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**Brokerage Styles and Interaction Rituals in Creative Projects:  
Towards an Interactionist Perspective on Brokerage**

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# **Brokerage Styles and Interaction Rituals in Creative Projects: Towards an Interactionist Perspective on Brokerage**

Despite the importance of brokers in creative projects, limited attention has been devoted to the micro-interactions by which brokers induce others' collaboration while simultaneously retaining some control over creative production. Building on an interactionist perspective, we develop the concept of *brokerage style* –i.e. a recognizable pattern in the ways in which a broker interacts with others. By using different brokerage styles in different phases of a creative project, brokers can orient the social interactions among project participants, “charging” those interactions with different types of emotional energy and mutual attention, eventually inducing collective collaboration and limiting participants' expectations of control.

**Keywords:** creative projects; brokerage; micro-interaction; interaction ritual; creativity; conceptual paper.

*“The label wanted one thing; the artist another. . . . So I found myself acting as the referee. . . . It’s tricky, if I butt heads with the artist, I get fired. If I don’t butt heads with the artist, the label fires me. I was up a creek. I also have allegiance to me, where I don’t believe this is a good song for [the artist] to play. That’s the hardest part, as producer, you’re hired to have a strong musical opinion and with three points of view, none of them lining up . . . I didn’t know what to do”* (producer on a music project, cited in Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010: 64)

Brokers have been shown to facilitate fundamental activities in creative projects, such as searching and selecting creative talent (e.g., Foster, Borgatti & Jones, 2011), coordinating and supporting artistic productions (e.g., Jones & Foster, 2014; Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010; Peterson & Berger, 1971) and filtering cultural products to audiences through evaluation and promotion (e.g. Foster & Ocejó, 2015; Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejnova, 2011; Hirsch, 1972). This research has predominantly highlighted the positive role of brokers for creative production, emphasizing that these actors enjoy *opportunities* to access new ideas due to their structural position between disconnected others (Burt, 2004, 2005). Relatively less research attention has been devoted to study the *challenges* that brokers face in implementing new ideas -such as the ones illustrated by the quotes above- and the ways in which brokers can successfully address these challenges.

A key challenge that brokers face in creative projects is how to ensure the collaboration of other project participants while simultaneously maintaining some control over the final creative product. Successful creative products require the combination of ideas and resources that are typically distributed among multiple actors in a project, such as artists, financial resources’ providers, engineers, technicians (e.g. Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Hargadon & Sutton, 1997). To increase the likelihood that a creative product will be successful, brokers need to induce these different actors to collaborate with each other and contribute their different resources and ideas to the project. At the same time, brokers must exercise some degree of control over the process by which others’ ideas and resources are combined to ensure that their different contributions are synthesized “into a coherent whole”

(Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010: 49). This integration work is particularly important in creative projects because such collective endeavors feature an inherent tension between commercial and artistic values as well as pervasive ambiguity about what constitutes a valuable creative output (Jones, Lorenzen, & Sapsed, 2015; Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2000; cf. Becker, 1974, 1982).

The problem is that collaboration and control imply opposite action imperatives for a broker. To foster collective collaboration, brokers need to connect otherwise disconnected parties, allowing them to share their ideas and resources (Obstfeld, 2005). They also need to be perceived as impartial between the parties' sides (Fernandez & Gould, 1994; Padgett & Ansell, 1993) or otherwise they will cease to be treated as reliable, trustworthy brokers (Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Hahl, Kacperczyk, & Davis, 2016; Rider, 2009), as illustrated by the opening quotes above. To exercise control, brokers are better off keeping the parties separated, so to control the flow of information between them and selectively implement their ideas and resources (Burt, 1992, 2005). In addition, to retain control over the creative process brokers need to take stands over the use of others' ideas and resources in a project, but affirming their own direction would undermine their impartiality (Leifer, 1988; Padgett & Ansell, 1993). Thus, there is a clear trade-off between brokerage behaviors that sustain collective collaboration and those that instead increase a broker's control, raising a fundamental research question: *how can brokers interact with other actors in a creative project to induce their collaboration while simultaneously exercising some control over them?*

In this chapter, we address this question by developing a process model that links brokerage behavior and willingness of project participants to collaborate and relinquish control of the creative process. Building on micro-interactionist perspectives on action (Blumer, 1986 [1969]; Collins, 1981; Goffman, 1967), we argue that the project participants'

motivations to collaborate and relinquish creative control emerge through the *situated social interactions* occurring between these actors and the broker as a creative project unfolds over time. Drawing on Randall Collins's (2004) interaction ritual theory, we focus on the level of *emotional energy* and *mutual attention* that such situated micro-interactions generate. We argue that, due to their favorable structural position, brokers can orient others' interactions so to increase the likelihood that those interactions will produce high (or low) levels of emotional energy and mutual attention. In turn, emotional energy and mutual attention can "charge-up" (or de-energize) project participants in different ways, inducing them to collaborate and accept the broker's attempts at controlling the creative process (or, on the opposite, resist collaboration and control the process on their own). Developing this core argument, we identify four *brokerage styles* –i.e. recognizable patterns in the ways in which a broker interacts with others- which a broker can leverage to induce different levels of emotional energy and mutual attention in project participants' interactions, eventually obtaining their collaboration as well as some control over the creative output. These different brokerage styles are more likely to be successful in eliciting others' collaboration depending on the phase of the creative project. We illustrate this interactionist model by distinguishing three project phases (resource gathering; creative development; implementation) and two types of project participants (artists; funders) connected by a broker (the creative project's producer).

This chapter makes three contributions to existing research. First, we contribute to the literature on brokerage process in creative projects (e.g. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005) by unpacking several styles of interaction that a broker can adopt at different stages of a creative project. While existing research typically distinguishes two basic types of brokerage processes (*tertius iungens* –i.e. connecting the disconnected parties [Obstfeld, 2005] or *tertius gaudens* –i.e. keeping the parties actively separated), we

enrich this classification by theorizing different styles by which brokers can orient others' interactions and shape their levels of emotional energy and mutual attention. Thus, following recent calls for "a more dynamic and situated understanding of the creative process" (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010: 48), we illustrate how broker can dynamically adapt their behavior depending on different stages of creative production.

