

## HOW ORGANIZATIONS FOSTER THE CREATIVE USE OF RESOURCES

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Using a multi-year qualitative study, I explain how employees at a fast-growing retail organization used creative resourcing—that is, the manipulation and recombination of objects in novel and useful ways to solve problems. I induce two core organizational processes (autonomous resourcing and directed resourcing) that explain how organizations foster ongoing creative activities in response to different perceived resource endowments. In doing so, I add clarity to a mixed literature that argues on the one hand that limited resources foster creativity, and on the other, that abundant resources foster creativity. Instead, I reorient the questions that scholars ask by shifting the conversation away from variance-explanation models and towards understanding organizational processes, specifically around *how* employees use resources in dynamic ways and *how* managers enable them to do so. My study unpacks how the link between resources and creativity is rooted deeply in the actions of managers and employees embedded in organizations over time. In elaborating theory around these actions, I contribute to scholarly and practitioner understanding around how organizations foster creativity in a variety of resource environments.

**Apple, Limited Resources:** “Apple’s longstanding problem is that it hasn’t come up with enough innovative products . . . But a company that is shrinking as fast as Apple loses talent and research funds to develop those very innovations.” (Gomez, 1997: A3)

**Apple, Abundant Resources:** “With quarterly revenue growth of 83 percent and profit growth of 95 percent, we’re firing on all cylinders . . . We will continue to innovate on all fronts.” (Apple, 2011)

**Google, Limited Resources:** “As the database and user base grew, Brin and Page needed more computers. Short of cash, they saved money by buying parts, building their own machines, and scrounging around the loading dock looking for unclaimed computers.” (Vise & Malseed, 2008: 40)

**Google, Abundant Resources:** “Last month, Google was hailed as the third most innovative business in the world by US magazine *Fast Company*. But its size and structure can mean that creativity is stifled and employees become bored.” (*Marketing Week*, 2012)

Is necessity the mother of all creativity or do an abundance of resources lead to creative outputs? Scholars and practitioners have wrestled with this question for decades. The Apple and Google examples quoted—two organizations hailed as among the most creative and innovative in the world (Walters, 2008)—exemplify the contrasting views around the relationship between resources and creativity. The Apple quotes illustrate the view that limited resources impede creativity and abundant resources foster widespread creativity as an organization expands its access to resources. Conversely, the Google quotes exemplify how resource-poor organizations can become highly creative to survive as a new venture but may lose that creative edge as they grow and acquire more resources.

While resources are unquestionably important in shaping creative outputs, scholars too have presented contrasting viewpoints. On the one hand, some scholars suggest that more abundant resources are a prerequisite to creative action through the direct effect of providing individuals with what they need for creative action and through the symbolic effect of demonstrating an organization’s

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commitment to a project (e.g., Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996); furthermore, a firm's slack resources allow for learning and experimentation (Cohen & Levinthal, 1990). On the other hand, some scholars argue that limited resources foster creativity though enhancing task challenge (Ohly & Fritz, 2010). Scholars have also argued that external resource constraints can foster creative behaviors through generating urgency (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 2005). Conversely, better-endowed organizations may struggle with creativity because too many resources can lead to wasteful spending and a lack of urgency (Nohria & Gulati, 1996).

What makes adjudicating between these diverging perspectives on resources and creativity difficult is that scholars rarely study the creative activities of individuals embedded in organizations over time. Instead, they focus on either new organizations with limited resources (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 2005; Katila & Shane, 2005) or mature organizations with abundant resources (e.g., Brown & Duguid, 1991; Danneels, 2002; Hargadon & Bechky, 2006), but rarely on the transformation of these organizations as they evolve over time. As a result, scholars have limited knowledge about what explains ongoing creative activity (or its absence) as access to resources change—something exacerbated by scholars' surprisingly scant knowledge about the organizational processes of creativity (Ford, 1996). Instead, scholars have a strong bias towards theorizing creativity as an outcome or individual difference (Drazin, Glynn, & Kazanjian, 1999; Zhou & Shalley, 2010).

As I conducted research at a retail company transforming itself from a small, resource-constrained family business into a large public corporation, the competing perspectives on resources and creativity provided incomplete insights into my data. The organization, despite lacking resources in its infancy, engaged in widespread creative activities but also maintained these widespread creative activities as it grew substantially. As I canvassed creativity research to make sense of these findings, I found that extant studies rarely followed the historical evolution of an organization to understand how creative activities, and the resource mechanisms that foster them, unfold over time. Thus, I sought to add clarity to the competing perspectives in scholarly and practitioner work around the role of resources in fostering creativity by focusing on critical organizational processes that connect resources and creativity over time. I do so through a theory elaboration study that asks:

*How do resources shape creative activities inside organizations over time?* In addressing this question, I draw from and build on research in resourcing (e.g., Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012; Glynn & Wrobel, 2006), which theorizes resources as arising from malleable objects shaped by individuals. This perspective contrasts with how creativity scholars (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996), and other organizational theorists (e.g., Barney, 1991; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), have historically theorized resources as fixed entities. Instead of viewing a resource as having a single use, a resourcing perspective makes a critical distinction between an object (i.e., a tangible and intangible asset that employees must act on) and a resource (an object that has been acted on to make it useful) (Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012). While an object is anything with innate qualities that may make it useful, until individuals take action on those qualities the object does not fulfill its potential as a resource. In revising how scholars theorize resources in the context of creativity, I move the conversation in the literature away from simply examining the relationship between resource quantity and creativity; rather, I advance research around how actions shape and generate the very resources that both constitute and facilitate creative activities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars define "creativity" as the production of novel and useful ideas by individuals (Amabile, 1988). They explain creative activity using interactionist models that examine characteristics of the person and the situation (Shalley, Zhou, & Oldham, 2004), pointing to a host of individual traits such as personality (e.g., Gough, 1979) and cognitive style (e.g., Amabile, 1996), intrinsic motivation (e.g., Grant & Berry, 2011) and key situational factors such as job characteristics (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), leader-member exchange (Basu & Green, 1997) and rewards (Amabile, 1996). These researchers frequently adopt a variance-explanation approach in which they seek to explain creativity as an outcome based on these personal and situational factors. While this research accounts for situational variables, this focus is usually on the immediate situation as opposed to the broader organizational context (George, 2007; Sutton & Hargadon, 1996). Hargadon and Bechky (2006) offer one important exception, in which they examine ongoing creativity in a group and theorize that four

behavioral patterns—help seeking, help giving, collective reframing and reinforcing—foster group creativity. Nevertheless, existing creativity research focuses largely on individuals divorced from the larger group, let alone broader organizational contexts.

Diving into the relationship between resources and creativity, some scholars propose that abundant resources are necessary for creativity, and they define resources as everything an organization can access for creativity in a specific domain (Amabile, 1997; Amabile et al., 1996). It is important to note that this definition of resources does not focus on the importance of action in transforming objects into resources. Consequently, existing research emphasizes the fixed use of resources. Synthesizing previous research (e.g., Cohen & Levinthal, 1990; Farr & Ford, 1990), Amabile et al. (1996) argued that resources mitigate the chance of restrictions on what people can accomplish with their work and may influence individuals' beliefs about the intrinsic value of the project, although they found weak empirical results for this argument. Furthermore, scholars argue that a particular type of resource, namely slack resources, fosters creativity by allowing for experimentation, responding to uncertainty, and freeing management's attention to innovate (Cyert & March, 1963). Resources, especially capital, are critical to allow firms to be creative (Katila & Shane, 2005) and gain a sustainable advantage (Barney, 1991). Lacking in existing firm knowledge (e.g., Cohen & Levinthal, 1990) and resources (Teece, 1986), newer firms struggle to generate and implement creative ideas. According to these perspectives, an abundance of resources enables organizations to afford to make mistakes (Bourgeois, 1981) and provides key managerial attentional resources (Ocasio, 1997), both of which may support creative activities. Some scholars place an important boundary condition on this argument, arguing that too many slack resources may undermine creativity owing to wasteful spending on pet projects (Nohria & Gulati, 1996). But more generally, this research assumes that abundant resources provide managers with the cover to experiment and take risks. For example, scholars claim that leaders who provide slack resources (Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993), including information and expertise, enhance creativity among their employees (Mumford, Hunter, Eubanks, Bedell, & Murphy, 2007; Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Other research has empirically demonstrated support for this prediction, particularly around time (Andrews

& Smith, 1996; Elsbach & Hargadon, 2006; Kelly & McGrath, 1985; Madjar & Oldham, 2006). As a result, many scholars endorse the view that "creativity functions best in a resource-rich environment" (Marion, 2012: 473).

While many scholars have historically viewed abundant resources as a prerequisite for creative activity, other research offers a contrasting perspective, positing that limited resources foster creativity because resource-constrained organizations are nimbler (Kanter, 1985). Additionally, resource constraints can lead to an elevated sense of challenge that motivates creativity (Ohly & Fritz, 2010; cf. Baer & Oldham, 2006) and may suggest a crisis in performance, which creates urgency around creativity to allow firms to survive (Bolton, 1993). But these views obscure how individuals act on objects to turn them into resources, instead theorizing that resources primarily act on individuals (e.g., by elevating a sense of challenge or invoking a sense of a crisis).

Of the literature that examines creativity and resources, work on "bricolage" offers the most action-oriented theory (Baker, 2007; Baker & Nelson, 2005; Garud & Karnøe, 2003). Scholars define bricolage as "making do by applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities" (Baker & Nelson, 2005: 333; Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010). The literature often portrays bricolage as a last resort because organizations have resource constraints or, put in the language of a resourcing lens, they lack access to a large reservoir of objects to transform into resources. To cope with these limitations, individuals devise creative solutions by transforming into resources objects that others do not value (Baker, 2007).

While bricolage helps nascent firms survive, scholars claim that organizations must eventually reject widespread bricolage in order to grow into mature companies (Baker & Nelson, 2005; cf. Brown & Duguid, 1991). Otherwise, they run the risk of "stalled growth" and an inability to take advantage of profitable opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005: 354). This suggests that while limited resources (or, more precisely, limited access to objects) may foster creativity in an organization's infancy, creativity may dissipate as organizations grow and acquire access to more objects to transform into resources.

In summary, extant research offers a mixed picture about the quantity of resources and creativity, with either limited or abundant resources (i.e., objects) predicted to lead to creativity. One reason for this is that creativity scholars usually focus on in-

dividuals and overlook organizational processes that explain creativity (Ford, 1996). As a result, scholars emphasize static, variance-explanation approaches, rather than dynamic processes around how creativity unfolds over time (Drazin et al., 1999). In fact, scholars largely assume that creativity is a stable characteristic of a firm, dependent on size, structure and leadership (Bolton, 1993). By focusing on variance-explanation approaches, scholars have overlooked how resources are malleable and shaped by organizational processes and individuals' actions. Consequently, a greater emphasis on the development of process theory, and the crucial actions that undergird such processes, may offer an important complement to the variance-explanation research on creativity by identifying *how* organizations create and shape resources over time to foster creative activities.

## METHODS

### Case Selection

I employed a single-site case study design, which is common in examining processes that require in-depth data collection (Yin, 1994). I collected data from BoutiqueCo,<sup>1</sup> a fast-growing retailer that owns and operates stores in lifestyle centers, malls, and urban areas of the United States and sells products such as clothing, jewelry, accessories, and gift items to predominantly female customers. This research examined BoutiqueCo as it grew from a small, family business into a large, public chain of retail stores valued at approximately \$1 billion.

My initial research question focused on understanding how organizational cultures are transformed as a result of dramatic change. I initially selected BoutiqueCo because I learned it would likely go through major changes—particularly, rapid growth. I wondered how its culture, which emphasized creativity, might change because of this growth. While the organization's growth was atypical, I reasoned that this extreme case might help elaborate theory (Lee, Mitchell, & Sablinski, 1999) by compressing the time for growth and allowing a real-time investigation of it. I also received unusually strong access facilitated by a personal contact. This allowed me to build an information-rich case in a detailed but still realistic manner (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As my data collection and analysis unfolded, I was surprised to learn that creative acts persisted over time, but that the underlying processes to explain these acts differed (and were not necessarily related to culture). My data and analysis led me away from more stable views of culture and, instead, towards actions around the creative use of resources. In fact, two experiences during my observations proved critical in helping me reorient my research. First, at a field observation a team leader asked me to join her team and help open a new store. In reflecting on this experience, I was repurposed from a scholar to an employee, suggesting that employees treat resources (i.e., a scholarly observer) as malleable. Second, while working on a new store opening, I unexpectedly found myself engaging in actions I would later understand my informants to be doing. My field notes provide insight into a critical example when I was working with moldable jewelry:

I molded one bracelet and made it the fixture—that is, I hung the others on one piece so customers could see that, as I had molded one into a fixture, they could all be molded. I made two of these . . . [The team leader] remarked how creative the idea was. Again, this was something I, a researcher, invented and it was allowed to become part of the store. (Midwest field notes)

As I explain below in the Findings section, manipulating an object as I did by turning a product into a display fixture is a key creative action I ultimately sought to explain. Reflecting on this critical experience sparked my reading of research on resourcing and creativity to help make sense of my emergent findings. As a result, my research focus shifted to examine how resourcing (i.e., turning objects into resources) shapes creative activities over time. I reasoned that BoutiqueCo remained an appropriate setting because it allowed for examining creative acts across different contexts and the processes used to facilitate them as the organization changed.

### Case Overview

To unfold the case, I separate the organization into two periods: family and investor ownership. This reflects not only differences in how informants interpreted the organization, but also follows research which posits that different capital structures have dramatic impacts on how organizations operate (e.g., Gomez-Mejia, Larraza-Kintana, & Makri, 2003).

<sup>1</sup> All names of organizations and individuals are pseudonyms.



