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Small businesses in the new creative industries: innovation as a people management challenge

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to present findings from an SME case study situated in the computer games industry, the youngest and fastest growing of the new digital industries. The study aims to examine changing people management practices as the case company undergoes industry-typical strategic change to embark on explorative innovation and it seeks to argue that maintaining an organisational context conducive to innovation over time risks turning into a contest between management and employees, as both parties interpret organisational pressures from their different perspectives.

Design/methodology/approach – A single case study design is used as the appropriate methodology to generate in-depth qualitative data from multiple organisational member perspectives.

Findings – Findings indicate that management and worker perspectives on innovation as strategic change and the central people management practices required to support this differ significantly, resulting in tensions and organisational strain. As the company moves to the production of IP work, the need for more effective duality management arises.

Research limitations/implications – The single case study has limitations in terms of generalisability. Multiple data collection and triangulation were used to mitigate the limitations.

Practical implications – The economic contribution of small businesses in the new creative industries is widely acknowledged. While the sector shows high business birth rates, the business failure rate is equally high. This remains of concern for policy makers. This study aims to contribute to understanding why businesses in the sector either fail to grow or decline.

Social implications – The economic contribution of small businesses in the new creative industries is widely acknowledged. While the sector shows high business birth rates, the business failure rate is equally high. This remains of concern for policy makers. This study aims to contribute to understanding why businesses in the sector either fail to grow or decline.

Originality/value – Few qualitative studies have examined people management practices in the industry in the context of organisational/strategic change, and few have adopted a process perspective.

Keywords Change management, United Kingdom, Innovation

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The computer games industry is one of the youngest and most rapidly evolving new media sectors (Christopherson, 2004; Cadin and Guérin, 2006; PriceWaterhouse Coopers, 2008). Its economic significance has been widely recognised regionally, nationally and internationally (Scottish Government, 2004; South West RDA, 2006; Welsh Assembly Government, 2006; NESTA, 2008a, b; PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2008; EKOS Consultants, 2009), and, most recently, in the UK's April 2010 budget which, after much lobbying, promised significant tax breaks to stem the "brain drain" as large and successful games companies continue to move to locations with more favourable

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tax regimes (Palmer, 2010; NESTA, 2008a, b; EKOS Consultants, 2009). Election fortunes meant that this concession was short-lasting as the newly elected Conservative-Liberal government, in its "Austerity Budget" of June 2010, announced a revision of this concession. However, the presence of the computer games industry in the political debate remains indicative of its growing economic significance, in the UK as elsewhere (Chatfield, 2010).

The UK games industry is populated by a large number of micro, and small independent studios and only a few larger players (Chaston, 2008; dePeuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2009). Support initiatives have yielded high business birth rates, but business survival rates beyond the critical five-year period (McGregor and Solek, 2009) continue to be low (dePeuter and Dyer-Witheford, 2009). Surviving firms, if they demonstrate value-creation potential, remain vulnerable to being sold, mostly to non-UK firms, a trend that also characterises the high technology SME sector in general (NESTA, 2008a, b). As high value adding jobs leave the country, the UK risks becoming a "creative and technical bodyshop" (NESTA, 2007). The volatility of the industry's small businesses, and their reluctance to scale up, thus remain critical issues for policy makers, in particular in local economies where the availability of high value employment is linked to economic regeneration (Bagwell, 2000).

The industry-specific literature examining facilitators and drivers of or barriers to growth is as yet limited (Holt and Macpherson, 2006), in part because of the relative youth of the industry, in part because games companies might be subsumed within more general studies of factors affecting SME growth, and performance (Edwards *et al.*, 2005; Mason and Brown, 2010). Small games studios share similar facilitators of and barriers to growth with the SME sector at large, and high technology enterprises specifically (Baron and Hannan, 2002; NESTA, 2008a, b, 2009). These can be classified into external and internal, supply/demand and resource-specific, structural or individual factors (Hadjimanolis, 1999), with variation, and degree of interplay between external and internal factors, depending, for instance, on industry or company life cycle, location, owner orientation, or competence levels (Lange *et al.*, 2000; (Littunen, 2000; Blundel and Hingley, 2001; O'Gorman, 2001; NESTA, 2008a, b, 2009). As yet no conclusive insights into the factors hindering small computer games firms from scaling up have been produced.

Increasingly, the literature has shifted towards innovation rather than efficiency as the key driver of growth, business success or failure (Hadjimanolis, 1999; Keizer *et al.*, 2002; Edwards *et al.*, 2005; Isaksen and Tidd, 2006; Bilton and Cummings, 2010). Changes in markets and the competitive strategies of large organisations have increased the pressure on SMEs to focus on innovation, innovation capabilities and innovation management (McAdam *et al.*, 2004). Accelerating technological and scientific developments and ever shortening product lifecycles have generated a particular innovation imperative – as well as opportunities – for SMEs (Keizer *et al.*, 2002; O'Regan *et al.*, 2005). These require a more strategic approach to innovation and effective innovation management skills if they are to survive and prosper in the long run (McAdam *et al.*, 2004; Bessant *et al.*, 2005; O'Regan *et al.*, 2005). Studies to date suggest that the SME sector in general still demonstrates an innovation management deficit (O'Regan *et al.*, 2005) or finds innovation management a challenge (Bessant *et al.*, 2005). This applies to SMEs in discontinuous environments characterised by technological step changes in particular (Bessant *et al.*, 2005). In the computer games

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industry, for instance, the accelerating rate of technological change rapidly replaces established business models, thus reducing opportunities to establish routines of best practice. Given the large number of business failures in this sector, and the industry's reluctance to scale up, it is timely to explore whether innovation management challenges are part of the problem. Effective innovation management is imperative for this industry. This can only be improved on the basis of a better understanding of barriers to and impediments of this process.