Second, we contribute to the literature on creative projects. A pervasive issue highlighted by this literature is that, to be successful, creative projects need to strike a balance between different conceptions of value, and most notably a market and aesthetic view of value (e.g. Jones et al., 2015; Lampel et al., 2000). Previous research has emphasized that this balance can be achieved through "new forms of strategic organization" (Lampel, 2006: 42) able "to support and market cultural products but not allow the system to suppress individual inspiration, which is ultimately at the root of creating value in cultural industries" (Lampel et al., 2000: 263). Differently, in this chapter we emphasize the key role of brokers in finding this balance through specific micro-behavioural tactics that can induce the collaboration of different others such as financial providers (guided by a business logic) and creatives (guided by an artistic logic). In this sense, rather than structural or organizational solutions, this chapter highlights the importance of brokers' "social skill" (Fligstein, 2001) –i.e. the ability to induce cooperation from others- and the relevance of training brokers to learn how "to structure interactions within and across groups" (Fligstein, 2001: 114).

Third, this work contributes to theories of micro-interactions by integrating structural ideas –such as the idea that a broker's structural position provides opportunities and constraints– with an interactionist understanding of how the same structural position can be differently used through different styles of social interaction (cf. Turner, 1985). By doing so, we follow the call for addressing the "a-structural bias" typically characterizing interactionist research (e.g. Fine & Kleinman, 1983: 98). In addition, while interactionist theories have

been applied to various empirical settings, such as higher education (Hallett, 2010) and labour markets (Rivera, 2012), they have not yet been fully leveraged to enrich our understanding of creative projects' dynamics. By using the concept of interaction rituals to enhance our understanding of creative production, this chapter shows the potential of interactionist theories to further our understanding of fluid contexts like creative industries where “relationships are never given, but must be actively constructed as participants struggle to enact roles and pursue careers” (Baker & Faulkner, 1991: 283).

The chapter is structured in four sections. First, we briefly and selectively review existing literature on brokerage in creative projects. Second, we introduce the two theoretical building blocks of an interactionist perspective on brokerage in creative projects (the concepts of “brokerage styles” and “interaction ritual”). Third, we link these concepts into a process model that connects brokerage styles and interaction rituals with the willingness of project participants to collaborate and relinquish control, thus showing how different patterns of micro-interactions can allow brokers to ensure both collective collaboration and control. Finally, we discuss the contributions and implications of the chapter for future research.

### **Brokerage in Creative Projects: From Structure to Process to Micro-Interactions**

Creative projects are temporary endeavors undertaken to develop and market a unique creative product or service, such as a music album, a movie, a theatre play, or a video game (Vinodrai & Keddy, 2015; cf. Duncan, 1996). Such collective creative endeavors represent potential “combinations of people, ideas and resources” (Obstfeld, 2015: 103) that need to be leveraged and integrated to develop successful creative products –i.e. products with both artistic and commercial value (Lampel et al., 2006)<sup>1</sup>. Leveraging and integrating the different resources that project participants can potentially contribute (such as creative talent, ideas,



financial resources, marketing and distribution knowledge) is a challenging task due to at least two inherent features of creative projects.

First, creative projects are typically governed through networks of relationships rather than hierarchical control systems (Jones, Hesterly, & Borgatti, 1997). Thus, inducing people to contribute their ideas and resources requires to “cope with circumstances in which control is not direct and immediate” (Powell, 1990: 327). Second, creative projects are characterized by an inherent tension between market and aesthetic perspectives (Becker, 1982; Uzzi & Spiro, 2005) and pervasive ambiguity about what constitutes a valuable creative output (Lampel et al., 2000). Thus, multiple people with various business and artistic interests often compete for “creative control” in a project (Keyton & Smith, 2006: 27), complicating the process by which different ideas and resources are selected, rejected, and synthesized into a coherent creative product (Lingo & O’ Mahony, 2010). This competition often involves the negotiation *in situ* of structured role systems (e.g. comprising roles such as “producer”, “artist”, “client”) characterizing creative projects (Bechky, 2006: 6). Taken together, these features of creative projects make coordination and integration work a challenging, and yet necessary, activity for successful creative production.

Brokers –generally defined as actors connecting otherwise unconnected others (Burt, 1992)– have been shown to play an important role in leveraging and integrating others’ ideas and resources in creative projects. Previous research on the creative industries has highlighted different types of brokers, often referring to these in-between actors with different terms depending on the particular activities they undertake in the creative production process (see Foster & Ocejó, 2015 for review). For example, Foster, Borgatti and Jones (2011) show how talent buyers act as “gatekeepers” mediating between artists and audiences in the nightclub music industry, shaping in fundamental ways the search and selection of creative talent (see also Peterson & Berger, 1971). Other scholars have emphasized the role of mass-media,

critics, and promoters of creative products as brokers between creators and audiences, noting their importance as “cultural intermediaries” (Bourdieu, 1993) that shape audience’s tastes, filter products to the market, and translate their meaning (Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Foster & Ocejó, 2015; Jones, Maoret, Massa, & Svejenova, 2012). Finally, a third stream has referred to producers in creative projects as brokers that coordinate the ideas and resources of others in order to bring a creative project to fruition (e.g. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010; Scott, 2012; Stjerne & Svejenova, 2016; cf. Peterson & Berger, 1971). In this chapter, we use the term “broker” along the lines of this third research stream, conceptualizing producers in creative projects as brokers that leverage and integrate the ideas and resources of often disconnected project participants into a coherent creative product.

We focus on producers as brokers for two main reasons. First, focusing on the role of producers allows to theorize the creative production process *as a whole*, unpacking how a broker can enact different brokerage styles at different stages of the creative production process; and how they can manage the tensions involved in shifting from one stage of a creative project to another. This holistic approach is more comprehensive than studying specific brokerage activities in relative isolation, focusing on what brokers do at *one* stage of a creative projects or in one part of a creative industry’s value chain (see Foster & Ocejó, 2015 for review). In fact, in their systematic review of the creative brokerage literature, Foster and Ocejó (2015) called for more research investigating how “one person may play different brokerage roles for a single artistic product at different point in time” (p. 410). Second, focusing on producers as brokers allows one to better see and conceptualize the constraints on brokerage behavior, which is the core interest of this chapter. These constraints are particularly salient and transparently observable for creative producers as their job typically consist of managing the different expectations and interests of various project participants (e.g. artists; funders) as the project unfolds over time.

Studies of creative producers as brokers (e.g. Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Scott, 2012; cf. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997) built on the structuralist insight that an in-between structural position provides a broker with opportunities to access non-redundant information and control information's use (e.g. Burt, 1992; Rider, 2009). They also went beyond this insight by complementing network research's focus on *structural position* with an emphasis on the *processes* that brokers carry out to use their advantage in practice. In particular, while network theory had traditionally highlighted the advantages of a *tertius gaudens* process (i.e. actively keeping the disconnected parties separated) (Burt, 1992; 2005), studies of creative brokerage echoed the importance of a *tertius iungens* process (i.e. connecting the disconnected parties) (Baker & Obstfeld, 1999; Obstfeld, 2005), showing also that these processes can be interwoven throughout a creative project (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010).

