatening (Morton, Haslam, Postmes, & Ryan, 2006).

High-conviction idea-giving with idealists

At the same time, I found evidence that high-conviction idea-giving approaches did not work with idealists. Specifically, idealists responded defensively to idea-giving approaches that were very specific and detailed, expressed with passionate emotion, and/or given with a high degree of urgency for implementation. As discussed below these types of idea-giving approaches appeared to threaten idealists' creative identities as independent creators of unique products.

For example, when idea-givers expressed high urgency and passion about their ideas, idealist project leaders perceived them as 'too eager' and desiring to 'take over control' of the project. Such enthusiasm signaled that an idea giver was highly invested in his or her suggestion and may want to become the creative leader on the project. As one idealist remarked about experiencing this type of idea-giving:

> 'Too much passion about their idea says to me, 'I don't need you anymore' and "I'm going to take over and do this my way."'

In a similar manner, another idealist explained how he might deal with an idea giver who he perceived as being too passionate about his or her ideas:

> 'There are few people that I might not ask [for suggestions] because I know they are going to get way over involved to the extent that it is not necessary. And they are going take away my creative stamp on the project.'

I also found evidence that giving ideas that were very specific and detailed, as well as passionate, were ineffective with idealists in project team meetings. For example, an idealist project lead I talked to described how he reacted when a colleague made very specific suggestions for improving his ideas:

> 'When someone gives me a very specific suggestion for improving my project, I feel that they are too focused on finishing the project, rather than getting the idea right. And it's almost like they've already decided on the way the project should go and have no respect for what I've done.'

In another example, in a meeting about the introduction of an existing product in a new country, an idea giver made a very specific, rational, and passionate suggestion that an idealist should try using a lower cost flavor in this market. As can be seen in the following exchange, the project lead was highly resistant to this idea.

Idea Giver:	'You should use a less expensive flavor in that product formula. You're using the most expensive flavor we have!'
Idea Taker (idealist project lead):	'But they already have tried it with the original flavor and they like it [in the test market]. They will notice the difference.'
Idea Giver:	'It won't be noticeable after it's on the shelf for a few weeks. We know that from past tests. You should try that.'
Idea Taker (idealist project lead):	'But this goes against our goals of keeping product parity across locations. I don't think they will buy it.'

In a follow-up interview with the project lead in this exchange, he confirmed that he felt attacked by the blunt and detailed suggestion, which contributed to his resistance. As he noted:

'I did feel something kind of weird, strange when he asked that question. I remember he used these very direct words, "You ... dot dot dot" And I think that kind of, kind of makes me afraid, to some extent, right? I was afraid he was going to take this in a direction I didn't want it to go. So, I felt it a little bit attacked and on the defensive about why I was doing things the way I was doing them. I mean, I have put a lot of thought and work into my plans ... . I mean, it probably wasn't a bad idea, but I couldn't think about it then.'

In the next section, I discuss how a completely different, low-conviction approach, was most effective when giving ideas to project leads who self-defined as idealists.

Low-conviction idea-giving approaches

Low-conviction idea-giving approaches involved presenting general and vague ideas for building on a pre-existing project, showing neutral emotions for ideas given that might build on the originality of a pre-existing idea, and conveying a low sense of urgency for incorporating these ideas. As mentioned earlier, these tactics worked best with project leaders who self-defined as idealists, but not well with project leaders who self-defined as pragmatists. I describe the components of low-conviction idea-giving approaches next, as well as how idealists and pragmatists responded to them.

Low-conviction idea-giving with idealists

A first component of low-conviction idea-giving was to **give broad and vague suggestions** (versus presenting new and completely 'finished' ideas). This component was effective in getting idealists to initially consider ideas because, as they explained, it provided general inspiration for improving an idea, while preserving their sense of ownership in the project. Collaborators who worked effectively with idealists appeared to understand these effects, intuitively. For example, one informant who worked with idealists described how she presented her ideas as less developed than they actually were, in order to avoid anticipated resistance:

'I think I like to give "seed ideas" to some very creative people, and I think I'm more effective that way. I put little thought "starters" or little ideas into people's heads, versus big, finished presentations ... I think when you present ideas as 'finished' people then see it as, "this is it" or "this is not it" and then they can start to poke holes at it ... if they're not fully on board. Whereas, I think if you present it in a, not ... fully finished idea, I actually think people are more willing to think about it, take it into account, and then do something with [it].'

