



**Unpacking Collaborative Creativity;  
A Membership Categorization Analysis of Writers' Room  
Dynamics**

Master of Arts: Media and Communication Studies – Culture, Collaborative Media,  
and Creative Industries

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## **Abstract**

The present thesis studies the concept of collaborative creativity in the Writers' Room setting. It applies membership categorization analysis to explore the conversations during which co-screenwriters contribute to the creative process of screenwriting. The study is based on participatory observation of the 2024 Writers' Room program as part of the Serial Storytelling master's program at *Internationale Filmschule Köln*.

By considering the creative process as the two-step process of blind variation and selective retention -based on Donald Campbell (1960)- and socio-culturally contextualizing it -based on Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1998)- different membership categories that could be played within a screenwriting team had been identified. Then, the researcher experimented with those through his participatory observation in the Writers' Room and came up with an explanation. The mechanism of interaction between them was also depicted in a systems model.

The findings explain that co-screenwriters collaborate in the Writers' Room by playing dynamic membership roles during conversations. These roles can be categorized into (1) the Generator, (2) the Analyst, and (3) the Strategist. The role of each co-screenwriter can vary at each turn of their speech, and different parts of a turn of speech can fulfill different roles. The Generator role emerges when they blindly generate a new idea, the Analyst role manifests when they rationally discuss whether an idea works, and the Strategist role appears when they attempt to navigate the discussion.

*Keywords:* Collaborative Creativity, Writers' Room, Collaborative Screenwriting, Serial Storytelling, Creative Process

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## 1. Introduction

The rapid growth of the TV series industry in recent decades, driven by the expansion of online platforms and streaming platforms, has made TV series one of the largest and most significant sectors of the creative industries. It raises the particular importance of examining the processes involved in TV series production within the field of media studies. The screenwriting process, as the point of “where it all starts” (Redvall, 2014), plays a key role at the heart of such processes.

On the other hand, there is a confluence-based approach to the disciplines of Communication studies and Creativity studies (see Fulton & McIntyre, 2013). This approach explains how creativity is an interactive and communicative process that occurs within a socio-cultural context (and not merely an individual, internal ability) and emphasizes the importance of such an approach for a better understanding of both concepts.

In addition to the practical relevance of this study to screenwriting and its theoretical contribution to the discipline of media and communication, the topic of this thesis is also deeply connected to the broader societal context. The two central concepts of this research—creativity and collaboration—are not only crucial within specific professional fields but also play an influential role in shaping contemporary societies. These concepts warrant careful attention given their wide-reaching impact.

Firstly, a deeper understanding of "collaboration" is essential when considering two fundamental values for social progress: democracy and diversity. Efforts to integrate more democratic models into social processes—whether in the workplace or other domains—alongside the aim to bring together diverse individuals from varying social

identities, physical conditions, and cultural backgrounds, all hinge on a nuanced grasp of the concept of collaboration.

Secondly, we are living in an age where technological advancements are rapidly diminishing the exclusive human ownership of creativity and innovation. Machines, particularly artificial intelligence, are increasingly becoming capable of creative output, improving in this regard with each passing day. As a result, humans need to deepen their understanding of "creativity" —not only to enhance the development of these technologies but also to collaborate effectively with them and redefine their relationship with the world around them. Developing this nuanced view of creativity is critical in this rapidly evolving landscape, as it remains one of the unique virtues that define human potential.

One of the key trends in today's TV series industry is the adaptation of the American tradition of collaborative screenwriting, known as the Writers' Room. The success of streaming services has inspired a constantly growing number of writers' rooms (Karhula, Lehti, & Nuutinen, 2021), and this method is rapidly being embraced globally, with writers and companies worldwide adopting it.

The term Writers' Room is used to refer to the collaboration of multiple scriptwriters in the writing process of a TV series: sometimes it means the collaboration of a small team and sometimes a writing group of more than ten people. (Karhula, Lehti, & Nuutinen, 2021, p. 6)

Writers' rooms were originally a long tradition in the US television industry (Karhula, Lehti, & Nuutinen, 2021; Maloney & Burne, 2021; Redvall, 2014). It gradually got imitated in other countries, e.g. it began to happen by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation in the late 1990s (Redvall, 2014). Today the success of streaming services



has also resulted in the constantly growing number of writers' rooms (Karhula, Lehti, & Nuutinen, 2021). Now it is a transnational term, being used to position a set of pre-production practices in script development (Maloney & Burne, 2021).

Literature on the Writers' Room mostly revolves around three main aspects of it, including the context it gives to the screenwriting process, special creative space, and collaboration (see Redvall, 2014). Many of articles and books (see Karhula, Lehti, & Nuutinen, 2021; Phalen & Osellame, 2012; Maloney & Burne, 2021; Redvall, 2014) have introduced and examined this method, discussing its creative advantages and addressing its challenges to improve it. A common theme across all this literature is the fundamental role of communication and interaction. This underscores how applying communication studies can significantly enhance the Writers' Room experience.

Besides the importance of screenwriting in media production studies and the inherently communicative nature of collaboration, the Writers' Room intersects with communication studies from another crucial angle. Considering the screenwriting process as a creative process, "creativity" is the second key concept contributing to the Writers' Room. A socio-cultural theory of creativity developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1998) explains the concept of creativity as an intersection where individuals, domains, and fields interact (DIFi model). Therefore creativity itself has a communicative nature even in individual creative processes.

The research gap recognized by the present thesis is interdisciplinary in nature. On one hand, within the field of creativity studies, Csikszentmihalyi's systems model defines creativity solely in terms of the interaction between a creative individual, a field, and a domain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). However, there are also collaborative creative processes (such as writers' rooms) where creativity is the product of

interactions among a group of creative collaborators (at the first level) and then with the field and domain (at the second level). This study aims to propose an extension (by modeling the first level) to Csikszentmihalyi's model of creativity. On the other hand, previous research on writers' room have consistently resorted to vague and non-scientific descriptions, such as "chemistry," (see Redvall, 2014; Maloney & Burne, 2021) regarding the concept of collaboration. There is a noticeable absence of in-depth studies that explain the mechanisms of collaboration within writers' rooms.

Since this research gap is interdisciplinary, addressing it requires a combination of knowledge and skills related to both "screenwriting" and "media and communication studies." My academic background as a graduate of a bachelor's program in screenwriting and a current master's student in media and communication provides the foundational points of support for me as a researcher in tackling this topic. In fact, identifying this research gap stems from my own experiences in collaborative screenwriting, and the tools and methodologies I employ in organizing the present research are derived from my academic activities as a master's program student in Media and Communication Studies: Culture, Collaborative Media, and Creative Industries.

The present study aims to explain the mechanisms of collaborative creativity within writers' rooms. For this purpose, the method of participant observation for data collection, and membership categorization analysis for data analysis have been applied. The research questions are as follows: (1.) During their conversations in the screenwriting process, what membership categories do collaborating writers in a writers' room adopt? (2.) What role does each identified membership category play in advancing the process of creative collaboration? This attempt seeks to contribute to the discipline of media and communication by enhancing the understanding of the

writers' room as a sector within the field of media production and by proposing the development of the confluence approach that integrates communication studies and creativity studies.

## **2. Background**

### **2.1. The Writers' Room**

As many writers have pointed out, the writers' room is an exclusive space that one cannot enter without an invitation. Therefore, there are few scholars who have had the opportunity to observe what happens inside the room. Most studies have been conducted through interviews with writers about their experiences in writers' rooms or through an "auto-ethnography" approach by researchers who have personal experience working in such rooms. This exclusivity helps to create an aura of mystery around them, and few academic researchers have been granted access to observe what goes on in the room (Redvall, 2014, p. 226).

A key tradition that seems maintained in studies on screenwriting is that "screenwriting is typically framed as a craft rather than an art (Conor 2014, Price 2013, as cited in Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 189)." Craft enables "a good idea to become something remarkable" (Maloney & Burne, 2021). The image Maloney and Burne's study (2021) draws of the writers' room, clearly indicates its combined nature: its craftsmanship on the one hand, and the qualities all of which are inherently communicative, on the other hand.

The concept of craft implies necessities such as method, technique, etc. The communicative notions signify that all the knowledge and skills required in the writers' room do not necessarily have a direct relevance to screenwriting (eg. communication and leadership). As Eva Redvall (2014) noted “One of the lessons learned during the early trials of collaborative writing was that not all head writers are good leaders” (p. 224) Therefore those two mentioned tensions cannot be tackled unless the topic is scientifically studied within the communication discipline to delve into the concept of collaboration, and methods and techniques for the writers' rooms.

In another study of the writers' room by Patricia Phalen and Julia Osellame (2012), they did a six-week observational study of a US prime-time drama series and also interviews with 45 television writers. Their study contributes to verbalizing the collaborative screenwriting process, its advantages, and its challenges.

In the case of its advantages, they mention that “collaboration contributes to the creative process by facilitating an exchange of ideas that helps writers improve their individual scripts.” (Phalen & Osellame, 2012, p. 8) The improvement has been described as (1) the variety of ideas and perspectives (p. 8), (2) the speed of progress (p. 9), (3) facilitating continuity with storylines and characters and demanding institutional memory (p. 9), and (4) the opportunity for writers to develop new skills by working with colleagues who have different talents and unique perspectives (p. 10).

In the description of characteristics of “good” rooms, all that Phalen and Osellame (2012) noted is the room's “chemistry”. They emphasize that the quality of the writers' room is determined by the selection of the right personalities as much as by choosing the right skills, and the whole chemistry of the writers' room can change with just one person (Phalen & Osellame, 2012, p. 10).

The idea of "chemistry" is mentioned in the study, but it isn't explained in detail, and there isn't an attempt to provide a more scientific definition of it. The study assumes that the role of strategy and leadership in the writers' room is limited to the "casting" before the project begins, and apparently, the study believes that matching the personalities of co-writers simply improves the quality of their communication and interactions. However, the study doesn't explain how this matching process should be done.

