

## Overcoming the Liability of Novelty: The Power of Framing

When is novelty more likely to elicit a favorable evaluation? “Start with why” would be Simon Sinek’s answer to entrepreneurs aiming at seducing audiences with their futuristic ideas (Sinek, 2009). This is an “excellent advice” according to Grant & Sandberg (2016), “unless you’re doing something original that challenges the status quo” (p. 124). In this latter case, they argue, innovators seeking to appeal evaluating audiences are better off pitching their ideas focusing on how rather than on why. This type of debate is illustrative of the dilemma that entrepreneurs face when they have to decide which is the *right* framing to pitch their projects. Is a novel idea more appealing when it is framed in “Why” or “How” terms? Can an idea’s frame shift audiences’ evaluation of novelty?

Our aim in this paper is to explore the dilemma of idea framing by empirically investigating the above questions. Specifically, we want to study how the frames of novel ideas influence audiences’ evaluations, that is, the idea’s appeal and the propensity to invest in it. In doing so we seek to address increasing calls to shed more light on the evaluative process that underlie the recognition of novelty, as well as audiences willingness to support it. As recently pointed out by Zhou et al. (2017, p. 180): “*Novelty recognition is the crucial starting point for extracting value from the ideas generated by others... [but] the phenomenon of novelty recognition has received little attention*”. Extant research has revealed contrasting views concerning what types of idea framing are more suited to elicit favorable evaluative outcomes. Some studies suggest that adoption of symbolic language and high-levels of abstraction enhance novel idea recognition (Howell & Higgins, 1990; Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Fiol, Harris & House, 1999; Zott & Huy, 2007), others emphasize the need to ground novelty in concrete details (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001). We contend that these seemingly controversial findings can be addressed by simultaneously considering the framing and the novelty of the idea that audiences are expected to evaluate.

Our findings contribute to two emerging streams of scholarship: the work on the role of framing narratives in shaping evaluators responses to novelty (Navis & Glynn, 2011; Garud, Schildt & Lant, 2014; Vaara, Sonenshein & Boje; 2016), and the literature on idea recognition, an area of scholarly inquiry that has been somewhat obscured by the prevalence of research focusing on the generation phase (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Anderson, Potočnik & Zhou 2014; Berg 2016; Boudreau, Guinan, Lakhani, & Riedl, 2016; Zhou, Wang, Song & Wu, 2017). Further, our study contributes new insights into the role of cognition in innovation and creativity (Perry - Smith, 2014; Wiesenfeld, Reyt, Brockner & Trope, 2017).

### THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

To develop our conceptual model, we draw on Construal Level Theory (CLT, Trope & Liberman, 2010), which shows that different construal frames influence evaluation, preferences and behavioral intentions. We use the CLT perspective for multiple reasons: first, CLT differentiates between concrete and abstract frames allowing us to contribute to the dilemma of idea’s framing in entrepreneurship and innovation; second, CLT

scholars have found evidence of the effect of mental construals on creativity generation and innovation (Wiesenfeld, Reyt, Brockner & Trope, 2017). However, CLT research on novelty evaluation has received limited attention. To the best of our knowledge, only one study investigates creative idea recognition within the CLT framework (Mueller, Wakslak & Krishnan, 2014). In addition to that, we explore the construal effect on novelty appreciation considering outcome variables so far neglected that is, idea's appeal and investment propensity. Mueller, Wakslak & Krishnan (2014) in their study are explicit about this shortcoming stating that "construal levels may affect people's views of creative ideas, but we do not know whether this translates into support for implementing the ideas" (p. 86).

According to the CLT literature, constructing an idea with an abstract framing versus a concrete framing influences its persuasiveness and evaluative outcome. In particular, since persuasiveness increase with congruent processing styles, we expect concrete framings to be more effective in eliciting the appreciation of highly novel ideas; whereas we predict abstract framings to be more effective in eliciting the appreciation of lowly novel ideas. Indeed, individuals naturally process more novel information using low level construals and, in contrast, process less novel information using high-level construals (Vallacher & Wegner, 1987; Liu, 2008). The appreciation of more or less novel ideas would be facilitated when audiences are induced to use a thinking mode that is congruent with the natural mental process adopted for such information. In sum, we argue that different ideas' frames will shift the evaluative outcomes of incremental and radical novelty by affecting the cognitive process through which audiences make evaluations

Our conceptual framework and hypotheses are depicted in Figure 1.