During the family era (1999 to February 2010), three siblings and a family friend founded BoutiqueCo as a means to offload extra merchandise from a family wholesale manufacturing business. BoutiqueCo opened its first store in 1999 and grew slowly for the next 8 years. In mid-2007, the founders initiated their first capital transaction, selling a small minority stake to a private equity firm. At the end of 2007, the organization had about 80 stores and opened up about another 30 stores in 2008 and in 2009.

In February 2010, the founders relinquished control by selling most of the organization to another private equity firm, ushering in the investor period (February 2010 to the present). During the investor period, BoutiqueCo hired professional management and sought to become a large *chain* of *boutiques*. The Current CEO, a part-time advisor and founder in the family period, joined full time and began hiring seasoned, home office retail professionals to fill key functional areas. The new owners pushed for even faster growth (opening up approximately 75 stores per year) and eventually completed a successful IPO in 2011. At the mid-point in 2012, the organization operated more than 350 stores in over 40 U.S. states, with plans to expand to 900 stores.

## Data

I conducted 60 interviews with a range of BoutiqueCo home office employees and regional managers (19), including most of the top management team, and some of the store employees (41), including store managers and sales associates (see Appendix A for the interview protocol). Interviews typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. I recorded most of them and had those professionally transcribed. Interview questions broadly focused on employees' roles at BoutiqueCo and the work they did, the organization's culture (which emphasized creativity), and the consequences of the organization's growth. However, the questions changed somewhat as my informants guided my inquiries through the stories they told (Charmaz, 2006). Table 1a contains an overview of the interview data.

I started sampling by selecting accessible top managers who could provide an overview of the organization, as well as field employees located in stores close to where I was based (Morse, 2007). From these initial interviews, I started to learn about the organization's culture and the role of creativity. After generating initial ideas about the

organization, I shifted to purposeful sampling, tracing the organization's history from its founding to its current stage. For example, I sought out interviews with the founders and early employees. I next interviewed informants in all key departments of the organization to understand whether the emerging patterns were isolated to certain groups. As my data collection and analysis unfolded, I used purposeful sampling to seek out additional informants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Direction for the additional sampling was provided through analyses of the existing data that I had collected, because I engaged in constant comparison of data across participants while at the same time allowing my emerging analysis to benefit from my own interpretations (Charmaz, 2006).

For store employees, I used purposeful sampling that maximized variation of conditions such as recently opened versus longtime stores and high- versus low-performing stores. I was particularly interested in whether patterns from my initial interviews would remain consistent across a range of stores. At each location, given the small number of employees working at any one time, I interviewed all available and consenting employees at the time of my visit.

Finally, as I started to develop provisional models of the data, I used theoretical sampling to seek out cases that could fill in any remaining blanks and refine my provisional ideas (Dey, 2007). This led me to visit several informants again as well as seek out new informants who might shed light on my findings. For example, when the early importance of creativity during family ownership became apparent, I interviewed the organization's first store manager.

In addition to interviews, I conducted 62½ hours of observation (see Table 1b), mostly participant-observation during the investor period. My initial intention was to observe teams tasked with opening new stores and training new employees; however, I was unexpectedly viewed as an available resource and my role shifted to participant-observer—an experience that helped me understand that store employees did not treat resources as fixed entities but instead as malleable objects (e.g., Feldman, 2004). During my observations both as a researcher and a participant, I recorded notes that served as the foundation of my field notes, written each evening after leaving a research site (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995).

I also collected 151 documents (see Table 1c), including proprietary communications between the home office and field organization, and key

**TABLE 1a**  
**Overview of Interview Data**

Informant	Name	Work Location	Position	Joined	# Interviews
1	Dana	Home Office	Director	Investor	2
2	Sue	Home Office	Director	Investor	1
3	Alexis	Home Office	Vice President	Family	1
4	Christi	Multiple Locations	Regional Manager	Family	1
5	Meghan	Store, S. Central	Store Manager	Family	1
6	Lacy	Store, S. Central	Store Employee	Investor	1
7	Brianna	Home Office	Corporate Employee	Investor	1
8	Zack	Home Office	Vice President	Family	1
9	Erika	Store, Midwest	Store Manager	Family	1
10	Erin	Store, Midwest	P/T Store Employee	Investor	1
11	Alicia	Store, Midwest	P/T Store Employee	Investor	1
12	Than	Store, Midwest	Keyholder	Investor	1
13	Abby	Store, Midwest	Store Manager	Family	1
14	Elizabeth	Store, Midwest	Asst Store Manager	Family	1
15	Ethan	Store, Midwest	Store Manager	Family	1
16	Bethany	Store, Midwest	Store Manager	Family	1
17	Ricky	Store, Midwest	Keyholder	Family	1
18	Deanna	Store, Midwest	Keyholder	Family	1
19	Ali	Store, Midwest	Store Employee	Family	1
20	Wendy	Store, Midwest	Asst Store Manager	Family	1
21	Lola	Multiple Locations	Regional Manager	Family	2
22	Paige	Store, Midwest	Keyholder	Investor	1
23	Candy	Store, Midwest	Store Employee	Investor	1
24	Tracy	Store, West	Store Manager	Investor	1
25	Jill	Home Office	Corporate Employee	Family	2
26	Jessica	Store, West	Store Manager	Family	1
27	Tamara	Store, West	Store Manager	Family	1
28	Rachel	Store, West	Store Manager	Family	1
29	Nora	Store, West	Store Manager	Family	1
30	Jake	Multiple Locations	Regional Manager	Family	1
31	Jollie	Store, East	Store Manager	Investor	1
32	Katrina	Store, East	Keyholder	Family	1
33	Veronica	Home Office	C-Level Executive	Family	3
34	Patty	Home Office	Founder	Family	1
35	Krystal	Home Office	Vice President	Family	1
36	Evan	Home Office	Founder	Family	1
37	Becca	Home Office	Corporate Employee	Family	1
38	Peter	Home Office	Founder/CEO	Family	1
39	Agatha	Home Office	Vice President	Family	1
40	Nicky	Multiple Locations	Regional Manager	Family	1
41	Catherine	Store, S. Central	Store Manager	Family	1
42	Lily	Store, S. Central	Asst Store Manager	Investor	1
43	Marcy	Store, S. Central	Store Manager	Family	1
44	Felicia	Store, S. Central	Keyholder	Investor	1
45	Waverly	Store, S. Central	Store Manager	Family	1
46	Penelope	Store, S. Central	Asst Store Manager	Family	1
47	Pheobe	Store, S. Central	Store Employee	Investor	1
48	Willa	Store, West	Store Manager	Family	1
49	Carmen	Store, West	Keyholder	Family	1
50	Jocelyn	Store, West	Asst Store Manager	Family	1
51	Jackie	Store, Midwest	Store Manager	Family	1
52	Nancy	Home Office	Corporate Employee	Family	1
53	Ella	Multiple Locations	Regional Manager	Family	1
54	Pam	Store, Midwest	Asst Store Manager	Family	1
55	Amber	Store, Midwest	Asst Store Manager	Family	1

**TABLE 1b**  
**Overview of Observational Data**

Date	Location	Description	Number of Minutes
July 2008	Restaurant	100th Store Opening Celebration	120
December 2008	Hotel	Company Holiday Event	120
December 2009	Restaurant	Company Holiday Event	120
January 2010	Central Region	Observation at Existing Store	240
April 2010	Midwest Region	Participant Observation at New Store	1620
April 2010	West Region	Participant Observation at New Store	1410
December 2010	Private Residence	Team Event	120
<b>TOTAL TIME OBSERVING</b>			<b>3750</b>

strategy and operational documents from both the family and investor ownership periods. These documents provided a running history of the organization (Pondy, 1983) and helped triangulate some of my findings. For example, some documents provided evidence in support of managerial interpretations of actions they took. I obtained these documents from key informants, the company's intranet and public sources.

Finally, I relied on a personal contact who introduced me to the organization and served as my key informant. We held frequent, in-depth updates, often lasting several hours, that helped me learn more about BoutiqueCo. Although relying on a key informant risks a partial interpretation of an organization, I reduced this risk by using the multiple data sources previously described and limiting the use of my key informant to providing a context for my observations from other data sources.

**TABLE 1c**  
**Overview of Document Data Referenced\***

Document Number	Description
28	Email from Veronica (33) to store employees (2/10)
34	October Daily Hot List (2010)
72	Get Inspired Intranet Post (5/10)
78	Intranet memo (2/10)
80	Spring Trend Alert (2/10)
126	Regional Manager Notes (6/10)
140	Visual Merchandising Manual (3/2010)
148	SEC Filing (3/12)
149	SEC Filing (7/11)
150	Newspaper story (7/12)
151	Annual Report 2011 (5/12)

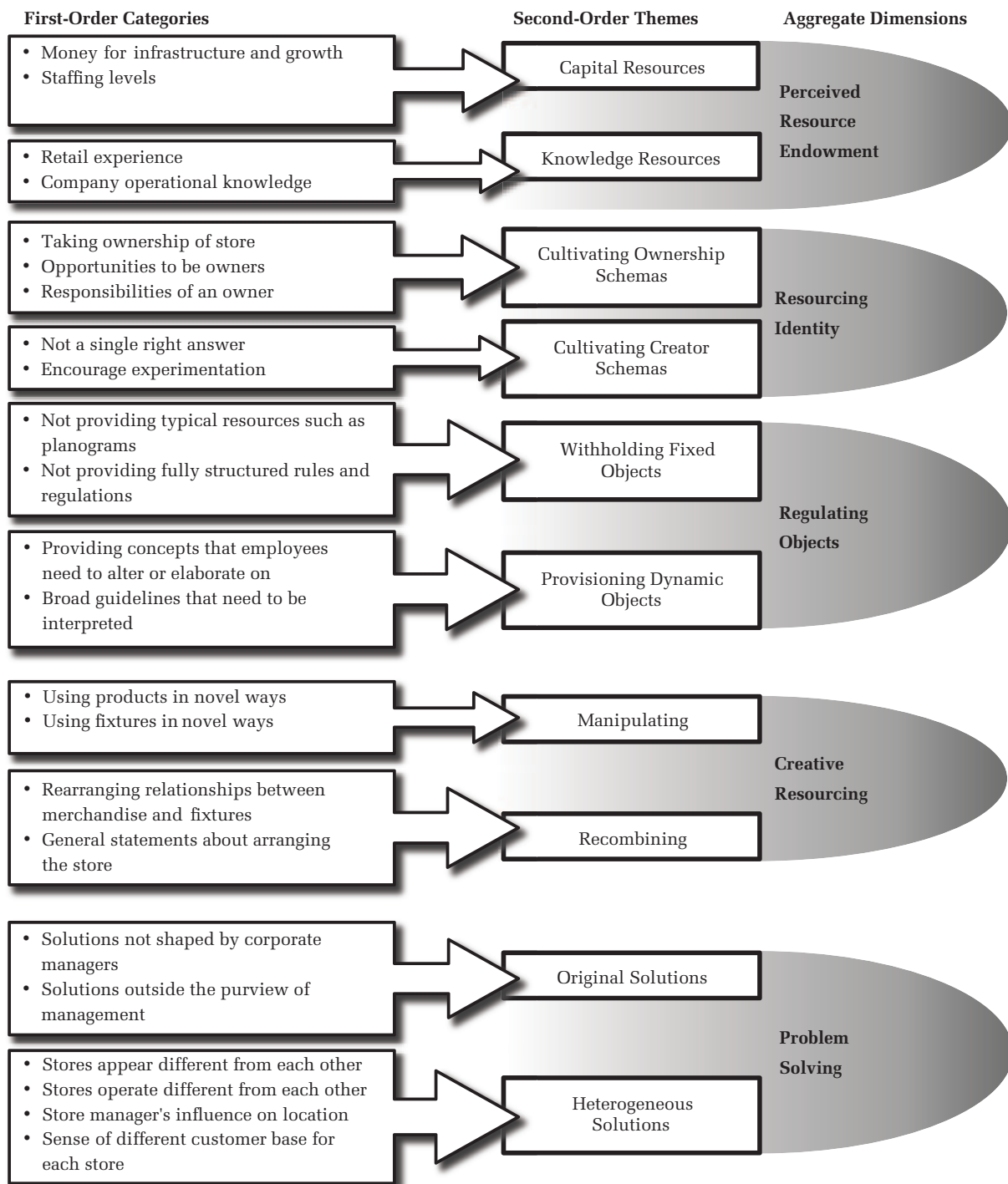
\* Reflects only document data referenced in texts and tables. A more comprehensive overview of document data is available from the author.

## Analysis

I used a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that involved three primary steps. First, with interview and observation data, I used open coding or in-vivo coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to capture informants' meanings about the organization. As with many qualitative projects, my analysis at this stage was very iterative (Locke, 2001). I started searching for codes based on my initial interest around culture, while also allowing new themes and categories to emerge from the data. Some of these new themes required that I return to the literature to make sense of my findings and thus prompted intensive reading of research around resourcing. With a more focused sense of my data, I recoded my interview transcripts and field notes in search of new codes that either supported or challenged my emerging findings, eventually reaching a saturation of first-order codes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) where continued reading of data did not yield substantially new insights. I then used second-order or axial coding to search for relationships within and between the initial codes to convert them into higher-order categories. This required a constant dialogue between my data and existing literature to ground constructs that were true to my data but abstracted from the particular context (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). I eventually settled on five aggregate theoretical dimensions: perceived resource endowment, resourcing identity, regulating objects, creative resourcing, and problem solving (see Figure 1 for an overview of the data structure).

Second, using the five aggregate theoretical dimensions as a foundation, I used memo writing to help organize my emerging thoughts in the data (Lempert, 2007) as I cycled through multiple reflections on the data to link codes in different ways.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Data Structure**



This step eventually formed the basis of the findings section and proved a critical step in seeing the connections across the aggregate theoretical dimensions. Eventually, I used these devices to develop a

provisional model that connected my aggregate theoretical dimensions and illuminated important nuances within the aggregate theoretical dimensions. Again reflecting the iterative nature of my project



(Strauss & Corbin, 1998), I went back and forth between my developing model and the data, making several refinements along the way.

