

---

11-4-2019

## Promoting Creativity in the Cooperative Work Environment: A Case Study of the Lacol Cooperative

Teresa Morlà-Folch

*Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, teresa.morla@urv.cat*

Mar Joanpere-Foraster

*Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Reus*

Eleni Papaoikonomou

*Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Reus*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

---

### Recommended APA Citation

Morlà-Folch, T., Joanpere-Foraster, M., & Papaoikonomou, E. (2019). Promoting Creativity in the Cooperative Work Environment: A Case Study of the Lacol Cooperative. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(11), 2722-2746. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss11/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact [nsuworks@nova.edu](mailto:nsuworks@nova.edu).

---



**Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate**  
*Indulge in Culture*  
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits  
**LEARN MORE**

NSU  
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

## Promoting Creativity in the Cooperative Work Environment: A Case Study of the Lacol Cooperative

### Abstract

Previous research has examined organizational factors that could facilitate or limit creativity also indicating that although cooperatives can be seen as innovative business formats, they are also considered slow growth models because of their organizational characteristics. In this study we aim to explore the processes, practices, and other organizational characteristics that define the creative dynamics in cooperatives. In this way, our goals are (a) to understand how the promotion of the creativity is carried out in the cooperative workplace and (b) to study the factors that can accelerate the development of a more positive climate for creativity, boosting transformative elements and neutralizing exclusionary elements. This article is focused on a qualitative case study of an architecture cooperative from Catalonia (Spain), Lacol. The data were collected through two in-depth interviews. Also, visual material was collected to study how the physical space is organised and how this affects creative processes. The results show that, of the studied elements, those most relevant to produce a creative work environment in Lacol are power decentralization, freedom and autonomy, work team support, training, and challenges. Likewise, friendship has been identified as an important transversal element. Finally, future research lines are discussed.

### Keywords

Creativity, Cooperative, Work Environment, Case Study

### Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

## Promoting Creativity in the Cooperative Work Environment: A Case Study of the Lacol Cooperative

Teresa Morlà-Folch, Mar Joanpere, and Eleni Papaoikonomou  
Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Reus, Spain

---

*Previous research has examined organizational factors that could facilitate or limit creativity also indicating that although cooperatives can be seen as innovative business formats, they are also considered slow growth models because of their organizational characteristics. In this study we aim to explore the processes, practices, and other organizational characteristics that define the creative dynamics in cooperatives. In this way, our goals are (a) to understand how the promotion of the creativity is carried out in the cooperative workplace and (b) to study the factors that can accelerate the development of a more positive climate for creativity, boosting transformative elements and neutralizing exclusionary elements. This article is focused on a qualitative case study of an architecture cooperative from Catalonia (Spain), Lacol. The data were collected through two in-depth interviews. Also, visual material was collected to study how the physical space is organised and how this affects creative processes. The results show that, of the studied elements, those most relevant to produce a creative work environment in Lacol are power decentralization, freedom and autonomy, work team support, training, and challenges. Likewise, friendship has been identified as an important transversal element. Finally, future research lines are discussed. Keywords: Creativity, Cooperative, Work Environment, Case Study*

---

### Introduction

In recent years, shorter product life cycles and new technological advances require a rapid and radical innovation mode. In turn, this implies a growing complexity and dynamism in the work environment, which translates to the corresponding need for organizations to adapt to changing circumstances, making them ever more reliant on their employees' abilities to continually innovate and be creative (Tavares, 2016). In the economic-enterprise context, the creativity notion is associated with innovation and invention, especially, in innovation of products, processes, management, strategies, and marketing. In other words, creative behaviour at work is considered an essential factor for innovation and consequent organizational success (Hunter, Bedell, & Mumford, 2007; Oldham & Baer, 2012; Soriano de Alencar, 2012). Previous research has discussed what makes an organisation creative and what factors favour or limit creativity in the workplace (Mumford, 2012; Zhu, Gardner, & Chen, 2016). For instance, it has been previously demonstrated that contextual characteristics and certain organizational processes such as putting in place mechanisms to develop new ideas and empower employees exert a strong influence in making certain organisational environments creative (Hammond, Neff, Farr, Schwall, & Zhao, 2011).

In addition, the literature shows that creativity can be learned, since creativity is a human behavior (Gagné, 2015). In this sense, the companies themselves can promote processes to teach and to foster creativity among their employees. For this reason, lifelong learning can be an opportunity to be innovative/creative and to empower the entrepreneurial spirit (Van der Heijden, Geldens Beijaard, & Popeijus, 2015). The United Nations Conference on Trade and

Development, UNCTAD, (2008) pointed out that the impact of creativity can be easily identified in business activity; nevertheless, the processes that surround it are not so easily identifiable.

The research on creativity argues that the process of creativity is based on processes of ordinary thinking and abilities common to all people (Boden, 2004; Csikzentmihalyi, 1999; Sternberg, 1998; Tan, 2013). In this sense, it is important to assume that workers are persons who can modify their capacities, adapting them to the new labor realities, since companies no longer focus only on formal qualifications, but increasingly focus on developing the competencies of their workforce. Current workers need adaptation skills in order to overcome the obsolescence of the training received, so professional practice must be linked to the development of knowledge to complete the learning process and the acquisition of creative abilities (Frick & Brodin, 2014). At the same time, contexts of collective creativity facilitate organizational creativity and influence towards a creative mobilization of existing resources to generate new organizational forms (Armstrong, 2002). Cooperatives may potentially be sources of creativity and innovativeness (Kemppainen-Koivisto, Siltavirta, Rusko, & Särkkä, 2015) Rusko et al., 2017). Following the definition of the International Labour Organization (n.d.), “a cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise” (para. 1; see <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/lang--en/index.htm>). In a similar line, Flecha and Ngai (2014) argue that cooperatives explore and create alternative organizational forms responding to society’s economic, social, and democratic needs, although at times there are tensions between cooperative values and the firm’s competitiveness. Also, cooperatives are considered to be democratic businesses based on participatory decision making (Heras-Saizarbitoria, 2014; Jossa, 2014), even though this precise aspect can lead to slower decision making for which they are often criticized (Beverland, 2007; Kemppainen-Koivisto et al., 2015). Such tensions need to be solved so that the organization moves forward and this is precisely where organizational creativity can play an important role (Haedicke, 2012).

However, previous literature on the creativity of cooperatives is scant and inconclusive. On one hand some authors (Jossa, 2014; Kontogeorgos, 2012) have debated about the cooperative’s creative and innovative potential because of their slowness, their lack of financing and qualified managers and of a clear focus on innovation. On the other hand, Kemppainen-Koivisto et al. (2015) make a distinction between traditional cooperatives such as agricultural and financial cooperatives and “new-coops” that are frequently made up of professionals in the creative industries, such as design, music, and videos. The same authors argue that in creative industries cooperative formats can be “natural channels for entrepreneurship” (p. 26) and foster organization creativity as members collaborate and develop new ideas and projects together. However, we lack empirical insights into new cooperative models in order to understand creativity and innovative dynamics in these new institutional arrangements.