In addition, I found evidence that idealist project leads were more likely to consider ideas that were given in vague and broad terms, in part, because they viewed such ideas as recognising and valuing the creative ideas they had already developed. In this way, the idea giver affirmed their *expertise* in creating ideas.

For example, in a project team meeting, I observed an idealist responding positively to an idea given in a very general way, that appeared to build on the idealist's existing

work. In this case, the idea-giver made the following suggestion for creating flavoring for a new chewing gum product:

> 'So, I know you've done a ton of work on this in the past, and you've dealt with the whole issue of matching flavors internationally. I wonder what you think about creating some flavor clones in the lab that could be re-produced in different sites for production. I'm not sure if this is even feasible, but I thought you might have some ideas about doing that.'

In response, the idealist asked some more questions, and then said he would talk to some folks in a different lab about this idea. Importantly, he didn't reject the idea. When I interviewed the idea-giver later, she noted that she was careful in giving this idea in a way that recognised all the past work this idealist had done in this area. As she noted:

> 'I know [the idealist] is very well-versed in this particular flavor domain. He's really the expert in this area, so I had to be careful to acknowledge that. I know that he would just reject anything I said if I didn't preface it with that part about his past work in this area. Also, I didn't want to give too specific of an idea, because he likes to think broadly at first and see if he can fit an idea into his way of thinking. If it's just too different from what he is already doing, it's not going to be well-received . . . . I guess I've learned these things over time from working with him.'

A second component to low-conviction idea giving approaches was to ***offer ideas with neutral emotion and attenuated enthusiasm***. Such components were effective with idealists because these project leaders perceived the idea giver as not strongly invested in ideas given, which was a sign that the idea giver would allow the project leader to maintain control of the project. This was affirming to the personal identities of idealists, as one informant noted:

> 'I used to go in full of energy think that everything was so clear and that this was going to be so simple to sell. But that didn't work with [X idealist]. So I learned to really just go in and not be too invested in my ideas, and get [X] engaged in the process of working on a solution that I had suggested. It was much better if I didn't put on the hard sell . . . . . [X] was always wary of too much enthusiasm for an idea because he thought you were going to change his project too much. . . . . I know he takes a lot of pride in his ideas, and if you let him know that you are going to take away his control, he is much more comfortable working with you.'

Similarly, another idea giver explained this component of idea giving in team project meeting. In this meeting, I had noticed that the idea giver was very dispassionate about his suggestions to one idealist project lead for improving a product he was working on. When I asked him about this, he responded:

> 'Yeah, I am very aware of how [Y idealist] gets invested in his ideas, and how defensive he can be if he thinks you are trying to change his ideas too much. I know that you can't just go in and start talking about how great your ideas are. Yeah, that doesn't work with him. He will just shut you down. I try and make my ideas just a suggestion that I'm not invested in. Then, he can think about them without worrying that I'm really excited to move them forward.'

A final component of low-conviction idea-giving approaches that was effective with idealists was to ***offer an open-ended timeline with low urgency for incorporating ideas given***. This component appeared to reduce knee-jerk, emotional responses to ideas, that

may have appeared to idealists, upon first hearing, to run counter to their established position. Thus, asking idealists to 'just think about' ideas given, or asking if they could 'meet later' to further explore these ideas was an effective way to set a longer timeline for considering an idea. Idea givers remarked that such delays allowed idealists time to consider how the given idea might be used in a way that preserved their control over the project.

For example, one informant who was working with an idealist project lead anticipated a strong negative response to an idea she had for improving the project. So, she encouraged this idealist to delay her initial response before making a decision. As she explained:

> 'Usually, what I've found is that almost any idea is really threatening to her at first. So really you can't do anything then. It's better to have her think about it a while. So, I ask her to just think about it, and then she goes away. Then, you have to kind of bring it back when she isn't so emotional.'

