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Creative Jolts: Exploring How Entrepreneurs Let Go of Ideas during Creative Revision

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CREATIVE JOLTS: EXPLORING HOW ENTREPRENEURS LET GO OF IDEAS DURING CREATIVE REVISION

ABSTRACT

Creative revision involves sharing nascent ideas and soliciting feedback. This process has been portrayed as providing instrumental feedback that enables autonomous creators to shape and progress their ideas in a mostly positive, developmental way. However, creative revision also entails destruction—letting go of some ideas to make way for the new. Research suggests that abandoning some aspects of ideas will be affectively challenging for creators, but has yet to elaborate how they navigate that challenge. In a longitudinal qualitative study of entrepreneurial ventures over a one-year period, we uncovered a novel phenomenon: the creative jolt—an episode of cognitive and emotional upheaval through which creators let go of their original ideas and allowed new ones to emerge, so that their ideas shifted in dramatic ways. We elaborate the processes through which creative jolts shape the trajectories of creative ideas. Our study captures the rollercoaster of heightened affect and cognitive disorientation experienced by autonomous creators as they try to bring nascent ideas to life.

After listening, he says to me, [...] "You have nothing...What is someone going to invest in?" And he's just very straight-talking, he's painfully blunt sometimes, which hurts… So, that was a profound impact. It basically just caused me to ultimately really reflect on what we did. Got a bit depressed afterwards [...] but got over it, and really reflected, and ultimately, it's what led us to change what we did…

-John, 21-year-old entrepreneur [recalling feedback interaction with mentor]

When artists, scientists, entrepreneurs, and other creators share nascent ideas during the process of creative revision, they hope to receive feedback that is constructive and developmental. Scholars portray creative revision—a process of sharing and testing ideas and incorporating feedback—as fundamental to sustaining, elaborating, and progressing early stage ideas towards implementation (Grimes, 2018; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Even when critical (Kaffka et al., 2021) or difficult to heed (Crilly, 2018), feedback obtained during creative revision is generally assumed to be aimed at extending or improving the quality of an emerging idea. Organizations and communities such as entrepreneurial accelerators and coworking spaces seek to foster interactions that facilitate creative revision for autonomous creators.

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However, as the quotation at the beginning of this paper illustrates, in many cases

creative revision also entails letting some ideas go (Rouse, 2016), as ideas are invalidated,

rejected, dropped, forgotten, or destroyed (Baer & Brown, 2012; Harrison & Rouse, 2015;

Harvey & Kou, 2013). It is common for creators to receive negative feedback that challenges the

viability of their ideas and suggests letting those ideas go during creative revision (Grimes, 2018;

Mainemelis, 2010). For example, entrepreneurs are called on to pivot their strategic direction

(Hampel, Tracey & Weber, 2020; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020; McDonald & Gao, 2019);

designers are told to redirect their projects in significant ways (Fisher, Pillimer, Amabile, 2018;

Hargadon & Sutton, 1997); and musicians are asked to forego their preferences in favour of

musical directions that match producers' view of the market (Lingo & O'Mahony, 2010). Even

the shift in perspective so often associated with creative insight (Cronin & Loewenstein, 2018;

Duncker, 1945; Smith & Linsey, 2011) entails abandoning one way of viewing the world and

adopting another. The destruction of some ideas and innovations has long been recognized as

fundamental to the creation of something new (Schumpeter, 1950).

Yet, despite its prevalence in creative processes, relatively little is known about how

creators let go of ideas during creative revision in order to allow new ideas to emerge and

develop. Prior creativity literature may have overlooked this issue because it has advocated a

creative process that discourages attachment to early-stage ideas by separating evaluation from

generation and delaying critical feedback until ideas are more well developed (Amabile, Conti,

Coon, Lazenby & Herron, 1996; Osborn, 1979). In that case, letting go of ideas might be

assumed to be unnecessary or trivial. However, researchers also argue that, creators –

particularly autonomous creators like entrepreneurs, designers, and inventors – need to be

passionate and persistent in advancing their novel and risky ideas (Grohman, Ivcevic, Silvia, &

Kaufman, 2017; Mueller, Wolfe, & Syed, 2017; Newman et al., 2021). This sets up a veritable

persistency paradox along the idea journey, since reconciling the need for flexible revision and

rigid persistency is likely to be difficult, as seen in cases where designers and entrepreneurs get

fixated on their ideas or develop a strong sense of psychological ownership that limits openness

to revision (Jannson & Smith, 1991; Grimes, 2018). This leaves a gap in understanding how

creators navigate the process of letting some ideas go in the face of negative feedback. In the

present research we therefore ask: how do creators let go of ideas during creative revision?

The question of how creators let go of ideas is both practically and theoretically

important because, as the epigraph at the beginning of this paper illustrates, the process of letting

ideas go is likely to be much more disruptive, even agonizing, for creators than is typically

acknowledged or conceptualized. Experiencing pressure to shift, transform, and pivot can throw

creators into cognitive and emotional turmoil, forcing them on an emotional rollercoaster (e.g.,

Baer & Brown, 2012; De Cock, Denoo & Clarysse, 2020; Feist, 1998; Shepherd & Patzelt,

2018). This is particularly true for autonomous creators like artists, musicians, designers, and

entrepreneurs, who experience intense connection to their ideas (Petriglieri, Ashford &

Wrzesniewski, 2018). Autonomous creators' efforts, identities and livelihoods are deeply

entwined with their ideas (Grimes, 2018; Rouse, 2016). Although the way that creators integrate

feedback to pivot or develop new ideas has been explored and examined in prior research (Ries,

2011; George & Zhou, 2001; Yuan & Zhou, 2008), that work has emphasized *cognitive*

processes that open up new ways of thinking (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020) rather than the

emotional effects of letting ideas go, focusing on that point where the tensions, frustrations, and

uncertainty of creative revision have already been resolved. In effect, that approach treats the

initial moment where the idea emerges as simultaneous with letting go of the prior idea,

temporally collapsing those points (see McMullen & Dimov, 2013) and skipping over the

intervening period of upheaval. That may match the reality of creating in organizational or

experimental settings where creators are less deeply connected to ideas and a sudden moment of

insight instantly provides new understanding (e.g., Smith & Linsey, 2011). However, for

autonomous creators, there is likely to be a time where one creative idea is falling apart as the

creator recognizes it will not work, but the next idea has not yet fully formed. That period is

theoretically interesting, because it is during that upheaval that a new idea may arise. How

autonomous creators negotiate those intermediate episodes is likely to be critical to their creative

resilience, well-being, and success.

In the present paper, we therefore explore how autonomous creators navigate disruptive

episodes during which they let go of ideas. We do so by observing creators' responses from

before they have the opportunity to make sense of destructive feedback through the ongoing

revision process. We studied this question in the context of one group of autonomous creators

engaged in creative revision—entrepreneurs developing nascent venture ideas—where the need

to let go of ideas is likely to be particularly salient due to high levels of uncertainty, and

particularly challenging due to the need to be persistent and passionate in pursuing ideas. We

closely followed the idea journeys of 12 early stage entrepreneurs over a one-year period. Our

longitudinal research approach was designed to capture entrepreneurs' reactions during the

creative revision process, before ideas had been revised and redeveloped, through ongoing data

collection inspired by the Experience Sampling Method (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).

We uncovered a novel phenomenon, which we label a *creative jolt*—an episode of

emotional and cognitive upheaval creators experience as they let go of their initial ideas during

creative revision. Creative jolts occur during the idea journey, but they differ from the normal

course of creative revision as characterized in past research. Specifically, rather than prompting

elaboration of ideas, during creative jolts, creators came to see negative feedback at first as

deeply threatening to their venture ideas or core mission, throwing them into a state of existential

crisis over the future of their ideas. Surprisingly, jolts did not stop creators from progressing

along their idea journeys. Instead, they jolted those journeys onto a different trajectory, so that a

dramatic shift was seen as creators let go of a focal idea and a new one emerged in its place. We

develop theory to elaborate how turmoil and upheaval facilitated such shifts by enabling some

ideas to fall away and others to emerge in their place. Our study emphasizes that ideas alone are

not enough, showing how ideas need an opening in which to develop and calls for research

attention to how that process unfolds.

CREATIVE REVISION AND LETTING GO OF IDEAS

Following the initial generation of ideas, creators typically enter a period of creative

revision. Creative revision is a dynamic interaction in which creators share and test their ideas to

assess and improve their potential (Hargadon & Bechky, 2006; Harrison & Rouse, 2015) and

elaborate those ideas based on feedback (Kim & Kim, 2020; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017).

Feedback from others is critical to appraising and elaborating ideas during this phase of creative

work (Mannucci & Perry-Smith, 2021). Interactions expose creators to new information that may

stimulate divergent thinking, expand cognitive schema, reveal new perspectives, and reframe

problems (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003; Harrison & Rouse, 2015; Perry-Smith & Shalley, 2003;

Perry-Smith & Coff, 2011).

Creative revision has primarily been portrayed as a developmental process during which

feedback helps creators to elaborate an idea with detail (Lonergan, Scott, & Mumford, 1994;

Mainemelis, 2010; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Since it is conceptualized as occurring *after*

a promising idea has been generated (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017), feedback obtained

through creative revision is expected to refine and improve ideas rather than produce dramatic shifts in their trajectory. Thus, although iterative, creative revision should move ideas forward in a relatively linear way.

Yet, in the course of elaborating an idea, creative revision may also surface highly critical, negative feedback (e.g., Grimes, 2018; Fisher et al., 2018) that calls for letting go of ideas (Rouse, 2013) in order to shift the course of the idea in more dramatic ways. For example, in entrepreneurship practice and research, the term pivot has been used to describe how ideas change, usually described as a sudden and dramatic shift in direction (Reis, 2011) as entrepreneurs reorient their strategies and organizations (Hampel et al., 2020; McDonald & Gao, 2019). Insight problem solving has been described as involving sudden clarity about a solution that requires giving up old ways of seeing functions and relationships (Smith & Linsey, 2011). Major shifts, in which ideas diverge in substantial ways from initial ideas, are essential for breakthrough creativity (Harvey, 2014). Yet, it is unlikely that such shifts are as instantaneous as they have been portrayed. For instance, recent research suggests that pivots unfold more gradually over time (Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). We know relatively little about what happens in those moments or intervals, and how creators experience letting go of old ideas to make way for new ones.

Research hints, however, that the process of letting go of ideas may be distinct from the normal process of creative revision. It suggests that creators receive and cope with negative feedback in qualitatively different ways compared to positive feedback (Zhou, 1998). Building on research on revision, feedback, and negative affect suggests that the process of letting go may be deeply affective, disorienting, and require gradual adjustment over time.

The process of letting go of ideas. Whereas research portrays creative revision as a

primarily cognitive process of accumulating information to elaborate and adjust ideas over time

(Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020), letting go of ideas may also entail strong affect. Recent research

reveals that cognition and affect are entwined during creative revision. For instance, Harrison &

Rouse (2015) found that "emotional expressions often felt interchangeable with a set of more

cognitively oriented expressions" in the pronouncements of feedback-givers, in the context of the

modern dance and product design projects they studied (Harrison & Rouse, 2015: 386). One

participant in Grimes' (2018) study of creative revision and psychological ownership explained

how he "got to a point of almost feeling kind of desperate or lost" at receiving challenging

feedback that questioned the point of his business (Grimes, 2018:1704). Similarly, a recent study

on how entrepreneurs process critical feedback surfaced strong affective reactions like

disappointment and frustration in response to episodes that deeply questioned their idea (Kaffka

et al., 2020).

That work hints at the potentially dramatic nature of affect experienced when feedback

prompts creators to begin letting go of their ideas. Positive, developmental feedback about

creative ideas primarily provides creators with information (Zhou, 2003) that can enhance

engagement with and motivation towards creative tasks (George & Zhou, 2001; Zhou, 1998). In

contrast, negative feedback can be experienced as threatening and cause deep levels of negative

affect (Kim & Kim, 2020; George & Zhou, 2001; Gray, 1999; Grimes, 2018; Baer & Brown,

2012). That may particularly be the case when feedback is aimed at discarding some core aspect

of an idea. For instance, Baer & Brown (2012) found that while creators with a strong sense of

psychological ownership over their ideas embraced additive feedback that helped them expand

and elaborate an idea, they responded with negative affect and resistance to subtractive feedback

that suggested a contraction to an idea. Similarly, entrepreneurs experience grief at the failure of a venture, signalling the end of an idea (Shepherd, Wiklund, & Haynie, 2009). Thus, negative feedback during creative revision causes feelings of fear and anxiety because creators experience it as a threat to their valued ideas (Gray, 1999; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Kim & Kim, 2020).