Third, to ensure the credibility of my data, I carefully managed data collection using Nvivo 8.0 to store interview transcripts, field notes, and documents (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004). As my theoretical account formed, I tested my interpretations by reviewing all of the data again, looking for both confirming and disconfirming evidence (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After reaching provisional conclusions about the data, I used member checking with key informants, asking for feedback about whether my interpretations of the organization were consistent with theirs. Furthermore, I used multiple data sources to corroborate my interpretations and only included findings present in several data sources. Finally, I relied on peer debriefing and discussed my emerging theory with colleagues not involved in the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## FINDINGS

To unpack my findings, I start with the family period, describing the perceived resource constraints of BoutiqueCo. Next, I explain how corporate managers responded to these conditions by facilitating creative resourcing among the organization's field employees, whereby employees manipulated and recombined objects in novel and useful ways to devise solutions to problems. To facilitate the development of objects into resources, managers fostered a resourcing identity, in which employees enacted themselves as owners and creators of their stores through creative resourcing. As a result of creative resourcing, employees solved problems with original solutions that were not imaginable by corporate managers.

During the investor era, outsiders infused capital into the organization and seasoned managers joined the firm—something that led corporate managers to perceive a more abundant resource endowment. However, managers still sought to facilitate creative resourcing but shifted how they did so. They focused on withholding objects that employees would likely interpret as fixed (i.e., having a single meaning and use) and provisioning objects that employees would likely interpret as dynamic (i.e., having multiple meanings and uses). In doing so, managers regulated the flow of objects to employees, which stimulated and shaped how employees used creative resourcing. As a result, em-

ployees continued to creatively resource to solve problems.<sup>2</sup>

### Perceived Resource Endowment (Family Period)

Similar to other startup organizations, the founders describe the family ownership era as one in which the organization lacked access to capital resources and knowledge resources—something that ultimately shaped how they decided to operate their business, which focused on minimal investments outside of growing the store base.

**Capital resources.** With limited capital during the family era, the founders used available cash from operations to fund expansion in the form of new store openings instead of investing in infrastructure. As Patty (34),<sup>3</sup> a founder, notes: “You need to have the capital to open stores . . . You don’t really have a lot of money left to do other things . . . It makes sense to me to just run really leanly and grow the operations.” Left with limited funds to invest, the organization nestled its home office in the headquarters of the family’s wholesale business to save on rent. When BoutiqueCo outgrew that space, it moved to a small building mostly occupied by merchandise (i.e., a warehouse) with relatively little office space for corporate employees. Peter (38), the CEO and a founder, recalls:

Everything was kind of a hand-me-down from the big brother, big sister [wholesale business]. We had a little tiny space that wasn’t being used over at the [wholesale company] office . . . That’s where BoutiqueCo’s one, two employees would work. Then when we moved . . . there was a little corner spot. That’s where the four or five employees would work.

As Peter points out, the organization scraped by through making use of another organization’s space and employing limited corporate staff, both of which helped the organization at a time when it perceived limited resources.

**Knowledge resources.** During the family era, the founders also considered that they had limited knowledge resources. These limited knowledge re-

<sup>2</sup> Consistent with accepted practice in qualitative research (Pratt, 2008), I provide illustrative examples in the text but also use tables (see Table 2) to provide supplementary support for my interpretations.

<sup>3</sup> The number after a name is the informant number (Table 1a) and the number after a “D—” is a document number (Table 1c).

sources focused primarily on the perceived lack of experience in retail of the founding management team, coupled with the inability to hire seasoned executives to run the business. Both of these perceived resource constraints hampered the development of a blueprint to operate their business—something that afforded BoutiqueCo the opportunity to deviate from established practices. Patty (34) notes:

Because we didn't have retail experience, we just did things based on what we knew and what made sense, so we were unconventional in a way . . . We didn't really know what other retailers did, so we improvised and we did what made sense. . . . We didn't have a planogram.<sup>4</sup> We didn't have it—because we just didn't know . . . We didn't have any experience, and we didn't model after—we didn't ask Chico's or White House because we didn't have any contacts . . . we really didn't know how other retailers operated, so we just did what we think [sic] was right. I mean that's how we operated. We did it based on what we knew.

As Patty points out, the founders lacked direct knowledge about how to run a retail business as well as connections to garner knowledge from other retailers. As outsiders and novices to retail, they relied on what they thought “was right” as opposed to standard operating protocols, and this was something that proved to be significant as I examined the actions of top managers and rank-and-file employees.

### Resourcing Identity (Family Period)

Lacking knowledge and capital, top managers turned to their geographically dispersed workforce for help. More specifically, managers fostered employees' construction of a “resourcing identity”—that is, as individuals who can creatively work with available objects in their organizational contexts. A resourcing identity suggests that employees view themselves as willing and able to take available objects in their stores and transform them into something of value. Managers developed a resourcing identity among employees through two means: cultivating ownership schemas and cultivating cre-

ator schemas.<sup>5</sup> This approach was echoed by Jill (25), who noted that, “we've allowed our [store managers] to own their store and be creative with what goes on in their store.”

**Cultivating ownership schemas.** Corporate managers did not literally turn store employees into owners—the company did not provide an equity stake to store employees—but, rather, engaged in actions (and inactions) that helped store employees enact a schema as if they were owners of their stores. Peter (38) notes that ownership came about:

out of necessity . . . because we were very frugal minded. That we couldn't afford . . . the infrastructure to put in the people and/or the processes necessary to have that amount of control over the stores . . . We didn't have the staff to do it. We didn't have the resources to do it. We didn't have the processes to control it.

Peter points out that, given the perceived resource constraints, the founders could not afford infrastructure and personnel to manage stores, resulting in store employees taking on responsibilities traditionally not performed by this category of worker. At the same time, the organization explicitly encouraged employees to view themselves as owners. For example, Jake (30) interpreted how store managers “really do own that building . . . That's the way we present it and I think that it kind of gives them that ownership right from the beginning . . . That's the piece that I love the most about this company, [that] you really give ownership to the individual that's running the store, so that they can . . . do things that they necessarily weren't able to do before.”

In taking on some of these responsibilities, employees further interpreted themselves as owners. For example, Ethan (15), one of the longest-tenured store managers, explained how he came to enact an ownership schema:

It kind of happened because [the founders] couldn't manage everyone . . . it was obvious the original intent was that they wanted us all to be—everyone in the field to be very much so a business owner, because that's always been ingrained in my head since the get-go, and that's come out of everyone's

<sup>4</sup> A “planogram” dictates how employees should merchandise a store. As Peter (38) put it, a “planogram is essentially a map of ‘how do you merchandise this store? Where do these purses go in the store? Where does this jewelry go? Where do these candles go?’” Peter notes that not having a planogram is “very counterintuitive for retailers.”

<sup>5</sup> These schemas refer to how employees construct their role identities from their cognitions and actions. Thus, a schema is not only a cognitive framework (e.g., Gioia, 1986) but also based on how individuals act out their identities (e.g., Pratt & Foreman, 2000) in ways that make them owners and creators of their stores.

mouth . . . They've always encouraged us to just really own it and take responsibility for what we were doing.

Ethan interprets that managers lacked the resources to manage everyone, which afforded him the opportunity to act like an owner. Additionally, managers explicitly ingrained in Ethan's mindset that he is an owner of the business, directly introducing the schema of ownership. Ethan then enacted this schema by taking ownership of his store, and this is something I return to when I unpack creative resourcing below. As another example, Bethany (16) describes how the opportunity to take charge at her store led her to construct an ownership schema:

I'm able to do a ton of different things in the store . . . When I'm at my store and I'm hiring my staff and I'm creating the feeling and I'm training them and basically showing them what I think customer service is, in that sense, I am teaching them what I would hope they would do if they had worked in a store that I owned.

**Cultivating creator schemas.** While ownership schemas emphasize employees' responsibility for key actions in their stores, creator schemas emphasize how employees embrace that responsibility. More specifically, cultivating creator schemas involves employees interpreting themselves as individuals who engage in creative activities. To grasp the significance of this in retail settings, I found it helpful to contrast this approach with how managers interpreted typical retail organizations. In making this contrast, Veronica (33) noted that, "That is so not retail, because there are people whose . . . job depends on being the ones with all of the answers, and they would never let that out; it just wouldn't happen." Veronica interpreted how BoutiqueCo does not embrace a role in which a centralized corporate management team has "all of the answers." In fact, one reason for this is that the organization embraces the idea that there are many possible answers, thereby obviating the need for a centralized and uniform answer. Erika (9) noted that, "For the most part, we're free to do what works for our store," suggesting that there is not a single right answer and that store employees need to experiment to reach an answer that works for them. Echoing this viewpoint, Jake (30) noted that his employees were "going out and experiencing and trying to figure out how to do it. And each market . . . is different." As a result, as Becca (37) interprets, each store might have its own answers,

so store employees experiment to find the answer that works best for them.

No one ever like tells you no, that's wrong, or like slaps your hand, or like why are you stepping out of your box . . . What I mean by a sense of wrong or right, is that everything—we can try everything. If it doesn't work out, we can always change it . . . The thing is nothing is necessarily permanent.

Given several potential answers, and that even if there were a bad answer it could be changed, employees enacted schemas around being creators to solve their problems through experimentation.

Since employees worked at other retail organizations that inhibited the formation of a creator schema, BoutiqueCo would often have to explicitly message employees to allow them to embrace this schema. Lola (21) pointed out that she afforded store employees with the ability to experiment, noting "if it's not technically okay, we have the ability to see how it plays out . . . I'm sure if you walked into Banana Republic and they had tried something different, that would not be okay, no matter how good it was working for that store." Jill (25) recounted training from her mentor in the organization about how to merchandise products: "She let me know that it was okay to be creative." She has then taken this experience and helped others develop a creator schema: "There are just some people there that just don't . . . know how to be creative—or it's not really they don't know how to be creative, they're scared to be creative because they wanna look at a planogram . . . They want you to tell them how to do it, and you just kind of have to work with them." Or as Veronica put it, "We're saying to the [store] managers, 'Feel free to take chances' . . . People are free to make mistakes."

At the store level, employees such as Marcy (43) interpreted how they get "more freedom." As a result, she stated, "I think for somebody that wants to be creative, it's a little bit easier to do that and embrace that . . . as opposed to other retailers that have planograms." Absent a single answer encapsulated in a planogram often typical of retail organizations, Marcy elaborates: "I kind of experiment and see kind of how much I can push the envelope on my creativity."

### Creative Resourcing (Family Period)

Creative resourcing refers to how employees act on objects available to them to solve problems. Available objects in the family era primarily in-

cluded merchandise and display fixtures. I found two types of creative resourcing: (a) manipulating, which involves altering a single object; and (b) recombining, which involves altering the relationship between a set of objects. Both types of creative resourcing call attention to the skill that individuals have in creatively transforming available objects in ways that solve problems. While these types of creative resourcing are not mutually exclusive, I unpack examples that emphasize a particular type for clarity of exposition.

**Manipulating.** “Manipulating” involves creative acts as individuals work with an object and change it in ways that creatively render it more useful to solve a problem. Accordingly, employees did not treat objects as having fixed properties but instead as mutable objects they could shape with their actions. Returning to Ethan (15), he describes how he transformed a poorly selling dress into beachwear:

We got these ridiculously inferior tube dresses that were completely sheer; you couldn't wear them with anything and the straps were falling off of them on the hangers. We couldn't sell them and we had ordered tons and tons and tons and tons of them for the company, and so I look at them and think, “Crap. We need to sell these. Otherwise, they're gonna be sitting here forever.” So I cut all the straps off of them. I rolled them up and I merchandised them on a mannequin. I made a sign for it: “Beach Cover-Ups.” And I marked them all down \$10 or something. I took a very small percentage off of them so that they were kind of like a promotion, like on sale. And we blew through 50, 60, 70 of them really, really fast . . . So sometimes when I get stuff that I think is personally garbage, I have to look at it as a challenge: “How am I gonna make it work?”

Instead of treating the dress as a fixed object in his store, Ethan viewed it as an object with several potential uses. To act on this object, he first relabeled the dress as beachwear, thereby changing its meaning for both him and his customers. In fact, this action was critical as Ethan initially interpreted the object to be of limited use, as “straps were falling off them.” Instead of unquestionably accepting “inferior tube dresses,” Ethan altered its meaning through making a sign for it with a new label: “Beach Cover-Ups.” Furthermore, Ethan physically transformed the object by cutting off part of it.

One question that arises is why Ethan engaged in creative resourcing. After all, he could have simply let the dress not sell or left the organization. Instead, he explains his actions around enacting him-

self as an owner and creator (what he refers to as flexibility):

[The founders] couldn't manage everyone . . . That's what they've always encouraged us to do is to just really own it and take responsibility for what we were doing, and I think that the best way they were able to get us to do that and to be very self-sufficient is to also give us a lot of flexibility [with] visuals and stuff . . . There was no other alternative because we didn't have enough people to train and to help each other out, and it forced a lot of us to be very, very self-sufficient though, and to really just figure it [out].

As Ethan notes, taking ownership led him to want to solve the problem and to seeing himself as an experimenter (having to “just figure it [out]”), providing the creative license to craft a solution that those in the home office could not envision.

**Recombining.** “Recombining” involves an employee taking several objects and infusing them with new meanings through how the objects relate to each other. This form of creative resourcing emphasizes the relationship among several objects whose meanings change as employees act on them as a set. Consider an example from when Krystal (35) was a store manager at one of the organization's first locations:

At the time, we had a really big bath and candle section, and home décor section, so I would just merchandise things the way I would want them presented—or how, maybe, I might display them in my home . . . I thought, “Okay, if I'm at home and I'm gonna take a bath, and this is supposed to be a relaxing time for me, I would probably first light my candle. Then I would take my bath. So, then I'd have the candle, the bath salts, then I'd have the bath gel. Then, after I take a bath and I wanna put my lotion on, then I'd have the lotion. Then I'm gonna put on my perfume.”