Similarly, another informant described how he used the same component of idea giving with all the idealist project leads that he worked with:

> ' … I try to get the artistic types to think about what I've told them, but to step away for a minute. You know, get their EQ out of the way and get their IQ thinking. I think this prevents them from focusing so much on how the suggestion will change their project, and helps them see how it might actually make the project better.'

These approaches also appeared to acknowledge the value of the idealists' original ideas and expertise as idea generators. As the informant above went on to note:

> 'I think taking this approach to suggesting ideas also helps to communicate that I value what they've done, you know. I want them to know that I appreciate what they've done, and I'm just trying to help them make it better, rather than to change it.'

Together, the above illustrations suggest that idea-giving tactics most effective with idealist project leads were those that considered the unique and visionary personal identities that these individuals held. By presenting ideas as general suggestions that were not intended to undermine their pre-existing ideas and that acknowledged their expertise as idea-generators, these low-conviction approaches reduced threats to idealists' identities.

Low-conviction idea-giving with pragmatists

At the same time, I found evidence that low-conviction idea-giving approaches did not work well with pragmatists because they appeared to threaten the identities of these creative collaborators. Specifically, I found that pragmatists responded defensively to idea giving that provided general fixes that didn't address specific, underlying problems, provided dispassionate suggestions that couldn't be tested or implemented quickly, or were vague and not related to the established line of thinking.

In a typical example, a pragmatist claimed in an interview that he had been in a meeting that morning with a non-scientist, idea giver who didn't seem to understand the science of the problem they were working on. In this case, the idea giver offered several suggestions that seemed very general and not in line with the current direction of the project. Further, the pragmatist found the ideas were vague, but didn't address

the specific, underlying problems facing the scientists. Together, these suggestions (which comprised a low-conviction approach to idea giving) were seen as not being very pragmatic and not able to be implemented quickly. This led the pragmatist to push back against them. As he explained:

> "This guy, I think he was from our marketing team, was invited to get a sense of the issues we were working on so he could have a better idea of the timeline for putting out some new products. Anyway, he starts by offering all these really general and simplistic ideas that would never work with our process. I mean he suggested that we might solve a shelf-life problem by just putting the product in refrigerated trucks. He didn't understand the first thing about why the product hardens over time, and he treated us like we were too dumb to solve a simple problem. But it's not a simple problem and he just didn't understand that this was a problem that could only be fixed by changing the formulation of the product. He needed to give much more detail for his ideas to be useful … .I wasn't very nice to him, but it was aggravating to be treated that way, like I wasn't a trained scientist and this wasn't a scientific problem … I probably should have listened more to his ideas, because I don't want others to think that I'm not open to ideas, but he really got to me.

This example illustrates how personal identity threats may have been felt by pragmatists who were given ideas in ways that threatened their expertise and practical problem-solving abilities.

I also observed this type of identity threat from low-conviction idea giving in project team meetings. In one case, an idea giver threw out a vague suggestion that a pragmatist project leader consider a less expensive component for the product being considered. This idea implied a need to revamp the entire project for the sake of cost alone, which did not appear to be a practical idea and sparked a defensive reaction in the pragmatist. As this pragmatist explained in a later interview about this meeting:

> ' I guess I did push back there because I really didn't want to go back to the beginning, and I didn't think his reasoning was strong enough for me to make such a big change that would take so much time. He also didn't seem to have thought about it enough.'

Further, this pragmatist also suggested that this idea-giving attempt also did not recognise his expertise in the area of product design, which appeared to be identity threatening. As he noted:

> 'It didn't seem like he took the time to understand my project, and he didn't review all the work that went into the project so far. He kind of treated me like I didn't know what I was doing in this area, which kind of put me off.'

Discussion

Idea-taking (i.e., considering and not rejecting ideas given by others) has not been the focus of research on creative collaboration, but is critical to the success of such endeavors (Elsbach & Flynn, 2013), and has recently been suggested as a key process in creating high quality or 'breakthrough' creative ideas (Ellis et al., 2013; Harvey, 2014). Thus, understanding when and why collaborators initially consider (vs. reject) the ideas of others may help us to identify tactics that improve creativity and innovation in organisations.

