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**Business un-usual – Dutch fashion designers and their business partners**

**Abstract**

To overcome the old dichotomy between management and creativity, we turn to the new research of organizational ambidexterity. It's goal is to describe a company's ability to manage the tension between the quantifiable, efficiency-driven processes of exploitation on one side and the intangible, creativity-driven processes of exploration on the other. It speaks of a constant danger of crowding-out which means that exploitation drives out exploration and vice versa. The solution: Nurturing "a paradoxical mindset that enables both/and thinking aimed at fostering synergies (integration), and distinctive practices that separate the competing demands to focus resources and action at one or the other at any point in time (differentiation)". (Lewis&Andriopoulos 2012, 365) Unfortunately, in all its complexity, this research delivers little inspiration to conceptualize new practices in managing creative work. More seriously, research on ambidextrous organizations constructs the ideal of a "master" manager who herself must strive to be as creative as controlling and as collaborative as competitive, applying these competencies in a situational sensitive mode. As creativity like structured thinking and value-motivations are deeply rooted in the individual's personality, this "master" manager is bound to turn into a frustrating ideal, disguising a reality where everyone remains in his imperative. Why not shift the focus from the ideal of one ambidextrous manager to the realities of differently motivated and skilled professionals and the way they make their collaboration work? Miles&Watkins (2007) refer to this approach as "complementary".

Combining complementarity with the search for new practices in managing creative work, the leading question of the remainder of this paper is an explorative one: How can ambidextrous collaborations of commercially skilled professionals and creatively skilled professionals be described? A particular context and work environment which

is highly dependent on creativity was chosen for further investigation: the Dutch designer fashion industry.

Twenty renown Dutch fashion designers and business partners of fashion designers were interviewed about their collaboration, the distribution of tasks, the characteristics of their relationship, work practices and applied skills. First findings suggest that the business partner to a fashion designer can be conceptualized as a hybrid between the creative and the commercial imperatives. Sense-making is mediated by shared mental models and goals by particular communicative practices. On the more material side of this work relationship, the economic independence (particularly) of the designer from the business partner seems to be most crucial. As Lampel et al. (2000) argue, the experience of the creative industries with integrating creativity and management can be an inspiration for other industries. There is some evidence that the designer/business partner model holds promises for economic sustainability within a cultural economy. The paper will further analyze and describe this model.