## 2.2. The Confluence of Creativity and Communication Studies

In their paper "The Future of Communication", Janet Fulton and Phillip McIntyre (2013) discuss the intersection of creativity and communication studies. They propose that applying the model from creativity research to the discipline of communication will offer new ways of examining communication. They argue that the future of communication theory may depend on this confluence-based approach and support their argument by summarizing the findings of creativity research in communication studies at the University of Newcastle in Australia.

They describe the creative process as multifaceted and involving various aspects. Scholars reviewed by them, have applied the systems model to their creative practices, revealing the interplay between structure, agency, and the creative process in different fields. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's systems model offers a comprehensive perspective on the communication process in cultural production, highlighting the highly social nature of creativity and the significance of cultural knowledge and social networks in shaping creative works. This approach applies to various spheres of cultural production, including journalism, editing, design, photography, and web design.

Fulton and McIntyre (2013) suggest that further research is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems model in other areas.

However, there is also a second layer of the confluence of creativity with communication studies in this case. It will be discussed as the concept of collaborative creativity. In Csikszentmihalyi's system model and also the application of it to the discipline of communication at the University of Newcastle, the communicative notion of creativity still merely refers to the interaction between the creator/producer and audiences/receivers. It results from focusing on the creative process with singular creators. But here, in collaborative creative processes, there is also an extra layer of interaction between co-creators.

### 2.2.1. Collaborative Creativity

The academic literature on “collaborative creativity” emerged from cultural psychology and social psychology theoretical frameworks that increasingly challenge individualist conceptions of creativity to argue that social interaction, communication, and collaboration are key elements in creative thought and practice (Barrett, Creech, & Zhukov, 2021). Studies revolve around different aspects of communicative dynamics within the creative process between collaborators e. g. workplace culture (Ivanov & Glaeske, 2023), context and the network's structural characteristics (Soda, Stea, & Pedersen, 2019), interactional patterns (Kupers & van Dijk, 2020), and embodied sensory micro-dynamics (Satama, Blomberg, & Warren, 2022) in the process of collaborative creativity.

Workplace culture is a crucial aspect of organizational management, known as Organizational Culture, which includes the underlying assumptions, values, and

practices that are recognized and reflected upon by various members of the company (Ivanov & Glaeske, 2023). Ivanov & Glaeske (2023) in their research about establishing a digital workplace culture that fosters innovation and creativity, show that on team level, innovation, and creativity are dependent on collaborations between teams and divisions, establishing appropriate communication platforms and approaches, as well as the new phenomenon that emerged from the data called natural creativity. They state that both notions of communication and collaboration are strictly related to each other. They define “natural creativity” as the process of exchanging creative ideas in an informal face-to-face setting, which can be done consciously or subconsciously (Ivanov & Glaeske, 2023; p. 650).

Ivanov & Glaeske (2023) state that this natural creativity can be fostered by enhanced knowledge sharing, promotion of collaboration between virtual teams, and improving the feeling of team belongingness. Thus, the goal is to achieve natural creativity through the guarantee of communication and collaboration, even in a digital team. In general, fostering innovation and creativity on a team level in DWC (digital workspace culture) is highly dependent on introducing knowledge-sharing systems that make communication and cooperation more efficient, maturity of the team, as well as encouraging transparency and openness (p. 65-66).

On the other hand, Soda, Stea, and Pedersen (2019) note that the debate on whether bonding or bridging ties are more beneficial for acquiring knowledge that is conducive to individual creativity has mostly overlooked the context in which such ties are formed. They challenge the assumption that closed, heavily bonded networks imply a collaborative attitude on the part of the embedded actors and propose that the level of collaboration in a network can be independent of that network’s structural characteristics.

This study (Soda, Stea, & Pedersen, 2019) emphasizes that the benefits of network positions arise from the opportunities they offer, rather than being inherent to the structures themselves. This insight challenges simplistic assumptions about network effects and underscores the importance of contextual collaboration within networks. By distinguishing between structural properties and collaborative behaviors, the study shows that both closed and brokered networks can exhibit varying levels of collaboration, impacting knowledge acquisition. The introduction of ego network collaboration as a key contingent mechanism highlights how collaboration influences the realization of benefits from network structures, advancing the understanding of how networks foster creativity and knowledge acquisition.

Elisa Kupers and Marijn van Dijk (2020) explore creativity in interaction: the dynamics of teacher-student interactions during a musical composition task. Their research aims to deepen the understanding of how novelty and appropriateness -two key characteristics of creativity- emerge in teacher-student interactions in a musical composition task. Kupers and Dijk (2020) coded teacher turns as convergent (aimed at instructing, providing information, and evaluation) divergent (aimed at idea generation), or neutral. However, they saw “no immediate relationship between divergent turns and student levels of novelty. In qualitative analyses of longer interactional patterns, they saw how novel ideas can emerge from interactions where the teacher alternates between convergent and divergent behavior, but also how a teacher and student can become ‘stuck’ in exchanges with no novelty and repeated convergent turns” (p. 1).

Detailed analyses in Kupers and Dijk’s study (2020) show that while some students generate novel ideas easily with open-ended support, others need more structured guidance. This highlights the need for teachers to be flexible, alternating between



convergent and divergent strategies to adapt to students' needs. The study underscores the importance of adaptive, student-centered learning in fostering creativity and suggests that both convergent and divergent thinking are essential in educational contexts.

In the case of embodied subtleties in the process of collaborative creativity, Suvi Satama, Annika Blomberg, and Samantha Warren (2022) Drawing on a sensory ethnography of two dance productions, illustrate the fine-grained ways in which professional dancers negotiate creative processes. identify three aspects through which collaborative creativity emerges from bodily subtleties: (1) moving beyond individual bodies towards collective ambitions, (2) relating to colleagues' micro-gestures and bodily nuances, and (3) the role of 'serious play' between bodies in setting the scene for the first two aspects to occur (Satama, Blomberg, & Warren, 2022; p. 167).

They explained the way the body is subtly involved in the process of collaborative creativity as follows:

Satama, Blomberg, and Warren (2022) discuss the importance of physical presence and body language in fostering collaborative creativity within teams. While verbal communication and social interaction are typically emphasized in organizations, the authors argue that non-verbal, physical aspects—such as body movements, gestures, and other subtle cues—also play a crucial role in the creative process. These physical expressions can reveal hidden, subconscious, or even suppressed thoughts and experiences, which can contribute to creativity. The paragraph suggests that even small teams and professionals can benefit from being mindful of these non-verbal signals, as they can help in recognizing and appreciating valuable, even minor, creative ideas.

### 3. Literature Review

The academic literature reviewed for this study revolves around the nature of the Writers' Room. It is a method of collaborative screenwriting which is originally a tradition in the US television industry. Scholars have studied its creative benefits, including the context it brings to the screenwriting process (Redvall, 2014; Sweet & Carlson, 2020), the creative space it makes (Redvall, 2014; Sweet & Carlson, 2020; Phalen & Osellame, 2012); also the potential tensions and challenges in it (Maloney & Burne, 2021; Phalen & Osellame, 2012); moreover, its structure and protocols (Sweet & Carlson, 2020; Phalen & Osellame, 2012), and its organizational culture (Sweet & Carlson, 2020).

#### 3.1. Context, Space, and Complex Collaboration in the Writers' Room

One of the studies that had the opportunity of an observational study of a writers' room was Eva Novrup Redvall's study (2014) of the writers' room used for the television series *Borgen* (2010-2013). Based on that observation, she analyzed what can be regarded as the creative benefits of working with Writers' Rooms. The first benefit of working with the writers' room that is mentioned by Redvall (2014) is the context that the writers' room can give to the screenwriting process. She explains how having a writers' room at the production site can facilitate the communication and interaction between writers and non-writing members of the crew. She mentions a common belief among professionals that good film production is all about communication (Redvall, 2014, p. 228).

The particular type of space that the writers' room creates for the process of writing itself is another benefit Redvall (2014) mentions. The writers' room can be regarded

as a room in which the idea is able to materialize gradually, and where those present can discuss directions and developments based on different ways of making the story come alive (Redvall, 2014, p. 230). This sense of physicality can also make a difference when communicating ideas to others at an early stage of development (Redvall, 2014). As the third benefit of working with the writers' room, Redvall (2014) mentions it as a room full of complex collaborations. This was regarded as a positive quality for a head writer by his co-writers, who described their role as very much challenging his ideas to ensure the right choices were made before moving on (Redvall, 2014, p. 232).

As you can see above, "all three of these aspects are concerned with facilitating communication around ideas and stories on different levels, between writers as well as between other people who are involved in the production of a series. (Redvall, 2014, p. 234)" Therefore, Communication and Media Production constitute two fundamental aspects of the present subject, and a comprehensive study of it requires the implementation of the discipline of media and communication studies.

Sweet and Carlson (2020) did another study on Writers' Room. It investigated what can be learned by tracing the collaborative efforts that begin in the writers' room and extend through every aspect of the show's production. To do this, they relied on extensive interviews with three of the show's writers, and one editor of the Amazon Prime series, *Transparent*.

The major codes that emerged from Sweet and Carlson's (2020) analysis include (1) a safe writing culture and corresponding emotional benefits; (2) a disciplined schedule and protocols; (3) a connection to stories; and (4) extended collaboration. Again, it has been shown that in the core of the Writers' Room, it is all a matter of communication which revolves around the relationship between co-writers with each other, with their

story, and with other crew. It can be underscored to what extent the efficiency of writers' rooms is inextricably intertwined with the communication within it.

In the case of a safe writing culture and corresponding emotional benefits, they state that a secure and inviting writing environment is primary for the types of collaboration and creation that occur in its writers' room. The writing practices of *Transparent* emphasize the significance of establishing relationships among the writers well before any writing takes place (Sweet & Carlson, 2020, p. 190). The way that the executive producer of the project -Jill Soloway- planned a two-week retreat to form a meaningful and intimate relationship between co-writers has been drawn by Sweet and Carlson's paper (2020). It is exactly an example of the importance of leadership in fashioning a space where encourages and respects moments of vulnerability. This dynamic proves integral to the writing process (Sweet & Carlson, 2020, p.188).