Although this research has provided fundamental insights, our understanding of how brokers can effectively contribute to creative projects has remained limited in two important respects. First, previous research has mostly relied on inductive theory building through case studies (e.g. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010), devoting less attention to develop a systematic theoretical framework explaining why certain kinds of brokerage practices are more likely to induce project participants' contributions. In fact, despite such systematic theoretical frameworks have been developed in the literature on creativity in general (e.g. Amabile & Kramer, 2011; Harvey, 2014), they do not explicitly take into account the constraints and opportunities provided by a broker's structural position (but see Stovel & Shaw, 2012 for a classification of brokerage processes outside the context of creative projects). Second, while studies of brokerage have had the great merit of going beyond a broker's structural position and highlighting brokerage processes, they have also devoted less attention to the more nuanced, transient micro-interactions between a broker and other project participants. This is an important gap because collective creativity has been

shown to be fundamentally rooted in the micro-interactions among people (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013). For example, Metiu and Rothbard (2013) showed that creative problem solving groups sustain a mutual focus of attention and shared emotion through specific patterns of micro-interactions, which eventually shape the groups' creative outcomes. Similarly, Hargadon and Bechky (2006) showed that four types of social interactions (help seeking, help giving, reframing and reinforcing) precipitate "moments" of collective creativity in work groups. Yet, despite their relevance for collective creativity, micro-interactions have not been theorized directly in studies of brokerage in creative projects.

Micro-level interactions are important not only for creative projects in general, but also more specifically for the role that brokers play in these projects. In fact, it is through social interactions with the broker that the participants of a creative project form their perceptions of her/him, assign meaning to her/his brokerage behavior, and ultimately decide whether to trust her/him for coordinating their ideas and resources. Numerous studies in network research have shown that others' perceptions of brokerage behavior affect whether a broker can maintain her/his advantageous position and ultimately translate the advantages embedded in that position into concrete influence (Fernandez & Gould, 1994; Friedman & Podolny, 1992; Hahl et al., 2016). For example, Fernandez and Gould (1994) demonstrated that a broker taking public stands on issues (i.e. acting partially in favor of one of the parties) will cease to be treated as a broker by other actors in the system and considered unreliable as mediator. In a similar fashion, Friedman and Podolny (1992) argue that brokers can activate a "distrust cycle" (cf. Adams, 1976) when they behave simultaneously as gatekeepers and representatives because the parties they connect will grow suspicious of their inconsistent behavior. Although not explicitly focused on creative industries, these network studies offer insights about the importance of parties' perceptions in shaping brokerage behavior and its

outcomes. Yet, one of the key source of those perceptions –i.e. the social interactions between a broker and the parties s/he connects- has not been systematically theorized and integrated in a more complete theory of brokerage behavior in creative projects. In order to do so, and to address the limitations of existing literature discussed above, in the next section we develop an interactionist perspective on brokerage in creative projects.

### **The Two Building Blocks of an Interactionist Perspective on Brokerage in Creative Projects: Brokerage Styles and Interaction Rituals**

The point of departure of an interactionist perspective on creative brokerage is a focus on the micro-level interaction *situations* between the broker and project participants. By “situations” here we refer to the temporally- and spatially-bounded settings in which these actors meet and interact (Collins, 2004; Goffman 1967). Our core argument is that project participants’ motivations to collaborate –as well as their willingness to let the broker exercise some control over the creative process- *emerge through situated social interactions* (cf. Collins, 1981). For example, Lingo and O’Mahony (2010) describe how music producers struggling to get good songs from publishers facilitate personal meetings between them and an artist, so that “if they can see the personality, get to know the artist as a person, they might be more inclined to give me their good songs” (p. 62). This example highlights that it is through specific types of social interaction, orchestrated by the broker, that project participants mature positive (negative) feelings about each other and a willingness (unwillingness) to contribute and collaborate with each other. In addition, through situated micro-interactions, project participants also form an impression of the broker that ultimately affects whether they will trust her/him to exercise control over the project. Thus, what we typically think of as attributes rooted *within the individual* (such as motivations, perceptions,

emotions) are conceptualized as emergent results of situated micro-interactions *between individuals* in an interactionist perspective (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006).

Starting from this theoretical foundation, an interactionist perspective on brokerage in creative projects draws on two conceptual building blocks, both rooted in the interactionist paradigm. The first building block is the concept of brokerage style. The second is Randall Collins's (2004) concept of interaction ritual, which is useful to conceptualize the interactions between a broker and a creative project's participants during a project. We now turn to illustrate more in detail each of these theoretical building blocks.

A brokerage style can be defined as *a recognizable pattern in the ways in which a broker interacts with others*. We use the notion of "style" in a similar way in which Mische (2008, 2015) use it to capture the performative dimension of social interaction and in particular "how participants [to an interaction] *communicate* their identities, purposes and relations in interaction settings" (Mische, 2015: 71; emphasis added). Thus, we focus on the *interaction* and *communication* style of brokers, pointing at the patterned ways in which brokers combine, avoid, and switch between different "communication modes" in interaction situations –similar to what Goffman defined as "footings" (Goffman, 1974: 496-499; Goffman, 1981: 124-157). This notion is more specific and micro-level than White (2008: 112-117)'s notion of style as the "unique marker of a person" (Godart, 2015: 3) across different macro-level network domains (i.e. the pattern of practices characterizing an actor across various social identities, for example as a father, a banker, a citizen). At the same time, similar to Mische (2008, 2015), we retain from White (2008) the idea that a style is an "interpretive tone" (p. 112) in communication and interaction, a tone that is recognized by participants of an interaction situation but that at the same time can change from situation to situation (see also Godart, 2015; Godart's chapter in this volume).

The construct of brokerage style enriches both the structuralist and processual perspectives on brokerage discussed above. Whereas the structuralist perspective focuses on a broker's role as defined by its structural position (Gould & Fernandez, 1989), a brokerage style defines how that *role can be enacted* differently within given structural constraints (Ashforth, 2000: 4; Baker and Faulkner, 1991; Blumer, 1986 [1969]). In addition, while the processual notions of *tertius iungens* and *tertius gaudens* capture two basic ways in which a broker can act (connecting vs separating parties), the notion of brokerage style aims to capture the multiple ways in which a broker can *inter-act* in here-and-now situations, sensitizing researchers to the type of interactions and communications *in situ*. As a result, this construct intends to take into account a broader variety of complex and more sophisticated behaviours than those captured by the classic *tertius-iungens* vs *tertius-gaudens* dichotomy. Finally, as the definition of brokerage style highlights, this construct focuses on behavior that is *recognizable* in the eyes of other actors, thereby emphasizing the symbolic dimension of a broker's action –i.e. the meanings evoked by the action in a situation of interaction. In fact, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, people make inferences and interpret the meaning of an action in context (Blumer, 1986 [1969]). Thus, while the notions of *tertius iungens* and *tertius gaudens* focus on two broker's actions, the construct of brokerage style focuses on how these two actions (and many others) are recognized, perceived and evaluated in different interaction situations (Galaskiewicz, 2007; Xiao & Tsui, 2007). This is consistent with the more general construct of “style” as conceptualized in sociology, highlighting that styles are communication tools “projecting meaning” in interaction (Godart, 2015: 6).