As Krystal pointed out, she did not view the relationship among objects as fixed by the founders. Instead, Krystal recombined the same objects (merchandise and fixtures) in ways that organized perfume, candles and bath products to create something more akin to a home. Instead of treating the relationship among these objects as fixed, she altered them in ways to create a more compelling store. When asked why she took this action, Krystal responded by highlighting both her ownership of the store (what she refers to as freedom) and her ability to be a creator because of the lack of knowledge of the founders:



[The founders] were just like, you know, ‘You present the product the way you need to . . . I knew more about it than [the founders] . . . it allowed me to be creative and [the founders] trusted that I would . . . take care of things properly . . . I was given a lot of freedom.

### **Problem Solving (Family Period): Original Solutions**

During the family period, creative resourcing allowed employees to solve important problems, whether reinvigorating a poorly selling product (Ethan’s example) or altering a store’s look and feel (Krystal’s example). In both cases, creative resourcing resulted in original solutions that corporate managers had not envisioned (i.e., that were novel) but that nonetheless served a vital purpose for the organization (i.e., that were useful). For example, Ethan (15) recalls that Patty (34) called him after he sold all of his “dresses” and asked, “How did you sell all those, because they’re all gone in your store, but no one else has sold them?” Ethan was able to sell down his own inventory, which solved his immediate problem, but also may have helped the organization avoid an inventory write down, which might be costly to a cash-poor organization. Krystal’s (35) recombining led to a solution that was “much different . . . than the way [the founders] did it.” She altered the look and feel of her store to better merchandise a product area but she also more generally helped the organization learn about new ways of merchandising products.

Both examples of creative resourcing also illustrate how the organization coped with perceived resource limitations by pushing critical problem solving downward to employees. Jill (25), a long-time employee, noted that by solving problems locally in stores it “made the responsibilities of the owners a little less.” Thus, instead of investing in infrastructure to centralize control and decision making, the founders used cash to open stores to help the organization achieve enough scale to become a viable business. This left store employees on their own to create original solutions to problems they encountered through how they resourced available objects.

### **Perceived Resource Endowment (Investor Period)**

While the family period involved corporate managers perceiving a limited resource endowment, in which they responded by helping foster a resourc-

ing identity around creative ownership, the investor period ushered in the perception of a much more substantial resource endowment. As I describe below, this resulted in an important shift in how managers fostered creative resourcing among employees.

**Capital resources.** In contrast to the family period, during the investor period corporate managers perceived more abundant resources. In fact, soon after BoutiqueCo sold a majority stake to a private equity firm, corporate managers declared to employees: “The best thing about this transaction is that BoutiqueCo now has some additional resources” (D-28). Patty (38) also interpreted the importance of “financial flexibility” of the organization during the investor period. With the additional capital, the organization expanded its growth rate by opening up stores at a much quicker pace (about 75 per year). Consistent with managerial interpretations, BoutiqueCo generated an almost fourfold increase in profits from 2008 to 2010. The company also generated more than \$46 million in cash from operations in 2011 (D-151) and reached a market capitalization of more than \$1 billion in 2012.

**Knowledge resources.** In addition to capital resources, corporate managers also interpreted enhanced knowledge resources during the investor period, such as by noting the management team’s “extensive experience across a broad range of disciplines in the retail industry,” (D-148) something in contrast to the family ownership era in which the founders declared they had limited knowledge about running a retail organization. Peter (38) noted that, “All of my senior management team are better at what they do than I would ever be able to do. They’re smarter. They’re brighter than I am. They’re more experienced. They’re more sophisticated in each of their respective fields.”

### **Regulating Objects (Investor Period)**

As corporate managers interpreted a shift in their resource endowment, they sought to continue to stimulate creative resourcing while exerting some more control over this process. However, unlike during the family period, the impetus for creative resourcing was no longer a perceived limited resource endowment. Zack (8) acknowledges that employee creativity was initially

borne out of a lack of human resource internally to instruct others . . . But I think, over time . . . it



encourages people to think on their own and they like that, and they're encouraged to merchandise the store and tend to the customer in a way that they think is most appropriate.

As Zack points out, the organization came to realize that the creative behaviors, while first needed as a result of a perceived limited resource endowment, nevertheless provided valuable outcomes for the organization as it grew. As corporate managers interpreted their resource endowment as abundant, they moved their focus to regulating objects. They did this because the organization no longer needed to scrape by as a small startup and wanted to exert some more control over the creative resourcing process without compromising it.

Put simply, regulating objects refers to the processes by which corporate managers make or do not make available objects that employees can resource as a way of influencing a creative process. More specifically, managers make available important dynamic objects that employees can use in a variety of ways (what I call "provisioning" dynamic objects) and do not make available typical fixed objects that employees would likely interpret as having a singular use and/or meaning (what I call "withholding" fixed objects). Often, these two processes are opposite sides of the same coin, with managers not making available a fixed object and instead provisioning a dynamic one. The most important, and most prominent example, of these two processes at work occurred in the area of merchandising, which was the central domain in which employees creatively resourced in both the family and investor periods. Accordingly, I will unpack regulating objects in detail for this domain but I offer additional examples around new store openings and store upkeep/remodels in Table 3.

**Withholding fixed objects.** As defined above, withholding of fixed objects refers to managerial actions that deprive employees of a typical object likely to be used in limited ways by employees. The most important typical object corporate that managers withheld in BoutiqueCo was a planogram. A planogram is widely used in retail organizations because it influences the products sold, their placement, and the overall look and feel of the store. It provides a management tool that allows design professionals coupled with data (such as which products sell best in what location) to provide detailed store plans, thereby centralizing creativity in a home office staffed with trained designers and merchandisers armed with data. When asked whether

BoutiqueCo would implement the typical planogram now that it had perceived a more abundant resource endowment that could support designing one, Peter (38) responded emphatically:

Never, never, never . . . That would be over my dead body . . . Could we afford to put more [capital expenditure] into a store? Absolutely! . . . And when I get proposed ideas that take us more in that direction, I say "No way." It's not about me being frugal. It's . . . to allow that freedom at the store level. Allow that ability of that gal in the store to exercise her creativity. If I give her a planogram, that all goes out the window.

Peter interpreted how a planogram would threaten creative resourcing in stores. One reason for this was that employees interpret a planogram as a fixed object that limits their ability to resource other objects. Paige (22) explained how employees customarily view planograms by contrasting her job at BoutiqueCo with other retailers:

At other jobs . . . there are planograms or very specific maps or blueprints on how to do everything. And Banana Republic, if the jewelry case wasn't done exactly right and the regional merchandising manager walked in it would be . . . a big deal if a coral bracelet was on the far left instead of the far right.

By withholding a planogram, BoutiqueCo was regulating creative resourcing by avoiding objects that employees would likely interpret as fixed that would obviate the need for them to work with other available objects to creatively resource.

**Provisioning dynamic objects.** While, during the family era, corporate managers offered little guidance, direction, or supporting infrastructure to employees, during the investor era this changed through the provisioning of dynamic objects. While these objects did not dictate solutions to problems, they nevertheless provided a foundation from which employees could act to solve their problems. One example is the "story" that employees use to create a store's overall look and feel. This story provides a coherent theme that permeates across the store—including its display and placement of merchandise and its customer experience. But this story was not supplied by corporate management. For example, corporate managers instructed employees to develop a story for their window without providing a set plan for what the window should look like and what products it should feature:

**TABLE 2**  
**Representative Quotes Underlying Second-Order Themes (○ Family Period; ● Investor Period)**

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
	<b>Capital Resources</b> <sup>○●</sup>	
• Money for infrastructure and operations (LOW)	<b>Peter (38):</b> “That we couldn’t afford or didn’t want to afford the infrastructure to put in the people and/or the processes necessary to have that amount of control over the stores. So, organically, it would have been there. Even had we wanted all the control, we didn’t. We didn’t have the staff to do it. We didn’t have the resources to do it. We didn’t have the processes to control it.”	} Perceived Resource Endowment
	<b>Patty (34):</b> “None of us took pay for what we did. We just put everything into the business, so at some point we built enough reserve into our operations, our bank account.”	
• Money for infrastructure and operations (HIGH)	<b>Patty (34):</b> “Now we have more space, more financial flexibility now, so we take on a little more space so that there is some back office for people to do their payrolls and use that space for back stock, management.”	
	<b>Ethan (15):</b> “I think one of the benefits of us getting bigger is that we have a larger infrastructure to kind of stay on and to ensure success and to ensure that we could weather some major financial disaster or some huge mistake.”	
• Staffing levels (LOW)	<b>Zack (8):</b> “I think, early on . . . I think people had to fend for themselves and I think that there was a lack of human resource. You had, you know, the IT guy who was helping stuff boxes to be shipped out—merchandise to be shipped out of the store and you had the construction guy who was helping the IT guy install a server.”	
	<b>Krystal (35):</b> “We relied on the [wholesale company’s] employees to help us . . . load the trucks for the [specific] stores. There really weren’t very many people; just a few of us.”	
• Staffing levels (HIGH)	<b>Zack (8):</b> “We are growing so rapidly and changing and . . . there are more bodies that are within the company”	
	<b>Evan (36):</b> “We did get a point where . . . we were able to get bigger facilities, add more people.”	
	<b>Knowledge Resources</b> <sup>○●</sup>	
• Retail experience (LOW)	<b>Peter (38):</b> “You had myself and Patty, who had corporate . . . big company, public company experience. But we were relatively new in our careers . . . it was a you know, bootstrap by your—you know, by the skin of your teeth type operation.”	
	<b>Evan (36):</b> We “never had this type of retail experience.”	
• Retail Experience (HIGH)	<b>Agatha (39):</b> “We’ve hired all these people to do all these functions better, and more in depth and more detailed.”	
	<b>D (150):</b> BoutiqueCo has “added another very experienced executive with significant retail background to the talent at the company.”	
• Company operational knowledge (LOW)	<b>Nicky (40):</b> “When I started [at] BoutiqueCo, I didn’t get no training; absolutely no training at all. I got the key of the store and I got [good] luck at the time. We didn’t have no manuals.”	
	<b>Lola (21):</b> “They all came with me and we knew how to work together . . . but yeah, visuals, hmm-mm, no training back then.”	
• Company operational knowledge (HIGH)	<b>Patty (34):</b> “Over time you know certain styles worked and you build that into your brain.”	
	<b>Peter (38):</b> “So what we would do with [what we learn] is we would give that as guidance. We’d say ‘Hey, stores, you know what? It’s called tips and tricks, and we have this blog thing that we put out merchandising ideas on.’”	

Continued

The theme of your window display is the unifying subject or idea of your presentation. This includes the style of product and the colors being featured. Begin brainstorming a theme based on the season, the new trends developing in fashion, new merchandise arriving in stores and, most importantly, consistent with the type of customer that shops in your store. Once the theme has been established, begin to tell a story. The stories you create are limited only by your imagination. (D-140)

In lieu of providing the “answer” in the form of a fixed object such as a planogram, corporate managers provided an array of objects that employees could creatively resource to help create their story. One type of object was “trend alerts” that described current fashion trends and provided a vernacular for accessing popular culture “to best understand what kind of stories to put together” (D-78). For example, the “Urban Boho” trend alert described a

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking ownership of location</li> <li>• Opportunities to be owners</li> <li>• Responsibilities of an owner</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cultivating Ownership Schemas</b><sup>○</sup></p> <p><b>Erika (9):</b> “I do pretend that this is my own shop”; “When I first started, it was kind of like you were on your own, like they were still trying to figure things out. You weren’t really being checked [o]n.”</p> <p><b>Meghan (5):</b> “This is my store. I own this store. It’s mine, everything in it, the people that work here, they’re my girls, they’re my people, they’re my responsibility and the success of the store and of these young ladies is my responsibility. They’re like my children . . . I’m raising.”</p> <p><b>Peter (38):</b> “They’re not franchisees, but franchisees are left to run their franchise—you know, Subway—the way that they want to within certain boundaries. There’s corporate . . . restrictions on the signage and the box, and the food and the offerings . . . So what I’ve done or what I’ve hopefully done is I’ve created a situation where this manager feels like this is her store. She doesn’t own it outright, but it’s her store.”</p> <p><b>Nicky (40):</b> “And what I call sink or swim . . . it’s almost throwing them in the fire and seeing what they’re gonna do next. And if they can survive that, and if they can get out of the fire not getting burned, and if they—or they can be innovative in the way that they jump out of the fryer. It’s about ownership, and that’s what is gonna spark the ownership right away, you know, with the team.”</p> <p><b>Willa (48):</b> “I come to work and I feel like it’s my store. Obviously, I’m just the manager, but I take pride in it and I get excited about being able to do different things and make different decisions. I mean, it feels like my store.”</p> <p><b>Jake (30):</b> “People here tend to become more business owners. They become more open minded, where there everything was planned out for you, so you were almost micromanaged. Here you have more of that realm of responsibility where you truly are the owner of this location . . . so therefore, they learn more like an owner because they have that responsibility to make more of the decisions for that location.”</p>	Resourcing Identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not a single right answer</li> </ul>	<p><b>Cultivating Creator Schemas</b><sup>○</sup></p> <p><b>Jill (25):</b> “When I started, I was not a visual merchandiser . . . The person that helped me learn how to merchandise was very open to things. She encouraged me to try different things. She let me know that, ‘Just because it doesn’t look exactly how I would do it doesn’t necessarily mean that it’s wrong . . . you don’t have to color in the lines all the time.’ You know, kind of like, ‘Branch out and try new things.’”</p> <p><b>Peter (38):</b> “But what we try to do is do things just good enough.”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage experimentation</li> </ul>	<p><b>Jessica (26):</b> “And that’s how you learn. And you have to take that table—and it takes somebody who’s I guess gonna critique you without putting you down. . . . that store manager or that trainer or whoever it is needs to be really positive about what they’re doing because the moment you feel like you just failed and fell on your face is the moment you don’t wanna do it again. You don’t wanna fall on your face again. I don’t wanna try it again.”</p> <p><b>Veronica (33):</b> “I talk about [experimenting in] my messaging a lot. The regionals talk about it a lot on their calls where they are—a lot of their call are for people coming in and saying, ‘How did you solve this problem? Let’s talk about it.’ . . . I sent out a broadcast message to the company saying, ‘I need your great ideas . . . send me your ideas on how you grow the sales . . . and people sent in really great ideas.’”</p>	

Continued

focus on “soft pastels, plenty of prints, weightless and feathery fabrics, delicate laces, sweet florals, and a hint of a ruffle” (D-80). Importantly, these trend alerts did not have instructions for how to use trends in a store but only provided a brief definition of a trend that could be incorporated (or discarded) into a store’s story to impact the merchan-

dise that was featured, how it was displayed, and how employees might dress and approach customers.