Threatening situations not only induce negative affect; they can be experienced as disorienting (Janoff-Bulman, 1989) and jarring (Lee & Mitchell, 1984), and can overwhelm one's ability to cope with a situation. That may further lead to a sense of denial and even trauma (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Brennan, 2001). However, it can also set creators off on new paths, as opposed to bringing an idea journey to a halt. Threatening feedback is therefore likely to be important for the trajectory of emerging ideas. People tend to be less risk averse when faced with a potential loss (Kahneman & Tverskey, 1979; Rothman & Salovey, 1997; Cacioppo, Gardner, & Bernston, 1999) and therefore may be more likely to seek and pursue risky or novel alternatives if confronted by highly negative, threatening feedback. For example, parallel research has shown that the shock of losing one's cultural understanding or the death of a significant person in one's life can be associated with creativity (Maddux & Galinsky, 2009; Eisenstadt, 1978; Oberg, 1954). As these examples make clear, that process is also likely to be accompanied or even driven by heightened, primarily negative, affect.

For negative feedback to feel threatening, creators must feel a strong prior commitment to an idea that they value and do not want to let go. Existing studies of affect and creativity often assume or induce a process where creators do not become attached to early stage ideas, so that there is little need for letting go. Those studies also prioritize positive affect and its benefits for cognitive flexibility needed during idea generation (e.g., Amabile et al., 2005). Even where studies focus on negative affect, they may capture shorter-lasting, milder, or more generalized

states of negative affect than those experienced by autonomous creators as they destroy treasured ideas that their identities and livelihoods have depended on. Autonomous creators like book authors, freelancers, and entrepreneurs (Petriglieri et al., 2018), as well as employees in creative organizational contexts like research and development, advertising, or product design, operate in loose organizational contexts where they engage in an open-ended, self-directed process that stakeholders and sponsors may not buy into. Yet, their very livelihood is deeply tied to their ideas in a way that is not true for employees, whose resources are not entirely bound up in the success of a single idea (e.g., Lingo & Tepper, 2013). Autonomous creators like entrepreneurs are also often encouraged to display persistence, grit, and resilience (Mueller et al., 2017; Mooradian et al., 2016) that may tie them even more closely to their ideas. Research supports that creators often feel deep commitment to and identification with their ideas (Baer & Brown, 2012; Elsbach, 2003; Grimes, 2018) so that they may struggle to let ideas go (Rouse, 2013). Thus, for autonomous creators, creative revision may entail a state of heightened affect that has yet to be fully explored.

Prior research leaves this issue relatively open because it has typically prioritized positive affect, finding it to benefit the cognitive flexibility necessary for idea generation (e.g., Amabile et al., 2005; Isen, Daubman & Nowicki, 1987). In contrast, negative affect has been associated with improving focus and persistence at creative tasks (Nijstad, De Dreu, & Rietzschel, 2010; George & Zhou, 2007). One reason may be that affect in those studies has been conceptualized as distinct from the creative revision process; affect is induced, viewed as a generalized state, or viewed as relating to dissatisfaction with the idea, rather than generated by the creative revision process itself. When affect is produced by, rather than distinct from, the generative process, the nature of affect may influence how an idea develops.

Our discussion implies that letting go of ideas may be gradual, as autonomous creators receive negative feedback that they come to view as threatening their idea, experience shock or confusion, and then begin to find a new path. Research on the idea journey has yet to unpack that process because it treats shifts in the direction of ideas as instantaneous, such as the sudden way insights open creators' eyes to a new way of seeing a problem (Davidson, 1995), akin to a "leap" (Baker-Sennet & Cesi, 1996) or a bolt of lightning (Smith & Linsey, 2011). As a result, research reveals that ideas sometimes evolve and connect to one another in non-linear ways, such that one idea can act as a stepping stone to another that moves the idea's trajectory in a new direction (Hagtvedt, Dossinger, Harrison, & Huang, 2019). However, it does not capture what occurs within that point of connection, as one idea falls away and another gradually emerges in its place.

In the present study, we look into the heart of those moments to explain how creators let go of ideas to allow shifts in direction as new ideas congeal. Mirroring recent work and calls for process-based studies of idea development (e.g., Harrison & Rouse, 2014; McMullen & Dimov, 2013), we build on micro-level data that tracks creators' interactions, affective responses, and the ways that their ideas develop over time.

METHODS

Research Approach and Setting

To explore how autonomous creators navigate the process of letting go, we adopted an inductive multiple-case study design (Eisenhardt, 1989) to trace that process in depth in one sample of autonomous creators—early-stage entrepreneurs. We followed the new venture journeys of 12 early-stage entrepreneurs for approximately one year, treating each case as a unit of comparison to confirm or deny inferences drawn from other cases, yielding more robust findings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2009). This approach is appropriate for our goal of observing how

autonomous creators navigate periods of extreme challenge to their ideas because relatively little is known about this phenomenon.

Our longitudinal approach allowed us to observe how creators' ideas shifted over time in response to feedback that arose through the creative revision process. Because we spoke regularly to entrepreneurs over the one-year observation period through in person and telephone interviews, and collected data from them in a mobile phone application, we could capture their responses close to when challenging feedback occurred and see how it evolved over time, as they made sense of it and revised their venture ideas to account for it. This approach is inspired by the experience sampling method (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), which aims to capture participants' thoughts and actions as they occur in context.

We defined early stage entrepreneurs as those working dedicatedly for a minimum of one month and a maximum of 12 months to turn an idea they have produced into a business. We focused on founders or co-founders who were the main inventor of the focal idea for the venture and who therefore operated as relatively autonomous creators during creative revision. This aligns with the venture opportunity development phase in entrepreneurship (e.g., Vogel, 2017), sandwiched between idea generation and opportunity exploitation.

Early-stage entrepreneurial ideas are ideal for our research question because they provide an extreme case (Pettigrew, 1990) of autonomous creators engaged in creative revision, seeking and receiving feedback to refine and improve their ideas. This context is likely to bring to the surface instances of feedback that suggests redirecting ideas in substantial ways, leading to the destruction of initial ideas or aspects of them. As such, this setting is ideal for theory building, allowing us to observe instances of our phenomenon of interest (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Our study is situated specifically in the context of the London startup ecosystem through four

different co-working spaces. Early-stage entrepreneurs in our study were based at the co-working

spaces at the start of the study, spending a minimum of two days per week at a given space. Co-

working spaces are physical spaces where freelancers, entrepreneurs, designers and other

autonomous creators work alongside each other, developing their own projects while learning

from the wider community through constant interaction (Spinuzzi, 2012). They are thus highly

conducive to creative revision, serving as sites for diverse types of creative interactions

(Toivonen & Sorensen, 2018; Toivonen, Idoko, & Sorenson ,2020) where users can establish

relationships with mentors, receive feedback, and find venture partners (Bouncken et al., 2018;

Capdevila, 2013).

Sample and Data Collection

To determine whether entrepreneurs met our criteria of being founders or co-founders

actively pursuing early-stage ideas for a venture they had conceptualized, we conducted scoping

interviews with entrepreneurs in co-working spaces. Interviews typically lasted for an hour or

more and focused on the concrete activities individuals had undertaken. Based on the data

collected through this preliminary scoping, we created a structured profile of 20 potential

participants. The criteria for selecting entrepreneurs into our sample was that they should be

working for at least one month but no more than one year on a nascent idea and that they had

joined the coworking space within the last three to six months of data collection and were regular

users of the space. Twelve entrepreneurs met those criteria and were included in our sample. Of

the twelve, seven were solo entrepreneurs and five were members of founding teams of two. The

five co-founders were intimately involved in generating the venture idea based on one of their

own personal experiences and viewed themselves as able to act with relatively autonomy to

revise their ideas, particularly given the early stage of the ventures. Descriptions of participants

are provided in Tables 1A and 1B.

[Insert Tables 1A and 1B about here]

We focused our data collection on tracking entrepreneurial idea journeys and their associated interactions as regularly as possible, to capture the richness of such journeys over time. The period of observation for a given venture varied from six to thirteen months. We chose a hybrid data collection method consisting of three complementary sources. The key source of data was 85 detailed semi-structured personal interviews, designed to regularly track an entrepreneur's changing business model, their interactions, salient conversations and other activities. Our interviews probed notable interactions and conversations, emotions, and business model changes. Interviews lasted between one to two hours. These semi-structured interviews were supplemented with 42 phone interviews, lasting ten to twenty minutes each. In Toivonen et al. (2020), we explain how this approach enabled us to trace the interactions and movements of entrepreneurs over time and provide a detailed example based on one case used in this study.

Further, to rapidly capture notable interactions and evolving situations, we developed a mobile phone application that allowed participants to regularly update us. The application included a set of questions that probed the entrepreneur's recent interactions, including, who the interaction was with, what the conversation was about, how it related to their venture idea, and whether they discovered new challenges or insights because of that interaction. To illustrate a typical response, one entrepreneur updated the application with details of an "engaging" interaction with "a consultant" on 8th July 2017, describing the meeting as follows: "It was an introspective conversation which brought out the reasons why I was frustrated with the lack of results. It helped me focus my attention on the biggest bang for buck actions necessary for my business". We used these app entries primarily as a tool for flagging key interactions or conversations that we would then follow up on through in-depth discussion during the next face-to-face or telephone interview (whichever happened first). Hence, app entries allowed us to keep

track of key interactions and ensure that we captured those interactions close to the moment they occurred. Entrepreneurs received daily evening prompts to complete the application questionnaire. Over the thirteen-month observation period we received 376 substantive entries via the mobile app, with an average of 31 entries per entrepreneur ranging from 2 to 70 entries. Entry length ranged from two to five sentences.

Data Analysis

We analysed our data through a multi-step inductive process. We began with in-depth analysis of each of the twelve entrepreneurs in our sample, without theoretical preference or *a priori* hypothesis (Eisenhardt, 1989), during the ongoing interview process. This allowed us to become grounded in the setting (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). At that stage, we sought interesting, recurring, or unusual patterns in the data to probe in subsequent interviews (Langley & Abdallah, 2016). We assessed each entrepreneur independently to identify shifts in their idea journey and longitudinal patterns of their venture, core idea, business model, social interactions and emotions. That allowed us to develop temporal narratives of each entrepreneur's idea journey (Langley, 1999) and capture "a concrete penetrating understanding of the particular" (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas & Van de Ven, 2013: 8), allowing us to answer the key question: "what is going on here" (Tsoukas, 2018: 298).

During this process, we became aware that many entrepreneurs in our study experienced episodes that were highly emotionally charged and cognitively active. We observed that those episodes followed interactions that entrepreneurs perceived as fundamentally challenging their venture ideas, and that through the episodes, creators began letting go of ideas and developing ideas that were substantively new. We therefore decided to use these challenging feedback interactions (which we label *trigger feedback*) as an event (Abbott, 1990) that triggered a period of change for entrepreneurs. We built episodes (Metiu & Rothbard, 2013; Bailey et al., 2010)

around those periods that began with the trigger feedback and ended when the entrepreneur viewed the challenge to the idea as resolved. We labelled the episodes *creative jolts* and treated them as the unit of analysis for our study. We also used tables to capture interactions that did not trigger such periods, to enable us to compare those cases to episodes of creative jolt (please see Appendix A).

Once we had empirically conceptualized the phenomenon of *creative jolts*, three authors independently assessed each creative jolt episode by returning to the data and, occasionally, to the entrepreneur concerned, to construct expansive tables that charted each potential creative jolt episode and captured direct quotes from the interviews and mobile app. The data from across the three sources were thus combined in the table. As noted above, we used the app data to identify when key interactions occurred and gather preliminary data on those interactions, which we then followed up on in our interviews. Thus, when an interaction surfaced through the mobile app, details of the interaction were constructed by combining the description in the app with the data from our follow up conversations.