The second building block of an interactionist perspective on brokerage is Collins's (2004) concept of “interaction ritual”<sup>2</sup>. This concept differs from the common understanding of the word “ritual” as related to formal ceremonies, but rather it is adapted from Durkheim (1912)'s more general notion of ritual as a social process that generate “collective

effervescence”, common beliefs, and solidarity. Collins (1981; 2004) applies this Durkheimian notion of ritual to micro-level interaction situations, building and extending the work of Goffman (1967). In this broad sense, interaction rituals include scheduled public displays such as meetings and events (*formal* interaction rituals), as well as informal conversations and encounters between small groups of people (*informal* interaction rituals). In all these cases, two essential ingredients that define an interaction ritual are that a group of people interact and that there are some barriers to outsiders to the interaction situation.

A core insight of interaction ritual theory is that not all social interactions are equal and that two fundamental dimensions of a social interaction are the level of *mutual attention* and *shared emotional energy* generated through the interaction (Collins, 2004: 47-49). We now turn to define these two dimensions. At the individual level, attention encompasses the noticing, encoding and focusing of time and effort by individuals on particular issues or activities (cf. Ocasio 1997: 189). An interaction ritual perspective emphasizes how the interaction process itself constitutes an important bottom-up factor shaping individual attention. Thus, *mutual attention* defines a situation in which two or more interacting people start attending to “the same activity, and [have] mutual awareness of each other’s attention” (Collins 1990: 31). At the individual level, energy can be defined as the “feeling that one is eager to act and capable of acting” (Quinn & Dutton, 2005: 36). *Shared emotional energy* refers to a shared “positive affect” (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) experienced by interactants as a shared positive mood, tone, or feeling (Summers-Effler, 2002).

Psychological research has consistently shown that people try to prolong or repeat the situations they perceive as increasing their energy and try to avoid the situations which are associated with diminishing levels of energetic arousal (e.g. Arkes, Herren & Isen 1988; Haidt, 2000; Thayer, 1989). Similarly, sharing a mutual focus of attention in interaction creates an intensification of the interactional experience, which will be more easily



remembered by individuals and more likely to be repeated (Collins 1981; 2004). Therefore, when social interactions generate high levels of shared emotional energy and mutual attention, as perceived and experienced by the interacting individuals, those individuals are likely to interact again in the future. In this sense, successful interactions produce positive “spillovers” spanning across interaction episodes because the high emotional energy and mutual attention generated in a given situation are likely to be carried over to the next interaction episode as a positive “residue” (Collins, 2004) or “trace” of past interactions. Thus, successful interactions generate not only short-term but also more long-term emotions and feelings, which in turn encourage interacting people to “seek [each other] out time and time again in chains of interaction” (Metiu & Rothbard, 2013: 458).

Collins’s conceptualization provides a useful starting point to characterize the interactions that can occur between a broker and other project participants during a creative project. Similarly, the core insight of interaction ritual theory –i.e. that interactions with high emotional energy and mutual attention are more likely to induce people to interact again in the future- is also useful to understand how micro-interactions may evolve in a project. At the same time, these elements are not sufficient *per se* to address the specific dynamics of creative projects and the complex activities typically characterizing them. To take into account the specificity of creative projects and explain what types of interactions can help a broker eliciting collaboration and exercising control at different stages of a creative project, in the following section we develop a process model of brokerage styles and interaction rituals in creative projects.

### **A Process Model of Brokerage Styles and Interaction Rituals in Creative Projects**

Figure 1 below represents the model of brokerage micro-interactions advanced in this paper. The core argument of the model can be summarized as follows: through specific

*brokerage styles*, a broker can orient social interactions among project participants by inducing different types of interaction rituals –i.e. by inducing different levels of participants’ emotional energy and attention and by orienting their energy and attention towards different targets (towards each other or towards the broker herself). In turn, the level and direction of the emotional energy and mutual attention generated through project participants’ interactions induce these actors to be more (or less) likely to collaborate with each other and with the broker, thereby making the broker more (or less) likely to achieve both collective collaboration and control.

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**Insert Figure 1 about here**  
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More specifically, we contend that the effectiveness of specific brokerage styles in inducing others to collaborate and relinquish control depends on different phases of the creative project, so that each style constitutes a “salient action ideal” (Leifer, 1988: 866) for each phase. In fact, previous research has shown that different phases of a creative project are characterized by different types of ambiguity (Lingo and O’Mahony, 2010) that are likely to affect brokerage behavior. Similarly, network research has demonstrated that the level of task complexity –which changes as creative production unfolds- matters for how brokers can pursue both individual control advantages and collective outcomes such as collaboration (Godart, Cavaretta & Thiemann, 2016). We add that, from an interactionist perspective, project participants’ commitments (of resources or ideas) and their expectations change dynamically across a creative project, as a residue of previous interactions happened in the previous phase, as illustrated in Figure 1. Thus, in order to keep ensuring other’s collaboration and maintaining some control, brokers need to adapt their styles of interaction to manage changing expectations and commitments.

Following previous research (Cleland & Ireland, 2006; Guild & Joyce, 2006: 267; Lampel et al. 2006; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010) and producers' accounts (Turman 2006), we distinguish three general phases of a creative project: 1) a *resource gathering phase*, in which brokers try to leverage financial resources around an initial artistic idea for a future creative product (be it a set of songs from a band, a movie script, a theatre play, etc.); 2) *the creative development phase*, in which brokers coordinate the work of both artists and financial resource providers, integrating their ideas and resources into a prototype creative product; 3) *the implementation phase*, in which brokers guide the process by which ideas and resources are synthesized into a fully-fledged creative product. We illustrate this model distinguishing, for the sake of simplicity, two major types of resource providers (*artists* and *funders*) that brokers in creative projects typically connect. Although this dichotomy is of course a simplification of the variety of different actors and roles characterizing larger, complex creative projects, it also captures the crucial tension between culture and business inherent to all creative projects emphasized in the literature (Jones et al., 2015; Lampel et al. 2000, 2006). Examples representing the type of brokerage described by the model includes producers (brokers) in music, movie or TV creative projects, typically intermediating between artists (e.g. singers, screenwriters of movie scripts or authors of TV shows) and funders (e.g., record labels, film studios or broadcasters, respectively).