In the case of discipline to collaboration, Sweet and Carlson's study (2020) describes, on one hand, a strict writing schedule that respects artists' time and allows for maintaining intimate relationships, and on the other hand, protocols of the writers' room that provide insight to the collaborative processes (p.191). It describes protocols in of the *Transparent* writers' room: "When the writers break character or story, they designate one person to lead the discussion... The person leading the discussion stands in front of the whiteboard and writes down ideas the other writers suggest... According to this protocol, the person running the room may deny an idea, but all the other writers may only grow ideas... The whiteboard functions as a graphic organizer and contains the basic episodic structure and character arcs. However, the sticky notes allow plot points to float among episodes and scenes that encourage the story as constantly in process... (p. 191)"

In the case of connection to stories, Sweet and Carlson (2020) explain how writers' room can take the writing process into a grounding that "articulates both an emotional connection to the material and a personal responsibility to the stories (p. 192)" and state that "good writing comes from a place of understanding and need in the writer (p. 193)". They describe the "complex process of creation and revision" throughout the production as the fourth code of the writers' room – "extended collaboration" as they called it (Sweet & Carlson, 2020). It includes both the division of tasks during the creation of screenplay within the room and during revisions in collaboration with other crew for example in "table read (Sweet & Carlson, 2020)" or the editing -as "final rewrite (Freedman, 2014 as cited in Sweet & Carlson, 2020)".

### 3.2. The Unique Characteristics of Each Writers' Room's

On the other hand, while it has been mentioned over and over in Redvall's article (2014) that "every room needs to find its own way to structure and talk about the work (p. 234)" and "Scholars and screenwriters seem to agree that the specific nature of a series and its writers' room always varies... (p. 234)", she explains (p.227): "It seems worthwhile to explore how to understand the unique culture of a particular series and the nature of writers' rooms that are perceived as examples of best practice."

Following the above statement, the present thesis attempts to study the particular *Internationale Filmschule Köln*'s culture of Writers' Room as one "example of best practice". It aims to unpack the mechanism of the third benefit mentioned by Redvall (2014) - Collaboration.

### 3.3. Togetherness in the Writers' Room

In another research, Noel Maloney and Philippa Burne (2021) studied the writers' rooms in Australian scripted TV productions. Their research was based on interviews with 22 professional screenwriters. They also mention that such research into Australian TV script development practices is limited (Maloney & Burne, 2021).

Two key tensions emerge from Noel Maloney and Philippa Burne's research (2021). However the concept of "togetherness" was valued by participants in their research, they use this ideal as a benchmark to measure the realities of writers' rooms, especially the hierarchies and inequalities they must negotiate, and the particular forms of leadership that are at times required (Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 186). Secondly, while they express a degree of optimism about the creative opportunities on offer in writers' rooms, they are also aware of how contingent these are on development budgets, global shifts in distribution, markets, and local funding policies (Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 186).

Noel Maloney and Philippa Burne (2021) delved into this sense of "togetherness" by listing different skills and qualities mentioned by the screenwriters: "The abilities to listen to and support others are skills constantly privileged throughout the research we undertook (Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 189).", "The need for writers to be "curious", to give participants "space" and not "shutting down" story too early (Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 189).", "leaving your ego at the door and a "no holds barred" approach (Maloney & Burne, 2021, p. 190)."

As reviewed above, the dynamics of collaborative creativity is the focal point of the literature on Writers' Rooms. It doesn't matter if it is about the creative benefits of it, or about the challenges and tensions of working with it, or its characteristics; it is

always rooted in the dynamics of collaboration in the creative process of screenwriting.

The present paper intends to contribute to the field of Media and Communication Studies: Firstly, by delving into the dynamics of the Writers' Room as a means of creating a screenplay, and its contribution to Media Production; Secondly, with a look at the communicative dynamics of collaboration within the Writers' Room that give rise to the notion of "collaborative creativity" and underscoring the value of incorporating the Communication discipline into the leadership of the writers' room.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This research is framed within the Membership Categorization Analysis and the Systems Model of creativity, focusing on the Writers' Room as a social setting where a group of screenwriters collaborate. In the following sections, I will explain how the Writers' Room is socially situated by examining the relationships between the co-writers and the story, their interactions with each other, their connections with the broader crew, and their considerations of the (perceived) audience.

Secondly, I will discuss how membership categorization analysis can be implicated in understanding such social situations in action. Then, the System Model will be explained. That is the way that the extracted categories from the analysis are formulated to unpack the dynamics of collaborative creativity in the Writers' Room.

After theoretically framing the concept of collaboration in the writers' room as a "social situation" and using the "Membership Categorization" theory to theorize the types of interactions among the writers, we move to the second layer. The second layer involves the theoretical framing of the creative process of screenwriting. In this

context, the creative process is initially explained using the Blind Variation and Selective Retention (BVSR) theory, which describes creativity as a two-stage process. The second stage, Selective Retention, is influenced by the environment encountered. This "environment" is contextualized culturally (domain) and socially (field) using Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity. The described approach—decomposing the collaborative creative process in the writers' room into its constituent elements and explaining their interrelationships—is itself a product of a systemic perspective.

Moreover, the participant observation method of data collection in the present research and interpretivism as the research paradigm will be described. Finally, with a description of the limitations and ethical considerations, this chapter will be finished.

#### 4.1. Media Production as Social Situation

Before delving into the Membership Categorization, it is necessary to review Philippe Ross's (2012) model of understanding media production called "conceptualizing media production as a social situation." This model helps us see the influence of the (hypothetical) audience on media production during the production processes and allows us to consider the role of the audience's point of view in our formulation of collaborative creativity. This will also provide a more clear context for the Systems Model in this research.

As explained, neither aspect of the environment in the System Model of Creativity - Field (society) and Domain (culture)- had been directly explained related to the production process of novelty on the producer side. In other words, although creativity is defined as "a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between



producer and audience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998)” what is mentioned directly about them is their “recognition” role regarding the final product, which comes only from the audience’s side of the interaction. It, of course, affects the production process too but it has not been explained in detail in Csikszentmihalyi’s article (1998). However, it has been considered in studies on both communication and creativity (for more, see Fulton & McIntyre, 2013).

To contextualize the System Model of Creativity for this study, the present paper reviews *Were Producers and Audiences Ever Separate? Conceptualizing Media Production as Social Situation* (an article by Philippe Ross, 2014). It aims to implement the systems model on the producer side of the creative process.

Ross’s Article (2014) rejects the postulate of a “structured break” between production and reception by discussing the producers’ tacit knowledge of the audience, their reflexivity and socialization, and their use of “audience images.” It proposes a new model for understanding production: as a social situation sustained by participants but explicitly oriented to an absent third party: the audience.

Ross (2014) conceptualizes media production as a social process with two layers. The first layer highlights "Tacit Knowledge, Reflexivity, and Socialization," which revolves around understanding the audience as central to production. Key media skills involve attracting attention, engaging interest, and assessing public taste, as producers constantly consider what the audience wants. Ross explains that producers often view their audience as similar to themselves, adopting the audience’s perspective and creating content they would personally enjoy. This fusion of production and reception shows that expertise in production is not only developed within professional communities but also through the producers’ own experiences as part of the audience.

The second layer is the concept of "Audience Images as Prior Feedback." Its relevance lies in how this prior feedback materializes externally within the Writers' Rooms. Essentially, the process of giving feedback on colleagues' new ideas is what propels discussions and drives progress in these spaces. Ross (2014) refers to Herbert J. Gans' idea of the "creator-audience relationship" to explain this dynamic. Gans suggests that beyond market research, movie producers incorporate "prior feedback" into the filmmaking process itself. This feedback comes from an imagined audience that the creator envisions, functioning as an external observer or judge. This imagined audience unconsciously influences the creator's work, acting as a measure against which the creator tests their product throughout the creative process.

By framing media production as a social situation, as depicted above, the present study contextualizes the Systems Model of Creativity for examining the Writers' Room. Specifically, this paper analyzes the Domain and Field components of the model by exploring how screenwriters' feedback and collaborations serve as "prior feedback", reflexivity, and socialization that can enable them to assume the roles of Field and Domain during the creative production process on their own. It will be discussed by implementing the membership categorization analysis of each turn of their participation in the collaborative creative processes within the Writers' Room.

#### 4.1.1. Membership Categorization Theory

Membership categorization analysis originated from the work of Harvey Sacks in the 1960s, which focused on examining how people as members of various social communities locally categorize people and their actions on the basis of their mundane, common sense reasoning (Fitzgerald 2015; Housley and Fitzgerald 2015; Paulsen

2018). He was interested in examining the principles and methods that members use when they categorize themselves as well as other people into various membership categories in social situations (Sacks 1972a, 1986, 1992). A membership categorization device, MCD, defined by Sacks, is “any collection of membership categories, (containing at least a category) which may be applied to some population (containing at least a member) so as to provide, by the use of some rules of application, for the pairing of at least a population member and a categorization device member. A device is then a collection plus rules of application.” (Hester and Eglin, 1997; p. 4)

One of the most prominent features of Sacks’ work is the concern with the concept of ‘recognizability’. In one sense, this notion refers to the way in which social interactants orient their actions to the mutual task at hand and engage in recognition work as a means of accomplishing local social organization. This observation, argues Sacks, should inform the examination of interaction as a mutually constitutive, methodical display that is socially recognizable and recognized as part of the process of getting things done in a social way rather than a cognitive, economic, theological, biological, telepathic or occult manner. For Sacks, one aspect of this analytic mentality is a concern with the plethora of descriptions that everyday language exhibits. Furthermore, descriptions occur within a wide range of discursive contexts. For example, newspapers, business meetings, and school lessons all provide for the generation of descriptions albeit within different contextual arrangements. (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002; p. 61)