The tables were structured to reveal the beginnings of each episode, or trigger feedback, entrepreneur's emotional and cognitive reaction, behaviorally, what changed over time and how the issue was "resolved" (if resolved during the study period). Based on this detailed mapping, we built case narratives. We began by dividing individual cases among three of the authors, who developed case narratives of the potential creative jolt episodes assigned to them. Next, all narrative drafts and associated idea journey maps were shared across the group, allowing each member to examine episodes that they did not develop. Finally, over several meetings, the authors evaluated and reconciled their respective interpretation of each creative jolt episode.

During the process of developing jolt episodes, we became increasingly cognizant of the variety, intensity, and change of emotions expressed by entrepreneurs. Accordingly, in step three, we undertook systematic analysis of emotional expressions in our data. Based on our review of literature on emotive responses (Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017; Emirbayer & Goldberg, 2005; Voronov, 2014; Voronov & Vince, 2012), the PANAS-X affect schedule (Watson & Clark, 1994) and 2015 LIWC dictionary, we developed a coding structure of 16 affective responses —six positive emotions (happiness, self-assurance, excitement, attentiveness, hope and joviality), six negative emotions (fear, anger, anxiety, frustration, sadness, and guilt) and four other emotions (relief, surprise, serenity, and fatigue). We used the LIWC dictionary tool to highlight all emotion words in our data. However, as "meanings do not reside in words but rather in how words relate to their linguistic environment and capture social actors' focus of attention" (Kippendorf, 2004: 290), instead of mechanically counting and analysing the proportion of such words, following Toubiana & Zietsma (2017) we used these words as a guide to direct subsequent manual inductive coding.

We supplemented that coding with interview notes, which captured the interviewer's observations. That allowed us to capture relevant emotional expression even when the source text did not indicate emotion. For instance, the statement "You have nothing….what do you have?.....what is someone going to invest in?" (said by a mentor/investor to one of our entrepreneurs) does not include any LIWC emotion word. However, the pain, fear and sadness experienced was evident in an entrepreneur's retelling of this meeting. On the other hand, the following statement includes several LIWC emotion words (underlined): "…if you are sharing an idea or a proposal with lots of different people… some will think it's fantastic, some will think it is great, some will think it is okay, some will think it's terrible". However, a closer

reading shows that these are not emotional expressions by the speaker. Where multiple emotions were expressed, we coded for all.

In the fourth, and final, step, we turned to cross-case analysis. In this step all the individual creative jolt episodes were compared to identify consistent themes, temporal patterns and shifts (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). We began by comparing pairs of cases. Once initial patterns were identified more cases were added for comparison, to develop robust theoretical concepts and examine underlying processes and mechanisms. We followed an iterative process of moving between data, theory and literature to refine our conceptualisations and contributions (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data analysis took approximately six months. Through this multi-step analytical approach, we developed the novel phenomenon of creative jolt, which begins with a highly challenging "trigger feedback", leading into the three stages of "existential crisis", "reappraisal" and "resolution", and includes both emotional and cognitive behavioural responses.

Our temporal data collection approach, which included several rounds of personal and telephonic interviews over time with all entrepreneurs in our sample, and a robust multi-step data analysis, also allowed us to deal with some of the issues inherent in retrospective interviewing. As our data collection involved regular meetings and interviews, we were able to interact with participants within a few days or weeks of key interactions during creative revision, capturing the emotionally rich aftermath of some interactions before participants had fully made sense of them. This is exemplified in the highly emotive recounting of some feedback interactions during interviews that occurred immediately following an interaction—which gradually gave way in future interviews to different narratives that better made sense of the role of the interaction in the participant's creative journey. Thus, our temporal approach allowed us to capture initial raw

responses to challenging feedback and to trace how subsequent sensemaking and narratives evolved from those responses.

FINDINGS

Our analysis revealed that, whereas autonomous creators regularly engaged in creative revision, not all creators let go of ideas or formed substantially new ones. In our sample of 12 entrepreneurs, six engaged in a creative revision process of elaborating and refining ideas with relatively neutral emotions. That process was associated with incremental changes, while retaining the core of the focal idea as it moved through the idea journey. In a small number of cases, creators also ignored or dismissed highly critical feedback (cf Grimes, 2018). Appendix A presents examples of several feedback interactions that followed a process of creative revision leading to incremental changes in the venture idea.

Six of the entrepreneurs in our sample, however, changed their ideas more radically, letting go of core aspects of their original idea and shifting the idea in a new direction. We label the process through which creators let go of ideas as episodes of *creative jolt*. During episodes of creative jolt, creators' experiences diverged from the normal process of creative revision. They were characterized by an extended period of cognitive and affective disruption and upheaval. Creative jolts were triggered when creators perceived feedback as threatening by suggesting letting the ideas go. Following trigger feedback, jolt episodes unfolded through three phases, as illustrated in Figure 1—*existential crisis*, in which creators questioned the viability of their original idea, *reappraisal*, in which they began to make sense of their ideas in light of the feedback, and *resolution,* in which they discarded core aspects of their idea while reorienting it in substantial ways. We illustrate these phases with a single extended example in Appendix B. Each phase of a creative jolt episode was characterized by affective and cognitive responses that moved creators through the episode.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The figure shows that we also observed variation in the ways that existential crisis, reappraisal, and resolution occurred, corresponding to different ways that creators interpreted feedback. This resulted in two ways that creators let go of ideas. When creators perceived trigger feedback as threatening their idea, they experienced existential dread characterized by shattered assumptions and extreme negative emotions. In response, they reappraised their idea by reaching out to others, which led to the re-creation of the core idea. When creators perceived trigger feedback as threatening the mission or core purpose of the venture, they experienced an existential awakening characterized by opening up of or assumptions and emotional ambivalence. They reappraised their idea by reaching in and reflecting on their values and rationale for conceptualising the venture in the first place, which re-oriented them towards a new idea that restored their core mission. We observed that creators tended to follow one pathway through a creative jolt; they did not shift between pathways from phase to phase. At the same time, the activities were not exclusive to a pathway; for example, most creators in our study engaged in some reaching out and some reaching in. For simplicity, we organize our findings around the pathways, focusing on the predominant approach we observed within each phase for a given entrepreneur.

The six entrepreneurs in our sample who experienced creative jolt episodes were: Sean [The Bucket List], Ryan [Doorstep Radish], Walter [BaysWater], Liam [Holiday Helper], Meg [Supercharge], John [Gym4Us][1]. One entrepreneur experienced two jolt episodes, leading to the observation of seven creative jolt episodes in total. We present an overview of each jolt episode we observed in Table 2 and provide additional supporting evidence in Table 3. In the following

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[1] All names in the paper are pseudonyms

section, we describe the way that creators interpreted trigger feedback and how it prompted a jolt that deviated from normal creative revision. We then describe the way that creative jolt episodes unfolded.

[Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here]

Triggering Creative Jolt Episodes: Trigger Feedback

Creative jolt episodes were initiated by trigger feedback that was perceived by creators as threatening their ideas or their core mission. Negative, even highly critical, feedback about venture ideas was extremely common across the 12 entrepreneurs in our sample, but it was not always perceived as threatening, and in those cases, it did not trigger a creative jolt episode. We observed several feedback interactions for every entrepreneur in our sample over the course of a year, but found only seven instances where feedback led to a creative jolt. Thus, trigger feedback arose as a normal part of the process of creative revision, as creators shared their ideas and sought input from mentors, advisors, peers, users, and family and friends; but it was perceived by creators as more threatening than other feedback. Our analysis shows that within a few days of receiving trigger feedback, entrepreneurs experienced it as destructive, fundamentally challenging the viability of their ideas and suggesting that they were, in some respect, following a wrong path.

A precondition for feedback to be perceived as threatening was that it came from a credible source—others who were deeply trusted by creators, or high in status or power. We observed many instances where creators received feedback from peers, colleagues, customers or friends that prompted them to elaborate or refine their ideas, but no cases where it triggered a creative jolt. For example, organic cosmetics venture Ginger Bread received an email from a customer who was looking for a website to order more products, but the venture did not have one. That made the entrepreneur realise that she needed an online sales platform to expand her

business, but it did not substantively change her venture idea; rather, it led to incremental

changes in the business model (e.g. adding online sales option). In contrast, trigger feedback

always came from credible actors, like mentors, successful entrepreneurs, or high-profile

members of the community.

Criticism from a credible mentor alone was insufficient to prompt a jolt. Trigger feedback

that entrepreneurs experienced as threatening focused on the core of an idea, rather than a

specific strategy or implementation plan; be subtractive rather than additive; and aimed at ideas

that creators were clear and confident about. When those characteristics were not present,

entrepreneurs were more likely to view the feedback as inviting them to reconsider aspects of

their venture and to use it for elaborating and refining their idea or to discard the feedback. For

example, Emily, the founder of Zelda, a venture for lifelong learning programs for people unable

to find appropriate niche masters programs or time and resources for university based

educational programs, described an interaction with her mentor that did not trigger a creative jolt.

The mentor repeatedly questioned how she could scale her business:

> "[she] talked a lot… about scale, and… I felt a bit like, God, why does it all have to be
> about scale all the time. I wish somebody would give it a rest… I was like, ugh ... if you
> want to get some funding… then you have to suddenly talk about your project like you
> are planning world domination or something … It's like, "where are you going to be in
> five years? What scale are you going to be at? How are you going to do this?" And it's
> just like, I don't know. So, I think I came out of that [conversation] a bit, like, you know,
> just reflecting on… how do I talk about it confidently…So then, to kind of be thinking,
> right, how does this scale? [Emily, Zelda (Interview)]

The example shows that Emily perceived the feedback as tiresome rather than threatening, and it

prompted her to consider the questions her mentor raised. The mentor challenged her about how

to scale up her business model, but she did not attack the core idea of the business—the mentor

did not suggest that the model could not be scaled. Her feedback was also additive, suggesting

that Emily add a plan for scaling up, rather than that she let go of any part of the idea. Finally,

the example shows that the feedback did not address a well-developed idea—the mentor was not

explicitly criticizing Emily's plan for scaling up; she was criticizing the lack of a plan.

Moreover, Emily herself recognized that she didn't know how she would scale or to what level.

The feedback led Emily to elaborate and improve the idea by developing a strategy for how to

scale her venture, which were materialised in pitch decks used for an entrepreneurial funding

competition.

Similarly, Clayton, the founder of Digital Lemon, an online event ticketing company

targeting small sports teams, received feedback from a respected football Chairman that did not

trigger a creative jolt. The Chairman told Clayton that his funding goal of raising £350,000 first-

round equity investment was unrealistic at this stage of the venture:

> "his attitude was, you've got no chance [of raising that amount], you can't do it. So that
> was really – that stood out a lot because the people that I thought who would be more on
> side and supportive of it, I thought he would be one of those. But his view was, no way,
> too much money, it's still too early, I can't see how it's going to happen… he said, there's
> no chance of – not (of) the business not working, but of raising 350 given how long we've
> been going." [Clayton, Digital Lemon, interview]

Clayton's description illustrates that, although the feedback was highly critical, he did not view it

as attacking the core of his business—Clayton comments that the Chairman did not say there was

a risk of "the business not working", he only doubted the chance of raising the £350,000 at that

stage. Clayton went on to describe how he believed that the Chairman, if he were going to invest

in Digital Lemon, "would want a bigger percentage of the company", so that his advice was not

purely subtractive; he was suggesting that Clayton wait or offer a larger portion of the business

for investment. Clayton did not substantially change his plans in response to this feedback. He

concluded that the investment was "not for [the Chairman] and I appreciate that. It's fine. But it

doesn't mean that it can't be done."