The innovation literature to date has tended to view innovation, broadly defined as "the development and implementation of new ideas by people [...] within and institutional order (Van de Ven *et al.*, 1989, p. 590) and for commercial purpose, as a sequenced set of (managed) activities (Edwards *et al.*, 2005; Isaksen and Tidd, 2006; Dobbs and Hamilton, 2007). This has resulted in a rich body of generic best practice literature, and implicit assumptions of easy transferability of such practice from larger to smaller businesses (Edwards, 2000; Tidd, 2001). In parallel, the majority of empirical studies are prediction-focused variance studies, which assume innovation as invariant. By and large, innovation research is still considered to be short of conclusive findings and comprehensive frameworks, or seen as overly static, or inadequately addressing the complex dynamics of innovation in specific organisational and industry settings (Edwards, 2000; Tidd, 2001; Edwards *et al.*, 2005). Importantly there is a paucity of qualitative studies and of studies addressing social and change dynamics of innovation (Edwards, 2000; Cardon and Stevens, 2004; Garnsey *et al.*, 2006). This is characteristic of SME innovation research in particular, despite the argument that this branch of research, given its relative recency, may still be best served by qualitative research (Shaw, 1998). In consequence the majority of SME innovation research still presents a socially disembedded picture of the process. Given the economic importance of the SME sector, and of high technology industries such as the computer games industry in particular (Chatfield, 2010), this remains a research deficit, waiting to be addressed.

The aim of this exploratory study is thus to further, through a qualitative study and a phenomenological approach (Shaw, 1998), our understanding of SME innovation management in the computer games sector as a high technology sector of vital economic importance, and still requiring further research attention. More specifically we aim to examine, through a case study approach, how SMEs in this industry experience innovation as a process, how employees and management interact in this process, and to what extent industry-specific factors are influential in shaping a company's experience of innovation. Given the exploratory purpose of the study, the emphasis is on how innovation is enacted and made sense of.

The paper is based on qualitative data generated from a project funded under the ESRC Business Engagement Scheme. The paper focuses on people management practice and proposes that specific innovation contingencies of the games industry produce innovation management challenges which require a more sophisticated approach to people management than is currently reflected in the relevant literature or practice of managing the industry's workforce. We suggest that "reluctance to grow" may not (just) be a matter of external inhibitors, or strategic choice, or a combination of these, but, paradoxically, a consequence of an innovation-oriented strategic decision which, unexpectedly, translates into a change management and, ultimately, a people management task. Attempts to examine the impact of innovation on SME people

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management practices and employment relations are as yet rare (De Leede and Kees Loise, 2005), and this study aims to contribute to research in this area.

The paper is structured as follows: the next section briefly reviews the innovation literature as it relates to SMEs with the view to demonstrating how this literature has shaped the explorative enquiry. The subsequent section outlines the specific innovation management context of the computer games industry to establish key change drivers. The case study explores how an industry specific decision to innovate for growth changes established management practices. These in turn result in an organisational reality best described as a dynamic contest between assumed and changing people management practices. It is proposed that "barriers to growth" may well be the consequence of such unfolding process as a company engages with innovation.

SMEs and the challenge of innovation

The SME innovation literature, while rapidly growing, still shows a range of generic biases (Hoffman *et al.*, 1998; Keizer *et al.*, 2002; Edwards *et al.*, 2005), the strongest one possibly being its emphasis on determinants of innovation efforts and results (Tidd *et al.*, 2001; Bessant *et al.*, 2005) and a tendency to provide generalised or generic rather than contextualised management guidance.

Thus, factors facilitating or hindering innovation have been related to external and internal, structural and resource factors, and their possible correlations. External factors include government regulations, policy actions, relative access to funding, weak contract enforcement, or local labour markets, levels of networks and relationships or knowledge networks (Rothwell, 1989; Lange *et al.*, 2000; Blundel and Hingley, 2001; Keizer *et al.*, 2002; Bougrain and Haudeville, 2002; NESTA, 2008a, b, 2009) and, to an extent, local environmental characteristics (Hadjimanolis, 1999; Littunen, 2000). Industry structure and lifecycle stages also impact on innovation and business growth and opportunities (O'Gorman, 2001). Internal variables include resources such as management capability, expert skills, time, internal funds, but also systems, in particular knowledge systems (Delahaye, 2005), or organisational variables including structures, cultures and norms and leadership (McAdam *et al.*, 2004; Tidd *et al.*, 2001; Keizer *et al.*, 2002; O'Regan *et al.*, 2005). At the micro level of analysis, owner/manager orientation towards innovation and training are identified as determinants (Kakati, 2000; McAdam *et al.*, 2004; Macpherson *et al.*, 2004). High technology entrepreneurs' reluctance to engage in training and development (NESTA, 2008a, b; Chaston, 2008) has given rise to a "development dilemma" (Chaston, 2008), resulting in inadequate exploitation of innovation and growth opportunities. This has been of concern for some time (Keogh, 1999; Kitching and Blackburn, 2002), but for creative industries businesses, both conventional and digital, there is an added dilemma (Rae, 2002). Here, reluctance to grow has been significantly related to tensions between commercial and artistic orientation (Chaston, 2008), a tendency to view commercialisation as compromising artistic integrity, a preference for lifestyle over commercial aspirations, or a perceived dissonance between managing creativity and managing innovation as its commercial realisation (Paige and Littrell, 2002; Wilson and Stokes, 2005).

Such focus on determinants of or barriers to innovation and growth has evolved side by side with, rather than integrated within, an – as yet inconclusive – "search" for

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best practice (Edwards, 2000; Tidd, 2001), arguably a weakness of the SME-related innovation literature. Innovation management literature, mostly adopting a functional perspective, has remained largely prescriptive and based on first linear, more latterly iterative, conceptualisations of innovation as staged, predictable sets of activities. These can be planned, managed and monitored from idea inception to commercialisation (Isaksen and Tidd, 2006), if supported by effective knowledge and IT systems, and project based management systems, including supportive HR systems. Where barriers to innovation are explicitly highlighted as a management task, they tend to be conceptualised as challenges arising at the start of the innovation process and to that extent as challenges that can be eliminated through management intervention, informed by conventional change management practice, such as variations of Kotter's step models to change (Isaksen and Tidd, 2006). Where barriers are conceptualised in terms of dualisms such as those between artistic, creative or expressive interests of "innovators" and corporate or commercial interests of managers, a negotiation-based brokering approach to management is recommended, albeit with little practical guidance (Bilton, 2007). How precisely these generic approaches are to be realistically transferred to the SME context or to what extent they are applicable or need to be modified, has remained unanswered, remains to be examined (Edwards *et al.*, 2005) as does the question whether SMEs in different industry sectors require different bundles of innovation management routines (Tidd, 2001). Paradoxically, despite the recognition that SMEs seem particularly well suited to generating breakthrough innovation (Delahaye, 2005), and despite consistent efforts of policy makers to support innovation in SMEs, knowledge about how SMEs (succeed or fail to) innovate has remained unclear (Hoffman *et al.*, 1998; Edwards *et al.*, 2005; O'Regan *et al.*, 2005).