Corporate managers also provided “inspiration” to store employees by providing them with dynamic objects they could creatively resource. In the notes below, a regional manager explains how she provided a struggling store manager with examples

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not providing typical resources such as planograms</li> <li>• Not providing fully structured rules and regulations</li> </ul>	<p><b>Withholding Fixed Objects<sup>•</sup></b></p> <p><b>Brianna (7):</b> “A lot of the other [retailers], they give planograms or very specific, ‘This is how this store needs to be set up, this is how this is going to run, this person’s going to do that.’”</p> <p><b>Nicky (40):</b> “We don’t have the planograms that the majority of the companies have.”</p> <p><b>Lily (42):</b> “Barney’s had a lot of rules. Like you couldn’t go in and redo the store on your own; you had to be told to redo it. Here you can just do whatever you want. You can move the jewelry tables around, you can dress the mannequins. I mean anyone can do it. It’s the manager, the sales associates.”</p> <p><b>Jake (30):</b> “Most people are so used to more of a structured training, and a structured you know, visual merchandising guy. Where here, we don’t have things like that. It’s really organic in terms of that specific location . . . it’s really hiring them—hiring the right individual who can think outside the box and not have to have those planograms in specific documentations to do their job.”</p>	Regulating Objects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing concepts that employees need to alter or elaborate on</li> </ul>	<p><b>Provisioning Dynamic Objects<sup>•</sup></b></p> <p><b>Nora (29):</b> “Obviously the visual merchandise manual gives you hints and gives you things like suggestions and if you look through it, a lot of the tables that are in there, like you can see like different ideas.”</p> <p><b>Nicky (40):</b> “I think there is a lot of creativity [and] this is the biggest thing . . . I think the core of [BoutiqueCo] is their visuals. . . . we have been giving them more standards . . . because it’s so different compared to other retailers. It is, again, the mom-and-pop concept, where everything is hands on, but we just brought some guidelines to help them understand how to do it, and how to break free from any past knowledge that they might have had . . . So, it’s an easy way for them to be creative.”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad guidelines that need to be interpreted</li> </ul>	<p><b>Veronica (33):</b> “If you go to Ann Taylor on Wednesday, you’re gonna see them taping up the planograms on all the fixtures . . . hey love that type of connect-the-dots retail. We are sort of the opposite of that, so you have to really want to explore. The best manager is one who—I always say who bends the rules but doesn’t break—bends them as far as they can go but doesn’t break them.”</p> <p><b>D (140):</b> “Just because it’s December doesn’t mean you have to display your window with a decorated Christmas tree or red and green apparel and accessories. December is a time for holiday parties, cool temperatures, friends and family, winter vacation, gift giving, and more. Think ‘variety of options.’”</p>	

Continued

of how to create a jewelry table to provide a foundation for the store manager’s own creative actions:

I worked closely with [store manager] on her merchandising opportunities to ensure that she was making the most of her space in her boutique. Her struggles with the jewelry tables showed and we worked on how to start fresh and re-work what she had in the boutique. She was very optimistic on the final results and was excited to see how it pays off in her sales this week. We also talked about where to get inspiration for her visuals. I showed her my inspiration book and we created two different tables *based around her inspiration* (D-126, emphasis added).



Importantly, the regional manager did not provision a fixed object, such as a specific answer to

create the store manager’s tables. Instead, she provided an “inspiration book” of malleable ideas and then used that inspiration book to help the store manager create tables around *her* inspiration.

While I analytically separate withholding fixed objects and provisioning dynamic objects, they often operate together since the absence of a fixed object allows for acting on a dynamic object. For example, in the absence of a planogram, Jill (25) talked about BoutiqueCo’s guidelines that provide a minimal structure but not a blueprint for action:

We do have standards that they have to follow, but we don’t use planograms. We don’t send them pictures or direction on, “This is how your store has to

**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using products in novel ways</li> </ul>	<p><b>Manipulating</b> </p> <p><b>Tamara (27):</b> “We have this one shirt that looks better backward, and this customer tried it on that way, and I didn’t even realize it, and I actually owned it. And then I started wearing it backward, and then everyone kind of started buying it to wear backward and . . . we sold it as it could be forward or backward . . . So it’s a lot about seeing how things influence people, I guess, over time. I mean, when somebody will wear a scarf a certain way, I’m like, ‘Oh, I never thought of doing it that way,’ and then I’ll think, ‘I have to do that sometime.’ And then we’ll put it on the mannequin.”</p> <p><b>Bethany (16):</b> “They have set displays; corporate comes out with them and –I was at Forever 21 and I was looking at this dress, and I was like, “Oh, is that dress—where is that dress?” and she’s like, “Oh, that’s the last one,” and I was like, “Oh, can I have the one off the mannequin?” and she’s like, ‘No. We can’t take things off our mannequins.’ And I was like, “Ew. That is the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard. You have the opportunity to sell me that right there. Why wouldn’t you give me that?” I didn’t say that, but I swear, if we become like that, that will be so disheartening. If we have to wait for someone at corporate to be like, “OK, yes, now you can take that dress off of there because we’ve given you a new three ways to dress a mannequin,” that would just—I would feel like a child.”</p>	Creative Resourcing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using fixtures in novel ways</li> </ul>	<p><b>Ricky (17):</b> “Last time [Bethany] left, I think I threw a bunch of belts on one of our jewelry T’s [a fixture] that we have usually to hold jewelry, and I just looped them, ‘cause we had so many belts, and we threw them on the table with a bunch of stuff, and she came back and she was like, ‘Oh, my G-d, I never thought about doing that. That’s a really great way to merchandise those.’”</p> <p><b>West Coast Field Notes:</b> Jill (25) used a trunk as a display item yesterday, e.g., no merchandise in it. Jessica (26) had warned Jill yesterday about needing display pieces to put merchandise in as she can never have enough of these. Since today they needed another place for merchandise, Jill had to unpack the box so she could fit shoes in there that she had just found. So she had to move the trunk from display and make it a fixture.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rearranging relationships between merchandise and fixtures</li> </ul>	<p><b>Recombining</b> </p> <p><b>Bethany (16):</b> “Well, like this morning, I came in at 9 and from 9 until 12:30, when the other girl came in, I redid all my jewelry tables, so there’s no exact way of how to do a jewelry table, and I have a lot of freedom with how I set up jewelry table . . . I don’t know if I even wanna say Forever 21. I don’t—like Gap or something—you can’t just go in and start changing things. You can’t just go in and say, ‘OK, this jean table is out today. We’re doing dresses here with jeans, and we’re putting this on it and we’re doing that.’”</p> <p><b>Ricky (17):</b> “I have the freedom to grab the new stuff that comes in and create a table . . . [or] make sure the displays are working in the window. It’s just fun to do . . . put things together. It’s almost like little girl; you play with your dolls. You dress up your dolls and you do that, and this is like real life, what we’re doing, and we’re trying to sell it to people and make it appealing, but it also works with what we want. I mean, most of the time . . . I look at our products, but I don’t go out and say, “Well, I’m just gonna use everything we have a lot of,” . . . if I don’t like it. I use what I like, and I put together stuff that I like, ‘cause I think other people are going to, and that’s what’s fun to me. If I had to use specific products to make it look a specific way that the company wanted, I don’t think I’d have as much fun here.”</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General statements about arranging the store</li> </ul>	<p><b>Tamara (27):</b> “I redo almost my whole store just because I get inspired from it.”</p> <p><b>Nora (29):</b> “I’m sure that you can find that in a table in the visual merchandise manual, but it may not look the same in there, but you take bits and pieces and you put it all together into one table.”</p>	

Continued



**TABLE 2**  
**(Continued)**

First Order Categories	Second-Order Themes	Aggregate Dimensions
	<b>Original Solutions<sup>○</sup></b>	
• Solutions not shaped by corporate managers	<b>Marcy (43):</b> “When I started, it was like if you wanted to—whatever you wanted to do with the candles, then do it. So now it’s a little bit more structured, as opposed to just go with it.”	Problem Solving
• Solutions outside the purview of management	<b>Lola (21):</b> “Everything we do involves our own level of creativity . . . each one of us have come up with something that works for us.”	
	<b>Ethan (15):</b> “I feel like our responsibilities as managers and associates is . . . exploring new options and trying to do things differently and creating a sense of uniqueness . . . Bethany and I had been through so much kind of problem-solving, figuring out different ways to different kinds of people to hire, different ways to merchandise, different ways to approach the customer.”	
	<b>Patty (34):</b> “Because we’re so lean with staffing, we didn’t have anybody to kinda push that out and also that creates that boutique model we relied on the managers to merchandise the store . . . the good managers really enjoyed that creativity and, you know, it’s like their own store in a way, and they get to make a lot of decisions. We didn’t have all these rules and process pushed down.”	
	<b>Heterogeneous Solutions<sup>●</sup></b>	
• Stores appear different from each other	<b>Nicky (40):</b> “Any customer can come here to this store and spend two hours shopping, and they can put an item on a hold to the store that’s 15 minutes away, and they will spend another additional hour shopping over there. It is absolutely the same product, but because it is displayed differently, it makes everything look new again.”	Problem Solving
	<b>Abby (13):</b> “I can have my mom or a friend or just a customer come in who just went to [specific store] or [different specific store] or whatever and they can walk in and be like, ‘Wow, this store is completely different . . . I want to shop around and see what truly is different.’”	
• Stores operate different from each other	<b>Ethan (15):</b> “Our stores in [specific city] are completely different . . . We have a very relaxed customer-service attitude and we’re very—you know, we make sure that our customer knows that we’re present and that we’re there for them, but we are so focused on sales as more of just making sure that our customers are having a good time in the store and having fun . . . Bethany’s store . . . she works with a neighborhood clientele, so it’s more of a “I know your name” kind of shop, where they have the same people coming in over and over and over again. So their staff is able to develop more relationships with the customer and have the opportunity to possibly get on the phone and call them . . . So they have kind of more of a mom-and-pop feel of customer service . . . when you go to the store in [different location], the store clearly looks very different from the other stores here, and they have a very . . . commission-based sales approach.”	
	<b>Alexis (3):</b> “We have our standards, but at the end of the day it’s their personal touch. You can tell, as you walk into a store, that it’s that manager’s personal touch on the store, ‘cause they’re all so different.”	
• Store Manager’s influence on location	<b>Abby (13):</b> “I think it’s a real reflection of not only myself but my staff. Whether or not I stand behind the quality of the product, I can at least stand behind the fact that my store is visually stimulating, it’s interesting to look at and it’s, again, a reflection of me.”	
	<b>Ethan (15):</b> “OK, well, we’ll just kind of replicate what we did at [my store],’ and it didn’t work. So, it was a lot of trying to figure out what was gonna work differently, and I think the more of Bethany’s own personality that she puts into the way that she manages, the way that she talks to her customers, the way that she merchandises, the more and more and more successful the store.”	
• Sense of different customer base for each store	<b>Jessica (26):</b> “The way I market towards my customer is not gonna be the way Rena [is] gonna market to her customer . . . I have an older clientele, but that older clientele brings in their 13-year-old daughters to shop with them or their 13-year-old granddaughters. But you need to dress them that way . . . whereas when you’re in a younger mall . . . you can do a little bit more with the little shorter skirts.”	Problem Solving
	<b>Tracy (25):</b> “Being able to really read what your customers are looking for and what sort of customer you have and changing your store to really make it attractive for people like that who are gonna be your regulars. At Loft or somewhere like that, you know, it doesn’t matter what your customer is; there’s a certain structure that you follow.”	