In contrast, trigger feedback was perceived by entrepreneurs in our study as criticizing a core aspect of their idea in a subtractive way that suggested they needed to let go of an idea that was well developed in the creator's mind. For example, during our first meeting with Sean who founded The Bucket List, an idea aimed at connecting people to others who could help with their "bucket list" activities, he described engaging in a process of creative revision, seeking out feedback and gradually adjusting his idea to best capture the opportunity he perceived. Although he experienced anxiety about the venture, he was self-assured, optimistic and hopeful about its success. However, several days after our first interview with Sean, a successful entrepreneur he greatly admired (Craig), deeply challenged his idea, telling him that the business model was flawed, and the venture would not make money. As Sean described, the feedback was critical, subtractive, and aimed at the heart of his idea:

> "…he was like, you won't make the numbers work. You just can't…. make money from B2C offering that we were doing. You have to switch to B2B if you want to make money… because of…[what] he said about it not making any money, it's going to be very difficult to make that sort of impact" [Sean, The Bucket List, interview]

Sean interpreted Craig's feedback as threatening his idea because it entailed a fundamental challenge to its financial viability. Craig's feedback attacked and suggested letting go of a core aspect of the idea—the B2C business model. At the time, Sean had a clear plan built around the B2C business model. Interestingly, the experience of threat reflected Sean's raw reaction shortly after receiving the feedback. While discussing this incident several months later, Sean saw the aftermath of that conversation in an entirely different light, framing it as a learning experience that had "a lot of value". Uncovering creator's perceptions of this feedback thus required capturing entrepreneur's reaction to feedback before they had an opportunity to make sense of it. Similarly, another entrepreneur John [GymForUs] described how a trusted mentor provided feedback that John viewed as threatening his idea:

> "…after listening, he says to me, "You have nothing" … I was like, "What do you mean? We have users." He was, like, "You have nothing, what do you have? I don't understand, what do you have? What is someone going to invest in?" [John, GymForUs, interview].

John viewed his mentor as dismissing the very existence of the idea, indicating that it could not

be the foundation for a viable venture. Another entrepreneur Liam [Holiday Helper] noted that a

mentor said to him "don't be afraid to give up and try something simpler", suggesting directly to

let go of his idea.

The examples illustrate how entrepreneurs viewed trigger feedback as threatening their

ideas. Other entrepreneurs described how mentors and advisors questioned the purpose of the

venture and suggested they were following the wrong path. That trigger feedback threatened the

raison d'etre of the idea—why the entrepreneur developed the venture and whether it was worth

pursuing, rather than whether it would actually work. It was viewed by entrepreneurs as

suggesting that by pursuing their current idea, they were threatening their original mission. For

example, Ryan, founder of Doorstep Radish, a social enterprise aimed at fighting food waste by

specializing in the delivery of misshapen fruit and vegetables to households and businesses,

described a conversation with his mentor. It followed an extended period of focusing on sales,

during which the venture's sales performance grew from less than 200 home customers to

approximately 600 home and business customers, totally 2000 boxes per month, driven by

Ryan's sense that "we're not moving and growing fast enough". The mentor prodded Ryan on

his core mission and purpose:

> "She asks what you want from Doorstep Radish and initially we said sales. (she said) 'Fine, you achieve sales, what's next?' Well, what *is* next?... We are a veg box scheme. [She asks] "Is that what you want to be though, limit yourself to a pure veg box scheme, there is nothing attractive about it or do you have a grander plan?" [Ryan, Doorstep Radish, interview]

Like feedback viewed as threatening ideas, feedback viewed as threatening the core mission also

tended to be aimed at something clear and concrete in the entrepreneur's mind. Ryan [Doorstep

Radish], for instance, had been highly committed to building sales before receiving feedback.

The feedback also tended to be subtractive, implying that an entrepreneur should relinquish an

essential focus of the business (like sales) in order to achieve the mission. Similarly, Meg

[SuperCharge] commented how having her mission questioned put her in a "more vulnerable

position". She described the following interaction with a mentor:

> "Why do I want to do it? Why does it matter at all? Not what is it and how am I going to
> do it but that whole question of, "But why?" Which I kind of realised is the more
> vulnerable position because when you say why you're going to do something … it's more
> vulnerable because it's closer to what you, you're putting out, what you believe in and if
> someone says [for example], "Well, that's a rubbish idea," then it's like they're criticising
> you and your values and it's so much more intimidating." [Meg, SuperCharge, interview]

The way that Meg distinguishes this kind of questioning from that focused on implementation

plans ("how am I going to do it?") suggests that creators often experienced trigger feedback as

qualitatively different from other feedback obtained through creative revision that they could use

to progress or develop their idea. Instead, they experienced it as a direct personal challenge to

their idea and their role as an entrepreneur.

Phases of Creative Jolt Episodes

Following trigger feedback that creators experienced as threatening their ideas or their

mission, they went through a period of emotional and cognitive upheaval that unfolded through

three phases—existential crisis, reappraisal, and resolution.

Existential crisis. The experience of trigger feedback was followed by a sudden and

immediate insight that led to deep questioning of a creator's idea, accompanied by a heightened

emotional state. This was reflected in our interviews and discussions that occurred within days

and weeks of receiving the trigger feedback. We label this *existential crisis*, because in this stage,

creators framed the feedback as suggesting the possibility that their idea, as they had conceived it

currently, may cease to exist; they acknowledged and came face-to-face with the potential

impracticality of their idea or its failure to generate profit or fulfil the bigger personal and social

objectives they were aspiring for. A comment from John [GymForUs] summed up this response:

"wow, we have nothing." Similarly, Sean [The Bucket List] described experiencing fear, stress,

and frustration, commenting it was like:

> "… being in crisis mode, being like well… if these figures aren't going to work what are
> we going to do, or how are we going to … And that's when… I started getting really,
> really, really stressed because I was just like there's no … there's no solution, like there's
> no easy answer, there's no obvious thing that's just going to fix this." [Sean, The Bucket
> List, interview]

Underlying these responses were two characteristics of existential crisis—cognitive upheaval

because assumptions about the idea were shattered and a heightened emotional state.

Creators described trigger feedback as *shattering assumptions*. One core assumption that

shattered in existential crisis was that the idea would be successful—entrepreneurs in our study

often described how they had been repeatedly encouraged about the value of their idea so that

trigger feedback came as a shock that suddenly made them doubt the support they had received.

Our coding showed substantial evidence that after trigger feedback, participants engaged in

cognitive processes to grapple with understanding the feedback and its implications. For

example, for Sean [The Bucket List], it was like the end of a dream. Prior to the trigger feedback,

he had repeatedly described his idea using the metaphor of finding a "golden ticket", from Roald

Dahl's story of "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory". In the weeks that followed the trigger

feedback, it became clear that the dream had shattered. After further discussions with other

members of the entrepreneurial community, he said:

> "…basically, the conversations with [another founder Carl] and with the other people, it
> kind of did just dispel that myth that we have about something of value being this golden

> ticket ... The conversations with him were exactly the same as the conversations with people over here [London, UK], in terms of like, you won't get any investment unless you have a legit thing." [Sean, The Bucket List, interview]

For others, shattered assumptions were about the way that the entrepreneur had framed the entire problem situation; their assumptions were shattered not only about the likely success of their idea, but about the very criteria for success themselves. For instance, Ryan [Doorstep Radish] realized that his emphasis on growing the sales of veg boxes was based on a flawed assumption, as he notes that the direction that the venture should move in "is a different conversation" from what he had previously been thinking:

> "We agreed about growing but she wanted to know why I was doing it, was I going on the right path. I said "we have to grow, there is no question about that". She agreed, but she repeated "is that why you're doing it"? That is a different conversation right? The question is not is growing, right or wrong, the question is, is that the right thing to focus on… or is it just a means to an end, is that the end goal?" [Ryan, Doorstep Radish, interview]

Ryan acknowledged the wrong turn he took in focusing on hard financial measures alone and how that side-tracked his pursuit of the social mission he started with: "we started off as a social enterprise then I suppose we were too hell-bent on sales, sales, sales, grow, grow, grow, grow and I think at some point we lost sight of the overall picture". This shattered his assumption that sales were necessary, or moreover, sufficient, for a successful venture. This began to open up a new understanding for Ryan, allowing him to focus on the social mission that he had assumed could not constitute the primary aim of the business.

Shattering assumptions were accompanied by intense emotional responses. The nature of emotional responses shaped how the crisis unfolded. Entrepreneurs' emotional responses varied depending on how they viewed trigger feedback and how their assumptions fractured. In response to feedback that threatened the idea, entrepreneurs experienced emotional turmoil— intense negative emotional responses that led to a sense of hopelessness and despair about the

future of the idea. Our LIWC driven coding of interview data shows that emotional turmoil during existential crisis is driven by a shift from the dominance of positive emotions, such as self-assurance, hope, and excitement to the dominance of negative emotions fear, anger and frustration. Figure 2 is a stylistic representation of shifts in the intensity of positive and negative emotions during creative jolts.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

Entrepreneurs vividly described their emotional turmoil during or immediately after a trigger feedback interaction, but it often stayed with them for weeks afterwards. For instance, John [GymForUs] described his emotional state:

> "I remember just leaving there completely battered, my soul was, like, gone, I was just, like, empty inside… I just went home and cried in my bed, I didn't actually cry tears, because I don't usually cry, but, like, I wish I'd cried, crying would make me feel better, faster. I just stayed in bed for a few days and didn't tell my co-founder anything, I guess, he kind of realised things were a bit bleak when I didn't really come to the office… so he probably felt a bit shit." [John, GymForUs, interview]

John went on to describe a period of depression following that interaction and recorded "feeling anxious all the time" in a mobile app entry. Liam [Holiday Helper] similarly described a discussion in which a respected former professor questioned his venture as a particularly "low moment", saying that he thought of giving up and that he "lost the motivation and love for doing it." Sean [The Bucket List] also described an "emotional month" after his interaction with Craig.

Shattering assumptions and emotional turmoil led to the state of *existential dread*—the painful acknowledgement of the end of their idea. There was no replacement for creators' shattered assumptions, and their cognitive upheaval was reflected in actions to stop developing or even reverse ideas. For example, Walter [BaysWater] described in an interview how for his idea, "…there was a whole concept in the proposal and the branches we had set up and had got funding for…it was pretty much all ready to go…and then like that was kind of stopped [because

of the interaction with ABC University]". Similarly, Liam [Holiday Helper] realized that his idea

may do more harm than good because instead of helping a large group of people as he had

expected, his venture would end up "redirecting funding to like, just 23 kids out of thousands in

one area". He then stopped his plans for an imminent launch. Arresting activity this way

reflected in how deeply creators' understanding of the value of their ideas had been shaken.

At the same time, existential crisis could also entail more complex emotional states. In

particular, in response to feedback to let go of the core venture idea or mission, creators

experienced emotional ambivalence—the simultaneous experience of negative and positive

emotions—that meant their existential crisis period was characterized by what we call an

existential awakening, in which their assumptions for their idea were shattered, but their eyes

were also opened to the possibility of either a new, if unknown, future, or achieving the original

mission, which had been side-tracked over time. In this case, creators described feelings of relief

and hope along with the negative feelings of uncertainty and fear about their idea's future. For

instance, Meg [SuperCharge] described experiencing "A sense of freedom. Like a weight lifted

off my shoulders". She went on:

> "I don't know if anybody's ever asked you to marry them but it's those sort of big
> moments or when you find out you're pregnant or, it's like…these big moments in your
> life … that's what it feels like, it feels like a, "Oh, God, well that's, that changes
> everything," you know?" [Meg, SuperCharge, interview]

Ryan [Doorstep Radish] quickly had the insight that "ah yes, (growing the business) is not the

end goal", and his remarks captured a sense that he was grateful for the intervention that

prompted him to let go of preoccupation with sales growth:

> "Had I been alone I would be focusing solely on sales, grow, grow, grow, grow. As long
> as I am growing I don't care. I wouldn't have considered stepping back, not so worried
> about sales but actually think a little more about what we're doing and provide value to
> our customer beyond functional value, an intangible value" [Ryan, Doorstep Radish,
> interview]

Thus, existential awakening entailed shattering of assumptions accompanied by emotional

ambivalence, driven by an increase in the intensity of negative emotions along with some

positive emotions, creating a complex and often turbulent emotional response.