SMEs and the challenge of managing people for innovation

While the search for SME innovation management "best practice" is set to continue, there is broad agreement that the source of innovation resides in the creativity and innovator capability of people. In the knowledge economy the emphasis is on knowledge workers, their creativity, ability to create and share new knowledge and hence innovation capability in particular (Drucker, 1993; Florida and Goodnight, 2005). Central to the discussion of effective people management in innovating companies is thus the management of creativity and innovation potential within individuals (Mumford *et al.*, 2002), and the required supporting mechanisms, systems and context variables. Relatively few studies address innovation-related people management practices in the SME context specifically, in part because HR practices are still considered to be emerging rather than fully developed and because relatively little focus has actually been placed on people management practices in the SME context (Reid *et al.*, 2002). However, there seems agreement that people management practices for innovation and organisational variables supporting creativity and innovation are likely to apply to all organisational contexts (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Bommer and Jalajas, 2002).

Similar, the "creatives" working in the new creative industries are thus not more than but merely differently creative than the (equally) creative knowledge workers elsewhere. All are high potential employees on who their employers depend. Some of them are equipped with "deep smarts [. . .], the stuff that produces that mysterious

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quality, good judgement" (Leonard and Swap, 2004, p. 88). All of them are engaged in a creative process that integrates the duality of "novelty" and value to generate innovation (Bilton, 2007; Mumford and Gustafson, 1998). Maximising the productivity and leveraging the tacit knowledge of such "creative people" (Mumford *et al.*, 2002) for innovation constitutes the central people management imperative for their employers in small and larger organisations alike.

The inadequacy of conventional management approaches for these employees was first attested by Drucker (1993), and has been reiterated since (Baron, 2001; Florida and Goodnight, 2005; Storey, 2005; Mumford *et al.*, 2002; Ehin, 2008). Encouraging innovation requires a managerial mindset characterised by a positive, celebratory attitude towards innovation, combined with tolerance for failure; encouragement of open debate, and a prioritisation of innovation and change over stability and routine (Storey and Salaman, 2005; Storey, 2005). Extrinsic motivation incentives are seen as detrimental to employees' innovativeness and productivity and managers are to focus instead on offering intrinsically motivating "opportunit[ies] to do new things, to be innovative, to [. . .] learn and develop" (Storey, 2005, p. 211). This is at the heart of people management strategies for innovation (Cummings and Oldham, 1997).

Managing these workers requires structures and processes, which are radically different from traditional forms of organising work (Tidd, 2001; Bilton and Leary, 2002; Isaksen and Tidd, 2006; Bilton, 2007; Ehin, 2008). Knowledge and creativity cannot be leveraged for commercial exploitation in conventional hierarchic structures (Baron, 2001; Tidd *et al.*, 2001). Flexibility, networked flatter structures, self-organising teams and projects, devolved decision making and democratic lines of communication are defining features of organising for knowledge creation (Simon, 2006; Bilton, 2007).

Autonomy, task complexity and ownership of work are seen as vital prerequisites for creativity, new knowledge creation and innovation (Cummings and Oldham, 1997), and intrinsically motivating, individually and collectively.

Tactics and arrangements recommended for the effective management of creative people include time, buffering against commercial pressures and client requests, structural separation for explorative innovation, encouragement of risk, a permissible attitude to failure, and slack (Mumford *et al.*, 2002). Feedback and reward should focus on work processes and the process of creative idea generation rather than merely outcomes (Stenmark, 2000) and the suggestion is made that extrinsic rewards may be counterproductive (Stenmark, 2000). If risk, failure and exposure to harsh peer-critique are part of the creative process, supportive teams and supervision are paramount to maintaining confidence and trust (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Oldham and Cummings, 1996). To be successful, innovative and creative companies are further advised to engage their employees in processes such as adventuring, exploring uncertainty, experimenting, incremental risk taking, conceptual or contextual confronting (Andriopoulos and Lowe, 2000). Such activities enhance organisations' capability to remain responsive to arising opportunities.

Cumming's model of the "creative organisation" (Cummings and Oldham, 1997) or Amabile's creative work climate (Amabile *et al.*, 1996; Amabile, 1998) address the organisational context and work organisation and the extent to which these support or impact on creativity and innovativeness. Amabile *et al.* (1996), and similarly Ekvall (1997), integrate most of the previous dimensions within a conceptual model of the creativity-encouraging work environment. Relative levels of organisational,

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supervisory and team encouragement of creativity, autonomy and the relative sense of ownership flowing from that, resource availability, the balance of positive and external pressures and constraints combine to create an organisational climate that is more or less conducive to creative work (Amabile *et al.*, 1996). There is thus broad agreement on how best to manage workers for innovation.

SME specific empirical research, while limited, confirms the argument that innovation in SMEs, side by side with management systems, requires an empowerment culture, a transformational leadership style, supportive people management practices and a management mindset predicated on flexibility, responsiveness and space for creativity (O'Regan *et al.*, 2005).

The SME innovation challenge revisited – three gaps in the literature

The literature confirms that ignoring the innovation challenge will inevitably result in business failure (Barkema *et al.*, 2002), has identified a wide range of determining variables of relative levels of innovativeness, and produced general guidance how the innovators at the centre of innovation are to be managed. But it has as yet remained inconclusive in explaining why so many SMEs, including those in the computer games industry, fail to translate new ideas into commercial success and subsequently fail to perform. At least three "shortcomings" in the SME literature may account for this deficit.

The lack of differentiation

Innovation literature clearly distinguished between types or domains of innovation (Jansen *et al.*, 2006). The most widely discussed typology concerns explorative and exploitative innovation, the former relating to radical innovations or innovations designed to create new products, markets, demands, distribution channels, the latter designed to produce incremental innovations designed to exploit existing knowledge and capabilities for maximum efficiency (March, 1991; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Jansen *et al.*, 2006). Both are required, both require creativity and innovator capability. Both have distinct processes, routines and managerial logics (March, 1991; Nooteboom, 2000; Gibson and Birkinshaw, 2004; Jansen *et al.*, 2006) and these are indeed well described and researched. The argument is well established that organisations capable of sustaining competitive advantage and high performance are organisations equally capable of explorative and exploitative innovation. This applies to organisations large and small alike. There is equally clear evidence that organisations prefer the less effortful either-or *modus operandi*, with a predominant preference for efficiency-driven exploitation rather than exploration (Güttel and Konlechner, 2009). Finally, there is equally sufficient evidence that organisations prioritising either exploration or exploitation for too long tend eventually get stuck in organisational inertia and fail (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996). Yet while the differences between different types of innovation, and their different requirements is well understood, there is as yet no research that considers interplays between, conflicting interests or dynamics of the two prevailing types of innovation. This may be either because exploration is tacitly assumed as "superior" or because differences in management, in particular with reference to people management dimensions, seem to be assumed to be differences of degree rather than of kind.