From a case study on the cooperative of Lacol architects (Barcelona), in this article we aim to identify which elements can facilitate the promotion of creativity at work. To meet this objective, we organized the article into five sections. Firstly, we introduce the scientific relevance of the research. Secondly, we analyze the theoretical framework and previous studies of creativity and innovation from the organizational creativity perspective. Thirdly, we explain the methodology chosen for the study, as well as the interests in the cooperative of Lacol architects, and detail their relation with the topic of study. Next, we report the results that emerged from two in-depth interviews. Finally, we provide discussion of how the results of this research contribute to the evidence, as well as provide suggestions for future lines of research.

## **Creativity and Innovation in Organizations**

The definition of creativity is difficult to reach a consensus on (Williams, Ostwald & Askland, 2010). Nevertheless, we observed a certain consensus in the literature on some of its distinctive elements. First of all, in the present context, creativity in the workplace is considered something original, whenever it also fulfills the conditions of usefulness, that is, providing value to various stakeholders (Pope, 2005), and conditions of effectiveness, generating products and ideas whose value depends on the current market (Runco & Jaeger, 2012). Early studies in the psychological field conceived creativity mainly as referring to individual and creative potential (Dellas & Gaier, 1970). For example, the literature in this field connected individual creativity with different parameters of individual cognitive styles and other intellectual factors, intelligence, personality, and individual motivation (Dellas & Gaier, 1970). Nevertheless, recent literature has focused on those processes that generate creativity and creative products (Simonton, 2003). From this perspective, creativity is the result of a collective process whereas social systems recognize and establish what creativity means (Sawyer, 2006). Therefore, the notion of creativity is built on shared meaning structures and is context-bound (Amabile, 1996). Different authors, as for example Sternberg (1998), Sawyer (2006), or Amabile (1996), emphasize the reciprocal influence between the environment and the individual, which in turn generates complex interactions among social factors, contextual factors, and personal characteristics. That is why creativity cannot be considered independent of the environmental context (Soriano de Alencar, 2012). In line with Csikzentmihalyi (1999), we understand that creativity is a phenomenon that is constructed through an interaction between producers and audience.

In the organizational context, creativity depends on factors related to work environment layout, namely labor flexibility, personal responsibility, and the problem-solving skills of the workers and their manager (Mathisen & Einarsen, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand what organizations can do to facilitate creativity-shaping social living where the individual is working and potentially “creating,” as well as the individual components that are necessary for any creative response. Particularly, if we focus on Amabile (2012) three components are defined as important for individual contributions to improve group creativity. The first component is task motivation, which is “specifically, the intrinsic motivation to engage in the activity out of interest, enjoyment, or a personal sense of challenge.” The second component is domain-relevant skills, “expertise in the relevant domain or domains.” The third component is creativity-relevant processes, “cognitive and personality processes conducive to novel thinking” (p. 3). The work of Ruscio, Whitney, and Amabile, (1998) demonstrated that these components could positively influence individual creativity. However, in addition, organizations themselves can influence individual creativity through these components. First of all, companies can select the right people to perform creative jobs, looking at their talents, intrinsic motivation, personality, and interests. (Mumford, 2012). Then, companies can motivate employees; for this reason, Taggar (2002) speaks of inspirational motivation when a company encourages its employees to elevate their goals in order to foster organizational innovation.

After all, creative workforces have been long linked to organizational effectiveness and innovation (Amabile, 2012). The concepts of creativity and innovation are closely related; organizations rely on the creativity of the team to boost their innovation (Miron-Spektor, Erez, & Naveh, 2012). Although, some authors have treated creativity and innovation as synonymous concepts (e.g., Sawyer, 2006; Simonton 2003), Soriano de Alencar (2012) summarized well both the relatedness and the distinction between the two concepts, by arguing, “creativity has to be conceptualized as the component idea of innovation” (p. 88). Undoubtedly, creativity is a complex, dynamic, and multifaceted concept that generates great organizational challenges.

But, at the same time, it is an essential factor for innovation and therefore the competitiveness and success of any organization (Mumford, 2012). Exploring the creative dynamics in organizations permits us to understand their innovative potential and their competitiveness on that basis.

### **Organizational Factors that Affect Creativity**

Previous literature shows an increasing interest in understanding contextual work characteristics that affect creativity, such as organizational climate and process- enhancing creativity. Following are the elements identified by the previous literature affecting the creativity of the work group. At the group level or the structure, the interaction between human agents has a key role in creativity. As Mumford (2012) shows, interaction is the key to inhibit or facilitate creative processes. If we focus on the facilitating factors, the studies show that heterogeneous groups promote different perspectives of knowledge and more experience to improve the quality of decision-making. Through these differences leaders could create innovative solutions (Choi & Thompson, 2005; Cox & Blake, 1991; Németh & Németh-Brown, 2003). Therefore, several authors (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Brophy, 1998) argue that the organization must, on one hand, organize, coordinate employees' contributions, and provide feedback to its members, and on the other hand, establish organizational practices that allow obtaining and appreciating different ideas, needs, and points of view.

However, this dialogical knowledge exchange requires special leaders or leadership behaviors to enhance it. In fact, several authors have already argued that research on creativity should pay great attention to leadership (Shin & Zhou, 2007). Leadership is significantly related to creative results, and different authors, such as Amabile (2012), have determined the importance of the configuration of teams that are highly cooperative and shape procedures for performing tasks, or establish standards to actively share opinions with others. Among the different types of leadership, recently in the field of creativity, the focus has been on distributed leadership, since this leadership conforms to the trend of improving empowerment and autonomy within the inter-organizational team (Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). Other studies have also indicated that the leadership rotation on the inter-organizational team provides shared learning and motivates the search for, exchange of, and systematic processing of knowledge (Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011).

Research also suggests that team communication is related to team creativity, but this communication must also be dialogically-based, as Habermas (1987) has previously pointed out, in which valid claims, not power, prevail. Previous studies have focused on the reciprocal influence between the leader and the employees; everyone acquires commitment in relation to creativity regardless of position, generating the social process of collaboration. Therefore, the most effective leaders for creativity are those who provide a certain degree of task structure and supportive environment that minimizes social conflicts and effectively manages cognitive conflicts. In this frame of collaboration, it is key to recognize how to support creative work in organizations through the availability of organizational mechanisms to develop new ideas. Overall, this is interpreted on one hand, as openness, flexibility, respect for divergent opinions, and encouragement of new ideas on the part of the manager. On the other hand, such organizational structures imply limited number of hierarchies, flexible norms, and power decentralization in order to increase the dialogue and reliance among members of the work group (Mumford, 2012). All these characteristics determine the daily life of the organization. Organizations that have these principles are seen as creating spaces of dialogue for group development of creativity.