Besides categories and methods, the interactional consequences of the categorization were at the core of Sacks’s interest (Fitzgerald 2015; Hester and Eglin 1997). For this purpose and in congruence with ethnomethodological tradition, the method focused on analyzing naturally occurring data – such as situational speech – for studying social

interaction (Fitzgerald 2015; Lee 2018). Since Sacks, membership categorization analysis has also been used to analyze non-personal objects and entities (Freiberg and Freebody 2009; Housley and Fitzgerald 2015). From an ethnomethodological point of view, membership categories, membership categorization devices and category predicates, like other natural language phenomena, are all examples of indexical expressions. their sense, in other words, is a situated, contextually, embedded sense. (Hester & Eglin, 1997; p. 11)

Thus, ethnomethodological studies have shown in demonstrable specifics (1) that the properties of indexical expressions are ordered properties, and (2) that they are ordered in an ongoing, practical accomplishment of every actual occasion of commonplace speech and conduct. (Hester & Eglin, 1997; p. 11) Fitzgerald highlights the ongoing in situ nature of members' category work whereby category and predicates do not remain static but are continually developed, clarified, made accountable, and even retrospectively modified within any unfolding interaction. (2015; p. 8)

Turn-Generated Categories: Other ways in which membership categorization can be accomplished in action may be found in the relation of categories to turn types. A category may be generated by a turn or turn-type (Psathas, 1999; p. 179). Based on Stokoe (2012), between the two different methods that have tended to be related but consequentially different aspects of discourse practice, this one is more reminding of the CA (conversation analysis) that specifies the normative structuring and logics of particular courses of social action and their organization into systems through which participants manage turn-taking, repair, and other systemic dimensions of interaction (p. 278). Stokoe (2012) suggests 10 key concepts of categorization and one of them is "Duplicative organization": Categories that work in a unit or 'teamlake' way, having

specific obligations to each other, such as ‘center-forward’, ‘goalkeeper’, and ‘defender’ in a ‘football team’ (p. 281).

The present study is framed within the theoretical framework of membership categorization theory and is structured by employing two concepts, namely Duplicative organization and Turn-Generated Categories, as explained above. Thus, within the context of the Writers’ Room, which involves collaborative group work of writers in the creative process of screenwriting, an examination of their conversations has been conducted, relying on specific roles they take on in obligations to each other (Duplicative organization), in each turn of speech (Turn-Generated Categories). The aim is to unpack the dynamics of these roles in the mechanisms of collaborative creativity.

#### 4.1.2. Systems Model

“System” is defined by Skyttner (2005) as “an organized whole in which parts are related together, which generates emergent properties and has some purpose (p. 58).”

In communication studies, Dirk Baecker (2013) reinterpreted systemic theories of communication as a critique of Shannon and Weaver's mathematical transmission model. He highlights that instead of adhering to a fixed set of possible messages from which one is selected, systemic theories suggest that participants in communication collaboratively construct the set of possible messages, known as the context, from which a message is then selected. This approach moves beyond the engineering model of signaling proposed by Shannon and Weaver.

Similarly, in creativity studies, Csikszentmihalyi (1998) emphasizes the importance of a systems approach. He argues that creativity cannot be evaluated solely based on

subjective experience. For creativity to have meaning, it must refer to a process that results in an idea or product that is recognized and valued by others. According to Csikszentmihalyi, creativity is not an inherent quality of an idea or product, but rather emerges through the interaction between the creator and their audience. The social system ultimately judges what is considered creative, making creativity a phenomenon constructed through collective judgment rather than the result of individual effort alone.

Janet Fulton and Phillip McIntyre (2013) explained that while both communication studies and creativity research have concluded that neither focusing solely on the individual producer nor solely on the audience adequately explains the process of creating a message; creativity arises from a combination of various elements. Thus, Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity allows for both the producer and receiver to be seen as equal components within a creative system, providing the necessary contexts for creative production.

## 4.2. Creativity and Communication Studies

Studies of creativity emerging from cultural psychology and social psychology perspectives challenge individualist conceptions of creativity to argue that social interaction, communication, and collaboration are key elements in creativity (Barrett, Creech, & Zhukov, 2021; p.1). To explore the concept of “collaborative creativity” in the setting of Writers’ Room, first, the concept of creativity needs to be explained. The present paper will describe it as a blind variation and selective retention process (based on Campbell, 1960), and it will also be contextualized in the DIFi Systems Model of Creativity (based on Csikszentmihalyi, 1998) in forthcoming paragraphs.

#### 4.2.1. Creativity: Blind Variation and Selective Retention

To define the concept of “creativity”, the present thesis reviews an explanation of it that is contingent on the two-step process of blind variation and selective retention (BVSR). It has been proposed by Donald Campbell (1960), although “he never developed BVSR into a more comprehensive theory of creativity, and other researchers have attempted to do so...” (Simonton, 2011).

The reason for selecting this explanation of the concept of creativity lies in its explanatory approach. This thesis aims to develop a systemic model of collaborative creativity, which necessitates breaking down the collaborative creative process into its constituent parts and stages and then explaining the relationships among them. In formulating the concept of creativity, the BVSR theory has been identified in this research as the closest approach to achieving this way of explanation.

Simonton (2011) explains that contrary to the assumption of many researchers, Campbell’s BVSR was not explicitly predicated on a tight analogy with Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection. In fact, Campbell himself viewed BVSR as connected to a far-reaching universal selection theory in which creativity and evolution were specific instantiations, each with their own distinctive operating principles (Simonton, 2011; p. 222).

Applying this general plan of blind-variation-and-selective-retention, Campbell describes creativity as follows:

“as thought achieves innovation, the internal emitting of thought trials one by one is blind, lacking prescience or foresight. The process as a whole of course provides "foresight" for the overt level of behavior, once the process has blindly stumbled into

a thought trial that "fits" the selection criterion, accompanied by the "something clicked," "Eureka," or "aha-erlebnis" that usually marks the successful termination of the process. (Campbell, 1960; p. 384)"

The difference between the successful and unsuccessful here is due to the nature of the environment encountered (Campbell, 1960). To discuss the role of the environment in this sense, the present paper will review the DIFi Systems Model of Creativity that explains it in a sociocultural context with the concepts of "field" and "domain". Before proceeding, it is important to note that the BVSR model divides the creative process into two steps and describes the connection between them within the internal context of an individual creator's mind. In this case, we will apply the model to the context of collaboration among a group of creative individuals.

#### 4.2.2. DIFi Systems Model of Creativity

Velikovsky (2016) introduces the DPFI (or DIFi) Systems Model Of Creativity as "a general model of creativity in the Sciences and the Arts / Humanities (or symbol-systems of culture) developed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988-2015) and used in applied creativity research by Csikszentmihalyi (1988-2015), R K Sawyer (2006, 2012), D K Simonton (2004, 2011, 2012) and others including screen media researcher Redvall (2012, 2016), and creativity researchers... (p. 39)"

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi proposed the theory as a response to psychologists who see creativity as a mental process. He believed that such an approach cannot do justice to the phenomenon of creativity, which is as much a cultural and social as it is a psychological event (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; p. 313).



Csikszentmihalyi's system model of creativity adopted a view that encompasses the environment in which the individual operates. This environment has two salient aspects: a cultural, or symbolic, aspect which here is called the domain; and a social aspect called the field. Creativity is a process that can be observed only at the intersection where individuals, domains, and fields interact (Figure 1) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; p. 314).

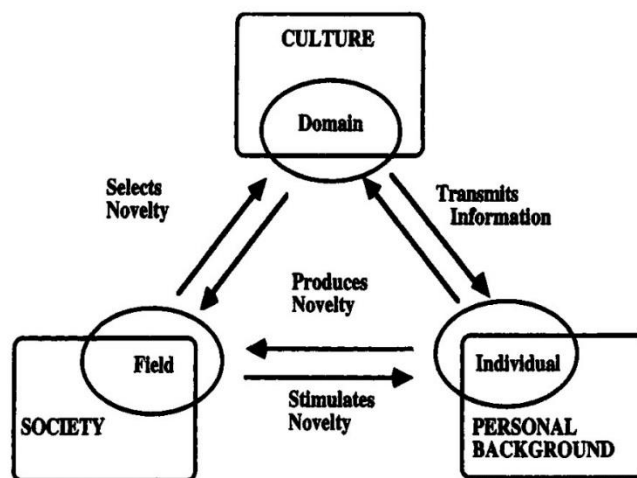


Figure 1 - The systems view of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998, p. 314)

Creativity relies on existing “domains” and traditions, as new ideas are born from the context of established patterns. Originality doesn't exist in isolation but emerges within established frameworks. It must operate on a set of already existing objects, rules, representations, or notations. One can be a creative carpenter, cook, composer, chemist, or clergyman because the domains of woodworking, gastronomy, music, chemistry, and religion exist and one can evaluate performance by reference to their traditions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). However, not all novel ideas gain acceptance; they must be endorsed by “some groups entitled to make decisions as to what should

or should not be included in the domain. These gatekeepers are what we call here the field. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; p. 315)”

The term “field” is often used to designate an entire discipline or kind of endeavor. In this context, however, Csikszentmihalyi (1998) defines the term in a more narrow sense and uses it to refer only to the social organization of the domain - to the teachers, critics, journal editors, museum curators, agency directors, and foundation officers who decide what belongs to a domain and what does not. He mentions that in the United States, 10,000 people in Manhattan constitute the field of modern art and they decide which new paintings or sculptures deserve to be seen, bought, included in collections - and therefore added to the domain (p. 315-316).

### 4.3. Ethnography and Participant Observation

For anthropologists and social scientists, participant observation involves the researcher actively engaging in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group to understand both the clear and subtle elements of their routines and culture. In this context, the "explicit" aspects of culture are those that people can consciously describe about themselves, while the "tacit" aspects tend to remain unconscious or beyond their awareness (Musante & DeWalt, 2010).

The methodology of participant observation aims to provide practical and theoretical truths about human existence. From this standpoint, a “theory” may be defined as a set of concepts and generalizations. Theories provide a perspective, a way of seeing, or an interpretation aimed at understanding some phenomenon. (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 16) The target phenomenon here is collaborative creativity in the context of Writers’ Rooms viewed from a systems perspective (inspired by Csikszentmihalyi’s model).