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The SME innovation literature in particular rarely distinguishes between these types of innovation as it searches for factors facilitating or impeding innovation, or business survival. Equally, more practice-oriented studies lack in differentiation on this point. This is particularly significant for the SME context, where the pursuit of potentially competing if not conflicting innovation activities may be the source of organisational strain. Given their resource scarcity, this may well be a factor of particular importance for high technology SMEs. It certainly is a factor recognised in the computer games technology where investment in explorative innovation is becoming ever more costly. How such organisations experience the exploration/innovation challenge may thus be of particular relevance.

The absence of contingencies

A second gap in the literature concerns the scarcity of innovation studies that focus on organisational and industry contingencies as constitutive of specific innovation challenges. More recently the importance of environmental contingencies has received particular attention (Tidd, 2001), including environmental uncertainty and complexity (Damanpour, 1996; Tidd, 2001) or the speed of technological advances (Tidd, 2001). This position has generated the strongest argument for sector specific innovation research and differentiating approaches to innovation management (Tidd, 2001), and once more a need for qualitative studies is established (Tidd, 2001).

The marginalisation of social processes

The third gap relates to the overall focus of innovation research, which has produced a predominately context-disembedded and under-socialised understanding of innovation, the innovation process and its management. We agree with Edwards *et al.* (2005) who argue, similar to O'Regan *et al.* (2005), that the SME literature remains overly concerned with factors impeding or facilitating business growth rather than with processes generating competitive advantage. More specifically Edwards *et al.* (2005) argue for the need to extend social process-orientated research emerging in the general innovation literature into the SME context with the view to addressing the deficits of a primarily normative-functional literature that promotes a static conceptualisation of innovation.

Edwards *et al.*'s "process manifesto" (2005, p. 1119) aims to overcome the limitations of current (deterministic) innovation process research which prioritises stages and sequences of innovation activities, by reconceptualising the innovation process as a interactive process shaped by the duality of agency and structure (Edwards, 2000; Edwards *et al.*, 2005). This view presents innovation as socially produced, and an iterative phenomenon determined by the interplay of institutional structures and constraints, and individual (strategic, behavioural) choices. This results in an interactional, socially embedded and contingent notion of innovation in which dominant designs are not merely understood as 'best practice' but equally as expressions of power, dominance, normative pressures or professionalisation projects (Nooteboom, 2000; Hotho, 2008). Edwards *et al.* (2005) propose to adopt structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as an appropriate lens to examine innovation in specific organisational contexts as politically shaped practice or as interplay of individual skills, interests and motivations, shaped by and motivated to challenge structures, through choices, decisions, actions, discretions and deviations (Hotho, 2008). This

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approach provides a powerful new perspective on innovation in SME contexts as it draws attention to innovation as a contested terrain were diverse interests (may) collide which arise from both internal as well as externally constructed, micro and macro level constellations.

This reconceptualisation of innovation as a product of structure and agency is powerful and widens our understanding of the socially produced nature of innovation, but as one of many epistemological stances, it also has limitations. An emphasis on the structure-agency nexus risks distracting from the phenomenological experience of organisational reality (Bryman, 2004), and processes of organisational sense making by prioritising institutionalised practices of social interaction and by defining organisational phenomena and discourses as expressions of the structure-agency interplay. For the context of young and emerging industries such as the computer games industry and its equally young small businesses an approach which emphasise the intra-organisational events, challenges and conflicts as these companies embark on innovation is equally relevant if their concrete management challenges are to be understood. For this purpose, we can draw on organisational sensemaking as a theoretical framework. Organisational sensemaking refers to the ongoing process of meaning construction, of the construction of plausible explanations that rationalize organisational members' action retrospectively and attribute causality (Taylor, 1999; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2005). From this perspective individuals select cues and symbols from events, and through such selection multiple and disparate organizational events are ordered into multiple if conflicting organisational realities (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2005). As these are used and reused, they become the interpretative lens through which organizational members interpret and enact their environment (Apker, 2004; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2005). Thus situated "between" current managerial-functional or deterministic studies of (SME) research on the one hand, a structural argument on the other, organisational sense making can provide a micro-level in sight into innovation in SMEs that is as yet missing.

Innovation in the computer games industry – pulling strands together

The brief review and critique of key trends in SME-related innovation research has highlighted the need for a differentiating approach to examining innovation as a socially constructed process in specific organisational and industrial contexts. More specifically such an approach needs to address whether industry specific practices construct innovation challenges with which organisational members interact as they respond to innovation opportunities. The computer games industry and its specific innovation imperative thus needs to be considered next.

Industry-specific challenges?

The computer games industry is turbulent. Technology cycles are getting shorter, investment in new products is risky, the pressure to go to market fast immense, and business models outdate quickly (Christopherson, 2004; Cadin and Guérin, 2006). The required skilled workforce is often in short supply (Cadin *et al.*, 2006). Instability thus remains a characteristic of the industry, not only because of its relative youth, but because dilemmas characteristic of all knowledge-based companies, i.e. the tensions between innovation and organisation, exploration and exploitation, autonomy and control, are particularly pronounced in this industry where the expectation of creativity

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and innovation are deemed the most defining features of the industry and the career identities constructed therein (Christopherson, 2004; Cadin *et al.*, 2006). Dependent on the enthusiasm and intrinsic motivation of their designers and developers (Gaume, 2006; Zackariasson and Wilson, 2007), small games developers must focus on commercial pressures, efficiencies and routines without ever being able to neglect the need to provide motivation and opportunity for their key workers if they want to retain these. Work organisation in the industry is project-based around production activities which are short term, defined by deadlines and production specifications set by the client or by the company's own artistic or commercial aspirations (Christopherson, 2004). As such organisational forms are temporary, fluid and the workforce is required to readjust continuously to new project team configurations. In small studios this is a particular challenge as team selection principles are limited by resource constraints and hence pragmatic (Christopherson, 2004).