## **METHOD**

We conducted two experimental studies designed to probe the conditions under which novel ideas have the higher chances to receive favorable evaluation. Accordingly, we began to explore the effect of the construal on the appreciation of highly novel ideas using a paradigm already employed in prior experiments. Specifically, in Study 1, we primed the participants using *How* or *Why* questions (Freitas, Gollwitzer, & Trope, 2004; Alter, Oppenheimer & Zemla, 2010; Mueller, Wakslak, & Krishnan, 2014). In Study 2, we induced the participants to think more concretely or abstractly by varying the content of the idea description, that is, its frame. The concrete framing emphasized "the ways" to use the idea; whereas, the abstract framing emphasized "the reasons" for using the idea. In both studies, we asked participants how much they liked the idea and, also, the propensity to invest in the idea. In addition to the two dependent variables, we measured the perceived usefulness of the idea to explore the underlying mechanism of the cognitive process.

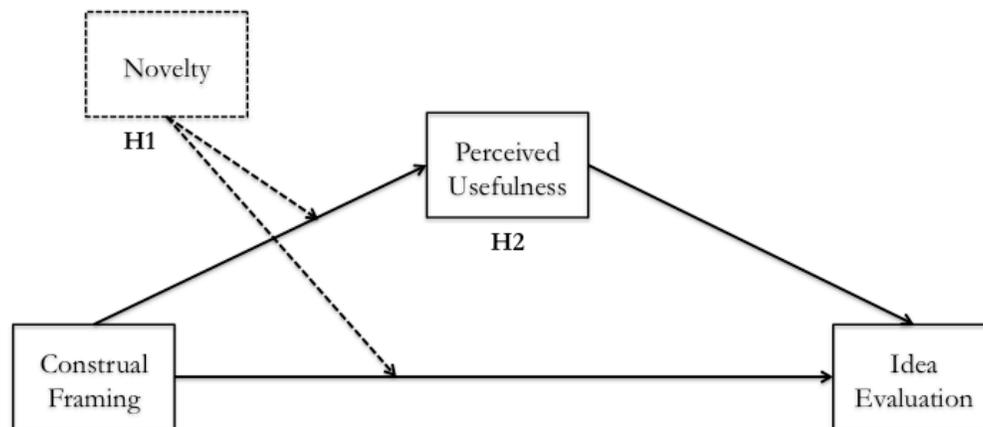
## **RESULT**

Our experimental findings, as expected, showed that concrete framings increase the appealing and the propensity to invest in highly novel ideas; whereas abstract framings increases the appealing and the

propensity to invest in less novel ideas. In addition, our results suggest that when ideas are in competitions, less novel ideas have a significantly higher chance of eliciting a positive evaluation to the extent that they are framed in abstract terms because abstraction dramatically reduces the evaluative gap between less and more novel ideas. Finally, we unpack the underlying cognitive process by providing evidence on the mediating role of perceived usefulness in Study 2.

**FIGURE 1**

**Conceptual Framework: How Idea Framing and Novelty affect Audiences' Evaluation**



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## SENSORY AND NARRATIVE INNOVATION: CREATING NEW PRODUCTS IN THE CONTEXT OF MOLECULAR GASTRONOMY

A recent current in organization studies is the quest to understand the relevance of visual and material aspects of products, organizations, and organizing. In this context, scholars of aesthetic design, viewed as the strategic manipulation of aesthetic product features in the context of increasing the symbolic aspects of products and their abilities to evoke affect and sensations, highlighted that products' aesthetic elements are linked to the meanings products evoke (Eisenman, 2013; Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011; c.f. Ravasi & Stigliani, 2012; Verganti, 2008). Specifically, these authors linked material aesthetic attributes to various socio-cultural meanings in a range of products made by firms, such as Alessi and Swatch. They highlighted that producers' attention to aesthetic design generates products that are functional items, such as dinnerware and watches, but more importantly, are symbolic goods, in that they are objects that evoke affect, make statements about users' identities and socio-cultural capital, or operate as fashion accessories. In this way, sensations, or aesthetic information that is known in a sensory way, are the basis for generating new meanings and experiences in the context of using the products.

Our paper extends these ideas by drawing on Henderson and Clark's (1990) idea of *modular innovation*: innovation processes based on identifying products' core components and rearranging the links among them. However, while the focus of Henderson and Clark and their many followers was on technological linkages and mechanical components leading to functional or utilitarian outcomes, we apply the idea of identifying core components and linkages to products' aesthetic features. That is, we argue that products have important core components that are aesthetic in nature: components that affect the senses and which convey information that is known in various sensory ways. We demonstrate that identifying these aesthetic core components and viewing linkages among them are central to understanding the sources of sensory, experiential, and meaning-related reactions products elicit.