Chiavenato (1999) argues that friendships or enmities in a company determine interorganizational dynamics. Reiter-Palmon, Wigert, and Vreede (2012) emphasize the

importance of trust and psychological safety. Firstly, this implies the significance of trusting the team, having the confidence that it is a competent team and can get the job done. Secondly, members must feel psychologically safe, that is, they must have interpersonal risk-taking insurance. The combination of both elements generates an environment conducive to free and open discussion of information; when persons feel safe to express their ideas, it is more likely that they will propose new ideas (Ohly, 2018). Creativity has its origin in a dialogic environment; when employees work creatively and cooperatively, products, ideas, or new and useful procedures emerge that provide the organization with raw material for the company to innovate and consolidate in the market in which it operates (Ford, 1996).

Another element identified in the scientific literature on creativity in organizations is the freedom to decide how to perform tasks holding autonomy to make decisions when necessary (Ekvall, 1996). Honest interaction is also key in moulding the final organizational product. However, this requires that the “exchange of honest perspectives should be done in such a way that groups members do not see it as a personal rejection or rejection of the group's goals” (Paulus, Dzindolet, & Kohn, 2012, p. 340). In relation, the literature also notes job design as a relevant element in the creative process of the work team. The link between job complexity and creativity is apparently not that straightforward, and consequently, studies have explored the potential moderating conditions shaping these effects (Oldham & Baer, 2012). Finally, another identified organizational practice is with regard to the establishment of a reward system that encourages innovative and creative ideas (Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfield; 1990). Florida (2002) points out that, more than money, the incentive for creative people is the creative challenge, and so what motivates them is the challenge itself. The challenge together with the support of the group guarantees team efficacy, the collective belief in relation to the capacity of the team to perform a task or answer to a goal, and potency, the collective belief in relation to the capacity of the team to be successful (Reiter-Palmon et al., 2012).

Although previous research has largely dealt with the issue of creativity in the workplace, more attention should be brought to different institutional and organizational formats and on how they foster creativity. For instance, as previously explained, existing research has focused on the leader figure and its importance for creative dynamics. Also, focus has been mainly on top-down organizational contexts in which different variables, such as organizational structure, job design, and other organizational practices, have been explored to channel employees' creativity into group creativity. Through this study, we further explore creativity in the work environment. But we focus on a different case study, a new cooperative in the creative industries that experiments with new approaches in terms of management, organization, and creative production. Therefore, the main question which we intend to respond is what organizational factors affect creativity positively or negatively in this particular case study, which is both striving for social innovation and for generating creative products.

We all have previously conducted fieldwork on cooperatives, but two of us have specifically analyzed housing cooperatives in the city of Barcelona, highlighting Lacol as a reference for the city (Joanpere & Morlà, 2018) Although, this is further explained in the methods section, Lacol cooperative is a cooperative of architects known in Spain for its pioneering perspective in terms of functioning and creative production. Furthermore, we are also motivated by the social value added by cooperative models and the dialogic leadership approach while considering the creative and innovative potential of these organizational arrangements. From a Foucauldian perspective, cooperatives could be seen as heterotopias, which permit democratic experiments and alternative work arrangements, thus, their exploration is both of academic and social interest.

## Method

### Research Design

We selected a qualitative study design based on the communicative methodology (CM) (Gómez, 2017) to conduct the present research; specifically, in this study, we employ a case study approach. CM is based on the egalitarian dialogue among social actors leading to a process of dialogic creation of knowledge. Moreover, CM involves participants in different stages of the research design, from the definition of the research focus throughout the fieldwork and data analysis and interpretation (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010). This egalitarian dialogue seeks to break with traditional hierarchy between researchers and research “subjects” as a means of constructing scientific knowledge (Padrós, 2014). In other words, the research design is based on eliminating the premise of an interpretative hierarchy. In this particular case, we, researchers and participants have collaborated in the research project since the start. We have communicated with participants during different stages of data analysis so that the final document would represent their views. Lacol members received from us updates of how we were interpreting and analyzing data as well as the final version of this paper prior to submission. Their feedback varied from grammar corrections to content corrections such as modifying the translation of certain quotes from Catalan to English if they did not manage to capture their reality. Also, participants largely emphasized on the importance of justifying the selection of Lacol as an empirical case and even sent additional information in that regard. The egalitarian dialogue and the permanent contact with the researched agents allow for a comprehensive vision of reality, since they provide the tools to carry out an in-depth study (Flecha & Soler, 2014). Furthermore, CM centres the attention on social transformation (Gómez, Puigvert, & Flecha, 2011). For this reason, CM is appropriate to analyse how reality can be improved, because it focuses on two dimensions, the exclusionary and the transformational. In our study, the first dimension refers to the difficulties and barriers that hinder the development of creative work. In contrast, the transformative dimension refers to those dynamics that favour and promote creativity at work.

Furthermore, the case study methodology provides an in-depth exploration of the unit of analysis (Smith, 2018; Yin, 2014). We decided on a qualitative exploratory case study, with the purpose of realising a description of a case (Flick, 2004), specifically, the Lacol architects cooperative. Our decision was based on what Stake (2000) refers to as the intrinsic interest in a case, since “here, [this case study] is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest” (p. 437). To understand the process of creativity from this case study, the focus is on (a) understanding how the promotion of creativity is carried out at work and (b) studying the factors that can accelerate the development of a more positive climate to generate creativity.

In this research we are applying the ethics for researchers procedures set up by the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (European Commission, 2013). We have the consent to use the name of the cooperative; likewise, the person interviewed has signed the informed consent. In this document, the objectives of the research, their voluntary participation, as well as the right to abandon the research at any moment have been made explicit.

Gaining access to carry out fieldwork can be complicated and involve many steps (Creswell, 1998). In this case, we easily obtained rapport with cooperative members because of our previous research engagement with this particular project. Two of us previously carried out another research project on housing and cooperativism focused on Lacol and La Borda cooperatives because they are widely recognised as pioneers and leaders by other cooperatives. Also, we have a longstanding relationship with different members of the housing cooperative



La Borda, a former client of Lacol. The first contact was established 5 years ago so we managed to observe over this period of time the evolution of the project, the collaboration between the two cooperatives while they also met early on with the team of architects that worked on the project. The previous study on both cooperatives, Lacol and La Borda, provided interesting insights regarding their functioning, organization and social impact. In fact, we have already published one article about leadership and social impact using these cooperatives as case studies (see Joanpere & Morlà, 2018). Therefore, we had full access to any material, we have been long engaged in observation of the selected cooperative and we have interacted with different cooperative members during this time. In other words, this study can be seen as part of a much larger and longer research project. It is also worth mentioning that in this particular case Lacol provides easy access for researchers since they see it as another form to evidence their social impact and gain visibility.