The computer games industry, as a new creative industry, displays a particular innovation challenge. The expectation that games developers should aim for the creation and eventual exploitation of intellectual property (IP), i.e. own games and consequently devote resources to higher value IP creation through explorative innovation is widely held among industry players, agencies, policy makers, present and future employees, and customers (Christopherson, 2004). It is a factor sensitively related to competitiveness in the global market (EKOS Consultants, 2009), and to the retention of those employees who create such value. Work for hire (WFH), i.e. games produced to client specifications, is considered a necessity to generate the revenue required for riskier IP and is often seen as subservient to IP work (Scottish Enterprise Tayside, 2010). Even companies who successfully produce games for clients feel compelled to creative opportunities for employees to engage in IP because this is required for retention and for individual career perspectives (Scottish Enterprise Tayside, 2010). Shifting to IP requires strategic shifts at some stage, which involve either experimentation with flexible organisational forms, increase in workforce, a total shift from commercial WFH to IP, or structural arrangements for simultaneous explorative and routine activities. These demands reflect the conflicting tensions of exploration and exploitation (March, 1991). But while computer games developers share the "innovator's dilemma" (Edwards *et al.*, 2005, p. 1122), the challenge to maintain both stability for exploitation and change for exploration (Nooteboom, 2000) is exacerbated in an industry with a fast-paced, pronouncedly creative and technology-driven innovation imperative. A games developer pursuing WFH will successfully build up a portfolio but at the price of dynamic capability (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996). Yet without such capability for adaptation high tech businesses will not be able to sustain innovation for growth. Organisational ambidexterity, i.e. the ability to engage in both exploitation and exploration, seems of particular importance for this industry (Raisch, 2008; Raisch *et al.*, 2009). How to develop such dynamic capability, and how to manage it, in this industry sector, remains to be addressed.

Typically the owner-manager will select the structure deemed most appropriate for the business. What links his/her structural choices is the recognition that "exploitation requires maintenance of existing identity, knowledge and practice, with a certain amount of control and co-ordination, in a dominant design" whereas exploration "requires their change, with a loosening of control and co-ordination" (Nooteboom,

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2000, p. 8). As a change management task this means managing paradoxes – and on a daily basis.

The computer games industry is a fast changing industry with technology permanently creating new business opportunities that may or may not be seized. Potential strategic inflection points may arise more frequently than in other industries. This context sharpens the organisational dilemmas mentioned previously, and poses particular management challenges. Organisations in turbulent industries such as the computer games industry are likely to undergo frequent changes of variable depth, triggered by external opportunity and internal strategic response. How these interrelate with people management practices is the focus of this study.

The case

This study is part of a project funded by an ESRC Business Engagement Grant and designed to generate deeper knowledge of interrelations between industry specifics, strategic decisions and management practices in the computer games industry. The nature of the scheme required an open-ended rather that research-question driven approach assuming that knowledge co-production would occur as researchers and business partner engaged in dialogue over organisational change and management practice.

The business partner, CCC, was a small computer games development studio established in 2000. The company had a management team comprising the MD, and four senior members, and a workforce of circa 20 artists, developers and coders. At the time of the research the company had taken the decisive strategic step of moving from WFH to IP and was several months into this change. This had generated substantial changes to the organisation of work. While previously work had been organised around small short-life projects with each project team member executing his (sic!) respective specialism, the company now worked exclusively on two self-funded games developed by two larger teams, working with more ambiguous outcome specifications, and a less certain timeline. Client specifications had been replaced by a single artistic vision and quality standards controlled by one member of the senior team. The company was thus in a process of change typical for the industry (Scottish Enterprise Tayside, 2010) in a. pursuing IP work as a prime strategic objective, b. managing this as a change process from commercial to creative work, and efficiency focus to exploratory focus, and c. selecting from a range of options the structures and work arrangements to MD considered most appropriate to achieve the IP related objectives. Throughout its existence the company had placed emphasis on creating an organisational culture and climate based on shared values of responsibility, autonomy and trust, and an understanding of the games they wanted to produce. That creativity and innovation needed to be fostered was understood, and various mechanisms supporting this had been employed over the years (Hotho and Haubrock, 2009). When we first encountered the company in 2007, there was a high level of commitment and focus on future IP generation. HR practices were emerging.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to understand a real life organisation, situated in a specific context, and over a period of time. The case study approach is recommended for such process-oriented and holistic exploration, in particular where researchers have little

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control over events (Hakim, 1994; Flyvbjerg, 2006; Patton and Appelbaum, 2003; Yin, 1994, 2009), as it generates in-depth reflexive data that capture the complexity and plurality of organisational perspectives (Patton and Appelbaum, 2003). An exploratory case study may be utilised to develop pertinent hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry and explore or refine existing theories (Yin, 1994, 2009; Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999), and this is indeed the future trajectory of the study. A concern about the value of case study research is scientific generalization from a specific case (Yin, 1994), however the purpose of a case study is to expand and generalise theories (analytical generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation) (Yin, 1994). The generalisability of case studies can be increased by their strategic selection and the relevance and typicality of the present case reflects this. To that extent the study matches the requirements for a representative single case study as discussed by Yin (2009). Further, as required for case study designs, triangulation, the synthesis of data from multiple sources, was attained through multiple data sources and contexts, stages of analysis, and researchers involved, which maximises the robustness of the study and the confidence of its conclusions (Bryman, 2004; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

The data for the study was collected over a period of eight months. Rich qualitative data was generated from semi-structured interviews with the managing director and senior management team, observations of meetings and staff interviews, producing multiple perspectives on change. The semi-structured interviews were used to elicit in-depth information about management practices as well as contextual information about the case study firm and sector. There are many advantages of interviewing, related to the long length of time spent with an individual respondent, including greater depth, allowing attitudinal and behavioural insights, the elimination of negative group dynamics such as difficulty with sensitive issues, and more control over the direction of the discussion (Greenbaum, 2000). The interviews were consistently structured around the key dimensions of the organisation, namely strategy, structure, culture, work organisation, to capture the shifting interactions and relations in the organisation. In addition researchers attended senior team meetings concerned with the strategic change issues. Five months into the data collection phase, the HR officer conducted in-depth interviews with all staff, which combined questions the company deemed relevant as it faced transition issues, and questions generated by the researcher as they analysed organisational changes. These data were complemented by data generated from semi-structured interviews with employees in 2007 (Hotho and Haubrock, 2009). The staff interviews were then considered at a senior management meeting, which the researchers attended. Data from these two sessions constitute what we later refer to as "later stage". All interview data were transcribed immediately after the interviews and the researchers identified and classified recurring themes separately and then compared these. Additional data sources were company literature, company value statements and web presentations. Five in-depth interviews with MDs of comparable studios were conducted separately to confirm the researchers' understanding of "typical events" in the industry, and these were complemented by interviews with policy agencies (Scottish Enterprise Tayside, 2010).