Spradley (1980 as cited in Musante & DeWalt, 2010; p. 2) used the term participant observation to refer to the general approach of fieldwork in ethnographic research. Participant observation in this sense was applied as a data-gathering method in this study. Thus, this research is conducted based on the researcher's attendance at writing sessions of a group of people – members of the Writers' Room program at *Internationale Filmschule Köln* in 2024 – as a means of learning how collaborative creativity works in the writers' room. As obvious, here a group of people is the craftsmen in the field of screenwriting for series, their routines, culture, and interactions are their tradition of the writers' room, and the aspect of it to be learned, is the concept of collaborative creativity. As evident, the culture here refers to the workplace culture of the Writers' Room.

It is notable to recognize that participant observation is a method that combines two somewhat different processes, and it should be distinguished from both pure observation and pure participation (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). Or as Danny L. Jorgensen (1989) noted “Aside from collecting information, the basic goal of these largely unfocused initial observations is to become increasingly familiar with the insiders' world so as to refine and focus subsequent observation and data collection. (p. 82)”

While pure observation tries to remove the researcher from the actions and behaviors, to the maximum extent possible, so that they are unable to influence them; pure participation is generally associated with a loss of analytic interest and often results in the inability of the researcher to publish his/her materials (Musante & DeWalt, 2010). Within these two extremes, Spradley developed a typology to describe a continuum in the "degree of participation" of researchers (1980:58-62 as cited in Musante & DeWalt, 2010). The degree of “Passive participation” exists when the researcher is on

the spot, but acts as a pure observer. That is, the researcher does not interact with people (Musante & DeWalt, 2010; p. 23). Observation for the present research has been designed with such a degree of participation. A great deal of information about a setting can be obtained by taking only a spectator's role (Musante & DeWalt, 2010) same as the present study having the setting of the Writers' Room in its focal.

In participant observation, analysis and theorizing are essential parts of the inquiry process. Collecting information, such as notes and files, initiates analysis. Early on, the focus is on gaining access, building field relationships, participating, and gathering information while tentatively analyzing and theorizing. As study issues become clearer, data collection becomes the main activity. As you amass materials and analyze them, the collection of additional information generally becomes less important, giving way to a growing need to concentrate on the analysis of these materials. (Jorgensen, 1989, p. 107)

#### 4.4. Validity and Reliability

Musante and DeWalt (2010) mention enhancing objectivity as the main goal of explicit research design. They also consider that an absolute state of objectivity is not reachable in any research. In social science research, objectivity is often broken down into two concepts: validity and reliability. Reliability refers to the extent to which results can be reproduced using the same approach over time and under different circumstances (Musante & DeWalt, 2010, p. 112). Validity is a quality of any type of observation that has to do with the extent to which the results of the observations correspond to the presumed underlying reality. In other words, the description accurately represents the phenomenon studied (Musante & DeWalt, 2010; p. 122). For

practical, applied research we can also speak of the degree to which the results provide sufficiently accurate descriptions so that they prove useful and productive for programs of planned change (Musante & DeWalt, 2010; p. 122).

Again, Musante and DeWalt (2010) remind us that “absolute validity of observations and conclusions produced through research, in practice, is not attainable in any research setting (p. 122)”. While some theorists say this "personal" level of validity is all we can achieve, we disagree. Experience and comparison of the writing of others convinces us that observations of trained, self-reflexive observers, using several different approaches to a phenomenon can achieve an acceptable level of reliability and validity and are, to the extent of the method, objective. Attention to the elements of design can enhance the reliability and validity of observation and, hence, the objectivity of research (Musante & DeWalt, 2010; p. 123).

Following the above proposition of reliability and validity for observation, the present study self-reflexively describes its design for Musante and DeWalt’s (2010) six elements of research design in field studies as follows:

1. Positing of questions: Drawn from the literature and theoretically grounded (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), this study positioned its research questions. Questions that addressed the concept of “collaboration” evoked from the literature on Writers’ Room, and the concept of “membership role” extracted from Membership Categorization theory in the field of conversation analysis.

2. Choosing a site: In which the questions can be addressed (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), this study selected the Writers’ Room program of *Internationale Filmschule Köln* as its case study. The program aims to educate and train screenwriting students to work in the Writers’ Room setting and does it under the supervision of professional

and experienced screenwriters and producers. It is obviously a perfect site for this observation to address its questions of dynamics in the Writers' Room.

3. Method selection: appropriate for addressing these research questions, the present paper found participant observation the most suitable method for its data collection phase. Since the topic -collaborative creativity in Writers' Room- is applied through conversations, the most direct way of studying it, is simply to be present in the "room".

4. Strategy for selections: In a way that maximizes the likelihood that the materials collected represent the range of variability in the setting (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), in each day of observation, the researcher attended a room and took notes and audio recorded (in one of the rooms where every participant consented to audio recording) all the conversations (during the screenwriting processes) no matter what kind of activity (e.g. brainstorming, planning, doing research, etc.) was going on, or in what sub-setting (e.g. all the team together or smaller groups within the whole team) was going on, or who was talking (e. g. head writer or episode writers). All turns of speech related to Writers' Room processes were collected during the observation.

5. Strategy for the management of data: For an effective analysis (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), a data management strategy was developed for this study. It was theoretically grounded in three aspects extracted from scholars on Writers' Room and Creativity. The first aspect was "Collaboration" -from the literature on Writers' Room (Redvall, 2014)- and two others were "Blind Variation" and "Selective Retention" -from creativity studies (Simonton, 2011). Each observed turn of speech was recorded in four types; based on its contribution to either one of these three aspects of "collaborative creativity" or none of them.

6. Preliminary strategy for analysis: Suggesting a set of analytic categories and techniques that respond directly to the research questions (Musante & DeWalt, 2010), the present study applied the membership categorization theory to categorize speech turns of those three types of contribution: (1) Generator, (2) Analyst, and (3) Strategist. It was the preliminary strategy for data analysis, and the analysis phase was completed by implementing the systems model approach. It formulated the dynamics of interactions between those categories that explain them as a whole: In each turn of dialogue, a co-writer performs at least one of these roles, advancing the collaborative creativity process. The Generator role is intuitive and involves proposing new ideas; the Analyst role is critical and evaluates ideas for their suitability; and the Strategist role is directive, steering the conversation.

The three membership categories hypothesized in the Preliminary Strategy for Analysis to be tested during the analysis phase were designed based on the BVSr theory and the DIFi systems model theory concerning creativity, and also the literature reviewed on writers' rooms regarding collaboration.

In designing these categories, the role of the "Generator" reflects the initial step in BVSr theory—blind variation—referring to the creative generation of raw ideas. From the pool of proposed raw ideas, most are discarded, and the more suitable ones are selected, a stage referred to as selective retention (see Campbell, 1960). Csikszentmihalyi (1998) situates this stage in the sociocultural context using the DIFi systemic model. He employs the metaphor of "gates" through which ideas must pass, with the gatekeepers being the community of individuals active within the relevant Field and the culture that governs the corresponding Domain (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). In the writers' room, this role is manifested in the conversational turns where writers collaboratively analyze, critique, and compare ideas, debating whether they

should be accepted into the script or rejected. This role in the collaborative creative process is classified as the "Analyst" role in this study.

The third membership role—the "Strategist"—is designed based on insights drawn from the literature on writers' rooms regarding the concept of collaboration (see Redvall, 2014; Sweet & Carlson, 2020; Maloney & Burne, 2021). This role refers to instances where a turn of speech serves not the screenplay itself, but the management and coordination of the writing process.

In the subsequent stages, this study tests the hypothesis of these three membership roles in the collaborative creative process within the writers' room. After reaching conclusions regarding the roles, the second phase of the analysis uses the systemic approach to model the relationships between these roles.

## 4.5. Research Paradigm

This study aims to answer the question “During their conversations in the screenwriting process, what membership categories do collaborating writers in a writers' room adopt?” And “What role does each identified membership category play in advancing the process of creative collaboration in a Writers’ Room?”. In forthcoming paragraphs, different phases of this research are described to depict the research paradigm of this study.

The 2024 Writers’ Room program at *Internationale Filmschule Köln* is chosen as the case study. This program is part of the MA Serial Storytelling at the *ifs*, "Europe’s first Master’s Programme focusing on collaborative writing for series. Focusing on both local and international series markets, this intensive two-year master’s degree



combines story development skills, collaboration techniques (Writers' Room), and the innovative approach of artistic research. (MA Serial Storytelling, 2024)"<sup>1</sup>

The data collection phase of the present research was through the method of participant observation. The researcher participated in the Writers' Room and observed turns of speech in the conversations between co-screenwriters in it. Then, the analysis phase has been done by categorizing those turns of speech by implementing the membership categorization theory. Since focusing on the nature of meaningful social action, its role in understanding patterns in social life, and how this meaning can be assessed (Blaikie & Priest, 2019, p. 126), it follows the interpretivism paradigm.

An interpretive approach suggests that social patterns can be understood and explained by creating models based on the usual meanings employed by common social actors during typical actions and situations (Blaikie & Priest, 2019). Similarly, this paper develops the concept of collaborative creativity by applying the systems model to its analysis. The model explains the dynamics of extracted categories in the Writers' Room setting. The way this finding has been reasoned is by following an inductive logic: through a specific observation -Writers' Room program at *Internationale Filmschule Köln* in 2024 – a pattern has been recognized – the way they collaborate in the creative process – to suggest a general conclusion – the way collaborative creativity works in the Writers' Rooms.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.filmschule.de/en/studies/ma-serial-storytelling>

## 4.6. Limitations

The limitations of the current research revolve around two issues. The first concerns the context of the Writers' Room selected as a case study. Given that these writers' rooms were situated within a film school and primarily aimed at educational objectives for screenwriting students, their susceptibility to issues related to series production was limited. However, the norms, regulations, and situations associated with series production, primarily centered around the series industry in the US, were consistently explained by the supervisors of each writers' room - themselves experienced and professional screenwriters and producers<sup>2</sup> - in the form of educational points.