### **Study Setting: Lacol Cooperative**

This study is about Lacol (the name comes from a play on words with the word “Local”), an architecture cooperative, which is located in Barcelona, in the neighborhood of Sants. We selected this case study because it responds to the criterion of uniqueness (Merriam, 1998). Lacol is one of the first cooperatives of architects in Catalonia, as well as the first one in the area of the social economy. Also, it stands out for its social impact because it designed housing cooperative in grant of use. Grant of use means that public institutions cede the use of properties to citizens for a limited period. This includes certificates of habitability and building permits. Once construction is completed, citizens have the right to use the property for which they pay a low monthly monetary contribution, but the property is not theirs (Joanpere & Morlà, 2018). In this particular case, the management of constructed buildings is collective and is handled by the cooperative itself.

Lacol began when a group of architects from Polytechnic University of Catalonia, still pursuing degrees towards the end of 2008, decided to rent a space to meet and carry out their student projects. At the same time, they were linked with social organizations of the district, specifically Can Batlló, an old factory owned by the city that in 2009 was given the platform, "Can Batlló és pel barri" (Can Batlló belongs to the neighborhood), and currently is home to social projects of the city of Barcelona. When some of their students left this workspace, the rest of the 14 members decided in 2014 to form the Lacol cooperative. Since its foundation, the cooperative has participated in 74 multidisciplinary projects. An example would be the construction of La Borda, the first house in grant of use on public land in Spain.

The cooperative has been built upon ideals of promoting debate and discussion regarding the uses of public spaces, as well as rethinking urban spaces management, city models, and participation, and heritage recovery. In other words, the Lacol cooperative represents an interesting case to study creative dynamics because its focus is not only on producing creative products and services, but also on producing cultural, aesthetic, and social change in community and public spaces. The cooperative principally chooses projects that generate social transformation from the field of architecture (Lacol, 2018).

### **Data Collection**

As already mentioned, two of us have been engaged in previous research on Lacol that involved interviews with other cooperative members, observation, and document analysis. Just to give some examples, the cooperative had previously provided documents regarding their mission and organization, as well as information about prizes they have received and expositions where they presented their creative products. We were engaged in participant and

non-participant observation for 5 years focusing on how a cooperative functions overall, their leadership, social impact, and organizational practices. The aspect of creativity emerged during this fieldwork and more specific insights were sought through two interviews with one cooperative member who was assigned by the cooperative itself. Therefore, the interviews allowed us to complete previous insights from the aforementioned techniques. When we decided to delve deeper into the aspect of creativity, we carried out another shorter round of non-participant observations that mainly focused on how the space was organised to favour/hinder creativity (interactions taking place, use of space).

Regarding interviews, they provide in-depth information pertaining to participants' experiences and viewpoints on a particular topic (Turner, 2010). This technique is also embedded in the CM which, in turn, focuses on egalitarian dialogue between the research participant and the researcher (Gómez et al., 2011). In other words, it is understood that the interviewees are active agents in the research. The interviewed member was in charge of external communications and information dissemination for the cooperative. Given the previous fieldwork in the cooperative, we already knew that he could provide detailed information about the organization functioning and creativity dynamics. Nevertheless, we first presented the research objective to the cooperative members and they indicated to us who should be interviewed in this case. Two of us conducted both interviews. Then we all analysed them. We recorded and transcribed verbatim the two in-depth interviews. The duration of interviews was on average 1½ hours. We conducted both interviews in Catalan and then a native translator helped us to translate to English. Then we all double-checked the translated documents to make sure that she captured well the original meanings. Also, the interviewee read the translations and made comments when he thought that they were not accurate enough.

The first interview was on June 6, 2018. We elaborated the guide for the first interview with the insights gained from previous fieldwork and a literature review on organizational creativity and innovation (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Ohly, 2018; Reiter-Palmon et al., 2012). To prepare for the first interview we took into account the exclusionary and transformative aspects of the CM methodology. So, on one hand we identified the factors that have been seen as obstacles for organizational creativity overall and other issues that have been previously discussed for cooperatives in particular (e.g., their slow growth, slow pace of decision making, difficulties of reaching decisions, possible imbalance between market and social orientation). Similarly, factors that favour creativity were recognised. In line with the CM methodology, the intention was to establish the potentially challenging organizational aspects for organizational creativity (exclusionary) and explore whether and how the cooperative can overcome them and transform them in success factors (transformative). The interview guide covered other issues as well such as what problems they have faced and how they have evolved over time, information about their organization and decision making, and knowledge transfer. Once we analyzed the data, we carried out the second interview on October 23, 2018. In this second interview, we did a follow up on certain issues that emerged during the first interview. For example, in this second interview we delved deeper in other issues such as task distribution and salaries, the relationship with the clients, and further details about the coordination of the projects. It is worth mentioning that the guide for the second interview was largely influenced by Mumford (2012). Hence, we defined the guide for the second interview after analyzing the first interview and after checking the findings in the handbook of Mumford (2012). Furthermore, the housing project of La Borda had just been inaugurated (October 11, 2018) so we thought that it would be a good moment to see its effect on organizational dynamics. After the interview, we visited the recently inaugurated La Borda since it represented a good example of Lacol's creative products.

Finally, one of us, carried out a non-participant observation of the working space of the cooperative. She observed how they make use of the space and how they manage it in

functional and aesthetic terms. The observation of the space was complementary to previous data recollection. In other words, the intention was to see whether the insights gained from the interviews were further confirmed through observation. For instance, space distribution revealed minimalism and simplicity and the absence of hierarchies since all were working in shared open spaces. The study of the space was meant to complete findings by focusing mainly on how it is used and how it enables (or not) interaction, communication and creativity. So, the scope of the observation carried out focused on aesthetic and functional aspects that could somehow affect creativity (number of offices, furniture, distribution of rooms, space for collective and individual work, availability of versatile space, organization and availability of different office supplies). She kept notes and photos.

Different measures were taken to ensure rigour and canons of verification. First of all, the reliability of data was achieved by establishing an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) including notes during the interviews and the observation, and photos. Also, we offered various representative quotes from the data in the findings section in an attempt to provide rich thick descriptions (Creswell, 1998). Triangulation of researchers was also used since we analysed the data separately and then jointly to offer common interpretations. The dialogical principle of the CM methodology is also worth mentioning as another measure to ensure rigour. The interviewee and other cooperative members have actively participated throughout the data recollection and analysis by providing their feedback and clarifications. We contacted them throughout the data analysis, after the translation of the documents and after completing the first drafts of this manuscript requesting and receiving their feedback. This has been previously referred to as member checks (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002).