As required by Strauss (1987) the data analysis commenced immediately with the first interview. The observations and questions raised informed the categorisation of findings and the choice of further questions. The data were analysed using thematic

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coding (David and Sutton, 2004; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996; Strauss, 1987). In generating codes we used both themes identified through the literature review and themes induced by the researchers in examining the interviews. At the first stage open codes were produced through asking a set of "theory-generating" questions (Bohm, 2004) which enabled us to move beyond description, order and relate the data and to move towards assigning conceptual labels to the broken down data (Douglas, 2003). The purpose of open coding was in particular to contrast employer and management perspectives effectively around emerging themes (Douglas, 2003). At a second stage we tried to refine the codes into stronger concepts to generate a set of axial (aggregate) codes by reducing the open codes further (Strauss, 1987). This aided both simplification, through reduction to dominant categories, and also complication through an expansion and reconceptualisation of the data (David and Sutton, 2004; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). In this way the approach to coding the data from this project was undertaken in a heuristic manner (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Within the analysis stage the emphasis has been on a holistic approach to explanation with an aim to think reflexively and critically about how the researchers' view of the world may have shaped their assumptions of the findings. This has helped promote the visibility of social processes situating the research within a real world context (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

For the purpose of data presentation in this paper, we draw on the following brackets:

- The change to IP work – innovation as imperative.
- Intrinsic motivation through innovation for IP.
- Key losses – opportunity for multiple view points and divergence, combined with tolerance for failure.
- Encouragement of risk taking.
- Key contests – autonomy versus control.
- Creative space – the end to slack and buffering.
- Brokering and boundaries.
- Blame and trust.

The study has generated rich and deep qualitative data from multiple perspectives of actors as the organisation underwent industry-typical change. This allows us to compare and/or juxtapose the perspectives of MD, senior team and employees respectively and to contrast an earlier and later phase in the process of change.

Findings

The view from the bridge – senior management perspective

The change to IP work – innovation as imperative. The shift to IP work was mixed from the start – while seen as an inevitable step given industry dynamics and imperatives, the timing of the change was not ideal: coming too soon, and without a preferable transition period. We did a pretty big step quickly and I think that took too many people by surprise. You need to transition. The shift to IP work was not a strategic choice but made sense of as an externally created imperative, necessary to build reputation, but also to escape the risk of atrophy, engendered by the successful

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work-for-hire. The company decided to jump in – but were uncertain whether it was the wisest thing to do. Stability had been lost but there was also a perception of freedom. But this freedom created its own pressure as the IP work had to be brilliant in order to generate the income streams required for survival.

Because of the perceived no option situation, more sophisticated forms of control were felt to be needed and senior team hoped to achieve this through a set of performance, quality and behaviour-related values. The team had invested much effort in obtaining buy-in to the set of company values. At an earlier phase management were convinced that morale, our identity, our quality has gone up, but the feeling gradually changed to a sense of disappointment: it is a sort of Chiefs and Indians thing [. . .] polarising the company into pivotal people who buy-into the values and maybe 60 per cent who do not. Midway through the change phase one senior member conceded that he had given up on trying to convert people. Management seemed to withdraw from the effort of managing all "creatives" around company aspirations, accepting that IP work had polarised their development resource.

Such ambivalences characterise the entire change episode, and all reflection on the key dimensions of people management practice, and became ever more pronounced over time.

Intrinsic motivation through innovation for IP. Earlier the senior team expressed confidence that the shift to IP had increased the opportunity for innovation and artistic expression as the MD highlighted: I have now delivered a deal that allows the team to make the game they want. But the increased risk also increased the performance pressure on the team: If they fail I would not trust them next time round. The shift to IP seems a mixed blessing: greater opportunity for artistic expression generated – unexpectedly – greater pressure from senior management to succeed where previously failure might have been tolerated. At the early stage this seemed to work: people take more responsibility and seem to be more innovative.

At a later stage problems transpired: as senior managers had increased internal benchmarks for quality and creativity, IP work seemed no longer to deliver on intrinsic motivation. Retrospectively, work-for-hire became satisfying because it produced a straightforward motivating cycle of satisfaction. IP work did not generate this, in part because management could not fuse its dualistic function of liberating originality and innovation and the commercial pressure that came with having to prove ourselves to the outside world . . . showing that we can compete on contemporary releases pervaded all interviews. The pressure to create something the company can be proud of, something brilliant was enormous as the company's reputation was at stake.

The senior team responded by controlling the conflict through ever more stringent definitions of standards, processes and milestones to ensure that all employees understood that the product comes first essentially rather than any personal preferences. Repeatedly senior members emphasised the need to control any one particular agenda – a deliberate response to the diva cult seen as prevalent in the industry. Ironically, this eventually resulted in a situation where practically all decisions were run past the senior team member credited by all as the individual defining the company's artistic vision or signature – the CCC god! IP thus reduced rather than expanded opportunity for all!

Key losses – opportunity for multiple viewpoints, and tolerance for failure. Tolerance for failure seemed to decrease. Instead senior managers talked about failure as a matter

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of letting down the company, not honouring the trust invested in the workforce. Tolerance for failure, in the literature functionally associated with innovation and experimentation, was replaced by suggestions of blame for failure, a significant and unexpected shift.

Encouragement of risk taking. There was no space for risk, as the entire enterprise was now at risk. Management had consequently introduced strict project management tools and discipline to ensure the reduction of risk, expecting daily updates on targets and milestones, and consistent progress reports. While project management routines had been in place while the company did commercial work, these were tolerated and supported as they clearly enabled efficient completion of tasks, and a speedy cycle of satisfaction as projects were completed within three to four week periods. As the company embarked on IP work, these routines were more frequently challenged, in their meaningfulness, and as unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Key contests – autonomy versus control. At the early stage the change to IP work was reflected on as a significant extension of autonomy and task complexity and an expression of greater trust in the workforce, with a clear emphasis on output control: this puts enormous pressure on the teams to deliver and to maintain the trust invested in them. Again at the early stage the belief in people and their ability was strong. Several months later, senior members used expressions of disappointment and surprise at the lack of progress made. This was disappointment in the development resource, which just is not set up the way that we need it. The difficulties of making staff work autonomously yet to standard became a constant theme and this was attributed to matters such as wrong attitude, personal agendas or inability to submit to the collective interests.