This paper identifies how tailoring idea giving to the personal identities of idea takers may improve their willingness to consider (and not reject) those ideas. In particular, the current findings suggest that high-conviction idea-giving approaches will be most effective when presenting ideas to pragmatists because they affirm the personal identities of those idea takers, while low-conviction idea-giving approaches will be most effective when presenting ideas to idealists because they affirm the personal identities of those idea takers. I illustrate these relationships in Figure 1. In the following sections, I discuss some theoretical and practical implications of these findings, as well as implications for future research.

Relating ideamtaking to creative collaboration and creative synthesis

As noted in the introduction, researchers have recently promoted the notion that high-quality creative ideas (i.e., those that are both highly novel and feasible) result from collaborations that integrate the diverse ideas of group members (Ellis et al., 2013; Harvey, 2014). This perspective implies that idea taking is as important as is idea giving to producing high-quality creative ideas. Yet, extant frameworks do not specify how to get creative collaborators to be open or willing to taking the ideas of others (Harvey, 2014). The current findings fill this gap in several ways.

Customising idea giving to personal identities of creative collaborators

First, the current findings extend general theories of creative collaboration by suggesting that idea taking in such collaborations may be enhanced by customising idea-giving
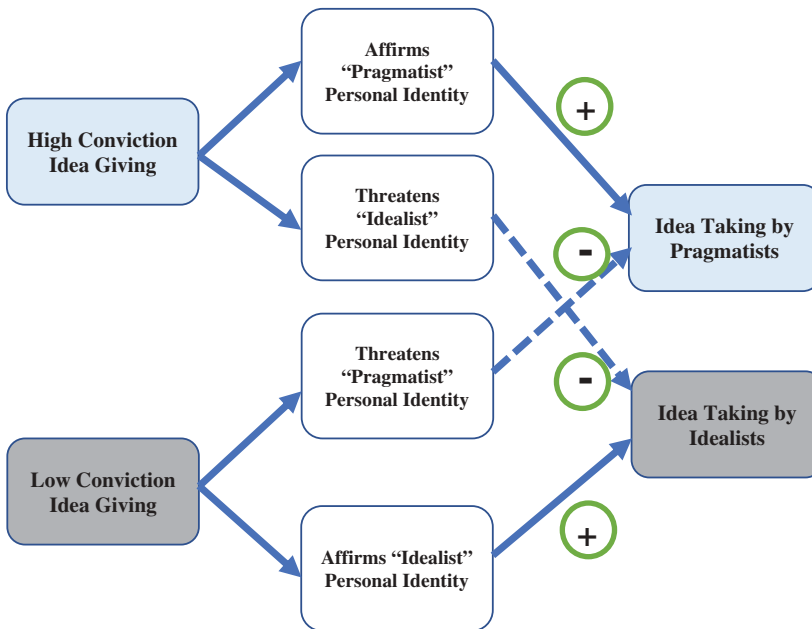
Figure 1. Grounded Framework Relating Creative Idea Giving and Idea Taking Via Personal Identity Affirmation/Threat.

approaches to the personal identities of creative project leaders. In turn, these findings identify personal identity as an important boundary condition that may affect the success of creative groups. As Harvey (2014, p. 335) notes, 'creative synthesis requires members' full engagement with one another and the creative task.' She suggests that group members' creative thinking skills, as well as task demands, like time pressures may serve as boundary conditions that limit the success of groups attempting creative synthesis. The current findings add personal identities of project leads (and threats to those personal identities via collaborators' approach to idea giving) to the list of these boundary conditions.

Of course, the current findings also suggest that creative collaborators need to identify the personal identities of project leaders before selecting the appropriate idea-giving approach, which adds complexity to task of managing boundary conditions in creative collaborations. Further, while these findings suggest that both high and low conviction approaches to idea giving may be used by pragmatists or idealists, we don't know if there are differences in the ease of use or effectiveness in these tactics when used by pragmatists or idealists. It seems plausible that idea givers who are idealists themselves may be more effective in giving ideas via a low conviction approach because that is the approach they would prefer to receive. Similarly, it seems reasonable to predict that idea givers who are pragmatists themselves would be more effective in giving ideas via a high conviction approach because that is the approach they would prefer to receive. These predictions, however, need to be tested in future research (e.g., through experimental studies) to determine if and how the personal identities of idea givers relate to the effectiveness of high- and low-conviction idea-giving approaches.