## Data Analysis

As already mentioned previously, we have engaged in a long research project focusing on Lacol and other cooperatives. Also, a general theoretical knowledge of the area under study was deemed important to forearm us with theoretical sensitivity to recognize categories and concepts (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Another key aspect of the analytical strategy involved a “zig zag process of data collection and data analysis” (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). Through constant data analysis we established the final coding categories. For example, the analysis of the first interview defined the interview guide of the second interview. In order to clarify the data analysis process, we will now explain the data transformation process (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). We shall explain data analysis in a processual manner.

**Step 1: Getting theoretical sensitivity.** We have already explained the notion of theoretical sensitivity. Nevertheless, we should mention that the first step involved visiting previous literature (i.e., the *Handbook of Organizational Creativity* by Mumford, 2012) which permitted us to identify 19 themes in total that could potentially affect positively or negatively creative dynamics. Certainly, not all themes were relevant as it may be seen in Figure 1. This first step clearly affected the following steps that describe in detail the coding process.

**Step 2: Open coding.** Open coding is the first phase of coding. During this phase, all of us read separately the interview transcripts and other documents to identify relevant categories for information (see Table 1 for examples). We explained what data seemed relevant and how we selected the open code names and their descriptions. We carried out this process manually after multiple individual readings. After these first readings, we met and went through the different open codes and transcriptions together to jointly reach a consensus. For instance, one of us created the open code “Absence of Power” in order to describe that decision-making is not defined by power hierarchies while another one used the code of Hierarchies. Finally, we renamed this open code into power decentralization (see example in Table 1). Furthermore, in line with the CM methodology, it was noted whether each of these codes represents or has

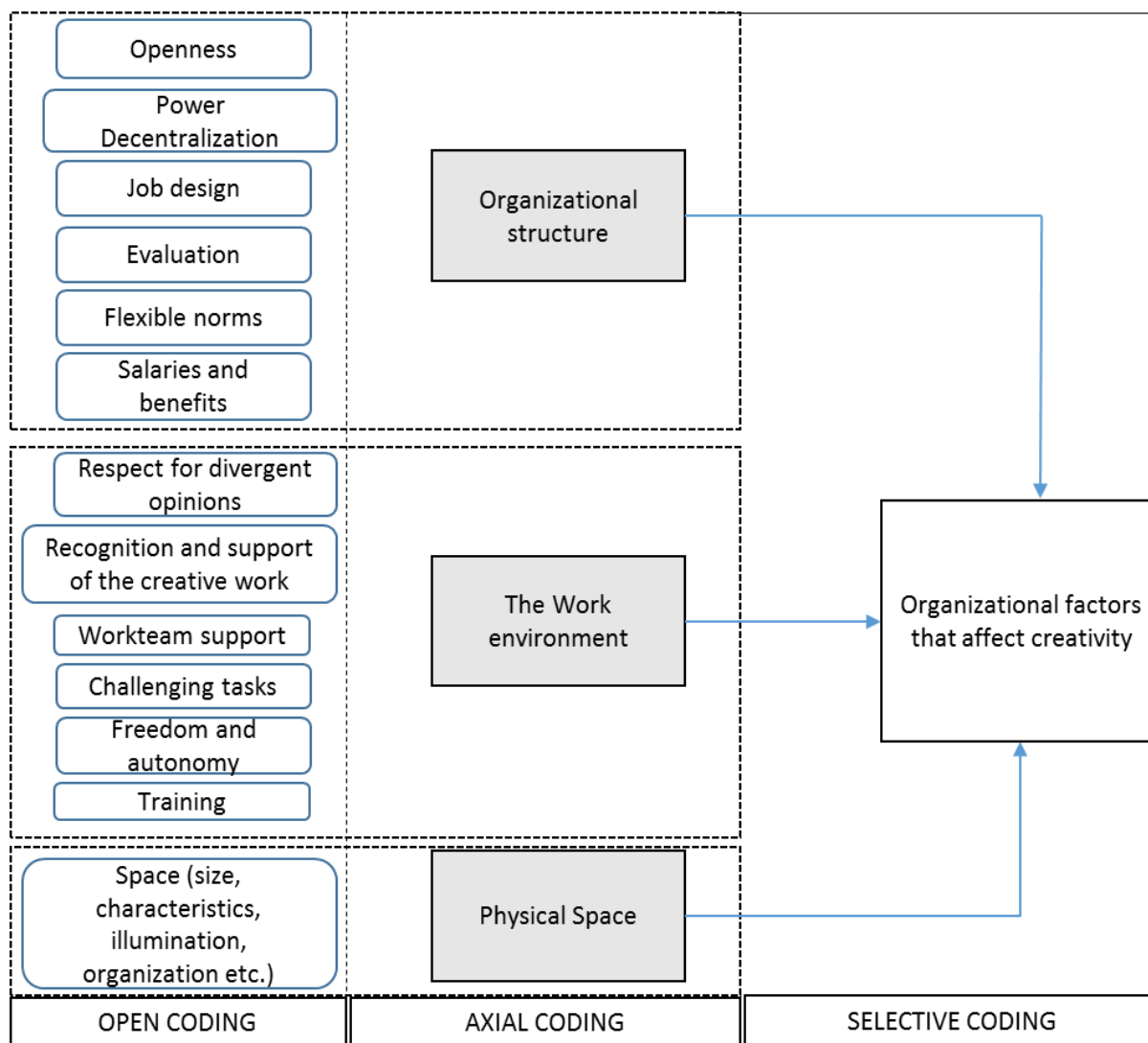
represented an exclusionary aspect and how it has become a transformative aspect, if that is the case.

Table 1. Example of open codes

Quotes	Open Code	Description
Regardless of the work each one of us does, we are all equal. Like any cooperative, we have our legal statutes, a governing council, a president, a secretary ... These are fictitious jobs because we are a horizontal organization and there is no one that only has this or that responsibility. We all check the accounts every three months. We do not have these job roles that the law specifies, we have not believed in them and we have not reproduced them.	Power decentralization	Horizontal organization and power symmetry emphasise the transformative aspects of the cooperative as a democratic space. They emphasise that legislation does not permit this but they do it anyway which marks more clearly the difference with more conventional types of organization and decision making.
In other companies the decision maker does not take into account who will execute it and then some things have to be redone. So we probably are more efficient.		In this quote, power decentralization has been criticized to be an exclusory dimension for making decision making slow and management inefficient. The participant does not seem surprised, instead he justifies how it may even be more efficient since a number of aspects that would affect the project's execution are contemplated in depth.