## Helping You Help Me:

### How Help-Receiver's Sensegiving Enables Helpful Help in Creative Projects

How do teams working on creative projects quickly receive help that they find actually helpful? To answer this question, we conducted an inductive, multi-method field study at a major design firm. We collected 401 daily diary entries and 109 weekly interviews from four project teams, as well as a separate sample of 42 critical incidents from 24 interviews. Using an inductive approach to our qualitative data (e.g., Locke, 2001), we analyzed the data by constructing process narratives for each episode, and comparing the processes in those givers and receivers perceived as helpful and unhelpful, checking with informants throughout the process. We found that, in helpful episodes, help receivers took a surprisingly assertive role, engaging in sensegiving activities that aligned expectations and understandings in advance of or at the very beginning of interactions. In unhelpful episodes, however, help-givers and -receivers maintained incongruent expectations and project understandings throughout the episode.

At the outset of helping interactions, givers have little information about the project or its needs. Because helping episodes are relatively brief interactions, receivers need to quickly provide the giver with an understandable account (Maitlis, 2005) that communicates their conception of the project and its needs. These accounts are intended to align givers' and receivers' understandings of the problem; we refer to such alignment as *diagnostic congruence*. In one example, Roger, a help-receiver on a team nearing the end of its work, asked for a sanity check before the client presentation:

I gave [the givers] a sense of what sort of input we were looking for. . . . At some level, you need to set expectations, like, "We're two weeks from the end. . . . Don't come in expecting to throw it all away, because we've been working with the client, so we're feeling pretty good about this. But we need another CDF designer [for a] sort of sanity check on it." . . . It's useful to establish some guardrails around the sort of input that you want. . . . And they were just very good. Obviously we steered them

## **The Role of Management Team Experience in the Performance of New versus Series Video Game Development Projects**

In innovation-driven environments, firms' competitive advantage often depends on their flexibility and ability to innovate. One way to achieve this is organize the development of products in projects, headed by cross-functional management teams (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1995; Cohen & Bailey, 1997; Shepherd & Ahmed, 2000). Instead of employing permanent management teams, these teams are composed “fluidly” across projects (Huckman, Staats, & Upton, 2009; Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cohen, 2012). These teams may thus consist of completely or partly different members across projects or have remained intact since the previous project, leading to different degrees of experience in working together as a team (Mathieu, Tannenbaum, Donsbach, & Alliger, 2014).

How does this management team experience affect the performance of these product development projects? The experience working together might be a unique source of competitive advantage that helps deliver successful products through anticipating developments, recognizing opportunities for growth, and increasing a product's speed-to-market (Kor, 2003; Taylor & Greve, 2006). Also, equilibrium theories would suggest that team stability is advantageous, as it helps the team to organize itself into a stable pattern of behaviors. In contrast, membership changes are considered disruptive (Gersick, 1991). Yet, management teams of product development projects are by definition composed for only a limited period of time. Whereas the demands arising from the dynamic nature and competitiveness of product development environments call for flexible rearrangements of teams (Huckman et al., 2009), management team stability may come at a cost in the form of risk aversion, impaired decision-making, and

lack of innovativeness (e.g., Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1990; Katz, 1982). Keeping these management teams intact across projects could thus help or hurt performance.

We examine whether and when this management team experience in working together across projects has positive or negative effects on the performance of innovative projects (sales, expert reviews, and consumer reviews). We do so in an innovation-driven setting, the video game industry, as it allows us to examine management teams overseeing innovative projects that by definition are limited in time. Research on teams that face high efficiency demands suggests a non-linear effect of team experience such that performance increases up to a certain point, reaching a plateau (e.g., operative time in surgery teams; Kurmann et al., 2014; Xu et al., 2013). We integrate and extend current theorizing in the team literature by arguing that in innovation-driven settings, the initial performance benefits of team experience will change into performance *losses*, as reflected in an inverted-U shaped relation. In a sample of 5,370 video game development projects executed in a period of ten years, we indeed find that the relation between management team experience and the games' sales, expert reviews, and consumer reviews is inverted U-shaped.

Further contributing to increasing understanding of the still-debated value of team experience (Humphrey & Aime, 2014), we also study a condition under which the proposed inverted U-shaped team experience-performance relation is more pronounced. Considering video game development projects against the background of the exploration versus exploitation literature (Lavie, Stettner, & Tushman, 2010; March, 1991), we hypothesize that the type of the game development—completely new or part of a series—determines when and to what extent team experience turns into a disadvantage; this disadvantage should realize earlier and more strongly for developments of completely new games than of sequels of existing games.

Controlling for the potential endogeneity of releasing a sequel game, results confirm that the inverted U-shaped curve is indeed steeper and its turning point sooner for completely new as compared with sequel game development projects. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of this research for permanent and temporary (management) teams along with suggestions for future research.

there, but they also didn't deviate. . . . They respected those rules of that engagement. (R12)

In this quotation, Roger emphasized how he explicitly told givers what kind of help he wanted at the outset of the interaction, intentionally working to align giver expectations with his own. We conceptualize this behavior as an instance of sensegiving, "the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality" (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). Further, the givers in this example were intuitively sensitive to the time constraints Roger and the team were facing; they respected the guardrails based on his sensegiving. Because givers and receivers pace their activities based on the time allotted, allotting relatively brief amounts of time with no expectation of future interaction amplifies the challenge of rapid diagnostic congruence.