Using idea giving to affirm expertise of creative collaborators

Second, the current findings suggest that expertise affirmation (i.e., the recognition and valuing of a project lead's creative expertise) is an important component of personal identity affirmation among creative collaborators that might be achieved via customised idea giving. As noted earlier, expertise affirmation has been recently discussed as a form of identity affirmation that may improve the collaboration of team members (MacPhail et al., 2009). That is, if team members recognise and value others' specific areas of expertise, those others will be more likely to contribute to team problem solving because their identities have been affirmed (Grutterink et al., 2013). This has been shown to be true on teams with a diverse set of experts as members who are tasked with creative problem solving (Polzer et al., 2002; Swann, Kwan, Polzer, & Milton, 2003; Swann, Milton, & Polzer, 2000).

The current findings suggest that, because idealists' creative expertise was in the area of idea generation (i.e., the development of original ideas to solve a creative problem), idea-giving approaches that affirmed that expertise were most likely to be accepted by idealists. Low-conviction approaches appeared to affirm this expertise by offering vague and weakly supported ideas that were unlikely to supplant the project lead's original ideas. Further, such idea giving might imply that the idea giver could not come up with a fully complete idea him or herself, and thus, was better at providing vague suggestions that might improve the idealists' original ideas.

By contrast, current findings suggest that, because pragmatists' creative expertise was in the area of practical problem solving (i.e., the development of practical solutions for a

creative problems), idea-giving approaches that recognised this expertise were most likely to be accepted by pragmatists. High-conviction approaches appeared to affirm this expertise by offering highly-detailed and even technical ideas that only an practical expert could understand. Further, because such idea giving often included an urgent implementation schedule, it implied that these ideas could only be implemented by a practical expert.

Together, these findings point to a new avenue for expertise affirmation in creative groups: customised idea giving. By giving ideas in ways that, not only, do not threaten a project lead's identity, but affirm it by recognising and valuing his or her expertise, idea givers may contribute to the long-term participation and engagement of these team leads in creative collaboration. These findings help to answer recent calls for greater exploration of factors that contribute to expertise affirmation in collaborative groups (MacPhail et al., 2009).

Using idea giving to 'build similarities'

Finally, the current findings identify specific mechanisms that may support the processes of creative synthesis. In Harvey's (2014) framework of creative synthesis, she identifies 'building on similarities' as an important process that facilitates group creativity. In her words, 'Synthesis occurs when people begin to see similarities in otherwise disparate perspectives', and goes on to note that, 'the persistence of differences disrupts synthesis' (Harvey, 2014, p. 334).

The current findings suggest a number of ways that idea-giving tactics may help project leaders to see similarities between their original ideas and the suggestions for improving those ideas given by creative collaborators. For example, findings about the benefits of giving general and vague suggestions to idealists (i.e., that idealists might accept these ideas because they signal an appreciation for the idealists original ideas and encourage the idealist to find ways to fit them into the existing project) provides a mechanism by which idealists could find similarities between the ideas given and their original ideas. Because general and vague ideas might be interpreted and shaped in ways that make them similar to the project leader's original ideas, they not only prevent rejection, but increase the chances that these ideas will be incorporated in a meaningful way into an idealist's project. Similarly, findings about the benefits of giving specific and passionately supported ideas to pragmatists (i.e., that pragmatists will accept these ideas because they suggest a careful consideration of practical concerns and an understanding of project parameters) suggests that pragmatists are open to ideas that fit with their logical and practical line of thinking, and that ideas that appear to flow from similar thinking are most likely to be incorporated into their projects.

At the same time, future research that extends these notions is needed to flesh out frameworks of creative synthesis to include specific tactics for idea giving and idea taking. For example, experimental research might test the effectiveness of high- and low-conviction approaches on both the rejection and consideration of ideas by idealists and pragmatists. Further, experimental studies might determine if initial consideration of an idea ultimately leads to its full incorporation into a project, and what, if any, factors influence that process. These types of studies might pin point which of these variables is most important to creative collaboration.