Reappraisal. In response to the cognitive and emotional upheaval suffered during

existential crisis, creators tried to restore their shattered assumptions by making sense of their

ideas in light of the feedback they had received. They entered a period of reappraisal, in which

they sought out additional information and social support through feedback interactions with

others. Initially, this involved *seeking disconfirmation* of the trigger feedback by connecting to

and receiving advice from others. For example, Sean [The Bucket List] described going into the

meeting room with his co-founder to try to make the numbers work, and then continuing to reach

out to others to test whether he would receive similarly challenging feedback. Liam [Holiday

Helper] similarly reported seeking disconfirmation from others during a period after his initial

trigger feedback conversation:

> "I think it's really important to get, again, feedback from all your stakeholders, to really
> learn … So, I've spoken to a lot of people and done a lot of research … I went to Exodus
> Travel, which is a big travel company, and spoke to the head of their responsible tourism
> … she studied under the doctor that I spoke to, and she was, like, "Don't listen to him
> [the mentor], it's fine." [Liam, Holiday Helper, interview]

Thus, creators used others to test their ideas, hoping to receive feedback to contradict trigger

feedback and restore shattered assumptions. As one entrepreneur described in a mobile app

entry, this process was "a real test of belief in the product and myself". As they obtained more

information, entrepreneurs began to make sense out of their disrupted cognitive world.

Entrepreneurs pursued two approaches in their search for disconfirming information. One

was *reaching out* to new mentors and peers. Entrepreneurs in our study tended to engage in

reaching out when they had interpreted trigger feedback as threatening their ideas and

experienced existential dread. They focused on diversifying their information and ideas by connecting with a broad network. These discussions were often with other entrepreneurs who had faced similar challenges, rather than people with direct industry or content specific connections to a particular idea. We observed entrepreneurs meeting with others and attending networking events to diversify their networks at this stage, explore new venture ideas, and seek confirmation. For example, Sean [The BucketList] reached out to two solo entrepreneurs to discuss various venture ideas. Through that process, he received positive reinforcement that led to a substantial change in his business model, which he further discussed with other entrepreneurs, a mentor, and his technology partners.

Reaching out helped to progress and even accelerate letting go of ideas by lubricating the tightly intertwined affective-cognitive processing creators needed to engage in to rebuild their assumptions. First, reaching out began to shift entrepreneurs' energy away from less productive rumination about their worry over the idea and providing new strategies for coping with their distress. John [GymForUs] described the process as:

> "…it was just chipping away of pain, was the real reality of it, was chipping away pain. Then, I went to this space, I spoke to lots of people there … and they just helped me usher my mind forward, I spoke to a guy called Remi from a company called Trail who was, like, a genius, he just, again, pushed my thinking along and helped me … Because, when I got to this logic of, 'we're going to run these marketing sprints', it was because I had spoken to Remi, so that was probably the biggest catalyst." [John, GymForUs, interview]

The quotation also illustrates that reaching out thus gave creators new ideas or information for revising and rebuilding their ideas. Through that process, creators could construct a new understanding about the idea. After these new interactions, creators came to see ways to take "a different direction" [Liam, Holiday Helper] or "another way" to create something [John, Gym4Us]. Walter [BaysWater] described how after a "significant conversation… where they

said they were doing exactly the same thing as us...forced us to take a different direction. And I

think we've found one, we found kind of a good compromise in that we're taking a very different

direction and have actually developed a really interesting idea…" Thus, new interactions helped

to reveal or prompt new perspectives on creators' ideas through which they rebuilt cognitive

understanding. Reaching out also provided creators with social support that helped to reduce

negative emotion. Sean [The Bucket List] described how he felt comforted by his discussions

with another early stage entrepreneur: "I've been talking a lot with Agaba, who started fairly

recently as well… and he's been a solo founder his whole time and he's just given me almost

like the validation that you can do it on your own, and taken away the sort of fear…" Similarly,

John [GymForUs] described how speaking to Hosea, who "had to change directions radically,

previously" and others helped him to overcome his existential crisis and radically re-orient the

business. Our LIWC coding shows that entrepreneurs' emotional expressions became more

positive during this phase.

An alternative strategy was *reaching in*. Reaching in involved reflecting on the core idea

and its purpose with a cohesive group of peers and advisors who had insight into the idea's core

mission or purpose. It entailed "closing the circle" around the venture, sometimes alone and

other times with a close group who deeply understood the core founding mission. Entrepreneurs

tended to engage in reaching in when they had received trigger feedback to let go of an important

aspect of their current venture idea and experienced existential awakening through which their

assumptions opened up to new possibilities. As Ryan [Doorstep Radish] described, reappraisal

occurred as he questioned his values and the legacy of his business along with his team:

> "I think from a lot of introspection as in asking ourselves what we wanted to achieve,
> what will tick our boxes a couple of years down if we look back and say this is what we
> achieved. Is it going to be we've sold 10,000 monthly Wonky Veg Boxes to our
> customers? Is that what we want to do? Or is it, we work with fifty to a hundred farmers,

we've saved 25 tons from food waste, we are truly sticking to our values, we're a zero waste company, what are the aspects that will make us happy as a team?" [Ryan, Doorstep Radish, interview]

Thus, revisiting core values provided a framework for entrepreneurs to make sense of their idea in light of feedback about their mission. Similarly, Meg [SuperCharge] explained how a conversation with her friend gave her courage to rethink her idea:

"... the conversation on Tuesday… It was the combination of the Why workshop and then this conversation with my friend Julia that, in a way, kind of, gave me the courage to start to rethink about it as the thing that I really want to do which is actually a non-commercial movement ... Well, this conversation on Tuesday obviously is a bit of a game changer." [Meg, SuperCharge, interview]

The examples illustrate that reaching in also involved others, but the aim was not to diversify information, but rather help entrepreneurs reflect on their core mission and values.

Reaching in helped creators reappraise and build new understandings of their idea. This often involved developing a new view of success for an idea, integrating a business model with often a social goal. This is evident for Ryan [Doorstep Radish] as described above—he elaborated his concept that being a social venture would mean solving a problem and searching for a different kind of investor. While introspecting about how to make the venture stay true to its social impact mission, Ryan was also keenly aware of the need to balance the financial imperatives of the venture with the social impact. The process of reaching in allowed him to rebuild a new model of his venture, which includes building relationships with many other actors and a fluid understanding of who the customers are:

"…it was clear in our mind that selling 10,000 boxes wasn't going to help, that is just a metric… but that is not the goal. The goal needs to be what we set out to do… which means that tomorrow, the Wonky Veg Box might not be the only solution. So we are building supply chains with farmers… with customers… We have connections with journalists and so on…" [Ryan, Doorstep Radish, interview]

Meg [SuperCharge] similarly explained how her idea for SuperCharge was evolving to create a new model that allowed the venture to go back to its core mission: it was now "less like a coaching [for profit] company and more … like a movement …" that could promote a cultural shift. Interactions with trusted others opened up these possibilities and provided impetus for moving them forward.

Resolution. As creators reappraised their ideas, they came to make sense of and repair their cognitive and emotional upheaval. Resolution was a creative process of rebuilding cognitive understanding accompanied by emotional repair. That process resulted in a significant shift in the direction of an idea, in effect jolting the idea onto a new path, while discarding other aspects of the idea. This does not imply that the new path was necessarily more novel or more useful than the original idea. For instance, Walter [BaysWater] developed a more unique and nuanced technical solution after discovering that his original idea was already being done by an established organization. Resolution thus took him farther away from what existed and therefore made the idea more novel. In other cases, shifts adopted strategies that made ideas more practical and useful. From our data, we cannot be certain about the direction of those changes. However, a key insight from our analysis was that in resolution, creators substantively discarded the original idea and shifted onto a new path, thus diverging in significant ways from their original idea. Reaching a conclusion about the new direction brought the jolt episode to a close.

We observed two different ways that ideas transformed as jolt episodes resolved. Both entailed discarding a substantial aspect of the original idea, and both were generative in that they involved the emergence of a new, divergent idea. *Re-creation* involved responding to trigger feedback about the idea by letting go of the original idea and developing and embracing an emerging new idea, such as a new business model or a new product. Re-creation was therefore

characterized by a fundamental change in the nature of the idea. New ideas in re-creation tended

to follow from a process of reaching out, through which creators came to more deeply

understand problems with their own ventures relative to the market, and gather information about

potential new alternatives. As Walter [BaysWater] described the shift in his idea following the

realisation that his value proposition was very similar to what another large institution was

already offering: "…it's basically like starting up the business all over again..…it's the same

organisation ostensibly but it's actually taking a different path… if I hadn't had that conversation

with ABC University, yes, we would have done things very differently." Sean [The Bucket List]

initially decided to "scale (the business) back, spend less time on it, see if it grows itself once the

new tech development's been implemented in a couple of weeks, and then react accordingly

once we've got a bit more data on whether or not it can grow like that", letting go of some

aspects of the business. He then began to craft new interpretations of the idea and elements of the

business model, which he used to develop future scenarios of financial performance of the

business. Interestingly, at this stage, Sean diverged by producing multiple options for the

venture's future. For example, he described the "new value proposition" as being that "you go

onto the website, you ask a question, and then within four hours you have three answers from

three different people around the world who've…actually done it." Then, he generated an idea

based on combining a bartering business (he had discussed with a mentor) with a new venture he

encountered called Soapbox, so that The Bucket List could use bartering to allow people to buy

cheap flights. At the same time, Sean substantially automated his current operations. In

combination, these steps represented a radical shift away from the original venture idea, after

reconstructing the understanding of the idea following the breakdown of assumptions. Re-

creation was accompanied by a sense of contentment with creators' evolving ideas. For example,

Liam [Holiday Helper] described beginning to feel more content as a new direction of partnering

with international development experts emerged for his idea:

> "We've taken a different direction with it now. I feel right good about it… I've decided
> to do this [change] over about the period of the next 18 months, to get some cofounders
> on board to try and take a bit of a step back at the moment, which is, yes, I think it's
> definitely the best decision." [Liam, Holiday Helper, interview]

This contentment was also coupled with validation from mentors and investors; for example,

Sean [The Bucket List] recorded a conversation with investors supporting and expressing interest

in investing in the new business model, in the mobile app.

Restoration, in contrast, involved responding to perceived threats to the venture by letting

go of specific aspects of the venture idea in order to take the venture back to its original core

mission. It was therefore a generative process in which creators found a new idea for achieving

their original core mission, in a sense reframing the problem. In restoration, creators discarded

significant aspects of ideas that they had often committed to and invested in. For instance,

Doorstep Radish went through an extended period of focusing on sales; but, in resolution, Ryan

returned to the core mission of the venture as a social enterprise, forsaking the sales that had led

to the business' success. In particular, Ryan took three actions: he moved away from a sales

driven approach, noting that "I don't think our legacy can be measured by the sales we achieve";

he shifted the focus from finding standard market investors to "investment from social investors

who appreciate our story, understand who we are and what we're trying to do"; and he decided to

focus on brand building and measuring impact and focus on his original purpose, noting in an

interview that "The goal needs to be what we set out to do which was have a social enterprise

that does something for the greater good and solves a problem". In combination, these actions

provided a radical shift in the idea journey for Doorstep Radish. The actions were dramatic in

that they constituted a move away from strategies that had made the venture successful up to that

point—focusing on sales and pursuing standard market investors. Yet, they also restored the idea

to its original form. Similarly, Meg moved SuperCharge from a B2C to a B2B strategy,

discarding that fundamental aspect of her business strategy of focusing directly on consumers in

order to achieve her core mission of triggering a cultural shift. Both re-creation and restoration

therefore involved letting go of something fundamental to the idea, and replacing it with a new

idea or restoring an original mission.

The initial tentative steps to revise ideas that began in resolution led to feelings of

emotional repair. For example, Sean [The Bucket List], decided to discontinue the troubled

relationship with his co-founder, and began to partially disengage from The Bucket List venture

and consider other venture ideas. This began to repair his emotional state:

> "…it got to the point where it's kind of unhealthy, the amount of time I was spending on
> it…which means that I'll have a lot more time to hopefully explore other things that I can
> do, and also just become a bit more of a normal person again and do a bit more normal
> things." [Sean, The Bucket List, interview]

Similarly, in a mobile app entry, Walter described "healing old wounds". Entrepreneurs also

built more positive emotions during this stage, as Ryan [Doorstep Radish] described figuring out

what would make them happy and Meg [SuperCharge] described the process of rethinking her

ideas as "fascinating". Our LIWC coding revealed that emotional expressions became more

positive, with increasing relief, hope and happiness at this stage.