Before illustrating the model, it is also important to spell out an important assumption on which the model is predicated: due to their favorable in-between structural position, brokers are assumed to be able to orient others' interactions and anticipate to an extent others' reactions to their moves. It is important to note that this assumption does not equate to giving the brokers special projective agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Rather, we argue that their in-between structural position allows them to have more information on others, consistently with structural holes theory (Burt, 1992) and that they can use such information

to *orient* others' interactions. We use the verb "orient" here not by chance because we want to emphasize that brokers do not have full control (Sgourev, 2015) on others interactions and so can not ultimately determine *ex-ante* the level of emotional energy and mutual attention, which is always the emergent result of situated interactions. Differently, our argument is that due to their favorable position brokers can influence, but not determine, others' interactions, increasing (or decreasing) the *likelihood* that emotional energy and mutual attention may emerge through those interactions.

In what follows, we theorize the different brokerage styles that can be successful in each of these phases of a creative project and the types of micro-interaction dynamics that they can originate.

### Resource Gathering Phase

In the resource gathering phase, the key challenge for brokers is to leverage the financial resources of funders to support artists' creative ideas (e.g. a set of songs, a movie idea), which are typically characterized by uncertain quality. Although this challenge may be more or less acute depending on the status and experience of the artist, the issue of creative ideas' uncertain quality is so pervasive in creative projects that it is reasonable to assume that this challenge is present, in varying degrees, in all such projects. From a micro-interactionist perspective, a broker could address this challenge in multiple ways, such as: call potential funders and directly promote the artist and her/his new ideas; meet the funders in person and speak on behalf of the artist, providing sample of her/his work; arrange a face-to-face meeting between the artist and funders, allowing the artist to present samples of her/his work in the eyes of funders. What is the "salient action ideal" for a broker in the resource gathering phase of a creative project?

Because of uncertainty about the quality of artists' ideas, in order to motivate funders to commit their resources, a broker needs to excite them about the potential value of those ideas, increasing their level of attention and emotional energy towards the artists. Similarly, it is important that artists focus their attention and emotional energy towards funders contributing their best creative ideas in order to spark interest. Based on interaction ritual theory (Collins, 2004), we contend that such high levels of mutual attention and shared emotional energy are more likely to be generated through direct face-to-face interactions among artists and funders rather than through asynchronous interactions mediated by the broker (such as the broker calling artists and funders separately). In fact, the physically bounded nature of face-to-face interaction is consequential because "when human bodies are together in the same place, there is physical attunement: currents of feeling, a sense of wariness or interest, a palpable change in atmosphere" (Collins 2004: 34). The orientation of human bodies to each other afforded by physical assembly is the starting point for the development of mutual attention and shared emotional energy between interaction participants. Yet, bodily co-presence facilitates, but does not guarantee *per se* a high level of mutual attention and emotional energy, which are ultimately a result of the interaction itself.

Although brokers can not fully determine the results of others' interactions, as discussed above they can orient those interactions in such a way to increase the likelihood that they will generate high levels of mutual attention and shared emotional energy. In the resource gathering phase, we contend that a broker is more likely to induce high levels of mutual attention and emotional energy by using a particular type of brokerage style which we label the "host style". The host style consists in facilitating a direct face-to-face meeting between funders and artists by preparing in advance the "stage" for the meeting, but intervening only minimally during the meeting itself. By meeting "stage", we refer here to the place, time, attendees and format of the meeting. Preparing a stage goes well beyond

arranging the practical logistics of the meeting, but rather consists in collecting information about the expectations of each party and conveying selectively these expectations to the other party before the meeting, in order to get them ready for the meeting.

An example of the host's style is provided by Ibarra (1996)'s description of how Xerox's manager John Clendenin enacted his broker role in order to induce collaboration among the disconnected operating units of the company: "prior to the [first] meetings [with the managers] Clendenin spent time on the phone, coordinating schedules, and getting to know the secretaries of group members....he organized and set [the meeting] agenda. "When they came, I wined them and dined them....we had them leave the room and set the table with china....I tried to do all these things to improve group behavior....I didn't want any decisions, I just wanted to give them information and have them feel good about the meeting. And we pulled it off.....you have to stay in the background to implement". (p. 5-6). As these quotes reveal, it is important that in playing the host style, the broker is perceived by the parties "not to be pretentious, or managerial, or overly preoccupied with being the host", (Riesman, Potter, & Watson, 1960: 18). Rather, effective hosts should avoid over-soliciting or forcing interactions among their "guests", but rather they should design in advance the "stage" so that it is conducive to spontaneous interactions that can create and reinforce high levels of mutual attention and emotional energy among the parties. As a result, the broker playing the host style of interaction can be represented as a rather passive observer of others' interactions as in Figure 1. The relatively passive behavior of the host in the situation of interaction conceals the intense preparatory work that the host has done in advance to set the stage for others' interactions.

Another example of the host style is provided by Stjerne and Svejnova (2016: p.12) who illustrate the boundary work carried out by the CEO of a Danish production film company in order to facilitate the interactions between the prospective funders of a movie

(i.e. the Danish Film Institute) and the movie writers and directors (i.e. the “artists”).

Similarly, Lingo and O’Mahony (2010) describe the case of a producer that “worked behind the scenes to strategically bring together several label heads at a showcase concert for his artist” (p. 62), arranging the showcase in a large club and bringing a “truckload of fans to plant in the crowd” in order to impress the label heads and convince them to sign off the artist.

### Creative Development Phase

In the second phase, the key challenge for brokers is to energize artists to develop a successful creative product, protecting them from too much interference by funders. At the same time, brokers need to keep funders posted about the artists’ progress to avoid disenfranchising them completely from the creative process. In fact, creative ideas need time to be developed as they don’t represent “resources ready to use” (such as money), but rather “resources in the making” that need action to be translated into products (Feldman, 2004; cf. Baker & Nelson, 2005; Sewell, 1992). In addition, funders typically have knowledge and interests informed by a market commercial logic (e.g. distribution and marketing knowledge and interest in the commercial value of the creative product), which are different from the knowledge and interests of artists (e.g. knowledge on how to combine different symbols in a creative product and interests in its aesthetic value). Given the high ambiguity characterizing the creative development phase, direct interaction between these different types of actors is likely to result in premature conflict over un-finished creative products and to stifle collective creativity with commercial concerns.