The second issue was the time constraint imposed due to the self-funding of the project. Since conducting participation observation to gather data required the researcher to travel to Cologne, Germany, and cover all expenses related to travel, accommodation, etc., the financial resources available to the student were limited to a one-week trip. Observing the entire six-week process of this program could have provided the opportunity to gather more data, thereby increasing the accuracy of the analysis.

## 4.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues to consider when dealing with data collection by participation observation at an institute relate to the consent and protecting confidentiality of individuals on one hand, and the institute's data protection policy on the other hand. To take care of these considerations, the observation phase of this research started with

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<sup>2</sup> The supervisor of the first Writers' Room was Richard Manning (Television writer and producer, from USA) and the supervisor of the second one was Denise Harkavy (Writer and producer, from USA).

contacting the head professor of the Serial Storytelling master's program at *Internationale Filmschule köln* - Dr. Joachim Friedmann- explaining the research project and asking for collaboration regarding data collection for it.

In response, Dr. Friedmann informed the researcher that individuals involved in the program generously supported this matter. It included CEO Nadja Radojevic, Head of Studies Su Nicholls-Gärtner, students, and mentors in the Writers Room project. The researcher was also provided with the rules for participation in the sessions, and templates of two required documents: a research information letter, and an observation consent form.

The researcher prepared both the information letter (Appendix 1-3) and the consent form (Appendix 4). Later, those two documents were printed for each individual in the rooms. With the research information letter, they were informed what this observation was about. With the observation consent form, they were asked for their permission to be observed and for the collected data to be included in this study. The consent form was prepared according to the rules of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation).

## **5. Data Analysis and Key Findings**

The present paper is based on directly observing the collaborative screenwriting process in the Writers' Room. This Writers' Room is part of the master's degree program in Serial Storytelling at Internationale Filmschule Köln, which lasts for six weeks. During these six weeks, students from the international line (in English) at the International Film School Cologne work in two parallel writers' rooms on their projects.

The direct observation process for data collection in the current study involved the researcher attending their sessions (both rooms) during the second week of the program (from the 22nd to the 26th of April 2024), observing their conversations and collaborations in the screenwriting process. Data collection in this research comprised 16 hours and 20 minutes of direct observation, during which 3,272 turns of speech were observed, forming the findings of this study upon the analysis of them.

Each Writers' Room team consists of 5 cowriters (students) and one head writer (teacher). The project in each room involves writing the first season of a series (6 to 8 episodes), encompassing all stages including plot design and development, character development, writing the series bible, breaking stories for episodes, etc.

During the week this observation took place, both writers' rooms were focused on developing their respective stories' main plots and subplots while simultaneously breaking them down into individual episodes. In both rooms, the tables were arranged in the center to form a square with an empty space in the middle. All the screenwriters sat around the table in such a way that everyone could see each other, with their laptops in front of them. In one room, the writers discussed everything collectively, progressing step by step. In contrast, the other room followed a different approach: they began by splitting into smaller teams to work separately on various tasks and generate new ideas, then regrouped to discuss and select the best ideas. The observer noted that this approach was highly dependent on the head writer's style and their perception of the room's needs and preferences.

The journey of each idea began in someone's mind, before being brought to the table for discussion. An idea would either be discarded or passed through the "gate" and survive the discussion. If successful, the rooms provided a separate space for recording the idea. Both rooms had access to virtual and physical boards, but one room primarily

preferred the virtual board, while the other favored the physical one. By using charts to split the series into episodes and colorful sticky notes to organize the beats of various subplots, these spaces were optimized for efficient management and retention of the project's information. Once again, the same overall patterns were observed in both rooms but customized to suit the specific needs of each.

Collaborative creativity in the writers' room is facilitated through conversation. These conversations consist of turns of speech, where each screenwriter addresses another writer(s), and after finishing their speech, the turn passes to another screenwriter, continuing this conversational pattern. As these conversations progress, the screenplay is crafted and refined. Essentially, the collaborative process in the writers' room can be viewed as a series of conversations through which initial ideas for the screenplay are generated, then sifted through, and further elaborated.

To explain the mechanism of collaborative creativity as a system, the first step is to delineate the component of this system and their interactions due to the definition of the concept: a "System" is an organized whole in which parts are related together, which generates emergent properties and has some purpose (Skyttner, 2005, p. 58)." Accordingly, the present study analyzed the observed turns of speech based on the role they play in the overall collaborative process and categorized these roles using the Membership Categorization Theory.

## 5.2. Membership Role Categories in the Writers' Room

A dual framework exists for explaining the application of membership categorization theory in conversation analysis, which includes the "decontextualized model" and the "contextualized model." This thesis adopts the contextualized model in response to

critiques of the decontextualized model, which argues that it lacks sufficient attention to the actual, context-bound use of categories in specific situations. The adopted approach emphasizes that categories are not pre-established entities merely applied instinctively in interactions; rather, they are constructed by individuals in real-time as part of the practical accomplishments of social interaction. In essence, categories do not exist as fixed constructs beforehand; they emerge and gain meaning through the course of conversation, shaped by the specific conditions and contexts of the interaction (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2002). Therefore, different categories, along with their associations and activities, are produced and recognized within each particular moment and conversational context.

Accordingly, this study formulated its initial hypothesis based on the context of the writers' room and then analyzed this hypothesis using data collected through participatory observation. The initial hypothesis posited three potential categorization roles in conversations that drive the scriptwriting process within the writers' room, grounded in the concept of collaborative creativity. The design of these three roles draws on creativity theories within the theoretical framework of this thesis, as well as previous research on writers' rooms. The first role termed the Generator, is defined as the initial step in the creative process according to the BVS (Blind Variation) theory. The second role, the Analyst, is contextualized by the second step in this process—Selective Retention—following the DIFi theory. After completing the role categorization for the two stages of creativity based on these theories, the final role—the Strategist—was developed to encompass the concept of collaboration, drawing on previous research on writers' rooms.

The findings of this research confirm the hypothesis that each turn of speech in the collaboration of screenwriters in the screenwriting process in the writers' room belongs

to at least one of the following categories: (1.) Generator, (2.) Analyst, or (3.) Strategist. It needs to be mentioned that a turn of speech may start with one of these three roles but may change to another role at some point.

In the BVSR theory of creativity (Campbell, 1960), the "blind variation" step refers to the generation of ideas or solutions without prior knowledge of which will be successful or useful. This step is characterized by an exploration phase where different possibilities are produced independently of the context or desired outcome, meaning that the variations (ideas or solutions) are not intentionally directed toward success. Instead, they arise randomly, similar to the trial-and-error process seen in both problem-solving and biological evolution. Success or failure in these variations is determined by the environment or specific context they encounter, rather than any inherent quality of the variations themselves. Thus, blind variation emphasizes the unpredictable and non-systematic generation of possibilities, which are later filtered and refined through selection and retention.

The "Generator" role embodies the nature of "blind creation". This role comes up with new ideas without getting involved in evaluating them as "good" or "bad." It is basically about "expressing the first things that come to mind," "thinking aloud," and "speaking impulsively." Typically, "Let's brainstorm!" is a call for collaborators to temporarily fulfill this role and put other roles aside. Whenever screenwriters in the Writers' Room describe a new idea for the screenplay during a turn of speech, they are essentially playing the role of a Generator in the collaborative creative process. For example, sentences starting with "What if..." or "How about..." proposing new possibilities for various elements of the screenplay (plot, character, etc.) are prominent examples of this category. Such turns of speech provide the raw materials needed to nurture screenplay elements.

Due to the DIFi theory of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998), to excel in a creative field, individuals must internalize the judgment criteria of their domain and develop a strong ability to evaluate their own ideas. This involves having a comprehensive knowledge base and a refined understanding of what constitutes valuable ideas versus those that are less promising. Internalizing these judgment criteria allows individuals to generate numerous ideas, critically assess them, and effectively discard those that do not meet the established standards. This process is crucial as it enables individuals to focus their efforts on developing ideas that align with both their personal standards and the expectations of their field, thus enhancing their creative output and success.

The "Analyst" role embodies such a "rational" nature. As the name suggests, this role is about analyzing and evaluating ideas. The findings of this research show that usually, after each turn of speech where one screenwriter in the Generator role describes a new idea, in the next several turns of speech, other colleagues engage in the role of Analyst to discuss that idea. These discussions aim to evaluate the novelty from various perspectives to ultimately decide whether the new idea should be incorporated into the screenplay or not. Although the way these decisions are made varies depending on the method, culture, and structure of that particular Writers' Room (usually hierarchical and determined by the head writers), it can be said that the Analyst role serves as a gate between individual creativity and collaborative creativity, filtering ideas through these discussions.

Contrary to the Generator role, which, no matter how much it is influenced by the surrounding environment, still has an intrinsic basis, the Analyst role is completely and multilayered based on the surrounding world. The observations of this research have led to a list of considerations that the Analyst role must take into account during its analyses to balance individual inputs in the project: consistency (both rational and



dramatic), audience expectations, medium (regulations, norms, format, etc.), production (goals, conditions, budget, equipment, time, rules, etc.), and aesthetic (genre, style, etc.). The Analyst role has allocated the largest share of observed turns of speech in this research.

Emerging from concepts of context, space, and complex collaboration that have been reviewed (see Redvall, 2014; Sweet & Carlson, 2020) in the literature on Writers' Room, the strategist role originates from the need to effectively manage and integrate various elements of the creative process. This role is crucial for coordinating communication and collaboration among writers and other team members, ensuring that ideas are developed and refined systematically. The strategist oversees the organization of creative tasks, maintains a disciplined schedule, and enforces protocols that facilitate the flow of ideas and feedback. By fostering a supportive and respectful environment, the strategist helps align the team's efforts with both the creative vision and production objectives, ensuring a cohesive and efficient writing process.