When givers and receivers failed to establish diagnostic congruence quickly, helping was seen as a misuse of time. In these cases, receivers did not effectively communicate what they wanted from givers, either because they assumed that the type of help needed was self-evident or they themselves were uncertain about the kind of help that would be most useful. As one receiver, Peggy (R13), put it, "I don't know if the challenge [I posed to givers] was too specific or if I wasn't specific enough or if I just didn't have things clearly enough in my head yet." Although Peggy had expected givers to understand what she needed from her explanation, she found that her attempts at sensegiving seemed to confuse givers. Because Peggy struggled to align givers' understanding of her needs with her own, much of the episode was spent talking about issues Peggy felt were tangential to the core issue. In this way, diagnostic incongruence can lead directly to givers providing assistance that is inconsistent with receivers' desires or to the parties spending more time trying to establish diagnostic congruence than addressing the issue at hand. In either case, the outcome will be one or both parties perceiving the incident as unhelpful.

The existing literature on helping in organizations provides a rich picture of many of the potential costs and benefits facing help-seekers and help-givers (Bamberger, 2009; Flynn, 2006; Nadler, 1997). However, in its focus on how actors decide whether to initiate a helping interaction, previous research has paid little attention to how helping actually happens. Further, prior research has often implicitly assumed that, if helping happened, the episode was a success (e.g., Organ, 1988; Mossholder, Richardson, and Settoon, 2011).

The central contribution of this study is the discovery of interactional influences on the success of a helping episode—in particular, the processes by which parties rapidly establish diagnostic congruence. Essential to this process were receivers' willingness to eschew politeness norms that might lead them to be obsequious toward help givers. Instead, receivers needed to behave in ways normally associated with leaders: being proactive and assertive in giving sense to helpers. This is especially important in creative projects, in which it may be difficult for outsiders to understand or assess the project state.

In contemporary knowledge-intensive organizations, providing help can be a complex task; the problems with which teams need assistance are often non-routine, and much can go wrong. In contrast to prior research, which focuses on the process of helpful help (Grodal, Nelson, and Siino, 2015), or only on the failure of a potential helper to actually give help when asked (e.g., Lee, 2002; Bamberger, 2009), we found that not all help given is actually helpful. Instead, we found that outsiders provide quick and helpful assistance when receivers took the lead by helping others to help them.

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We empirically examine this framework in the context of data we collected about the *molecular gastronomy* movement. Chefs associated with this movement seek to generate new sensations and experiences among diners, sensations that aim to disconnect them from their previous experiences of food and cuisine. They do so through the introduction of new ingredients, textures, flavors, and color compositions. Menus consist of numerous small courses that are eaten over a three to four hour period; and diners are expected to think, laugh, be challenged and even frightened after every bite. As said by one of our interviewees, beyond providing pleasure, molecular chefs seek to transform their restaurants into “places of reflection” through the act of cooking. So, eating at an experimental high-end restaurant can be compared to other cultural activities, such as going to the theatre, an art exhibit, or even an amusement park

Methodologically, we perceive this as an *extreme* case, classified as such by having a lot of variation, rather than typicality, along the variable of interest, in this case, linkages between components that evoke sensory reactions. We use this case to demonstrate that new products emerge from potential combinations and in so doing identify a potential toolkit for innovation in creative context. Specially, we analyze dishes in terms of their main elements and whether these elements intend to evoke a sensory reaction (e.g., taste, smell, a visual presentation) or a narrative one (e.g., references to a particular concept like childhood memories). In the process, we develop a classification of these combinations as primarily *sensory*, primarily *narrative*, or as combinations of the two and demonstrate that this classification leads to a six part typology which we detail.

In terms of contribution, this paper expands our knowledge about the use of material features to situate products as symbolic conveyers of meaning. In this context, it advances two bodies of work. First, it advances the literature on organizations and innovations by extending the idea of modular innovation beyond technological and mechanical linkages toward aesthetic ones and emphasizing that these linkages

take shape along several modes (e.g., units of meaning making such as visual information, taste, smell, texts, etc.) and that the interrelations among these modes drive the creation of new product, new meanings, and new experiences. Second, the paper advances the literature on multimodality by advancing a typology classifying the underlying mechanics through which various modes evoke sensations and ultimately, generate new meanings and experiences (e.g., Bell & Davison, 2013; Meyer et al., 2013). Moreover, the paper advances work on multimodality by increasing the resolution with which we analyze multimodality and aesthetic design beyond the more typical analyses based on the relationship between words and pictures. Subsequently, this study increases our ability to understand products for which aesthetic design is central specifically and the impact of visuality more generally.

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