DISCUSSION

Creative revision has been described as a positive developmental process through which

ideas progress. That reflects the priority of idea generation over other creative activities in the

current literature (George, 2007). Our study shone a light on the destructive counterpart of

generation, recognizing that in order for new ideas to develop, creators sometimes need to let

existing ideas go. Although the destructive side of creativity has long been acknowledged, the

way in which it unfolds through creative revision has not been laid bare in the literature.

We discovered that creators relinquished their ideas during creative jolt

episodes—distinct periods of cognitive and emotional disruption during creative revision that

resulted in shifts to the trajectories of ideas. This pattern is surprising for two reasons. First, prior

research emphasizes how difficult it can be for creators to escape rigidity and cognitive fixation

on their own ideas and prototypes (Cronin & Loewenstein, 2018; Crilly, 2018). Indeed, creators

can become deeply attached to ideas that become enmeshed with their identities, which is why

creators often respond to challenging feedback with denial, rather than incorporating it (e.g.,

Grimes, 2018; Baer & Brown, 2012). In contrast, we found that creators let go of substantial

parts of their original ideas during jolt episodes. Second, research on the creative process tends to

show ideas undergoing incremental changes as they become more elaborate, nuanced and

concrete over time (e.g., Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Kirtley & O'Mahony, 2020). It is

challenging to move ideas forward in more dramatic ways, requiring greater risk-taking and

resources (Madjar, Greenberg, & Chen, 2011). Yet, we found that jolt episodes abruptly pushed

creative work in substantially new, even radical, directions.

Our study therefore suggests that radical new ideas can emerge through the generative

aftermath of destructive feedback. Below, we draw on prior research on jolts, shocks, trauma,

and disruption (e.g., Lee & Mitchell, 1994; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985; Tasselli et al., 2018) to

develop theory about how creative jolts loosened creators' attachment to original ideas, enabling

them to let go of ideas and providing an opening for the emergence of radically new ideas. We

then elaborate how this model reveals new directions for research into constructing openings for

ideas, shifting attention away from ideas themselves and towards the spaces that exist around them.

Towards a Model of Creative Jolts: How New Ideas Develop Through Letting Go

Creative jolts are triggered when creators interpret feedback as questioning and threatening the viability of their ideas. We theorize that jolts helped creators loosen their attachment to ideas by breaking down their so-called assumptive worlds, or "strongly held set(s) of assumptions about the world and the self which is confidently maintained and used as a means of recognizing, planning and acting" (Parkes, 1975:132, cited in Janoff-Bulman, 1989:114). The assumptive world that creators build up around their core creative idea—especially one that their identity and livelihood relies upon—is based on conviction that their idea is valuable and their efforts worthwhile. Threatening the idea breaks down the assumptive world underpinning it, making it impossible for a creator to continue as before and initiating a process of letting go of one set of deeply held assumptions. This parallels research on life-threatening cancer diagnoses (Brennan, 2011) and bereavement (Neimeyer & Sands, 2011), which show that such events present a person with an incontrovertible truth that is incompatible with an existing assumptive world, such that new information must become accommodated in one's cognitive understanding. Similarly, disruptive experiences like moving country (Oberg, 1960; Maddux & Galinsky, 2009) break down ways of understanding the world. Our study shows how creators come to treat trigger feedback episodes like "life-threatening diagnoses" for their idea, creating an existential crisis in which old ways of thinking are destroyed.

We further propose that this leaves creators with a gap in meaning to be filled, generating an opening for a new idea to enter and emerge. When deeply held assumptions are threatened, people experience cognitive and emotional upheaval (Brennan, 2001). The desire for cognitive coherence and psychological wellbeing (Josheph, Murphy, & Regel, 2012) provides motivation

to search for new meaning. We observed two alternative paths through which this occurred. In existential dread, negative affect produced emotional discomfort that creators were motivated to resolve through cognitive effort (Roskes, De Dreu, & Nijstad, 2012); in existential awakening, emotional ambivalence created a sense of dissonance that creators may be motivated to understand or reconcile, often by expanding their cognitive structures (Fong, 2006; Huang & Ganlinsky, 2011).

We suggest that the search for meaning then prompts social interaction through a sensemaking process (Weick, 1993). Cognitive upheaval demands the reconstruction of the assumptive world from the ground up; a creator cannot find a resolution simply by believing more confidently in the success of an idea, because that core assumptions has been credibly undermined. We also observed two paths through which that occurred. Reaching out may have connected creators to new information and ideas, prompting greater divergent thinking (Guilford, 1950; Campbell, 1960); reaching in may have helped creators to reconstruct the fragments of their assumptive worlds into a new understanding through integration or synthesis (Koestler, 1964; Harvey, 2014). Those processes enabled creators to use the jolts to redirect their idea, much like trauma victims go on to reconstruct their assumptions about themselves and the world after an initial period of tumult.

Our model implies that, for a creative jolt to occur, creators must have previously constructed a coherent, relatively consolidated assumptive world around a core idea. Correspondingly, we propose that jolt episodes require creators to experience strong commitment to an idea, having invested their time, energy, and reputation in its development (e.g., Grimes, 2019). Creative revision may enhance this dynamic; when creators reach out to others who provide feedback on the quality of ideas can lead to an impression of repeated confirmation

about the value of an emerging idea by relevant others over months or even years. The longer

and more consistent the string of confirmations, the stronger the creator's conviction in the

potential of a creative idea in its current form and the greater the shock of a credible

disconfirmation (Parkes, 1975). Although any feedback may be perceived as threatening and

rejected by creators, we also speculate that a shock reaction is more likely when feedback comes

from a credible source, such as trusted or high-status mentor; when it is framed as focusing on

stripping away elements of an idea (i.e., is subtractive) rather than as a positive step for moving

forward (Baer & Brown, 2012); and when it addresses a core aspect of the idea.

Contributions of the Model

Our model reveals a previously unconceptualized aspect of how radical ideas develop

during creative revision: the destructive process of letting go, which opens up space for new

ideas. Thus, ideas alone are not enough. This insight suggests shifting research attention from the

decades of study devoted to understanding how new ideas are generated and selected (George,

2007; Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017; Zhou et al., 2019), to a new stream of work on the

processes through which openings for new ideas are constructed.

Prior research has recognized the importance of the space around ideas. For instance,

entrepreneurial opportunity research (Baron & Ensley, 2006; Alvarez & Barney, 2007)

emphasizes that entrepreneurs must "abandon existing means-ends frameworks and develop

entirely new frameworks" (Renko, Shrader, & Schneider, 2012: 1241) to recognize

entrepreneurial opportunities; innovation research suggests that science provides a map that

guides search processes and shapes what combinations creators attend to (Fleming & Sorenson,

2004); and creativity research reveals the importance of problem construction to the generation

of new ideas (Mumford & Reiter-Palmon, 1994). Yet, prior work has rarely studied the processes

through which those factors provide new openings for ideas.

Our work reveals three insights into the process of opening up space for ideas through jolts, opening up new questions for future research. First, because opening up space involves dissolving extant ideas, it is destructive in nature and likely to be experienced negatively by creators. Prior work implies that creativity is typically a positive and enjoyable process linked to intrinsic motivation and positive affect (e.g. Amabile et al., 2005; De Dreu, Baas, & Nijstad, 2008; Perry-Smith & Coff, 2011). Yet, autonomous creators like entrepreneurs sometimes experience an emotional rollercoaster (De Cock et al, 2020). Our work reveals that those periods of emotional upheaval are critical to letting old ideas go and motivating the search through which new ideas emerge. Further research is needed to more completely map the emotional journeys of creators and explore the way that emotional upheaval in particular is prompted. It may be that different creators or those in different contexts experience different patterns of emotion leading to creative jolts. For instance, in an organizational context, rejection from managers may be anticipated at early stages of the creative process, but jolts may occur if support is withdrawn after a project has been greenlighted and developed. Future studies may explore other patterns through which creative jolts occur.

A second insight of our work is that, in order to develop radical new ideas, creators paradoxically need substantial commitment and relative rigidity in the assumptive world around their ideas. Past research has viewed unyielding commitment to ideas as problematic (e.g., Dunker, 1945), heralding openness and cognitive flexibility as key creative skills (Baas et al; 2013); alternatively, it has portrayed commitment and persistence as necessary for the full development of ideas, especially in the face of rejection (Mueller et al., 2017; Mooradian et al., 2016). Our work suggests that commitment to an idea may help form constraints that can then be challenged and shaken, opening up space for new ideas and pushing idea journeys forward.

These insights introduce new questions about the nature of the assumptive worlds constructed by autonomous and other types of creators—what are their fundamental beliefs and which are most important to forming and sustaining an assumptive world? Further research may also probe how creators can emotionally prepare for the destruction of those worlds.

Finally, our work builds on a growing recognition about the inherent dependencies between ideas (cf Harvey & Berry, 2022; Hua et al., 2022). Our study shows that the roots of a new idea grow from the remains of old ideas, so where an idea begins and ends cannot be easily disentangled, even when ideas have taken dramatic turns along the idea journey. Moreover, those ideas are not connected through the steps one's mind skips along a divergent thinking path; they are connected because ideas that are let go define the opening into which new ideas can emerge. Further research is needed to understand in more depth how original ideas in different forms or at different stages may shape the space for new ideas.

Boundaries and Future Research Directions

Consistent with prior research, we observed that creators had a broader set of responses to negative feedback, including ignoring it or incorporating it through incremental changes. However, we did not examine those responses in detail because our theoretical focus and therefore analysis was on cases where creators let go of ideas. We cannot know from our data whether letting go of ideas improved outcomes for creators; it is possible that creators' original ideas were high in quality and could have been successful had creators persisted with them. Further work may explore whether and when the process of letting go of ideas is more or less successful.

Our analysis further revealed that interactions with credible others could initiate jolt episodes. Jolts may come from a variety of sources; for instance, the Covid-19 crisis has likely been perceived as threatening to many new ideas and ventures. However, because our study was

situated in the context of creative revision, we observed triggers that occurred at early stages of

development, when feedback is likely to surface substantial challenges. Future research should

explore other sources of jolts. An intriguing possibility is whether jolts can arise through positive

triggers and unfold through positive experiences. For instance, an autonomous creator may

experience a positive jolt if a mentor seizes on an idea that had been dismissed as having

breakthrough potential, bringing a "dead" idea back to life.

A further boundary is that our study is based on autonomous creators. Jolts may be more

prevalent amongst autonomous creators because their identities and livelihoods are closely

intertwined with their ideas. However, there are many instances across organizational settings,

such as R&D teams and project-based work, where ideas are pitched and may be rejected that

may produce similar dynamics (cf Fisher et al., 2018; Mainemelis, 2010). Our analysis also

focused on individual creators or the co-founder who was the primary creator of an idea. It may

be that teams would experience a collective jolt, or that individual members would experience an

interaction in different ways, triggering a jolt for one but not others. Our data do not allow us to

elaborate how jolts may unfold at a collective level. However, because we uncovered reaching

out or reaching in as ways that creators reappraised ideas, others who are deeply involved with

an idea are likely to shape responses of the creator. Future research may further explore such

dynamics.

Conclusion

Our study captures the rollercoaster experienced by autonomous creators as they let go of

ideas so that new ones can emerge. We show how letting go of ideas is accompanied by a period

of heightened emotion and cognitive upheaval and introduce the term creative jolts to describe

such periods. Creative jolts disrupt the life of an idea, shifting it onto a fundamentally new path.