The "Strategist" role embodies a "leadership" nature. The word "leadership" here should not be confused with the various roles of individuals (such as head writers) in the writers' room. This categorization focuses on turns of speech, not individuals. According to the observations of this research, the role of the Strategist is noticeable in turns of speech where the screenplay itself is not discussed but rather the screenwriting process is discussed. Essentially, the role of the Strategist is concerned with optimizing the screenplay writing process, the team's efficiency, overcoming writer's block and "awkward silences," managing space and time, and also stimulating novelty.

In hierarchical writers' rooms, if the Strategist role is to be fulfilled by higher-ranking individuals, it is usually done in the form of commands or directives, setting rules for

how screenwriters should participate in conversations, or requesting feedback from the team regarding the writing process. If this role is to be fulfilled by lower-ranking members, it usually takes the form of suggestions, feedback, or requests for solutions.

Some examples of the Strategist role observed in this research include: "[head writers addressing the room] You shouldn't disagree with an idea unless you have an alternative for it!", "I wanna see crazy shits like this! [mentioning an idea]", "Ok now let's talk about [another character]!", "I don't know why are you arguing this. What's the point of this right now?", "Let's take a break! We need more fresh minds to work on this.", "Maybe we should talk about the storyline first. [before discussing this idea anymore]", "let's think about a smarter way [for the character] to do that." As evident in these examples, whenever a speaker attempts to influence the conversation in the writers' room with their speech (to change the direction, pattern, or methods), they are playing the role of a Strategist.

At times, the role of the Strategist is fulfilled through different and innovative ways. Examples of such instances observed in this research include (1) reviewing what has been considered in the screenplay so far to stimulate the Generator role in team members, (2) joking to cheer up the team, (3) joking by proposing "bad ideas" to clarify paths they do not want the conversation to follow, and also (3) performing an idea instead of narrating it to make it more visible for the team to stimulate generating idea. Such innovations are crucial for enhancing team performance and improving the quality of their final product and the head writers are more suited than anyone else to fulfill this role; as fulfilling it evidently requires more experience and also more authority and power within the group. It is notable that the Strategist role has allocated the lowest share of observed turns of speech in this research.

As an example of the dynamics of the roles in turns of speech in the collaborative creative process within the writers' room, below you can see a piece of the transcript (representing 2 minutes and 10 seconds) of one of the observed conversations (Figure 2).

There are three important points to note regarding this selected segment (10 turns) chosen as a representative sample of the study. First, in writers' room discussions, the flow of conversation typically unfolds in such a way that it is rare to observe all three membership categories within a short time frame. For example, during brainstorming sessions, everyone might only play the role of the generator for several minutes, or they may engage in analyzing a set of initial ideas to see which works best, with everyone acting as an analyst for an extended period. Alternatively, a discussion on writing strategy might emerge, where each person contributes from their perspective, fulfilling the strategist role. Therefore, finding a short time slice that includes all three membership categories is not easy. However, in the representative sample selected here, all three categories are observable.

Second, due to the word limit imposed on this thesis, it was not possible to select a longer segment to represent the entire sample studied. Third, this study is focused on identifying the roles that each turn of conversation plays in advancing the collaborative creative process, rather than the specific content of each turn. For instance, a transcript of a longer segment would contain a significant amount of detailed information about the script being written in that room. Reading such a large amount of information would not only fail to enhance the reader's understanding of this study, but would also risk overwhelming them with excessive, irrelevant details that could confuse rather than clarify the analysis.

Turn of speech	Speech	Role
1	A: [character's name] is unconscious because of crash and dreams about meeting boy...	<b>Generator</b>
2	B: That is so [a movie's name] ...	<b>Analyst</b>
3	A: so maybe boy tells her that [another character's name] is alive... or [same name] is taken...	<b>Generator</b>
4	C: we didn't really imagine how to shift the timing...	<b>Analyst</b>
5	A: then [character's name] wakes up in the forest, next to her dad and [another character's name] is injured - broken arm or leg. Then, [the other character's name] tells [character's name] he used to work in the [a place in the story] and he rescued her there... and then [...]	<b>Generator</b>
6	B: How much does she know about [...]?	<b>Analyst</b>
7	A: Just this... That he worked in the lab...	<b>Generator</b>
8	B: Does he say anything about her ... [a detail from the character's backstory] in the lab?	<b>Analyst</b>
9		<b>Generator</b>

	<p><b>A:</b> I don't think he would say anything about [...] that was what we [a smaller group within the team who were in charge of the brainstorming for this storyline] decided... then [the other character's name] makes up [character's name] and he gives her a gun while that was happening [another character] show ups and [...]</p> <p>Long pause – silence</p>	
<p><b>10</b></p>	<p><b>B:</b> I wonder if we could have a tension if they're on the road for a bit... and [character's name] has to realize that they didn't have the wrong person... and they're being chased and that's why they're having an accident... that just means that we have to shuffle the order of the cards [the cards that each bit of the storyline is written on one of them] ... that would give us more tension... because right now it feels like they are just driving and [...]</p>	<p><b>Analyst</b></p>

**Figure 2 – Transcript table of a conversation sample**

In the transcript table above, 10 speech turns have been transcribed, and in these speeches, the interaction between the two roles of generator and analyst can be seen. As it shows, this part of the conversation begins with describing a new idea for the screenplay (Generator role). In the second turn of speech, an evaluation of this idea is presented (Analyst role): the similarity of the idea to a part of a famous movie that has been recently released. This is clearly perceived as a “negative” evaluation because the creative nature of screenwriting requires new ideas to move the narrative forward.

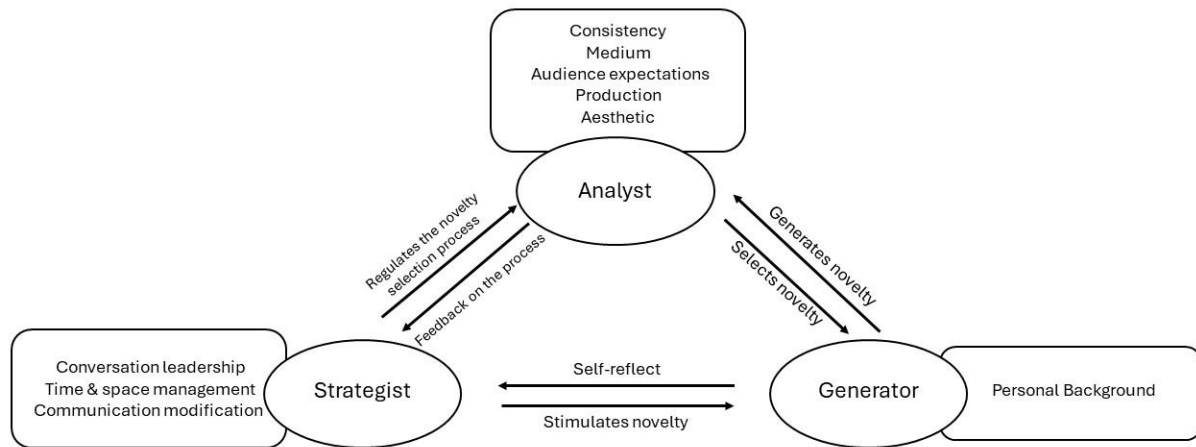
This is, in fact, an example of evaluating ideas based on considering audience expectations during the creative process. However, the Generator role continues to explain the generated idea. This is common because other details in an idea can be evaluated positively, and in that case, “negative” details will be replaced with “positive” ones later. In the fourth turn of speech, another writer who contributed to the idea points out a detail to remind the group of a missing part that needs further elaboration.

Once again, the Generator role begins to speak and explains the remaining idea. In the sixth turn of speech, the Analyst clarifies another aspect of the idea with a question. This turn of speech clearly does the task of maintaining rational and dramatic consistency, as a new idea must accurately explain its position in the chain of cause-and-effect with other screenplay ideas, and this is one of the tasks of the Analyst role in the collaborative creativity system. The idea is examined in the next 3 turns of speech, and finally (in the tenth turn of speech), the Analyst role evaluates another aspect of the idea, which is the requirements of the medium aesthetics (the element of tension in drama). Despite the assumption that a “good” bit of story in the screenplay requires tension and this idea lacks sufficient tension, the last argument is presented to reject this idea. According to the observations of this study, in the same situations as at the end of this part, the Generator role may move the writing process forward by proposing a new idea or new details for the current idea, or the role of the Strategist may change the direction of conversation and idea development. In this study, a similar analysis to what has been presented in these two paragraphs (for ten turns of speech) has been done for all 3,272 turns of speech that had been observed.

## 5.2. The Systems View of Collaborative Creativity in the Writers' Room

In this thesis, the term "system approach" refers to a comprehensive framework that integrates multiple factors influencing Collaborative Creativity. This framework extends to organizational contexts, where all the components interact. The components are the roles that co-screenwriters take on during discussions in the writers' room. A systems model is used to illustrate the relationships among these roles.

The present paper proposes a model (Figure 3) to explain the concept of Collaborative Creativity in the screenwriting process in the Writers' Room setting, inspired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's theory of creativity (Figure 1) and with the Implication of a Systems Perspective. This model explains that co-screenwriters collaborate in the Writers' Room by playing dynamic membership roles during their conversations. These roles can be categorized into (1) the Generator, (2) the Analyst, and (3) the Strategist. The role of each co-screenwriter can vary at each turn of their speech, and different parts of a turn of speech can fulfill different roles. The Generator role emerges when they blindly generate a new idea, the Analyst role manifests when they rationally discuss whether an idea works, and the Strategist role appears when they attempt to navigate the discussion. Therefore, it can be argued that to have an effective Writers' Room, three types of knowledge, skills, and abilities are required: firstly, minds that are capable of generating new ideas; secondly, the knowledge and skill of screenwriting to evaluate, select, and arrange ideas; and thirdly, the communication and management skills to provide a suitable framework of communication for stimulating novelty and selecting it.