Keeping artists and funders separated in the creative development phase may prove to be a difficult task for brokers because in this phase, differently from the resource gathering phase, funders have already committed resources to the project (e.g., signing the artist) and

are therefore likely to expect a greater involvement in the creative decisions of the project. As Lampel (2006) highlights: “money buys talent, and talent must obey the dictates of money.....creative artists always want the freedom to create without to financial or market constraints, whereas their backers want to maximize returns on their investment. One side appeals to artistic freedom, the other points to financial risk” (p. 42).

For these reasons, we argue that *in the creative development phase direct social interactions producing high levels of shared emotional energy and mutual attention between artists and funders are more likely to reduce the likelihood that these parties collaborate between each other and increase the likelihood that each of these parties will attempt to control the creative process on their own.* Consider this example from Lingo and O’Mahony (2010)’s study of country producers: “there was one song that was very rockish. Just seemed a little outside the rest of the material.....[the label rep] actually walked in the day we were tracking it...and we got it on the second take, really up, jamming, and hard hitting. And he walked in... [and said] “we didn’t agree about this, did we?” (p. 65). This vignette illustrates how direct interaction between funders (i.e. the label representative) and artists may be negative in the creative development phase because such interactions focus the attention and emotional energy of funders on the work of artists, allowing their commercial logic to interfere with collective creativity too early, when the creative product is not yet ready. Similarly, artists interacting directly with funders are more likely to focus their attention and energy on them, either resisting their commercial logic (reducing collective collaboration) or adapting their artistic work to that logic (thereby not fully leveraging their creative ideas for the benefit of the project).

In order to address the challenges of the creative development phase, we argue that brokers need to adopt two contradictory brokerage styles simultaneously: in the eyes of the funders, they need to enact the role of the “buffer”, insulating artists from the funders’



influence by interacting directly and separately with the funders, reassuring them about the progress of the artists without giving out too much details. In the eyes of the artists, they need to play the role of the “catalysts”, who energize their interactions by not imposing their rules but rather observing first their emergent interactions and building upon that to create a common understanding among them.

As an example of catalyst’s style, consider Furnari (2014)’s description of the different ways in which two individuals coordinated the actions of disconnected groups (the creative engineers and the political activists) that eventually come together in the emerging Homebrew Computer Club (which ultimately generated the idea of personal computer as we know it today). One of these individuals (Lee Felsenstein) was perceived as an effective catalyst “because he was ‘in sync’ with the spontaneous interactions and interaction rituals emerging in club” (p. 454). In fact, Felsenstein’s interaction style was perceived by members of the club as “simultaneously autocratic, democratic and anarchistic” (p. 454) and thus was characterized by multi-vocality –i.e. the capacity of a style of interaction “to be interpreted consistently from multiple perspectives simultaneously” (Padgett & Ansell, 1993: 1263). Differently, the other individual attempting to coordinate the creative work of others in the Homebrew Computer Club (Gordon French) appeared to be “trying to overtly and uni-directionally control the emerging flow of interactions and to have others playing by ‘his rules’” (Furnari, 2014: 454). This uni-vocal, uni-directional coordination style alienated others from collective interactions, and failed to create mutual attention and emotional energy among club members.

A good example of the buffer’s style is provided by Lingo and O’Mahony (2010)’s description of the brokerage practices of “bracketing and checking in” by which brokers temporarily limited the participation of some parties in creative decisions at specific times. For example, these authors illustrate how producers temporarily excluded record label

personnel (i.e. funders) “to avoid the premature narrowing of creative options”, while at the time they also checked in periodically with them “to keep them informed of the progress” (p. 65). In fact, bracketing without checking-in often disenfranchised funders from the process and created problems in the subsequent implementation phase. For example, a producer noted how a record label that was kept out of the loop for too long did not develop an interest in marketing the album: “how could they sell this record if they didn’t have any interest emotionally? How could they sell it if they didn’t have any say in it?” (Lingo & O’Mahony, 2010: 74)

### Implementation Phase

In this phase, the major challenge for a broker is to turn the various prototype products emerging from the preceding phase (e.g., the songs produced, the shots of a movie or TV show) into a fully-fledged creative product that can be commercialized (e.g., a music album, a movie, a TV show). In order to do so, the broker needs to engage both artists and funders in order to balance their different views on the prototype products. In fact, it is in this phase that the political nature of creative endeavors becomes more apparent, so that the creative project turns into a political “arena(s) in which people with various business and artistic interests compete and negotiate to shape the decisions....upon which culture production is collectively organized” (Baker & Faulkner, 1991: 284; see also, Becker, 1974, 1982). Thus, when funders start directing high levels of emotional energy and attention towards artists, they are more likely to engage in “creative control”, attempting to shape artists’ work according to a commercial logic. Relatedly, artists focusing their attention and emotional energy on funders and their behaviours are more likely to attempt imposing their artistic views over a commercial perspective. As a result, in the implementation phase a high level of shared emotional energy and mutual attention between these two different types of

actors may be negative for achieving the necessary compromises between their different perspectives in a balanced and sustainable way. At the same time, inputs from both a commercial and an artistic viewpoints are needed in this phase to turn a potential creative product into a successful commercial product. In addition, both parties need to sign off and agree on the content of the final product. To balance these opposing imperatives, we contend that in the implementation phase a broker is more likely to induce collective collaboration and retain some control on the process by using a mediator brokerage style. The mediator's style recalls Simmel (1950: 146-147)'s concept of the non-partisan "who balances ...contradictory claims against one another and eliminates what is incompatible with them" (p. 146-147). Interestingly, Simmel (1950) himself pointed at the emotional component of mediation by mentioning that the role of the nonpartisan mediator is to *defuse affect*, to take the conflicting claims and neutrally present them to the parties involved (Collett, 2011: 2). In fact, when a mediator "delivers the claims and arguments of the other [party], they...lose the tone of subjective passion which usually provokes the same tone on the part of the adversary" (Simmel, 1950: 147). Thus, brokers acting as mediators guide the resolution of possible conflicts emerging between the parties by relaying requests, offers, and information between them, but leaving the parties ultimately decide the outcomes by themselves.

A good example of the mediator style is provided by the producers of Disney's hit animated movie *Aladdin*. The implementation phase of this movie project turned out to be particularly complex as the movie producers (i.e. the brokers) encountered the opposition of a powerful Disney Studio's executive, who did not approve the first complete prototype of the movie. Despite being strongly affected by the unexpected setback (Maltin, 2004), producers acted as mediators between the studio executive and the creative team: they first gathered the creative team and had the team re-working the entire movie and, only after that, went back to the studio to gain its views on the revisions and obtain its ultimate approval. Also, in

conveying the negative news of the studio's rejection to the creatives, the producers paid particular attention to keep them motivated and engaged. As one of the associates of the producers recalls, "*if all I did was to explain [to the creative team] technically what we had to do, I can guarantee we never would have done that picture....because artists don't respond to numbers, charts or even money....you got to tell them why....you got to help them understand and get them to start to believe in why you are doing what you are doing....*" (Maltin, 2004).