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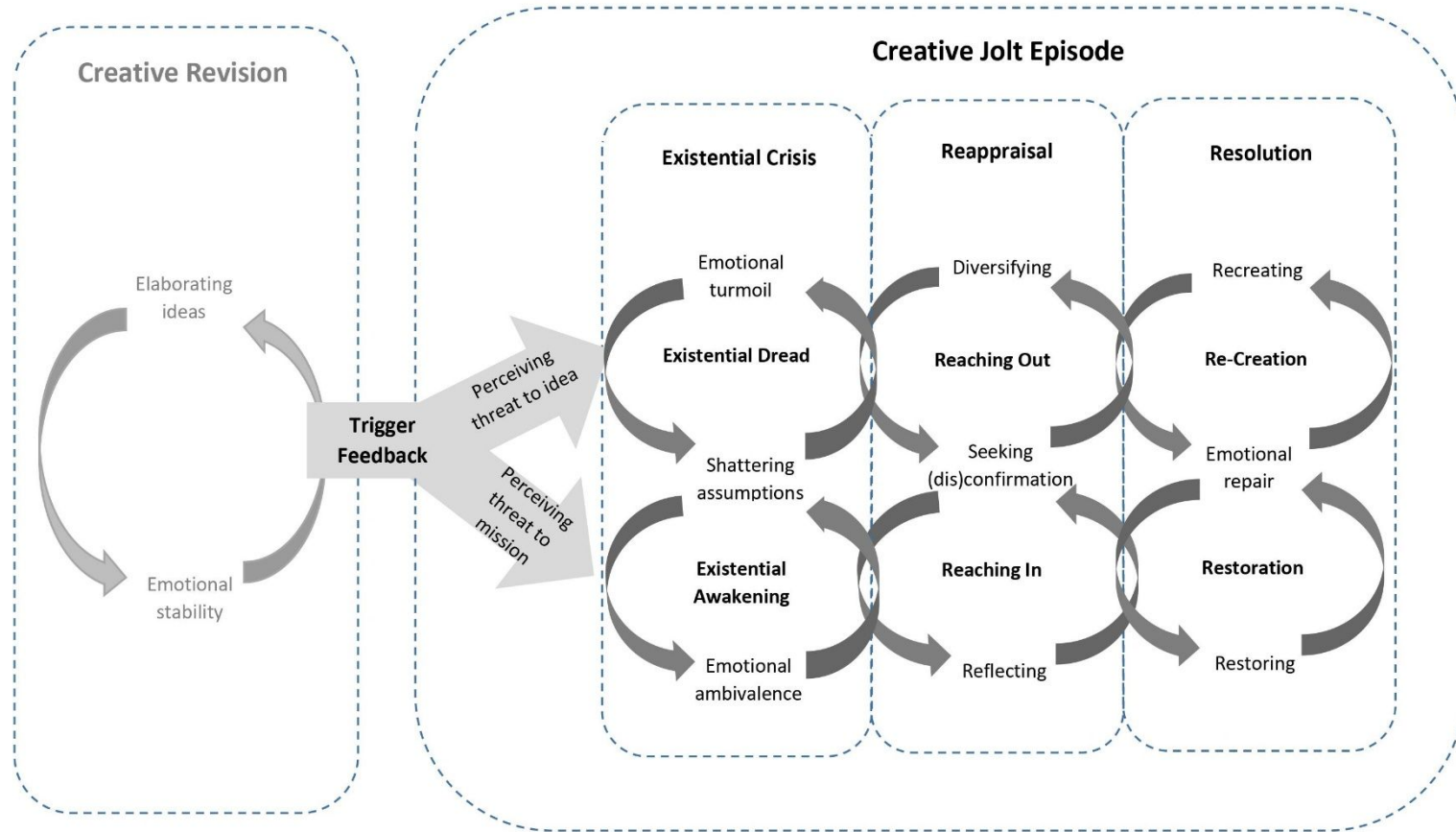
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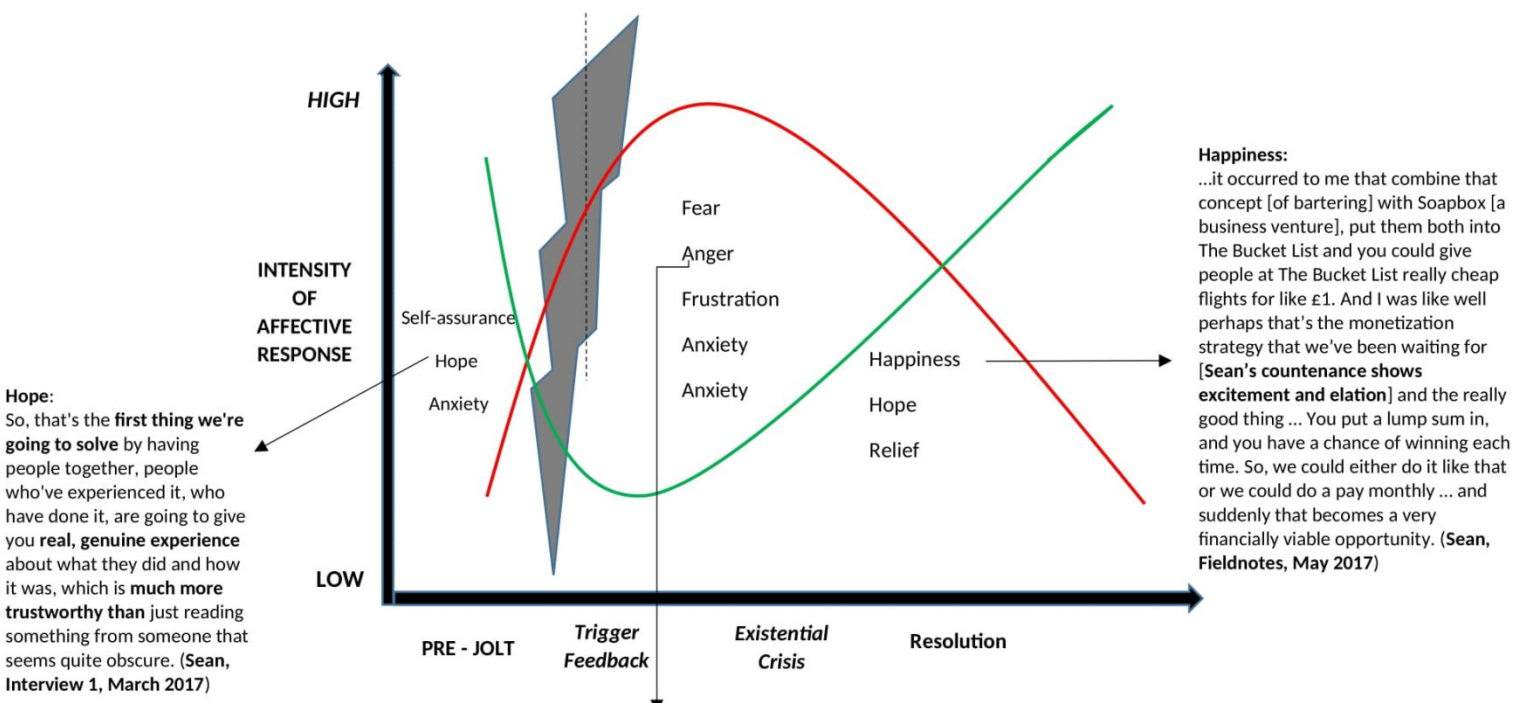32
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FIGURE 1: Overview of Creative Jolt Episode

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FIGURE 2: A stylistic representation of affective intensity within creative jolt episodes
(Negative Emotions – Red Line; Positive Emotions – Green Line)

Hope:
So, that's the **first thing we're going to solve** by having people together, people who've experienced it, who have done it, are going to give you **real, genuine experience** about what they did and how it was, which is **much more trustworthy than** just reading something from someone that seems quite obscure. (**Sean, Interview 1, March 2017**)

Happiness:
…it occurred to me that combine that concept [of bartering] with Soapbox [a business venture], put them both into The Bucket List and you could give people at The Bucket List really cheap flights for like £1. And I was like well perhaps that's the monetization strategy that we've been waiting for [**Sean's countenance shows excitement and elation**] and the really good thing … You put a lump sum in, and you have a chance of winning each time. So, we could either do it like that or we could do a pay monthly … and suddenly that becomes a very financially viable opportunity. (**Sean, Fieldnotes, May 2017**)

Anger and Frustration:
It's been like a **really grim month to be honest. It's been really stressful** … The thing that's really weird for me is that I've had so many conversations with so many intelligent people … **and like no one said this! Do you know what I mean?** So weird and then I had one conversation with Craig … and he was like yeah, you're never gonna make money from it. **… How could no one pick this up sooner? I was having such a crisis last month when I realised this.** … because if we need to scale this back and we know it's a much longer play to make some money from it, then how are we gonna get there? And I still don't know what the answer is to that yet … (**Sean, Fieldnotes, May 2017**)

TABLE 1A: Description of Sample Entrepreneurs who experienced creative jolts

Characteristics	The Bucket list	GymForUs	Bayswater	SuperCharge	Holiday Helper	Doorstep Radish
Industry Domain	Online travel and adventure platform	Physical fitness	Online education for students in displaced communities	Workplace health and wellbeing	Online fundraising app for social projects	Online fruit and vegetable delivery scheme
Founding Team	Team of two	Team of two	Single entrepreneur	Single entrepreneur	Single entrepreneur	Team of two
Founding Context	Opportunity developed from personal experience. Challenges experienced during process of planning and organising bag-packing trip across Europe, turned into an opportunity.	Opportunity developed from personal experience. Motivation to consistently engage in physical training generated from having a partner to train with.	Opportunity inherited. Opportunity developed from workshop on the use of peer-to-peer technology for humanitarian aid.	Opportunity identified from personal experience with customers. Identified a need for easy self-managing techniques that can be practiced in workplace settings.	Opportunity developed from personal experience. Opportunity developed from personal interest in combining adventurous travel with voluntary projects.	Opportunity developed from personal experience. Opportunity developed from identifying trade-off between the taste and aesthetics of fresh fruits and vegetables.
Initial Funding and other resource support	Mentors, friends, family and Private investors	Accelerator programme	Grant funding	Self-funded	Self-funded, Corporate partners	Self-funded
Entrepreneur Background (Informant)	Events and marketing (temporary role)	Recruitment (temporary role)	Humanitarian aid	Freelance voice coaching	Social enterprise and international development	Investment banking
Number of interviews	10 (7 personal + 3 phone)	8 (6 personal + 2 phone)	10 (7 personal + 3 phone)	10 (6 personal + 4 phone)	6 (4 personal + 2 phone)	7 (7 personal)
Interview period and months	March 2017 - December 2017	May 2017 - November 2017	December 2016 - December 2017	May 2017 - December 2017	May 2017 - October 2017	January 2017 - December 2017

TABLE 1B   Description of Sample Entrepreneurs who did not experience creative jolts

Characteristics	Digital Lemon	Jack and Gill	Zelda	Healthy mind Coach	Mile High Jewellery	Ginger Bread organic cosmetics
Industry Domain	Online event ticketing platform	Math education	Adult lifelong learning curator	Transformational coach	Jewellery	Cosmetics
Founding Team	Team of two	Single entrepreneur	Team of two	Single entrepreneur	Single entrepreneur	Single entrepreneur
Founding Context	Opportunity developed from prior experience working for established ticketing firm	Opportunity developed from personal experience tutoring home-educating children	Opportunity developed from personal experience of not being able to find desired niche Masters programme	Opportunity identified from personal experience with psychoanalysis	Opportunity developed from hobby.	Opportunity developed from personal experience with having sensitive skin and unable to find suitable products.
Initial Funding and other resource support	Self-funded	Self-funded	Self-funded	Self-funded	Self-funded	Self-funded
Entrepreneur Background (Informant)	Product Manager (Ticketing systems)	Math tutor	Design and learning	Psychology degree	Science communication	Aromatherapy and cosmetology degrees
Number of interviews	14 (8 personal + 6 phone)	13 (8 personal + 5 phone)	13 (8 personal + 5 phone)	12 (8 personal + 4 phone)	13 (8 personal + 5 phone)	11 (8 personal + 3 phone)
Data collection period	December 2016 - December 2017	January 2017 - December 2017	December 2016 - December 2017	January 2017 - December 2017	January 2017 - December 2017	January 2017 - December 2017

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TABLE 2: Description of Empirical Data on Creative Jolt Episodes

	Initial venture idea	Trigger feedback	Existential crisis	Reappraisal	Resolution	'New' venture idea
1. The Bucket list	Online platform to help people tick off their bucket list items (e.g. skydiving or learning French) by connecting a user who wants to undertake an activity (receiver) with other users who can offer that service (giver)	*Perceived Threat to Idea* Meeting with an investor/advisor – highly critical feedback suggesting that the business model is faulty and financially unviable.	*Existential Dread* Trigger feedback led to a period of intense negative emotions; Angry and frustrated that such obvious business model flaws were not pointed out by others; acknowledges the toxic relationship with the co-founder and the unhealthy lifestyle he is leading;	*Reaching Out* Reassessment of the current business model; considers including more automation; considers other venture ideas, e.g. working with independent musicians; meetings with many solo entrepreneurs and established small entrepreneurs; received substantial positive validation about initial setback and new ideas	*Re-Creation* Partially dis-engaged from the venture;; had positive interactions with other solo founders; contemplated other business ideas and opportunities, including a new raffle based business model	Monthly subscription to access travel and holiday discounts, and entry into a prize draw.
2. GymForUs	Mobile application to connect gym users - "gym buddies" – allowing them sustain routines and avoid boredom and lack of motivation.	*Perceived Threat to Idea* Meeting with a trusted mentor to discuss the funding pitch. Mentor directly challenged the viability of idea and asked the founder to first prove his business model.	*Existential Dread* Trigger feedback led to an initial period of intense feeling of failure, sadness and depression; Entrepreneur realized that the current idea is not going to be successful	*Reaching Out* search for alternatives to fix the model; meetings with users, which suggested that model didn't work for them; tried to take a non-emotional view; acknowledges that he can't fake it and needs to fix the problems.	*Re-Creation* Concluded that the venture idea was impractical and unlikely to scale up; decided to change the business model from connecting gym buddies to connecting users with personal trainers and providing studio spaces for the work-out sessions.	Online platform that connects gym users to available personal trainers.