**TABLE 3**  
**Additional Examples of Creative Resourcing during Investor Era**

Core Process and Importance to the Organization	Creative Resourcing Example	Withholding Fixed Objects	Provisioning Dynamic Objects
<b>New Store Openings (NSO):</b> These teams are essential for helping the organization grow by adding to its store count. They unpack inventory, set up and decide where to locate fixtures, and visually merchandise products. They also work with the incoming store manager to provide guidance on visual displays, customer service, and store operations.	<b>Recombining fixtures across multiple locations:</b> While I was working on an NSO team to open up a store in the Midwest, Jackie, the NSO team leader, felt there were not enough fixtures to display the merchandise. With the new store scheduled to open in two days, my field notes capture what came next as the team tried to solve this problem: "Pam [a NSO team member] chimed in that she had some extra fixtures at her store, so Jackie and Pam drove the 15 minutes to Pam's store and moved extra fixtures from the back room at Pam's store to the new store. Upon returning, Jackie went to Target to purchase some bowls to provide some additional fixtures to display rings and other small merchandise." (Midwest field notes)	<b>Withholding fixed object of fixture plan for store:</b> Although the organization had fixtures, there were too few sent to the store being opened and no set plan on how to use them. In fact, "The home office does not know which fixtures are in which stores, thereby leaving employees to work with the available resources to create and maintain a store." Pam and Jackie created a solution by recombining spare fixtures from a neighboring store and some ordinary bowls purchased from Target with other fixtures in the new store (Midwest field notes). <b>Withholding dedicated new store openers:</b> During my participation-observation on two of these teams, members included store managers who were local to the area (to avoid paying travel costs) for one store, or, in the case of a new market where there were no pre-existing stores, one corporate employee and three store managers from nearby stores. By not having a dedicated team open stores, there was not a fixed routine for how to set up a store (Midwest and West Coast field notes).	<b>Provisioning store managers to open new stores:</b> "I just get e-mails that ask if I wanna go, and I say yes or no, and most of the time I say yes . . . have a nice little traveling experience and meet new people, like meet other managers is a nice experience and how they do things, and how they might deal with situations is always interesting to find out." (Marcy, 43) <b>Provisioning a finished store for the incoming store manager as an illustration of how to set up a store, not a mandatory set-up for them:</b> "Take a mental snapshot all over the store. Embrace what the possibilities are for this box that you've been given, and then you take it and put your own creative touch on it, and then we'll come back and make sure that you stay within the boundaries." (Veronica, 33)
<b>Store upkeep and remodels:</b> Employees update the stores by using capital expenditures to replace carpentry, flooring, signs and other infrastructure in the store. This keeps older stores fresh, something important to maintain business.	<b>Manipulating cabinets to fix and repurpose them:</b> "In the cabinets in the old stores, they're not all outfitted for the clothing. So, I run to the Home Depot. I have the paint in my house. I paint things, and I go ahead and fix the cabinet and make myself the cabinet be a closet for clothing. Many times, like, the floor would come out, and we had extra wood. I would saw the wood, glue the wood, and make the bottom part, if that was needed. I remember when we are doing remodeling . . . and we pulled the big cabinets out of store . . . I asked [construction crews] to switch the counter to the sides so we could add more tables into the store. And when we pulled the cabinet out of the wall, there was not a wall, it was a hole, a complete hole . . . if I pull the sheetrock that is already painted from this side and put into that side, it's gonna cover, and we can make the cabinet . . . It's going to be perfect . . . I pulled out the shelving and I put a bar on it, and I turned the two cabinets into a little closet for clothing." (Nicky, 40)	<b>Withholding "fixed" fixture standards:</b> "I would've had to call a handyman. The holes, I knew they could not be fixed anymore, because it is like a cheese cabinet already, so many holes inside and the shelves were not staying. So, I kind of measure my risks right there . . . I knew what it was between the standards they had, you know." (Nicky, 40)	<b>Provisioning dynamic fixtures:</b> "What I do see is having a little more sophistication on the fixturing, have the fixturing be a little more multipurpose and functional . . . fixtures that mask, that are modular." (Krystal, 35)

be." We just basically kind of give them guidelines and say, "Use these guidelines and kind of do your own thing."

These guidelines were important because as the organization expanded, it needed to develop a way to foster creative resourcing without employees devi-

ating from the organization's vision. But at the same time, providing an object as fixed as a planogram would have impeded creative resourcing. Krystal (35) nicely captures this challenge of trying to exert some control over creative resourcing without interrupting this process or too strongly shaping it:

We're not like the Gap, where everything is set up, where you follow this planogram and you put the red shirts here and the white shirts here, next to the jeans and the skirt . . . *I have to make sure everyone understands what the big picture is, so that they can then interpret that to be able to present a product that still maintains the brand and maintains brand integrity, maintain the vision, but make it unique and creative for their store* (emphasis added).

Krystal provided an object ("the big picture") but this object was dynamic because employees needed to interpret it on their own to "make it unique and creative for their store." Thus, corporate managers can provide dynamic objects that are of limited value until employees creatively resource them. While there is a uniform vision shaped by provisioning a "big picture," this picture is incomplete and requires employee actions to make it useful for solving problems around merchandising.

### Creative Resourcing (Investor Period)

During the investor period, employees continued to creatively resource. While the organization underwent dramatic change, "the discretion and the freedom that [employees] have to be creative in their store . . . That's probably the one thing that hasn't changed" (Jill, 25). But as suggested above, managers shifted how they encouraged creative resourcing. Managers withheld typical fixed objects that could have supplied solutions to a store's problems, thereby leaving employees to have to creatively resource available objects to solve problems. In doing so, they maintained some of the contextual conditions in stores that characterized the family era. However, unlike the family era, managers could have provided more typical and fixed objects to employees—but instead they provisioned dynamic objects that employees could more readily creatively resource. Put another way, managers used regulating objects to provide more structure to employees without over-determining their actions, thereby allowing creative resourcing to persist but in a more controlled fashion. I provide an example of both manipulating and recombining creative resourcing during this period in the text below specifically around one of the organization's most essential processes: that of merchandising (and I provide additional examples of creative resourcing for new store openings and store upkeep/remodels in Table 3).

**Manipulating.** Deb is a store manager who wanted to increase jewelry sales. Deb creatively

resourced a necklace to find other uses for this product category, boosting the category's sales:

Deb and her team . . . have found a creative way to pump up their jewelry sales while adding a bit of "Inspiration" to one of Spring and Summer's hottest trends. Deb and her team turned a floral necklace into a belt. They belted it around a floral dress and topped the ensemble off with a solid cardigan, thin gold chains, and a straw clutch. This is the perfect outfit for a Sunday brunch with the girls (D-72).

In this example, Deb took what many might view as a fixed object, a necklace, and turned it into a belt. Absent a fixed object that would have dictated how to use the necklace (e.g., a planogram, a directive from her supervisor, etc.), Deb had the ability to act on the belt and transform it into something more useful. Furthermore, the "hottest trend" provided a concept that Deb could work with to repurpose the necklace in a compelling way, which provided "inspiration" but not a fixed solution. Additionally, Deb's creative resourcing was shared with other store employees across the organization, thereby becoming a provisioned object itself that other store employees could subsequently creatively resource.

**Recombining.** Recombining, similar to the family period, involved changing the relationship among objects to create something of value. Lily (42) offered an illustrative example when she improved on a so-called *Sex and the City* table:

There was a table, a little "Sex and the City" table, and the clothes had been there for a while. So it was just like "I'm done looking at those" and so I grabbed another keyholder and we just redid the table and put out new clothes . . . a different color scheme. [We] changed it all up so when people walked in they wouldn't see the same clothes over and over and it would look fresh and new. . . . No one was saying, "Hey, you have to put pink tops up there today." It was just, "All right, we like these, we'll put them up." And if we didn't like them, we didn't have to put them up. . . . It's nice to be able to have that kind of freedom and control . . . We just did it. Because I knew that the table had been the same for like maybe two weeks . . . Customers don't want to see the same stuff.

Lily's account describes how she changed a table that appeared stale into something she thought was of greater use. In explaining what facilitated her actions, Lily talks about learning how the organization "wanted it to look a certain way" while still recognizing that the stores should be "personalized." She is pointing out that the organization has

a viewpoint (shaped by provisioned objects such as trend alerts) that require her to act on them to make them useful, i.e., a broad description of a trend is of no value until Lily acts on it, in combination with other objects such as merchandise and fixtures, to create a compelling display.

As I learned in talking with Veronica (33), the original idea for a *Sex and the City* table came from another store manager. The organization then took this object (i.e., the concept of a *Sex and the City* table with accompanying pictures) and distributed it to other store employees, who would then subsequently act on this object like Lily did by recombining its different parts:

We have one manager . . . who . . . for example, the *Sex and the City* [2] movie is coming out in a couple of weeks. Took it upon herself. She put together four or five versions of what people could be coming in to look for if they're going out with their girlfriends to go to the movie, photographed them, put them in a little PowerPoint presentation, sent them out . . . Yesterday it was broadcast to everyone in the company. You would never see that . . . We encourage the sharing . . . because there are so many variations on a theme.

Thus, one store manager creatively resourced a *Sex and the City* table, the organization then provisioned this object to other stores, and Lily adopted this object for her own store. In doing so, she recombined existing merchandise around a theme, which changed the look and feel of the store and potentially broadened customers' uses of products. As Lily noted:

We put [existing merchandise] back on the floor . . . So everything's still on the floor, it's just in different locations. And so maybe a customer will see a dress folded and they won't understand how to wear it, but once we put it up somewhere they're like "Oh, that's a unique idea."

### **Problem Solving (Investor Period): Heterogeneous Solutions**

Turning a jewelry fixture into a display for belts and recombining objects around a *Sex and the City* theme were actions that not only solved a store's immediate problems (i.e., how do we merchandise our store?) but also played a role in helping BoutiqueCo solve some of its most critical problems, particularly around growing into a large chain of boutiques. As a chain, the organization wanted to enjoy the benefits of scale economies and have a

unified vision. But as a boutique, the organization sought uniqueness at each location that depended on the ongoing creativity of employees. Creative resourcing helped resolve these competing demands because even though employees had access to similar objects (products, fixtures, trend alerts, etc.), the way employees creatively resourced these objects differed. This helped BoutiqueCo project to customers that each store was unique while still related. Consequently, creative resourcing solved problems through heterogeneous solutions. Relative to original solutions, heterogeneous solutions were less novel because creative resourcing had a more common foundation, particularly provisioned objects. Nonetheless, this problem solving remained a creative act because each store solved problems uniquely (i.e., heterogeneously) although in ways that might be more imaginable to corporate managers. Put another way, employees creatively resourced in novel but somewhat more predictable ways. As Veronica (33) put it:

For us to say that every boutique needs to look the same, first of all, we don't want that . . . We want people to think that the one you're shopping at is the only one that exists, and so to have them all cookie-cutter would just, I think, be a death knell for us, because a customer walking in a door who sees that—it's just like going into a grocery store: The bread's gonna be here; the eggs are gonna be here . . . which is what you'll find at, let's say, an Ann Taylor . . . I couldn't get them into the store and get them to browse and to discover. I can take two stores, send the exact same merchandise and have, for the most part, two different experiences with the same product, both though, brand-appropriate, *staying within the idea of the brand* [emphasis added].

As Veronica noted, BoutiqueCo was buying in scale for the chain, but stores work with objects differently. As a result, creative resourcing led to heterogeneity in solutions across the organization in ways that affirmed the organization's general vision while reflecting the unique creative activities inside particular stores.

By solving problems at a local level, creative resourcing also allowed stores to cater to niche markets as opposed to applying a one-size-fits-all approach typical of retail chains. This allowed each store to market to and service customers akin to how a traditional boutique would, while still maintaining some standardization as each store received similar objects. For example, Nicky (40) explained how employees should "customiz[e] your store to your customer, customize your store, your market"

and traced this customization to the “freedom of the visuals” that allow employees to creatively resource, thus allowing each store to become “what’s best for them.”

Meghan (5) provided a store employee’s perspective. She talked about how she can creatively resource her store and respond to customer needs, thereby creating a different store experience:

While we’re here in this store, we can move things around, we can change our mannequins. I can watch the traffic. I can watch the crowd. I can watch the age group. I know if spring break is coming, I really need to set my tables, set my window for the vibrant, bright, youthful, young group. If we’re going into holiday, various things like that. So, to be able to set my store to what my traffic and what my clientele is has been a lot of fun. It’s funny because we’ll set a table and we’ll put everything up and it sells great. Well, what is so odd is we’ve taken something out of the rack that’s been there for two weeks that nobody has bought one piece and we display it differently and it’s out the door, so just little things like that that we’ve been able to do. Whereas, at David’s

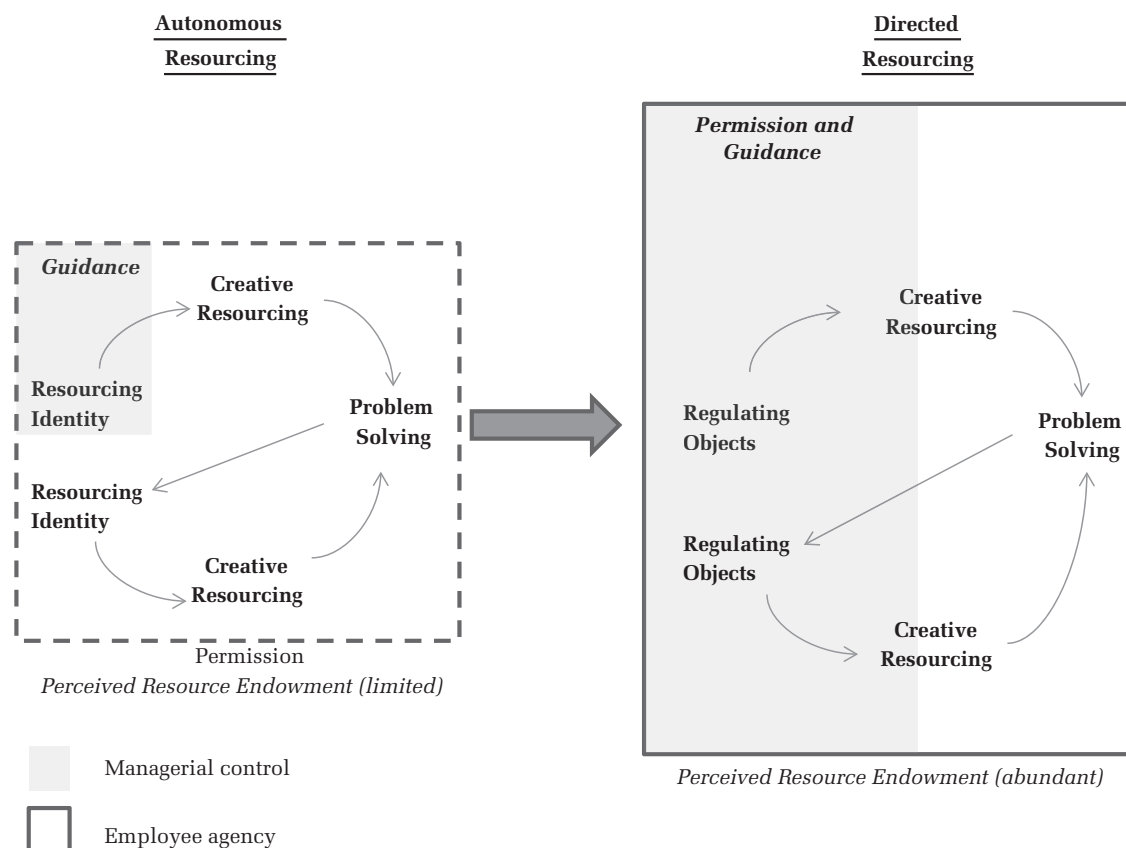
Bridal, it was very calm, very relaxed, very step-by-step. You bring the bride in for this process, she’s in for this process and everything is in exactly one certain place and you don’t move it at all for any reason.