In other words, producers somehow insulated the artists from the funders' language highlighting "numbers, charts and money", focusing their attention on the product and mediating the funders' requests in a language that creatives could understand and relate to. Differently, an interesting case of creative implementation's failure because of a lack of brokers' mediation is provided by the movie *Fantastic Four*, which turned out to be a box office flop and a cinematic fiasco. The production of this much anticipated movie featured an unexpected clash between creatives (in particular the movie director) and the film studio, a clash that some observers attributed to a lack of mediation by the producers in charge of the project (Brenzican, 2015). As a result of this lack of mediation, the film studio requested and obtained multiple re-shoots of the movie and various last-minute changes, so that the movie director reportedly felt "intense oversight" of his creative work (Brenzican, 2015).

## **Discussion**

This chapter addressed the question of how brokers can interact with other actors in a creative project in order to sustain their collaborative engagement while at the same time exercising some control over creative production process. The model advanced in this chapter suggests that a fruitful way of investigating this question is to focus on the many *situations* of micro-interaction that, as a creative project unfolds, involve brokers, artists, and funders. It is indeed through those transient, yet consequential, episodes of interaction that the multiple

actors engaged in a creative project mature, episode after the episode, their motivations to collaborate or their eagerness to control the process. In particular, building on Collins's (2004) interaction ritual theory, we contend that emotional energy and mutual attention are two salient features of micro-interactions, which can shape the motivations of project participants to collaborate or control the process. From this perspective, brokers need not only to focus attention on whether to connect or keep separated others (Obstfeld, 2005), but also on the ways in which they orient and guide others' micro-interactions to induce different levels of emotional energy and mutual attention.

More specifically, this chapter makes three contributions to existing research. First, we contribute to the literature on brokerage process in creative projects (e.g. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Obstfeld, 2005) by conceptualizing the construct of brokerage style and showing how it can be used to understand the dynamics of brokerage in creative production. The notion of brokerage style enriches the traditional dichotomic classification of brokerage processes (*tertius iungens* and *tertius gaudens*) by directing attention to the complexity and variety of interactions that a broker can entertain during a creative project. In this respect, this notion can usefully complement the *tertius iungens* and *tertius gaudens* processes by highlighting how these two basic networking strategies can be combined with different styles and what could be the results of these different combinations. In fact, the notion of brokerage style emphasizes important aspects of the brokerage process that have traditionally received less attention, such as the way in which brokers' actions are perceived and recognized by others in situation of interaction and the symbolic meanings that are attributed to those actions (Padgett & Ansell, 1993; White, 2008). In addition, we highlight the inherently interactional nature of brokerage as a process that can not be fully understood outside of micro-level situations of interaction. In this regard, the interactionist perspective outlined here directs attention not only to the key choices of connecting vs

separating other actors, but also to the ways in which brokers' actions can *structure others' interactions and induce different levels of emotional energy and mutual attention in their interactions*. This perspective opens up new research questions at the intersection of network theories of brokerage and micro-interactionist approaches, such as conversation analysis (Gibson, 2005) or the inhabited institutionalism approach (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006).

Second, we contribute to the literature on creative projects and their dynamics. We follow recent calls for “a more dynamic and situated understanding of the creative process” (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010: 48) by highlighting how situated interaction rituals can shape the dynamics of collective collaboration and control in creative projects. The model advanced here illustrates how individuals' motivations to collaborate and control the process –which we typically conceived as rooted within individuals– can instead be fruitfully conceptualized as the emergent product of situated micro-interactions between individuals. Such an interactionist view provides the added value of shedding light on the situational drivers of the dynamics of collective collaboration and conflict. Although individual and organizational factors are of course also crucial in shaping such dynamics, situational factors have been less studied and so a framework such as the one proposed here can usefully complement our understanding of collective creativity (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013). In addition, this chapter speaks to the persistent issue of how to balance commercial and artistic conceptions of value in creative projects. Whereas previous studies have particularly emphasized ambidextrous organizational and “corporate management” solutions (e.g. Jones et al., 2015; Lampel et al., 2006) that can sustain both collective creativity and commercial success, this chapter directs attention to two other important antecedents of that “balancing act” (Lampel, 2000): the situated micro-interactions among artists and funders in the every-day work unfolding during a creative project; the key role that brokers have in structuring

those interactions in such a way to ensure the continuous engagement of both types of actors while at the same time limiting that one over-rides the other.

Third, we contribute to micro-interactionist theories and in particular to theory of interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004). While these theories have contributed to our understanding of how novelty emerges (e.g. Furnari, 2014; Metiu & Rothbard, 2013), they have also been criticized for an “a-structural bias” –i.e. an inattention to structural considerations, such as network roles and processes like brokerage (e.g. Fine & Kleinman, 1983: 98). Differently, in this chapter we attempt to integrate a structural understanding of network roles (intended as positions in a network of relations that are more durable and persistent over time) with an interactionist understanding of how those network roles can be differently enacted and used through distinctive patterns of interaction that are more transient and short-term but no less consequential (cf. Turner, 1985). This structural-cum-interaction sensibility has been proven to be useful for understanding particularly fluid contexts like creative industries where “relationships are never given, but must be actively constructed as participants struggle to enact roles and pursue careers” (Baker & Faulkner, 1991: 283). In addition, this chapter constitutes an extension in terms of application and scope of micro-interactionist theories, and interaction ritual theory in particular, to the context of creative projects. Whereas several inherent features of these projects –such their fluidity in terms of membership and their ambiguity in terms of rules- make them a well-suited candidate for these processual theories, they have so far remained out of the scope of application of these theories.

As any other study, this chapter is characterized by some limitations which define the boundary conditions for using the model developed above. The first important limitation is that the interactionist model developed here concerns a particular type of broker whose role is to bring a creative project to fruition by coordinating the resources and ideas of other project

participants (i.e. the role of producers of creative projects). While the key importance of conceptualizing creative producers as brokers has been acknowledged by previous research (e.g. Hargadon & Sutton, 1997; Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010; Stjerne & Svejenova, 2016), the brokerage styles and project dynamics highlighted in this chapter may not necessarily hold for other broker roles such as gatekeepers (e.g. Foster et al., 2011) or taste-makers (e.g. Foster & Ocejo, 2015; Clayman & Reisner, 1998; Jones et al., 2012). The second limitation concerns the types of brokerage styles identified above (i.e. host, catalysts, buffer, mediator). Although the idea of brokerage style further unpacks the traditional dichotomy between *tertius gaudens* and *tertius iungens*, the four types of brokerage styles developed in this chapter do not fully capture the broad variety of brokerage patterns that can emerge empirically. A more systematic typology needs to be developed in order to comprehensively capture the heterogeneity of brokerage behavior, potentially drawing on the detailed empirical analysis of conversations in situated interactions (e.g. Gibson, 2005).