**Step 3: Axial coding.** Axial coding took place once we have had identified salient categories. The purpose of axial coding is to understand interrelations between concepts, causal relationships, and the context (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). We coined three broader categories: organizational structure, the work environment, and physical space. For example, organizational structure refers to the rules, norms, and other devices that are employed to manage the cooperative as a creative workplace. We categorized six elements under this broader theme (e.g., how evaluations are carried out, how work is designed or remunerated).

Figure 1: Coding levels and conceptual framework



**Step 4: Selective code.** Selective coding is described by Creswell (1998) as “building a story that connects the categories” (p. 150). A higher degree of abstraction is sought to reach a core conceptual category. In our case, the core conceptual category was the factors that affected creative dynamics (see Figure 1 for conceptual framework).

We carried out jointly both axial and selective coding. During this phase, each of us brought our subjective perspective during meetings. We all have prior theoretical sensitivity as a result of the literature read and own experience. But, two of us, who had been long immersed in the research setting, could provide additional insights to the interview transcriptions with regards the cooperative functioning. Such an example would be our knowledge of Lacol’s clients, given that in previous fieldwork we had interviewed some of them.

Then, as already explained in order to validate the results, and on the basis of the dialogic principle as exhibited by Glaser (2002), we constructed the data with interacting interpretations. As aforementioned, both the interviewee and the other cooperatives have had access to the results and an active role in their discussion. Therefore, the final paper we produced was crafted to present joint understandings and interpretations of the social reality observed (Padrós, 2014). Another important aspect of the analytical strategy employed

involved the exclusionary/transformational principle of the CM methodology. Hence, we constantly sought this principle in data analysis and interpretation. We offer some examples to clarify this point. Previous research has emphasised that cooperatives are slow in making decisions which could limit their creative and innovation potential (Jossa, 2014; Kontogeorgos, 2012). However, for Lacol holding assemblies and discussing in depth all issues is seen as a strength rather than a weakness since it allows delving deeper in all the aspects of the project and permits different members to participate in the creative process. As such, the creative dynamics can involve different cooperative members rather than just a smaller team. So according to other studies, we have considered the decision making through assemblies as an exclusionary aspect but in this case we saw how it became a transformational one. Certainly, we should mention that most clients of Lacol are other cooperatives which have similar organizational characteristics so no conflicts are observed regarding the project's evolution pace. Another example is related to the salaries and benefits theme. In the beginnings of Lacol this would have been classified as an exclusionary aspect since cooperative members spent all day working in the cooperative and had very low and irregular salaries. But since the start, they emphasised the importance of organizational democracy and distributed salaries and workload equally. Over time they managed to have more projects and have now reached a point where they have achieved good salaries and a work/personal life balance. We further analyse these aspects in the next section.

## Results

In this section we will explain the three broader themes that emerged during data analysis as decisive in hindering or promoting creativity in the cooperative setting, namely organizational structure, workplace environment, and physical space. Creativity plays an important role in different workplace contexts, but it becomes critical in creative industries such as architecture. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that Carles, our main informant, does not only describe what organizational factors affect creativity at the moment but also narrates the “creative journey” of the cooperative until now including the problems, the solutions and changes that took place.

### Organizational Structure

In any workplace rules, norms, and other devices are set and these define the organizational structure and individual performance. This first theme encompasses all the rules and norms that could have an impact on the creative potential of Lacol. The analysis is based on the following six elements: (a) openness, (b) power decentralization, (c) flexible norms, (d) job design, (e) evaluation, and (f) salaries and benefits.

Openness has been previously identified in the literature as elements that promote creativity in the work environment. Openness is about the team's disposition to embrace new organizational forms considering beneficial win-win scenarios for the cooperative and its members. In this particular case, one of the initial barriers for Lacol was what we themed “self-exploitation” of cooperative members:

At first, we were working all the time, it was self-exploitation, we were overloaded. (...). We decided that one of the assembly priorities should be work balance of the cooperativists. To make it happen we kept discussing it in assemblies. (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

Similar findings have been encountered for self-employed entrepreneurs who, in spite of trying to escape from traditional employment options, finally may also reproduce exploitative work arrangements by working very long hours with low wages (Jurik, 1998). Carles explained that they needed to adopt a more flexible approach to facilitate work life balance. First of all, self-exploitation could be counterproductive and limited creative potential for the cooperative as a whole and for each individual member. Furthermore, Lacol was meant to be an alternative organizational arrangement and an example of social innovation. Therefore, cooperativists debated in their assemblies how to fix the problem. The solution was the incorporation of different practices of care that would ensure work-life balance.

We have plenty of time and flexibility. For example, as paternity leave permits are very short, and we have made them longer. Or when we have a meeting that we know we must all be at, we arrange the meeting so that it does not affect our work-life balance, these types of things... (interview, June, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

Then, **power decentralization** stands out; this concept refers to the limited number of hierarchies that creates a climate of participation and empowerment. In the case of the Lacol, the organizational structure is horizontal and all the decisions are made by consensus of its members, while responsibilities are equally shared. The workspace is established as amongst equals to foster mutual cooperation and decentralization of decisions. In relation, Carles said,

Abiding to the law, we have approved statutes, a governing council, a president, a secretary ... as any other cooperative. But these are all fictitious, because in our case everything is horizontal and there is no one who has more responsibility than another. We settle accounts each quarter all together. We don't have these roles fixed by the law, we do not believe in them. (interview, June, 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

In a similar vein, Carles emphasized in the second interview the way decisions are made:

At weekly meetings we talked about our projects' updates, and with the biggest projects we do this: we create open spaces for participation, creative spaces of brainstorming to help us move forward and weave tips and offer help between us. Everyone who wants can participate. We value the same all of our tasks. (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

The horizontal and egalitarian mode of communication, decision-making, and workload distribution not only gives cooperativists greater autonomy and freedom and promotes a deeper commitment, but also provides access to more information. Such elements should encourage more creativity (Oldham & Baer, 2012). As Carles points out,

We know each other for many years and we talk openly to each other. Every time we improve more in that. The positive thing is that there is much diversity in terms of projects. Each project has a coordinator and two or three people working, you can be a project assistant in one project and coordinator in another. Little by little we are improving our communication. (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

According to Carles, on many occasions, the process of decision making that takes place is more efficient than in companies that have more vertical organization, because as he puts forward,

In other hierarchical companies they are slow, sometimes, because they have to reorganize many times and redistribute the tasks assigned. However, the way we work doesn't have these problems. Thanks to the work teams [mixed: clients, architects, builders...] we can manage tasks efficiently. There is a constant dialog taking place. Clients have a key role as they can participate in the entire process, including their opinions and perspectives. Thanks to this cooperation between all of us we create new projects. (interview, October 23rd, 2018)

As explained, cooperation with other agents facilitates different points of view and allows for reflections that enhance the co-creation and participatory arrangements to generate innovation and creativity that go beyond the strict sense of workplace.