At the later stage autonomy and control became key topics discussion. It almost seemed that the pressure to succeed on the two IP projects led to increasing conflict, resulting even in talk about disciplinary action. Teams seemed to struggle with the project management procedures as control mechanisms not fulfilling any purpose and rebelling against these: they do not see the value of these mechanisms and they do not believe that there are any consequences for not doing it. While senior team members expected daily accountability, employees consciously chose not to do this. For management this was a lack of professionalism and employees seemed to have risked the trust invested in them: all it does is undermine my confidence in us delivering anything. We cannot do our job with that kind of attitude.

Eventually the senior team's reflections on autonomy and the resultant trust to deliver, not just deliver something but something that is quantifiably CCC became a most ambiguous issue: the senior team felt they might not have supported staff sufficiently, but rationalised this by asserting that no other business in the industry would do differently. Autonomy during the work-for-hire phase was now seen as an amazing illusion – people felt that they had more autonomy but that was intentional – it was a carefully controlled system.

Creative space – the end to slack and buffering. IP work meant that the company had no resource slack, thus losing one component emphasised as supporting creative work. Combined with the firm imposition of a single – corporate – artistic vision, employees considered opportunities for creative expression reduced, resulting in a sense of disappointment regarding their psychological contract, while the senior team seemed to use the corporate creative vision as a means of risk control. Buffering from

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commercial realities was equally ambiguously treated – on the one hand regular communication of commercial realities had been deliberately replaced by a decision to place stories about the company outside to encourage staff to seek proactively any information they might need. At the same time employees' lack of commercial realism was deplored.

Brokering and boundaries. As the company changed, there was less evidence of brokering and negotiation of boundaries but increasing evidence of uni-directional managerial intervention. Dualities of artistic versus commercial activity, creativity-supportive and routine work had been replaced by a single artistic vision, and systems and structures designed to realise this vision, even at the price of properties supporting the creativity-conducive organisational climate. Rationalisation of processes and need for hierarchical controls shaped management intervention, and this was presented as a necessary process of professionalisation: This industry, does not need artists, this industry needs professionals. It seemed that to survive the commercial risk of original work the company had to become far more "managed".

The view from below

The change to IP work – innovation as imperative. The employee perspective presents a similarly ambiguous picture as employees reflected on the change to IP work. Employees too embraced IP: you get so much more satisfaction out of something you have created. And like the senior team they felt liberated: we were starting to get like dozy old men. But ambivalence had set in too: having expected that the original stuff would be far more buzzing, they became soberly aware of the ramifications of failure. Work-for-hire was "nostalgically" described as a period where I was happy because there was freedom within constraints. Repeatedly employees felt that something had been lost.

Intrinsic motivation through innovation for IP. There was a sense that the "artistic vision" was much more controlled from the top, a one man one idea sort of thing behind design, and this was seen as a source for irritation, conflict and disaffection in particular among the artists whose career aspirations were to what they want to do. For some, opportunity for artistic expression, was replaced by a visionary at the top, and a mysterious opaque, kind of vision. This meant a loss of commitment, because employees' own ideas not longer seemed to be valued: I think we have lost what it was that attracted me to the company.

Key losses – encouragement of risk taking. Encouragement to take (artistic, technical) risks was replaced by strict process plans. While project management routines had been in place while the company did commercial work, these were tolerated and supported as they clearly enabled efficient completion of tasks, and a speedy cycle of satisfaction as projects were completed within three to four week periods. As the company embarked on IP work, these routines were more frequently challenged, in their meaningfulness, and as unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Key contests – autonomy and task complexity combined with control. Unexpected for all, work-for-hire was now seen as giving much more autonomy and room for expression. Its loss was regretted as the many pressures made project leaders too controlling, and too insistent on reviewing and milestones. Decisions were now taken at the top and filtered down as task lists. Significantly employees felt that previously there was more trust in people and their capabilities, which they felt management had

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now lost, resulting in stricter control, which is not good for morale. Employees remembered almost nostalgically the time when they could produce games for clients as a period that allowed autonomy, task discretion and satisfying amounts of creative opportunity. IP work had proven to be the opposite of what had been expected.

Creative space – the end of slack and buffering. There was no slack or space for creativity in this controlled operation. In fact the MD compared the company at one stage to a traditional manufacturing business. Commercial realities were ambiguous, employees feeling neither buffered nor challenged to realise these.

Brokering and boundaries. Employees seemed to ask for more negotiation of boundaries and options of work. They suggested that the company should configure projects differently, to different time scales, and in different configurations to enhance autonomy and creativity, should balance activity differently and should embed more trust, autonomy and artistic licence in employees to ensure that teams are getting enthused about what they are doing. The current system was seen as being triggered by the huge commercial risk, yet too controlling and thus in their perception wrong because rules do not necessarily work in the industry.

Both sides united – blame and trust

A pervasive theme throughout the interviews was that of trust and, implicitly, blame or failure. All interviewees were reflective as they made sense of the organisational experience of innovation, and the search for reasons why or causes for the pervasive sense of disappointment was a defining feature of the interviews. There were no simple, explicit or unidirectional attributions of blame and responsibility. But senior team members frequent references to misjudgements of resource capabilities, of timing and readiness, occasional them-us polarisations and a seeming tendency to increase levels of control rather than to seek more consultative resolutions to local conflicts signalled a distancing from employees rather than a will to re-examine the creative context of the organisation. And a sense of disappointment, or a qualified "wait and see" attitude, among employees seemed indicative of some subtle changes to their psychological contract as the innovation process evolved.

Discussion

The literature relevant for the new creative industries context emphasises prescriptively the array of people management strategies, tools, practices and associated management responsibilities, or their implementation. Autonomy, task complexity, on the job challenges and supportive leadership (Mumford *et al.*, 2002) are seen as vital for success in knowledge intensive firms, as are other techniques to foster intrinsic motivation. It is recognised that implementing these remains challenging and requires both experimentation and the ability to learn from failure (Davenport, 2006). For small creative firms, more engagement with learning and development is recommended (Chaston, 2008), in particular to overcome the seeming difficulty of subordinating the creative or expressive dimension of work to the commercial interest of the firm (Chaston, 2008). The literature is confident that this can be done by managerial intervention. This is a perspective on management as a sequence of episodic intervention. This literature does not uncover how small companies need to manage innovation as a change process, in particular where this process means the move from the routines of steady state innovation (Bessant *et al.*, 2005).