Despite its limitations, this chapter has practical implications for producers in creative projects and for managers who are in charge of staffing and overseeing producers in such projects. For creative producers, this work highlights the importance of different brokerage styles for ensuring the continued collaboration of creatives and funders as well as for preserving some degree of control over the final creative product. In particular, the model advanced here suggests that creative producers are more likely to achieve both collaboration and control when they change and adapt their styles of interaction and communication through the different stages of a creative project, as project participants' expectations and motivations evolve dynamically. For managers staffing and overseeing creative projects and producers, this chapter identifies specific types of social and relational skills that make a producer an "effective" broker able to balance the inherent tensions of creative projects, thereby providing guidance for the hiring and management of creative producers.



In conclusion, this chapter acknowledges and reinforces the vital importance of brokerage as one of the key mechanism underlying collective creativity. It contributes to our current understanding of this process by offering a situated, micro-interactionist perspective that outlines several brokerage styles through which brokers can orient others' interactions and specifies the likely consequences of such styles for the dynamics of creative projects.

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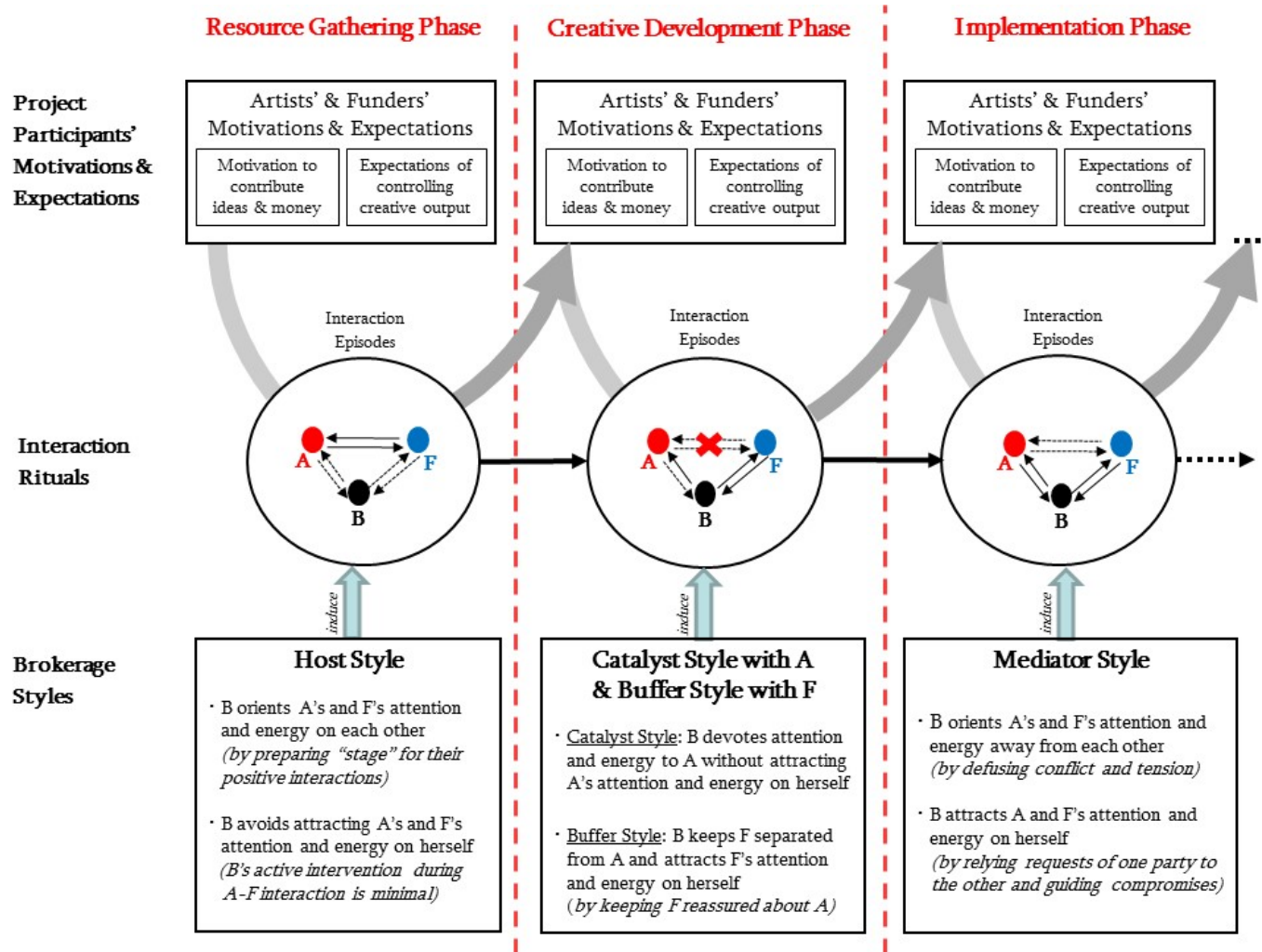
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**Fig. 1 – An Interactionist Model of Brokerage Styles and Interaction Rituals in Creative Projects**

(B = Broker; A= Artists; F = Funders).  $A \rightarrow B$  = A devotes high attention and energy to B during interaction.  $A \dashrightarrow B$  = A devotes low attention and energy to B during interaction.

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<sup>1</sup> We focus here on a short-term notion of value –i.e. when a creative product obtains both artistic and commercial value in the short term. This notion does not include the instances in which a creative product is attributed economic and/or artistic value long after its production has been completed, often through a complex and non-linear process of “consecration” that depends on audiences, such as critics and other cultural intermediaries (e.g. Cattani, Ferriani & Allison 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Although there are many interactionist theories that could be used to systematically distinguish different types of interactions (see Hallett, Shulman & Fine, 2009 for review), we build here on Randall Collins’s (2004) theory of interaction ritual chains because of its emphasis on emotional energy and mutual attention. Both these elements have been highlighted by previous research as fundamental, and yet hitherto under-studied, components of collective creativity (Adler & Obstfeld, 2007; Harvey, 2014).