The third element refers to the **flexibility of norms**. Flexibility has been previously raised in the literature as an enhancing factor for creativity. Flexibility refers to the organizational capacity to adapt to changes. In the second interview we wanted to explore more the issue of flexibility in order to understand how the practice of having flexible norms was put in place. Carles explains:

In the cooperative there are members who have non-productive tasks assigned: buying materials, invoicing, team organization, communication with external actors, accounting. Members voluntarily assume the responsibility of these tasks which are rotating. Now, for example, in the case of accounting, we feel overwhelmed, and considered the possibility to hire an external person. In addition, there is a cooperativist in charge of keeping track of each of us, in order to know who has too much workload and who does not. (interview, June 6th, 2018)

Some of the tasks are referred to as “non-productive”; this term is assigned to tasks, which are necessary but require little or no creativity. For example, Carles describes how during meetings there is a person who moderates and another one who takes minutes. In these cases, he clarifies that these responsibilities are assumed voluntarily and are rotating tasks. Also, Carles adds that, if, at any time, the members of a cooperative do not want to continue with a specific task or they feel overwhelmed, then they consider other solutions. In other words, although norms exist they are treated flexibly, as attention is placed on how they affect members' satisfaction, individual motivation and ultimately, wellbeing.

Regarding the fourth element, **job design**, it refers to how tasks are organized and carried out. As stated by the interviewee, a challenge of collective management is the correct attribution of tasks:

Complete all the tasks without there being gaps, but without overloading anyone, even though this is one of the challenges that we are trying to improve. (interview, October 23, 2018)

Previous quotes show that cooperativists rotate in terms of work roles and tasks. Also, it was explained that all tasks, creative and non-creative, are equally valued. Creativity in this area implies also a collaboration between architects and clients in order to reconcile the demands



of each other. Thanks to their experience, Carles claims that they have been able to find mechanisms that have allowed them to improve in this regard, transforming the obstacles, speers, and needs of the client into opportunities.

People when they want a project they come up with an idea, but they don't know much about what they really want or need. Then we must first figure out what they need, and we also explain who we are and what we do. (interview, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

Regarding the job design theme, another important element is the specialization of each cooperativist; for this reason, in Lacol, creative teams of two or three people are used for each project, depending on the availability and expertise of members.

The fifth element is about **work evaluation** and the related organizational practices . As Carles notes, in the beginning once a project was completed they would carry out a financial evaluation. However they saw that this was not enough and they later incorporated, external evaluations by clients and other agents who have intervened in the construction process. For the cooperativists, the relationship and the feedback of their clients concerns them all as a team, but they also evaluate themselves as a team for the overall operationalization of the project: "how their relationship has been with us, if they are happy with the results or not, if we are happy, the relationship with the clients." (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

Finally, the sixth element is about **salaries and benefits**. At the moment of the fieldwork all members enjoyed satisfactory remuneration, however, Carles acknowledged that

At the very beginning, we were very young, we assumed the responsibility and we worked 50, 60 hours a week for a starvation wage. Now we have grown and there are colleagues with children and other needs. Now we all have decent wages. We consider all tasks equal, we all earn the same despite of the responsibility taken on, (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>. 2018)

In Lacol, Carles clarifies that there is no policy of a benefits and rewards system that directly fosters innovative ideas because their objective is to promote equality between partners without generating any type of competition. Simultaneously, that implies that creativity can come from any member of the cooperative, all members know that they have the same responsibility and rights to the cooperative and its creative production.

## The Work Environment

In this second section, we analyzed those elements relating to Lacol job work dynamics that contribute to creativity. The analysis is based on six fundamental elements: (a) respect for divergent opinions (b) recognition and support of the creative work (c) work team support (d) challenging tasks (e) freedom and autonomy, and (f) training. Certainly, these dynamics can be associated with the structural elements discussed above.

Firstly, we highlight the importance of **respect for divergent opinions** and encouragement of new ideas, two themes that are unified in the analysis because of their relatedness. As aforementioned, it is necessary to explain how the relationships in Lacol foster respect among cooperative members also promoting debate among all the members. In that regard, Carles explains the dynamic that is generated when a project is taking place: "We try to pamper each other to the maximum so that people can express themselves and go as far as they can with this freedom we give to each other" (interview, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018). In particular, he describes that one established practice in the cooperative is the creation of workshops to discuss

projects. These are open spaces where all cooperativists participate, give advice, and feedback whether they are involved in the project or not. Such discussions take place both at the beginning of a project as well as during its progress. Carles mentions that some cooperativists are more progressive and open to experiment with new materials and construction projects, whereas others are more conservative in terms of architectural techniques. However, it is this combination, according to Carles, that allows them to balance the new with the already established. The diversity of approaches requires opening spaces for dialogue and for idea generation.

There is always option...People can contribute and create new things. They have done some very crazy things to cover the patio of La Borda [one of their latest construction projects where they created a retractable roof to be managed according to the weather conditions]. What we do remained only on a theoretical level in Catalonia and Spain. We have applied new things for the first time, which demonstrates that we do not limit ourselves! There is debate and diversity of opinions but we allow ourselves to go till the end and we have done some very extreme projects. (interview, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

Lacol, through its egalitarian and collaborative dynamics, has carried out architectural work that had not been previously done in Spain. Also, the aforementioned practices and devices such as workshops for discussion and follow-up on projects reveal an environment in which creative work is recognized and boosted. Carles narrates their collective experience regarding creative production which may involve difficult moments such as getting stuck not knowing how to go forward. During these moments, Carles highlights the importance of working as a team to help the cooperative and the projects move forward. Creative production is not seen individually, instead it is the result of collective effort. “We do accept advice and help among us, openness and creativity in order not to get stuck. At the moment everybody that wants can participate unless this is no longer efficient” (interview, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

Carles also emphasizes that they are not discussion spaces to question the projects, but of constructive criticism where members exchange opinions with the common goal of improving the projects. As mentioned already, Carles says, “sometimes people tell others their opinions and these opinions make you open your eyes to things you hadn’t seen before” (interview, June 6, 2018).

Thirdly, **work team support** stands out. In this regard, Carles explains that one of the exclusionary elements of architecture in general is that it is very individualistic work. This aspect always struggles with the effort to generate dynamics of teamwork, group meetings, and collective pursuit of projects to strengthen relationships among team members that favor and stimulate new ideas. Therefore, as revealed in the interview an effort is placed to change the individual mindset that the nature of the work presupposes to collectively sharing problems, solutions, successes and failures. “Every three months we have a meeting in which we set the objectives of the cooperative and review the previous ones. (...) We also talk about personal stuff in order to distribute future tasks” (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018).