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This study, in contrast, suggests that greater emphasis must be placed on understanding how such companies endeavour to sustain established practices in the face of changing innovation contexts and what happens to the shared understanding of these practices as management and managed experience their – changing – organisational reality. The study suggests that sustaining such practices is less a matter of gradual adjustment, than a struggle. It certainly is a process.

While the perception of IP work as more intrinsically motivating and commercially valuable is widely held, the findings qualify this. Seemingly more creative work – the focus on exploration and the production of a new, company-owned game, resulted in significantly higher levels of managerial control, and stricter rationalisation of processes. While this took participants by surprise, the same trend has been observed as a prerequisite where game development increases in complexity (Tschang, 2007), which is arguably the case in on-routine game production in this case study. While in theory increased management and brokering effort should retain the balance between process rationalisation and interventions to sustain creativity, motivation and enthusiasm (Bilton and Leary, 2002; Bilton, 2007; Tschang, 2007), and thus the innovation effort, the pressures and resource constraints in the small case company resulted in a twofold loss of that balance as a perceived loss of confidence in the development resource exacerbated the perceived need for rationalisation and control. The subsequent sense of loss of autonomy and discretion then resulted in loss of commitment, motivation, and morale and among some a wish almost to return to work-for-hire. In turn, this attitude seemed merely to justify senior managers' reduced confidence in their teams' capability to rise to the challenge. Autonomy, control, space, support, expressed through feedback (Amabile *et al.*, 1996) were not realised as deliberate people management practices (Storey, 2005), but became contested issues, seen by senior managers as areas that needed more top down direction if the company was to survive, and seen by employees as components of their work arrangements that were being lost, thus undermining their commitment – and confidence. A previously more collegial and creativity-supporting environment seemed to transform into a stricter hierarchical organisation where previous team autonomy was replaced by almost conventional notions of line management. Where the literature emphasises multiple coaching and facilitating roles of team or project managers (Simon, 2006) as prerequisite for successful creative projects and innovation, the company's IP work required, from the senior management perspective, the opposite of tighter control and accountability – a move ambiguously acknowledged as a commercial necessity and as counterproductive in terms of staff morale.

The challenge of managing innovation in the creative industries has been described as resulting from the "paradoxes of managing and organising creativity" (deFillippi *et al.*, 2007, p. 15) and Bilton's notion of brokering between the opposites of exploration and exploitation, creative and routine work (and their relative status), and self expression and commercial interest (Bilton, 2007) points towards a notion of people management as a process of negotiation, facilitation and creation of risk space, resources and supporting structures (Bilton and Leary, 2002; Scase and Davis, 2001). The effective management of these paradoxes is vital (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996; Jones *et al.*, 2004), the balancing act perpetual (Townley *et al.*, 2009). This study sheds further light on the dynamics of this balancing act as we juxtapose management and employee perspectives and trace these over time. In response to industry specific

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opportunities, and the imperative to undertake IP work, collaboratively constituted by all stakeholders in the industry, the company embarked on an industry-typical risk strategy. As the strategy unfolded, the nature of IP work changed in texture, if not in meaning, and in consequence senior managers and employees, through the interrelated decisions and responses to work and people management practices, pulled the company in almost opposite directions. While management – paradoxically – saw the need for more control to deliver original work, employees – paradoxically – longed for the satisfaction generated by commercial work. What bound all was the surprise at this. Introducing practices designed to sustain creative or innovative knowledge work is an event; maintaining these is not a mere process, it is a struggle, and success is not guaranteed.

Conclusion – lessons to be learned

This paper aims to contribute to our understanding of the reluctance of companies in the new digital media industry to grow. Case studies do not allow for broad generalisation and their explanatory value is confined by the nature of the case (Yin, 1994, 2009). Yet the in-depth nature of this study has generated pointers for potential answers and avenues for research. The case suggests that management practices designed to support the "creative climate" in the organisation, or at least a climate that motivates the typical workforce in the industry, their and the company's aspirations are not merely difficult to sustain but may risk collapsing as the company confronts the challenges of innovation as a process of significant change. Moreover these very practices can become a territory for contest and organisational strain as commercial and individual (not necessarily specifically creative) interests and perceptions collide. The MD acknowledged that it is hard to build a creative business for the long term.

At the end of the interview period the case company announced a reduction of its workforce and reduction of IP work, and this poses the question what might the industry learn from this case. A key lesson is certainly, that explorative innovation, i.e. IP work, needs to be prepared in advance through small-scale pilot sites, and continuous capability building through consistently maintaining a creative organisation. Perhaps even small studios in the industry need to revisit the way they balance WFH and IP, not seeing WFH as subservient (and implicitly inferior) to IP but as equally, if differently, creative, and innovative. If the tacit IP-WFH hierarchy is typical for the industry, policy makers should encourage a more balanced view rather than supporting WFH as merely "means to an end". Finally, change management capabilities should figure more strongly in management practice and in management development programmes supporting the industry than seems currently the case. The shift from WFH to IP, in this case study, has proven to be a change management challenge more than anything else. And maybe it is time to incorporate change management into the innovation research agenda (Edwards, 2000).

Limitations and further research

This case study has some limitations. As a single case study its level of generalisability is limited. We have countered this by triangulating the data with the literature review, interviews with managing directors of comparable firms and support agency representatives. While this has assisted in confirming the typicality of the case (Yin, 1994; Patton and Appelbaum, 2003), multiple case studies ought to be undertaken to

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verify further the findings, and to extend the insights into practices of innovation management in the industry. More research into change and changing management practices in the new creative industries needs to be undertaken to understand better what precisely makes this task so challenging, but also how responses to the innovation challenge differ across the sector. The industry specific innovation challenge seems framed around high levels of expectation, and success of IP work, of taking a wow game to market, i.e. success of explorative innovation links more deeply and more intricately the often conflicting interests of the organisation as a business and the individual "gamer", developer or artist who builds is career and his market value on the basis of the company's success or otherwise in producing IP. Our study has illustrated how this innovation imperative creates manifold organisational strains that inevitably impact on the business and the people within it. This opens up new and challenging research avenues.

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