As Meghan describes, she altered her store by watching shoppers and adjusting her actions (such as recombining objects) to meet their changing needs. How Meghan creatively resourced will differ from employees at other stores, in part because she interprets her customers as different (a college-campus crowd) from other stores (such as moms with young children).

### TOWARDS A PROCESS MODEL OF CREATIVE RESOURCING

While Figure 1 reports a data structure that grounds core constructs, Figure 2 displays the relationships among these constructs. Based on the findings, I propose a process model of how managers facilitate creative resourcing as perceived re-

**FIGURE 2**  
**A Process Model of Creative Resourcing**





source endowments increase over time. The model depicts two resourcing processes: autonomous resourcing and directed resourcing. The two resourcing processes explain the different ways that managers respond to perceived resource endowments to shape the creative acts of employees.

### Autonomous Resourcing

Autonomous resourcing explains how managers facilitate creative resourcing by shaping the identities of employees. I label this process as “autonomous” because once managers start shaping employees’ identities as creative owners of their stores, creative resourcing takes place with minimal managerial action. Instead, employees enact a resourcing identity (creative owners), interpreting themselves as responsible for solutions in their stores. In enacting a creative owner identity, employees reinforce that identity, thereby fueling a recursive process among a resourcing identity, creative resourcing and problem solving.

To initiate autonomous resourcing, managers shape employees’ identities with a resourcing identity of being creative owners. The initiation of autonomous resourcing through the shaping of employees’ identities unfolds as a result of three mechanisms. First, corporate managers directly shape how employees interpret themselves, a type of identity sense-giving (e.g., Corley & Gioia, 2004; Fiol, 2002; Pratt, 2000), such as through the introduction of the key vocabulary word of “ownership.” The introduction of this vocabulary word provides employees with language to make sense of their self and motivates action in identity-consistent ways (Swann, 1983). Second, corporate managers respond to their interpretation of a limited resource endowment by relegating key problem solving to store employees. As a result, store employees interpret themselves as having to solve problems independently, without substantial managerial capital and knowledge to assist them. In doing so, employees interpret themselves as having to take ownership of their stores in creative ways to cope with limited resources from top managers. Third, managers embrace equivocality by acknowledging that there is not a single right answer to many problems the organization faces (Gioia et al., 2012; Sonenshein, 2010; Weick, 1995). This licenses employees to view themselves as creators who experiment to respond to this equivocality without fearing that they will reach the wrong answer. Managers, interpreting their own knowledge

deficiencies, create a psychologically safe environment to experiment by embracing this equivocality (Edmondson, 1999; Lee, Edmondson, Thomke, & Worline, 2004), which allows employees to develop their own interpretations (e.g., Sonenshein, 2009).

A “resourcing” identity refers to a self-concept based on an ownership schema that provides the motivation to resource and a creator schema that provides the means of how someone resources (i.e., creatively). By shaping an employee’s self-concept as owning their store, managers psychologically tie employees to their workplace (Dittmar, 1992), which leads to a sense of responsibility for solving problems (e.g., Avey, Avolio, Crossley, & Luthans, 2009; Pierce, Kostova, & Dirks, 2001). How employees solve problems gets shaped by the creator schema, in which employees view themselves as having a creative role identity (e.g., Farmer, Tierney, & Kung-McIntyre, 2003). When employees interpret and enact themselves as creators, such as through embracing the experimental nature of what they do, they test different ways of working with available objects, seeking new manipulations or re-combinations of those objects.

When individuals embrace an identity, they seek to perform behaviors consistent with that identity (Swann, 1983), such as through creative resourcing. Creative resourcing is an activity in which employees manipulate and recombine available objects in their stores in novel and useful ways. The resourcing is novel because employee manipulations and re-combinations are new; they are neither provided by managers nor any other source. The resourcing is useful in the sense that it creates value for the organization by solving problems in original ways not imaginable by managers. When employees solve problems in original ways, they reinforce their identity as they make sense of their creative behavior (Grube & Piliavin, 2000), and that is something that explains why autonomous resourcing can continue with minimal managerial interference (I depict this recursive process in the bottom part of Figure 2 for autonomous resourcing).

An important aspect of autonomous resourcing is that it depicts the creative process as paradoxically involving permission and guidance, something scholars have proposed as being important for the discovery of new ideas (e.g., Locke, Golden-Biddle, & Feldman, 2008). Permission comes primarily from individuals’ perceptions of a limited resource endowment, in which individuals cannot access typical solutions and instead may feel permitted to create their own solutions (e.g., Baker & Nelson,

2005). But this permission may nevertheless steer individuals towards useful solutions as the organization's members perceived a limited resource endowment, thereby providing limited tolerance for impractical solutions. I visually depict the permission from the limited resource endowment by enveloping autonomous resourcing with a box bounded by dashed lines. At the same time, managers provide guidance, or support, by helping employees initially enact a resourcing identity (I depict this managerial guidance with a small shaded box in the upper left-hand corner of Figure 2). This guidance may not only further motivate employees to creatively resource but also shapes that creativity towards experimenting with available objects. This may lead to novel solutions as the guidance of a resourcing identity encourages experimentation. Put another way, original solutions from autonomous resourcing can map onto the classic dimensions of creativity (namely, novelty and useful) (Amabile, 1988): novelty generated by a resourcing identity empowers employees towards new discoveries while the lack of perceived resources dictates those solutions to be pragmatic to keep the organization viable. Finally, the relative distribution of the shaded to unshaded box in Figure 2 (which represents the sphere of employee agency) shows that for autonomous resourcing, managers play a less involved role compared with directed resourcing (where the shaded box is substantially larger).

In my particular case, autonomous resourcing best explains the early history of BoutiqueCo. More generally, though, this type of resourcing might unfold in not only new ventures but also whenever managers perceive limited resource endowments, such as due to a decline in revenues, an exogenous shock, or a crisis. What is important for autonomous resourcing is that managers interpret a limited resource endowment and attempt to cultivate widespread creative action to cope with this endowment. But a consequence of this approach is that, once started, managers have relatively little control over how creative resourcing unfolds—something that leads to original solutions often not imaginable by managers.

### Directed Resourcing

In contrast to autonomous resourcing, directed resourcing involves greater ongoing managerial control over creative resourcing. I visually depict this using a larger shaded box for directed resourcing in Figure 2. The central mechanism in directed

resourcing is managers' regulation of objects. When managers interpret an abundant resource endowment, they withhold objects as a means of motivating employees to creatively resource by denying fixed objects that would require limited employee actions to create solutions to problems. Instead, managers provision dynamic objects that shape but do not fully determine how creative resourcing unfolds.

The idea that managers withhold some objects but provision others necessitates a closer examination of the type of objects managers regulate: fixed and dynamic. While any object can be put to use to make it valuable (Feldman, 2004), fixed objects have qualities less readily put to use in multiple ways. The most prominent example of this from my data was a planogram. Planograms can be valuable resources when they are put to use to set up a store, which is something many organizations do and something some BoutiqueCo informants did when they worked for other organizations. Even so, the number of ways that individuals can act to turn a planogram into a resource is limited by its innate qualities as a specific plan for how to do things. And in contrast, employees can more readily put to use dynamic objects in multiple ways, such as trend alerts, stories, and broad guidelines. For example, two employees can differentially act on a trend alert and end up creatively resourcing their stores in very different ways and solving problems in novel ways (what I termed heterogeneous solutions). Lily's *Sex and the City* table could be traced back to an object that managers provisioned to her, but Lily acted to give the *Sex and the City* concept a new meaning. Lily's *Sex and the City* concept was different from others in the organization (hence, it was a heterogeneous solution even if it was not a completely original one).

The fact that the central mechanism of directed resourcing emanates from how managers withhold and provision objects leads to greater managerial control compared with autonomous resourcing. Managers provision objects to gently shape creative resourcing by introducing objects that employees can work from to solve problems. Objects such as loosely structured guidelines and broad concepts such as trend alerts are of limited value to employees until they act on them, in conjunction with other objects (such as products and fixtures), to create something of value, such as a merchandise display. Thus, employees still retain important agency (represented by the unshaded box on the right-hand side of Figure 2 for directed resourcing)

in working with available objects, but managers play a more direct role in providing objects for them to work with that shape their resourcing (hence, the shaded box covers a portion of creative resourcing).

Directed resourcing is also a recursive process. It unfolds as employees solve problems that create new objects that employees can subsequently creatively resource, thereby grounding an ampliative resourcing cycle (Feldman & Worline, 2012). Returning to Lily's *Sex and the City* example, her creative resourcing of the table was initiated from another store manager's creative resourcing that first introduced the object, *Sex and the City*. Put more generally, as employees creatively resource to solve problems, their solutions also create objects that can then be subsequently creatively resourced by employees and/or provisioned (or withheld) by managers to motivate and/or shape future creative resourcing of other employees. Consequently, problem solving creates subsequent objects that employees can further resource to solve new problems.

In directed resourcing, the dynamic between permission and guidance is different from autonomous resourcing. In directed resourcing, the permission to creatively resource comes from managerial actions to withhold objects, which creates the need to creatively resource (i.e., employees lack access to typical fixed objects). At the same time, by provisioning objects, managers guide how that creative resourcing unfolds. This guidance prods employees to reach useful solutions by having those solutions generated from a set of provisioned objects. Managers take this approach because, unlike for autonomous resourcing, directed resourcing involves an abundant perceived resource endowment. Without regulating objects, employees may creatively resource in ways not useful to the organization (or may even sense little need to creatively resource because managers do not withhold fixed objects). Put another way, under directed resourcing managers create urgency by withholding objects (thereby permitting employees to creatively resource) and focus creative resourcing on useful solutions by provisioning other objects (guidance). As a result, managerial control incorporates not only the guidance found in autonomous resourcing but also permission.

In my case, directed resourcing explains how employees continued to act creatively as the organization perceived a more abundant resource endowment. But this type of resourcing may also help explain creative activities when organizations are

large but need to engage in continuous creativity (e.g., Hargadon & Sutton, 1997) or ground a differentiated culture or strategy around creativity (e.g., Harrison & Corley, 2011). It does so by positing that managers' key action—regulating objects—shapes the repertoire of objects that employees likely perceive as fixed or dynamic, which both encourages and shapes creative resourcing.

### The Relationship between Autonomous and Directed Resourcing

While the data are only suggestive here, I find that by solving problems in autonomous resourcing, employees create original solutions that help the organization increase its perceived resource endowment. The arrow in Figure 2 connecting the two types of resourcing depicts that problem solving can shift resourcing from the autonomous form to the directed form. Problem solving can improve the perceptions that corporate managers have about their resource endowment, including the organization's collective knowledge to operate its business and its capital resources. As perceptions of the resource endowment improve, managers shift to directed resourcing. Three mechanisms explain this transition from autonomous to directed resourcing.

First, when employees solve problems through creative resourcing in autonomous resourcing, they allow the organization to get by with limited infrastructure investment (e.g., Baker & Nelson, 2005). Instead of investing in infrastructure, managers expand the repertoire of employee activities through shaping their identities. This capital can instead be used to grow as BoutiqueCo did, or invest in marketing, recruitment and other aspects that overcome an organization's liability of newness (Stinchcombe, 1965). This resource conservation explanation (e.g., Voss, Sirdeshmukh, & Voss, 2008) emphasizes how organizations can use objects such as capital and knowledge to pursue opportunities to grow instead of for current operations, until the organization perceives it has enough of a resource endowment to turn to operations.

Second, fostering a resourcing identity may endogenously create psychological resources (e.g., Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012), such as motivation (Amabile, 1988), which helps an organization overcome a perceived limited-resource environment as employees feel empowered to do their job and have increased task significance, variety and identity (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). This endogenous re-

sourcefulness explanation (Dutton et al., 2006; Glynn & Wrobel, 2006; Spreitzer, Sutcliffe, Dutton, Sonenshein, & Grant, 2005) suggests that employees generate new resources within the organization, and these resources in turn help to propel further action (e.g., Quinn & Worline, 2008). Thus, the very act of engaging in creative resourcing may create psychological resources that continue to foster this activity, and in turn help the organization enhance its perceived resource endowment.

Third, creative resourcing may help employees develop a repertoire of actions to solve subsequent problems, grounding a strategic advantage in transforming common objects into something distinctive (e.g., Nag & Gioia, 2012). This knowledge-based explanation (e.g., Kogut & Zander, 1992) proposes that creative resourcing can help enhance an organization's perceived resource endowment through employees' development of knowledge around how to creatively resource. More specifically, as employees develop procedural knowledge (Anderson, 1996) about how to manipulate and recombine objects, they solve problems that help a nascent organization grow. But this problem solving can also create objects that can then be further resourced, which is what happened with Lily's *Sex and the City* example. This suggests that directed resourcing may depend on autonomous resourcing first, which helps build a repertoire of objects to subsequently creatively resource. Absent these objects, managers may not have a sufficient repertoire of objects to regulate.