**Figure 3 - The systems view of collaborative creativity in the writers' room**

The present thesis proposes the above model to explain the dynamics of collaboration among screenwriters in the Writers' Room. As previously explained, each team member, in each turn of their speech (depending on the type of their participation in the conversation), occupies at least one of the three positions depicted in the model. When in the "Generator" position, they generate novelty; their colleagues in the Analyst position analyze that novelty. The collaborator, while performing the Analyst role, evaluates the idea. If it "works", they select it for the screenplay. Screenwriters may also realize, in the Generator role, that an "error" in the process is affecting their creative performance, if so, they can self-reflectively address this disruption in the system. In such situations, there is a need for the Strategist position to address the managerial-communicative solution to the error to re-stimulate novelty in the team. This includes feelings of writer's block, the writer's feeling of being lost, and also awkward silence in the room. In such conditions, the Analyst position may also analyze external factors and address the Strategist position in the form of feedback.



Furthermore, if the Strategist identifies the disruptor in the system in analysis patterns and novelty selection process, they regulate how colleagues participate in the Analyst role. It is essential for screenwriters to feel comfortable in the Writers' Room, and if the way that their colleagues criticize their ideas makes them uncomfortable; it is definitely a system error and needs to be solved through an intervention of the Strategist role.

Another important point about this model is its relationship with the hierarchical structure of the Writers' Room. Notably, the Strategist position is often exerted by collaborators from higher positions in the hierarchy. If lower-ranked writers want to participate in conversations from this position, they do so through questioning, requesting, or suggesting. The final decision will still be with the higher-ranked writers (showrunners). However, no specific relationship between the "Analyst" or "Generator" positions with the hierarchy of the screenwriting team was observed in this research, and it can be said that everyone participates similarly and equally in these positions in the conversations.

## 6. Conclusion

In the domain of creative industries, the rapid growth of streaming services has led to an unprecedented boom in the television series industry, with series now enjoying wide-ranging and global audiences in both quantity and diversity. Consequently, production companies must enhance quality and cultural diversity in their offerings to meet the demands of today's market, making the study of series production processes practically significant. Additionally, such studies hold theoretical importance in media and communication disciplines, deepening our understanding of media production processes, which play a crucial role in popular culture and creative industries. At the core of these processes lies screenwriting, with the collaborative method known as the Writers' Room, rooted in American TV traditions, being the most prevalent approach.

In conclusion, this thesis advances our understanding of collaborative creativity within Writers' Rooms, offering a systemic model inspired by Csikszentmihalyi's creativity framework. By identifying three key roles—Generator, Analyst, and Strategist—this model elucidates how dynamic role-playing among co-writers fosters creative collaboration. This research holds practical significance for the television series industry, providing insights that can enhance the effectiveness of Writers' Rooms in producing culturally diverse and high-quality content. It also has theoretical importance, contributing to media and communication studies by extending existing creativity models to collaborative contexts.

Existing studies on Writers' Rooms have frequently referenced the concept of creative collaboration, yet there remains a notable lack of scientific exploration into the mechanisms of collaborative creativity within scholars on Writers' Rooms. This thesis aims to contribute to this area. The key outcome is a systemic model that frames collaborative creativity in Writers' Rooms, suggesting that this creativity emerges through the dynamic enactment of three membership categories by co-writers during their conversations in the Writers' Room: (1) the Generator role, (2) the Analyst role, and (3) the Strategist role. In each turn of dialogue,

a co-writer performs at least one of these roles, advancing the collaborative creativity process. The Generator role is intuitive and involves proposing new ideas; the Analyst role is critical and evaluates ideas for their suitability; and the Strategist role is directive, steering the conversation.

This systemic model, inspired by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's creativity model, has broad theoretical and practical applications within and beyond academia. It provides a foundational model for deeper and more detailed studies of Writers' Rooms, offering a more scientific understanding of these collaborative processes. Moreover, in the context of creativity studies, it attempts to extend Csikszentmihalyi's model to include collaborative creative processes, inviting further research in various contexts.

Ultimately, this thesis aspires to bridge theory and practice, offering valuable perspectives for educators, industry professionals, and researchers. By fostering a deeper understanding of collaborative creativity, it aims to enhance both the educational preparation of future screenwriters and the operational strategies of production companies, contributing to the ongoing evolution of the creative industries.

In screenwriting education, this model can classify the types of activities occurring in Writers' Rooms, helping film schools and screenwriting programs more precisely develop the necessary skills and protocols for their students, better preparing them for the series production industry. In the industry itself, the model can aid showrunners, producers, HR staff, and managers in understanding collaborative creativity mechanisms, assisting in recruiting, providing suitable work environments, and optimizing process planning and management.

Despite limitations such as the focus on a single Writers' Room and a limited observational period, this study lays the groundwork for future research. Subsequent studies are suggested to include multiple Writers' Rooms across different production contexts and observe the entire screenwriting process to gain a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, exploring Writers' Rooms in active series productions could yield richer insights.

The limitations of this thesis include time, budget, and personal connections, leading to the study of only one Writers' Room. Future studies should, if possible, include multiple rooms to enable comparative analysis. Additionally, this study observed only one week of a six-week program at the International Film School Cologne; future researches are suggested to cover the entire screenwriting process. Finally, obtaining access to a Writers' Room in an actual series production would provide more comprehensive insights, though educational settings also offer unique advantages such as reflective discussions by instructors.

In conclusion, the researcher hopes that applying Csikszentmihalyi's systemic creativity model to the study of Writers' Rooms has taken a step forward in understanding collaborative creativity in media production processes.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1 - Research Information Letter (page 1 out of 3)

### RESEARCH INFORMATION LETTER

Research Title:

#### **Unpacking Collaborative Creativity; A Conversation Analysis of Writers' Room Dynamics**

My name is **Tahmasb Mahdavi**, and this research project is my first-year thesis for a Master of Arts program in **Media and Communication Studies: Culture, Collaborative Media, and Creative Industries** at **Malmö University**.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of my research project is to explain the concept of "collaborative creativity" within the communication discipline.

The main question is:

**How do writers collaborate in a writers' room setting to generate and develop creative ideas for their screenplay?**

#### **Your participation and how the information will be collected:**

The research will offer voluntary opportunities for participation through observation of group work and interviews. In the first step, I will attend a week of your Writers' Room program at Internationale Filmschule Köln as an observer. I am going to write a transcription of conversations that I observe. I will use the conversation analysis method to analyze the transcription later.

There may also be some interviews outside of the Writers' Room. I will ask a few questions about interviewees' experiences of collaboration in the Writers' Room setting.

#### **Benefits and risks to participation**

We ask you to consider if there would be any risks for you personally to participate before giving consent to participate. **Please know that your participation is completely voluntary, and you are free to decline to participate.**

## Appendix 2 - Research Information Letter (page 2 out of 3)

- Anonymity: No personal information or identity of participants will be collected or mention
- The research will take a week.
- The conversations will be audio recorded at first only to use the voice for writing the transcription of conversations. When the transcription is ready the audio file will be deleted permanently.
- I disclose this information here so that you can make a fully informed decision on whether to participate in this study or not.

### **Confidentiality, security of data, and retention period**

I will work to protect your privacy throughout this study. All information I collect will be maintained in confidence with original pdf (e.g., consent forms) stored on a hard drive locked in my desk in my home. Other electronic data (such as transcripts or audio files) will be stored on a password-protected computer. Information will be recorded by way of audio recordings and in hand-written format and, where appropriate, summarized, in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless a specific agreement has been obtained beforehand. All documentation will be kept strictly confidential.

### **Sharing results**

In addition to submitting my final report to Malmö University in partial fulfillment for an MA in Media and Communications degree, I will also be sharing my research findings with the ifs, Internationale Filmschule Köln. Also, the final research report will be available to all participants through the Malmö University Student Theses portal (DiVA).

### **Procedure for withdrawing from the study**

#### **Focus Group**

Withdrawal from the focus group is possible at any time. However, your participation may have influenced the conversations and it is therefore not possible to remove the data after the focus group has started. To withdraw from the study before the focus group, please contact me one week before the date of the focus group. In this case, your name and any data that has been collected from you up until that point will be exempt from the study.

### Appendix 3 - Research Information Letter (page 3 out of 3)

#### **Interviews**

Lastly, interview participants may withdraw at any time. If you wish to withdraw from the interview in advance of the event, please contact me to let me know by way of email. Participants who choose to withdraw from an interview in-progress may request their data be removed from the inquiry, as well as any record that they participated in the interview. After the interview, participants will have two weeks following the receipt of their interview transcript, to request a withdrawal, after this time the data will subsequently become part of the anonymous data from the inquiry as a whole.

**Please know that you are not required to participate in this research project. Your participation is optional and voluntary.** By replying directly to the e-mail request for participation you indicate that you have read and understand the information above and give your free and informed consent to participate in this project. My credentials as a student with Malmö University can be established by contacting [K3student@mau.se](mailto:K3student@mau.se).

Please keep a copy of this information letter for your records.

## Appendix 4 - Research Consent Form For Research Observation

### RESEARCH CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH OBSERVATION

Thank you for taking the time to review this form and for taking an active role in my research. By signing this form, you agree that you are over the age of 19 and have read the information letter for this study. Your signature states that you are giving your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this project and have data you contribute used in the final report and any other knowledge outputs (i.e., articles, conference presentations, newsletters, etc.) without any identifying information.

As the researcher, I will maintain your confidentiality, and I will follow according to the rules of the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation). I will join your Writers' Room program sessions at Internationale Filmschule Köln **between April 22<sup>nd</sup> and April 27<sup>th</sup>**, as an observer. There I will observe your conversations to collect data for my research. My research utilizes the conversation analysis method to examine how "collaborative creativity" works. I may excerpt and quote some of your conversations in the final paper, but it will not contain any personal information or the identity of the speaker or listeners. I would like to record audio for my personal use so that I can listen to it later and write a transcription. Please note that I will not share the audio file with anyone else or allow anyone else to listen to it. I will delete the audio file immediately after I have finished writing the conversation transcript.

- I consent to the audio recording of the group work I attend.
- I consent to quotations and excerpts expressed by me through the group work to be included in this study, provided that my identity is not disclosed.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signed:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_