3. Bays Water	Distance higher education provider for students from displaced refugee communities in the Middle East.	*Perceived Threat to Idea* Meeting with officials at the Global Engagement department at a top UK university; he was informed that the university was delivering exactly what he was proposing; his value proposition was not unique	*Existential Dread* Trigger feedback led to the realization that he was facing an existential threat, might have to close down the venture, as it was a small non-profit competing with a large established academic institution and donors might stop funding as they might consider his venture redundant; felt intimidated and frustrated	*Reaching Out* Reconsiders venture's strengths, resources and capabilities; extensive discussions with technical support and donors regarding a more nuanced technologically mediated targeting model, by focussing on both refugee students and academics;	*Re-Creation* Concluded that it was foolhardy to compete against, larger well-resourced organization; decided to focus on one refugee context – Syrian refugees in Turkey; decides to focus on how refugee students and academics can be connected, with his organization providing relevant support	Provide academic and psychosocial support to refugee students through online platform that connects students with peers and refugee academics.
4. Holiday helper	Online fund-raising platform to help tourists donate funds to local charities (in typically poor countries).	*Perceived Threat to the mission* Extremely challenging feedback from international development expert and former university supervisor; the feedback questioned his basic understanding of the complexity of the issues and negative unintended consequences of his venture idea	*Existential Awakening* Trigger feedback led to an initial period of demotivation and depression; especially the comment that he may end up doing more harm than good (defeating the very purpose of his venture idea)	*Reaching In* Appreciates the critical feedback; deep introspection about the core values and aims of his proposed venture; come to terms with the fact that he lacks understanding of ground level complexities	*Restoration* Considers alternative ways through which the core venture mission can be served, such as, "handing over" the venture idea to a corporate CSR department; decides to take a break from the venture and reconsider future options later	Venture scaled back – put on hold
5. Super-Charge	Corporate self-management, mindfulness and well-being coach.	*Perceived Threat to mission* Interaction with a supportive	*Existential Awakening* These two conversations led to	*Reaching In* Acknowledgement of how important the questions raised	*Restoration* Considers away from the pressure driven aim to find more clients who	Self-management and well-being coach; Shift

		mentor/friend, who directly challenged her fear of failure; followed by a workshop conversation the same day about *why* she was pursuing the venture idea	"open ended existential questioning"; helped her to see beyond fear of failure and the courage to rediscover he mission, a non-commercial movement to change the way people work.	during the trigger feedback were; Considered various ways through which to achieve the core mission	want to improve communications skills and instead focus on organizational well-being, which may allow for better impact.	from B2C to B2B business model
6. **Doorstep Radish – Episode 1**	Wonky/misshapen fruit and vegetable delivery (to reduce waste)	*Perceived Threat to Idea* Conversation with his mother, wherein she asks when he is going to turn a profit and stop living off his wife's income	*Existential Dread* Felt strong sense of pressure and frustration; worried about the venture not growing fast enough and begins to believe he needs to be more aggressive	*Reaching Out* Narrowing of perspective; considers ways through which venture can be scaled up; rethinks social value proposition as not being enough of a differentiation;	*Re-Creation* Shift of focus from reducing waste to accelerating sales growth by delivering more vegetable boxes	Fruit and vegetable box delivery
7. **Doorstep Radish – Episode 2**	Fruit and vegetable box delivery	*Perceived Threat to mission* Meeting with an mentor-enabler in which he is challenged on what he wants to be known for; followed by meeting with a loyal customer, who is cares about avoiding food waste.	*Existential Awakening* Initial sense of unease; deep introspection about what the venture mission was and what he has achieved till now	*Reaching In* Rues about overemphasis on sales; realization that he doesn't want to be just a "veg box"	*Restoration* Goes back to the original venture mission – reducing food waste; adds new elements to the venture, especially developing a network of suppliers and customers and creating a "brand" focussed on social value.	Wonky fruit and vegetable delivery service (social mission driven)

TABLE 3: Additional Evidence - Example Quotations
(See Appendix C for full list of example quotations)

Processes	Evidence
Shattering Assumptions	• …the opportunity we thought we had has changed a lot. We have a lot more understanding now. We realise that it's going to be a lot more difficult, a lot higher risk and a lot lower reward than we first thought'. (**Sean, Interview 2, May 2017**) • Spoke to a doctor who's heavily involved with responsible tourism. He's tried to do something like [Holiday Helper] before. It failed miserably and he wished me the best of luck and said that it has a high probability of failure … What I'm trying to achieve will be extremely challenging :) (**Liam, Mobile app entry, August 2017**)
Emotional Turmoil	• 'My reaction, I was on holiday, and I sat on it for a few days and then started composing a message back to her [Prof], to address all the points that she made. For my sake and for hers, for her to see that, actually, much more thought has gone into it than just giving her a broad overview and just saying, 'well, this is it'. … So, it was about explaining that. [Interviewer: To her.] Yes. And justifying it to myself (**Liam, Interview 4, October 2017**) • Raising this cash allows us to hire people. which will make the whole experience less painful...I'm constantly anxious that we're going to lose all of our customers and run out of cash - so having cash gives us runway and time… The big risk is if we decide not to raise the money and it doesn't work out between us as potential co-founders... it would have been a big waste of time. (**John, Mobile app entry, September 2017**)
Emotional Ambivalence	• That was frustrating because she was challenging me, it was not an information session, it was a challenging session … So frustration - turning into a realisation... (**Ryan, Interview 6, November 2017**) • Few days ago I got some really poignant encouragement from a client. I showed her my copy for [Better Voice Coaching] and she said I wasn't in it enough. And that it is me that is the product. That it's not the exercises I do, but how I do them with my personality. And really encouraged me to put myself at the heart of my copy and be more courageous and maverick with the language and design. (**Meg, Mobile app entry, September 2017**)
Seeking (dis)confirmation	• [Sean]: It's been like a really grim month to be honest. It's been really stressful … The thing that's really weird for me is that I've had so many conversations with so many intelligent people … and like no one said this! Do you know what I mean? So weird… And I still don't know what the answer is to that yet … [Toby]: I mean I'm not going to beat about the bush. I'm not the kind of person to do it… there's nothing you can do about it. [Sean]: it's kinda funny at this point cause [The Bucket List has] taken so many hits. Like this ship has taken so many hits and it's still just floating – just about. I don't know. It's not ideal. [Toby]: No. As I say there's nothing you can do... (**Field notes on meeting between Sean and Toby (close peer/entrepreneur) May 2017**) • We spoke about [SuperCharge] and the psychology around culture change. Helped to clarify the business model. Ended up drawing a big mind map on the How and Why of switch up … I am moving deeper into the Movement idea. (**Meg, Mobile app entry, October 2017**)
Diversifying	• Yes, so it's like ... the transition emerged from trying to ask ourselves, what are we actually offering, just motivation? How else can we motivate people? Who else can we motivate? It was like, okay, we've got PTs. (**John, Interview 1, May 2017**) • Spoke with one of our original investors about the new business model, he very much likes it and is interested in investing in it again ... Then emailed with … the other investor, he is also interested in investing again……..Then met with the tech guys … and told them about the idea that I might be splitting them out into two different businesses... They proposed the idea that they might want to take a more significant role…(**Sean, Mobile app entry, August 2017**)

Reflecting	• 'He forced me to accept that the original GymForUs may not work … maybe it's a fact, maybe, you can't make a business out of it… So, he just forced me to accept that I could be wrong, which when I then changed the company, that forced the behaviour in my psychology and the emotion of 'you could be wrong' and going through those motions, empowered me to then be able to say, 'okay, we could be wrong, I can treat this as a hypothesis and then try to prove the hypothesis as opposed to forcing my hypothesis into existence'. (**John, Interview 6, November 2017**)
	• It was an introspective conversation which brought out the reasons why I was frustrated with the lack of results. It helped me focus my attention on the biggest bang for buck actions necessary... (**Ryan, Mobile app entry, August 2017**)
Emotional Repair	• 'We've taken a different direction with it now. I feel right good about it. So, I just found, like, I'm very thinly stretched at the moment ... I've now taken on three different jobs to try and earn some money … I've decided to do this over about the period of the next 18 months, to get some cofounders on board to try and take a bit of a step back at the moment, which is, yes, I think it's definitely the best decision. I was getting to the stage where I was going to launch, but that's not going to happen at the moment ...' (**Liam, Interview 3, September 2017**)
	• It's really hard. But I am healing very old wounds and I am grateful for the opportunity. Conversation with donor: Their focus moving to cross-provider gaps/duplication/collaboration. Our recent recognition of potential duplication and subsequent pivot fits under their agenda and in line with their thinking. (**Walter, Mobile app entry, June 2017**)
Recreating	• '…it occurred to me that combine that concept [of bartering] with Soapbox [a business venture], put them both into The Bucket List and you could give people…really cheap flights for like £1. And I was like well perhaps that's the monetization strategy that we've been waiting for and the really good thing … You put a lump sum in, and you have a chance of winning each time… and suddenly that becomes a very financially viable opportunity.' (**Sean, Fieldnotes, May 2017**)
	• I met with the tech guys and discussed what we're going to do with [The Bucket List] - if I'm not working on it much, they want to do something with it. But that would mean investing more time and effort… Nothing has been decided, but I need to make a decision about how this plays out - do I give them more equity in the company so they can continue to build it? Or do I hold onto it so I can do something with it in the future? OR do we create a new duplicate company so that I still have the original company and they have the new one with higher equity - that way if it goes wrong, I still have the original business to revert back to. (**Sean, Mobile app entry, September 2017**)
Restoring	• So, we've come to the realisation that to do that, it's not enough just to focus on sales. We've got to show what we are doing to do good. The way to do that is to change our website, new marketing messages to be more … focused, get more stats as in like team packed mattresses, how many tons of food waste can we save? What the impact is on the environment that we've created and so on and so forth… how to reinvent our social enterprise as a brand. That is our focus right now and as a next step, once we've created those foundations and we're so we're including a video at the same time to show how [Doorstep Radish] works, we are going to add some suppliers' videos, customer videos, charity videos and things like that to expose what we're doing… (**Ryan, Interview 6, November 2017**)
	• Spoke about [SuperCharge] and whether to soft launch with b2b or b2c. It was after a small workshop on branding and we were reminded to return to "The Why" of the business. And mine is about culture shift. So a b2b model really makes more sense. And we discussed what failure would look like as that is something I feel is often blocking my progress. (**Meg, Mobile app entry, October 2017**)

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