## DISCUSSION

By providing a rare examination of an organization's creative activities as it grew into a public company, I elaborated theory around the relationship between resources and creativity over time. This clarifies competing perspectives in the creativity literature by integrating creativity and resourcing research. In doing so, I infuse creativity research with an important emphasis on action that highlights how organizational processes are shaped by managerial action and influence the creative actions of employees. I now describe how my findings contribute to research on creativity and resourcing.

### Contributions to Research on Creativity

Scholars present competing perspectives on the role of resources in fostering creativity, with some claiming that limited resources stimulate creative

action (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Ohly & Fritz, 2010) and others claiming that abundant resources stimulate creative action (Amabile et al., 1996; Cyert & March, 1963). The findings from this article suggest that focusing solely on the quantity of resources obscures how individuals use and alter resources (or more precisely, objects). Individuals creatively act on objects that appear to have little value and transform them into something more useful. Explaining how individuals creatively act on objects to turn them into resources, and how managers facilitate this process, has four important implications for creativity research.

First, the idea that certain resources might be necessary for creativity (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996) misses that a creative process itself involves transforming objects into the very resources needed for creativity. While scholars have emphasized creative outcomes, they have largely ignored creative processes (Drazin et al., 1999; George, 2007; Shalley et al., 2004). Of the more process-based research, scholars have identified skills that foster creativity, such as problem identification, resource gathering, idea generation and evaluation, and modifying and communicating ideas (Amabile, 1996). Yet, this work assumes that when the resource amount is not abundant, creativity becomes hindered (e.g., Amabile et al., 1996). But the findings from the current study show an important element of the creative process is resourcing objects to endogenously produce what employees need in order to act creatively.

On a related note, the findings from this study suggest that it is difficult to explain creativity as a function of an organization's resource endowment without concomitantly asking how managers (and employees) act in response to a perceived resource endowment. This is because the objects that employees creatively resource are not static, suggesting the need to understand actions that transform these objects. However, scholars have not given due attention to managerial actions to cultivate creativity (Ford & Gioia, 2000). The current research suggests that creativity scholarship should broaden from primarily an exercise in mapping independent variables (such as resource amount) to creative outputs, to include an examination of the processes by which employees and managers act on objects. In this regard, research has not considered in depth organizational processes of creativity in which managers mediate between interpretations of an organization's resource endowment and employees' creative actions. Yet it is precisely a focus on



the mediation of an organization's resource endowment and employees' creative actions that may resolve the theoretical conflict over whether limited or abundant resources foster creative acts. The findings from this paper propose that both types of resource endowments can lead to creative acts, but that this creativity is dependent on how managers (and employees) respond to these endowments.

More specifically, managers can foster creativity with perceived limited resources through autonomous resourcing, in which managers shape employees' identities to enable them to act creatively. But this comes with minimal, ongoing managerial control. This view contrasts with extant explanations in creativity research, which suggest that managers might respond to limited resources by enhancing motivation such as through setting goals and altering expectancies (Ford, 1996) or more effectively helping employees utilize what resources they already have (Taggar, 2002). Alternatively, under directed resourcing, managers regulate objects to find a balance between withholding fixed objects and provisioning dynamic objects. By regulating objects, managers create some of the conditions more typical under a limited resource endowment (i.e., the lack of resources that embody the one right answer) while also providing objects more likely under an abundant resource endowment (i.e., objects that provide a foundation from which to resource that help employees solve problems). Put in more psychological terms, regulating objects may provide a way of conditionally presenting objects to employees, which likely leads to more engagement with the objects and potentially greater creative problem solving (Langer & Piper, 1987). The tentativeness suggested by provisioning dynamic objects coupled with withholding fixed objects demands that individuals find a creative solution and limits their tendency to perform work tasks mindlessly. This suggests that managers engage in an artful balance of providing the appropriate type of objects that continue to stimulate and shape creativity without over-determining it or stymieing it. This explanation contrasts with the view of organizational theorists who propose that as organizations enhance their resource endowment, they seek to standardize solutions in ways that might limit intra-organizational heterogeneity (Quinn & Cameron, 1983).

Second, in unpacking autonomous and directing resourcing, I explain how scholars can understand organizational processes of creativity as a dynamic between permission and guidance (Locke et al.,

2008). In some contexts, perceptions of a limited resource endowment can permit employees to creatively resource (autonomous resourcing), whereas in other contexts managerial actions play a more prominent role in permitting creativity (directed resourcing). At the same time, managers guide employees through the creative process using different means—through either helping to foster a resourcing identity (autonomous) or regulating objects (directed). While scholars have suggested the role of permission and guidance in fostering new discoveries, they have done so in the context of theory development (Locke et al., 2008; Swedberg, 2012; Weick, 2006). Yet, in accordance with this viewpoint, the managers from my study created an environment in which employees had both permission to be creative and some guidance about how to do so. Permission, in the form of a perceived limited resource endowment that demanded creative solutions, or in the form of managerial withholding objects to replicate some of that limited resource endowment, sparked a need for creative action. Guidance, in the form of a creative owner identity that encouraged experimentation or in the form of provisioned objects that provided a foundation from which to creatively resource, shaped that creativity. While only tentative, these findings suggest a shift from a unitary view of creativity, popular among scholars, in which similar processes explain both novelty and usefulness dimensions of creativity (George, 2007; Shalley et al., 2004; cf. Unsworth, 2001). For autonomous resourcing, employees have broad permission to enact a creative owner identity; but they are nevertheless modulated by their limited resource endowment, which requires practical solutions to keep their store (and the organization) operating. In directed resourcing, withholding objects motivates novel actions as managers deprive employees of a fixed object to solve their problems. But employees creatively resource from provisioned objects that help direct that creative resourcing towards solutions useful for the organization. In both cases, the organizational context is critical for understanding creative actions as opposed to primarily the innate qualities of individuals. While scholars have suggested that creativity is largely a byproduct of personality or innate ability (Feist, 1998), my findings complement this research by indicating that creativity is shaped by organizational context and processes (see also Hargadon & Bechky, 2006).

Third, a focus on managerial actions also explains how organizations can continue to foster



creativity as they grow. Similar to alternative mechanisms to foster creativity such as knowledge brokering (Hargadon & Sutton, 1997), collective sense-making (Drazin et al., 1999; Ford, 1996), and improvisation (Kamoche, Pina e Cunha, & Vieira da Cunha, 2003), I explain how creativity is not simply an outcome but also an organizational process. But unlike extant research, the findings from this study add an important focus on how actions change over time as organizations evolve. In doing so, I call attention to the skill of managers who shift from autonomous to directed resourcing as their perceived resource endowment changes. As a result, the findings from this paper encourage scholars to account for the wider organizational context in which creativity unfolds (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004). Creativity is contextually embedded based on the organization's lifecycle development (e.g., a new or mature organization (Koberg, Uhlenbruck, & Sarason, 1996; Quinn & Cameron, 1983)) and I illuminated how managers and employees collectively act to reach creative solutions as the organization's lifecycle progresses. While this claim warrants further exploration, highly original solutions may be more useful to a new venture with limited knowledge and experience when it is searching for answers to survive, whereas a focus on intra-organizational variations that have more in common across an organization might be more useful for a larger, more mature organization seeking to have a uniform identity. This is especially important to creativity scholars who have heretofore lacked a nuanced discussion of how key terms such as "usefulness" may be contextually dependent (George, 2007). It also suggests that, at an organizational level, fostering a resourcing identity may help organizations explore ways to cope with perceived limited resources, whereas regulating objects may help them exploit a perceived abundant resource base (March, 1991).

Fourth and finally, my research joins a growing body of scholarship around the importance of the material context for creativity (e.g., Bechky, 2003; Garud & Rappa, 1994; Stigliani & Ravasi, 2012). My research explains how managers influence this material context by regulating objects that stimulate and shape the recombining and manipulating of material resources (e.g., fixtures and products). In theorizing this material context of creativity, my work unpacks how organizational members interpret many objects not as having a fixed meaning but, rather, as more akin to epistemic objects that have a wide degree of interpretive discretion (Knorr

Cetina, 1981, 1997). This is an important shift in how creativity scholars typically theorize resources, because it suggests that focusing simply on the quantity of resources, without recognizing how individuals act on material (and non-material) objects to transform them into resources, overlooks how resources can be endless wellsprings of knowledge creation that continually acquire novel (and potentially useful) properties as individuals act on them (Rheinberger, 1997).

### Contributions to Research on Resourcing

The findings from this paper also make two important contributions to the literature on resourcing (e.g., Dutton et al., 2006; Feldman, 2004; Feldman & Worline, 2012; Glynn & Wrobel, 2006).

First, the resourcing literature calls attention to the skilled actions of individuals who resource using a variety of mechanisms, such as narrating to forge a collective identity (Quinn & Worline, 2008) and juxtaposing new and existing cultural resources (Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011). To this body of work, the current study adds the importance of creativity as a foundational skill for resourcing. Creative acts may broaden and enhance the way that individuals resource, and can help explain other mechanisms such as narrating and juxtaposing. For example, individuals can creatively resource to enhance narratives as they manipulate and recombine objects to create more novel and useful stories that may foster a more compelling collective identity. In this regard, the current study opens up the possibility for deepening resourcing research by drawing from research on creativity to add detail to the skilled resourcing actions of individuals.

Second, scholars typically theorize resourcing as a bottom-up process (e.g., Feldman & Worline, 2012). Although employee actions play a large part in my empirical story and emergent theory, managers play a critical role in permitting and guiding creative resourcing, and it is something that suggests the need to better understand the managerial skill involved in fostering resourcing. For example, scholars can examine how managers learn to resource in ways that are more helpful. Furthermore, resourcing scholars may benefit from a closer dialogue with more psychologically oriented scholars who offer a rich tradition of explaining the antecedents of creative acts (e.g., George, 2007), which may also serve as important antecedents for actions that support a resourcing process.

## Contributions to Practice

My findings suggest two key practical implications. First, it should be noted that, rather than focus on the amount of resources to foster creativity, practitioners can focus on the actions that managers and employees take in response to their perceived resource endowment. Managers facilitate creative action under a wide variety of contexts through adopting actions consistent with either autonomous or directed resourcing. But there are distinct, practical tradeoffs between the two types of resourcing. While autonomous resourcing requires less ongoing involvement from managers, it comes with less control over employees' creative activities. At the same time, it offers the possibility for more original solutions to emerge from the open-ended nature of problems that employees solve (Unsworth, 2001). As a result, managers may want to facilitate autonomous resourcing, not only when their perceived resource endowment is limited but also when they seek highly novel outcomes. In contrast, directed resourcing affords managers greater control over the creative activities of employees but also depends on the development of a repertoire of objects to provision that serve as the foundation of employees' creative resourcing—a prerequisite that most likely depends on previous experience with creative resourcing. While somewhat speculative, solutions from directed resourcing may favor usefulness more than novelty as managers exert greater control over the creative process, although scholars clearly need to conduct more research to substantiate this tradeoff.

Second, while creativity research has developed important practical insights into factors that explain creative action of employees, such as their personal characteristics (Shalley et al., 2004), intrinsic motivation (Amabile, Hill, Hennessey, & Tighe, 1994), and leader–member exchange (Basu & Green, 1997), my findings suggest other ways managers can spark creative activity through fostering a resourcing identity and regulating objects withheld and provisioned to employees. This opens up new avenues for managers to influence creative activities among their employees. Furthermore, this research calls attention to a new domain of creative activity often overlooked by scholars and managers alike, namely, that a crucial creative activity of employees is the way in which they work with objects, which they use to solve problems vital for themselves and the organization. This can be equally important for new ventures with a limited

resource environment and mature organizations with a more abundant resource environment.

## CONCLUSION

By spotlighting the crucial actions that managers and employees take to mediate interpretations of a changing resource endowment with creative activities, I elaborate theory around critical processes that help explain the elusive goal of fostering ongoing creativity as organizations grow. In doing so, this research broadens the conversation of creativity scholars beyond the amount of resources needed to foster creativity to include the actions that managers and employees take in response to perceived resource endowments. The theory provides a valuable depiction of key organizational processes that call attention to the skilled actions of managers and employees in engaging in creative activities. Returning to my opening question, necessity *can* be the mother of all creativity. Similarly, an abundance of resources can spark creativity. But whether each type of resource endowment leads to creativity depends on the interpretations and actions of managers and employees.

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Protocols

#### Home Office Employees:

- Can you tell me what you do for BoutiqueCo?
- What did you expect your job to be like before you started? How has it actually been?
- Can you tell me what a model BoutiqueCo employee is? Is there more than one way to be a model employee?
- How do store employees learn about being a model BoutiqueCo employee?
- Who is [iconic symbol of BoutiqueCo]? How would you describe her?
- How do you exemplify BoutiqueCo in your job and role?
- BoutiqueCo has been opening up a lot of boutiques. Has this impacted your job?
  - Follow up: how have you had to adapt to this growth?

#### Store Employees:

- Can you tell me about what you do for BoutiqueCo?
- What did you expect your job to be like before you started? How has it actually been?
- How long have you worked in this position? What did you do before taking this position? Can you tell me about your other experience in retail?
- Can you tell me about what is a model BoutiqueCo employee?
- How did you “learn the ropes” about working at BoutiqueCo?

- How would you characterize your relationship with your co-workers?
  - Follow up: what was it like trying to be accepted by them when you first started?
- Who is [iconic symbol of BoutiqueCo]? How would you describe her?
- How would you describe your interaction and relationship with headquarters?
- How do you go about the sales process?
- What are the different ways in which you exercise creativity or discretion in your job?
- BoutiqueCo has been opening up a lot of boutiques. Has this impacted your job?
  - Follow up: how have you had to adapt to this growth?
- What do you most enjoy about working here? What do you least enjoy about working here?
  - (Store managers only): What practices do you use to help your employees “learn the ropes”?

\*Note: Due to the semi-structured nature of the protocol and the grounded theory design, the interview questions differed slightly among participants as the research progressed. But the protocol emphasized the above core questions.



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