Relating conviction of idea giving to resistance to idea taking

The current findings may also enhance our theories of creative collaboration by relating idea-giving conviction to research findings about attitude certainty and resistance to persuasion tactics (Tormala & Petty, 2004). In these studies, researchers have found that people who have strong attitudes are most likely to resist strong persuasion attempts (i. e., strong arguments that are perceived to be highly persuasive) to change those attitudes (Bassili, 1996), and that people who resist strong persuasion attempts to change their attitudes are more likely to increase their certainty about correctness of those attitudes (Tormala & Petty, 2002, 2004). Interestingly, however, this research has shown that resisting *weak* persuasion attempts does not lead to increased attitude certainty (Tormala & Petty, 2002).

These findings are explained by a meta-cognitive model, which posits that when individuals perceive their own resistance to strong persuasion attempts, they make inferences about their original attitudes (i.e., that those attitudes were highly valid) that explain that resistance (Petty, Briñol, & Tormala, 2002). By contrast, resistance to weak arguments does not lead to inferences that original attitudes were highly valid, and thus, does not increase resistance to further persuasion attempts.

With regard to idea taking and the current study, these findings suggest that creators who resist high-conviction idea giving by collaborators may become increasingly committed to their original ideas because such resistance further convinces them of the validity of these original ideas. At the same time, the findings suggest an additional predictor of who might be resistant to initial persuasive attempts – individuals with idealistic personal identities, whose self-definitions rely, in part, on their sole ownership of original ideas. In this manner, the current findings help to explain why idealists may be *repeatedly and consistently resistant to idea taking* in creative collaborations. That is, because they have resisted high-conviction idea giving in the past (due to its common use and initial threats to their identities), over time they become more and more firmly entrenched in the belief that their ideas are superior to others. This belief makes it increasingly hard for creative collaborators to convince idealists that any of their ideas should be modified to include new ideas. Thus, personal identity threats may be an initial trigger that begins the cycle of resistance to taking ideas from others, which increases as each successful resistance enhances their certainty that their original ideas were correct (and should not be altered).

At the same time, the current findings combined with the research on attitude certainty, provide a way out of this cycle. As noted earlier, attitude researchers have shown that resistance to weak arguments does not increase attitude certainty, purportedly, because it does not suggest that the original attitude was highly valid (Petty et al., 2002). In line with this notion, the findings indicate that low-conviction idea giving (i.e., general ideas given with neutral emotion and no urgency) – which may appear similar to weak persuasion – does not threaten the personal identities of idealists, and thus, may not trigger initial resistance to idea giving. Together, these findings suggest that making low-conviction or weak arguments is a good strategy for giving ideas to idealists, because these types of approaches will neither trigger identity threat responses, nor entrench original attitudes of idealists (even if the ideas given are refused). Over

time, then, idealists who encounter low-conviction idea-giving approaches may become more and more open to taking those ideas.

While these insights provide interesting ideas for creative collaborators, future research is needed to test these ideas in a more controlled setting. For example, future research might use a series of experimental studies to determine if idealists become more open to taking ideas if they are consistently (versus inconsistently) given ideas via a low-conviction approach.

Conclusion

Understanding how to create high-quality creative ideas has become a primary goal of research on group or team collaboration. To date, however, most of this research has focused on identifying how to generate and promote creative ideas within a team, without considering how those ideas might be taken or rejected by other team members. The current study provides some insight on how the personal identities of creative collaborators may influence their willingness to consider creative ideas given in group collaborations. I hope this insight provides a springboard for future research that examines the important process of idea taking in creative collaborations.

Notes

1. While it is true that a person could identify with a social group of 'music lovers' – personal identities do not require that a social group be affiliated with an identity attribute. Thus, the personal identity of 'music lover' would hold for a person even if there were no other 'music lovers' with which he or she affiliated. If one identifies as a music lover only when a part of a group of other music lovers, then this would be a social identity, rather than a personal identity.
2. I focus on *initial* idea consideration or rejection in this paper because most creative collaborations last months or even years, and ideas that are initially considered, ultimately change over the course of the project. Thus, I anticipated (and later confirmed) that it would be difficult to determine if any idea that was initially considered in a creative collaboration, was ultimately incorporated, in its original form, into a project.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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