These practices, in line with Lister (2017), could be considered as “practices of care” in the workplace in order not to exhaust any of the members and allow them to fully promote their creative potential. In other words, work team support refers to the support cooperativists receive for issues related to work but also their personal life.

The fourth concept analyzed is **challenging tasks** or missions. New challenges are a constant in the cooperative, both at the architectural level as well as at the organizational level. However, at the same time, they are opportunities for new creation. For this reason, at the architectural level, Carles describes that before carrying out a project, members consider the

value the project would contribute to the cooperative and to their sense of accomplishment. Such evaluations are done in assemblies, which were initially an organization obstacle since “the world is not intended for new ways” (interview, June 6, 2018). In spite of that, through the observation of other cooperatives’ assemblies and through their own experience, Carles often emphasizes that they have become much more efficient. An example is given: “Now with 2 hours we have finished the assembly whereas 9 years ago in 2 hours we had hardly begun” (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018).

The fifth concept analyzed is **freedom and autonomy**. These two themes have been grouped. The former refers to freedom to decide how to perform tasks and the latter to the autonomy to make decisions, when necessary. The freedom and the autonomy of the cooperative members are subject to the norms agreed upon by all the partners and which are established in the statutes. However, Carles recognizes that

it’s very useful because sometimes people tell you their opinions and it makes you open your mind to other things you have not thought before. But when there are different point of views, the leaders of the project should have the final say. Our diversity and multiplicity of views doesn’t hinder us. It takes us to the limit and that’s the fun of it. (interview, June 6th, 2018)

Finally, there is the theme of **training**, which according to Carles is fundamental for the cooperative. All cooperative members have taken training to become more efficient in their responsibilities, to develop their creative potential and facilitate the innovation process. In Lacol, the training of the members is funded by the cooperative; consequently, it is hoped that the training can also result in personal and collective improvement. For that reason, feedback from the training is required. Carles provided the following example:

People do training proposals. When we prepare the annual budget we assign budget to training, then we evaluate it collectively. (...) one of the colleagues did a master degree thanks to the grant we provided. We recognize this effort as a collective benefit because all of the new knowledge has an impact to the entire cooperative (...). Then we have feedback of her training and knowledge transfer. (interview, June 6th, 2018)

### **Physical Space**

Here we point to the importance of **physical space**. Previous literature discusses space as an intangible concept whereas its effects on creativity have not received much attention. As explained in the methodology section we carried out observation. The cooperative is located on the first floor (Photo 1). It is an open space, where there are two large worktables where the cooperative members are working. One of the areas is also used for meetings, as at the end of the table, there is a TV screen and a projector, used by members when they discuss project proposals (Photo 2). There is an independent smaller room where there is also a projector; videoconferences and meetings with fewer attendees are held there. This layout generates an environment of confidence and communitarian work, where the premises of equality and horizontal work are demonstrated, since all the cooperative members have the same tools and workspace. However, space is also identified as an exclusionary aspect. Carles explains the problematics: “We are now in the process of changing our physical space because we are very tight, and we are doing efforts to move to larger premises” (interview, June 6th, 2018). In the second interview he also emphasises that “We want to take advantage of moving somewhere

new to come up with more proposals and synergies with other spaces. We intend to share a common space with other social economy projects” (interview, October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018).



Photo 1: Front of building Lacol



Photo 2: Multi-purpose room

## Discussion

As prior literature points out, creativity arises from a collective process (Sawyer, 2006). In the case study of Lacol, we show that a company can respond to group needs and the demands of clients through innovation as suggested by Csikzentmihalyi (1999). The results of this study also add to the debate on leadership of creativity (Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011; Shin & Zhou, 2007; Thorpe, Gold, & Lawler, 2011). Lacol demonstrates that horizontal structure and shared responsibility are elements of success. Instead, other aspects are considered such as work-life balance, wellbeing at work, creativity and innovation and the social impact of the projects carried out. It is necessary to emphasize that organizational practices, such as the

“practices of care” (Creswell, 1998), are in place to prevent overload of some partners, which would limit their creative potential. There are also attempts to move forward with creative projects through continuous and dynamic cooperation. This cooperation is institutionalized by putting in place certain practices, elements, and spaces (e.g., workshops, rotating tasks and roles, shared workspaces, and a horizontal organization). Members feel free to express new ideas, as well as to decide the work carried out, that is to say, they have control over their work. At the same time as the organization is open to new organizational dynamics and adapts to the needs of its employees, we observe, for example, how training outside the cooperative is regarded or the importance of the work-life balance.

On the other hand, note Lacol’s workspace; this is the aspect that we have identified as having the most barriers and difficulties, since, due to the number of cooperative members, there is little space to develop all the project proposals or meet with various agents. However, at the same time, it is possible to appreciate that, although small, it is a space that encourages cooperative work, where the interactions, due to work distribution, are all concentrated in the same space, without hierarchies.

Another feature of Lacol is that it fosters more creativity since the bonds of trust, mutual support, and respect are enhanced to encourage that collective decisions are always made taking into account the needs and concerns of all members. Previous literature identifies training as a key element and Lacol corroborates its importance. However, an important point to emphasize is that Lacol autonomy is not exempt from internal organization rules or assessments that contribute to the improvement of the results obtained. The case of Lacol confirms that creativity is not a result of chaos (Simonton, 2003), instead creative solutions are the result of a collective creative process. As also analyzed in previous literature (Amabile, Goldfarb, & Brackfield, 1990), the focus of the cooperative is placed on the generation of new ideas and the emergence of synergies.

Another element identified as transformative is in relation to salaries and benefits, since all members earn equally regardless of their task at the time. The most boring, non-creative tasks are carried out in a rotating manner to avoid overload and demotivation. Previous work showed that motivation arises not only from wages or from rewards, but also from the nature of work itself and the creative challenge it poses (Amabile, 1998).

In our study, along the same lines as Mumford (2012), the interaction between members is a key element to enhance motivation, and consequently, creativity. A recurring theme that stands out throughout the fieldwork is the significance of friendship. Such structures are not viable without relationships of trust as they facilitate respect for divergent opinions, encourage new ideas, as well as allow for the recognition of creative work. The cooperative is a dialogical workspace where equalitarian interactions become the norm and where cooperative members perceive emotional security to develop their ideas (Ekvall, 1996). Therefore, despite not being a central element of our analysis, friendship is considered a determining factor in the organizational success of the creative environment of Lacol.

### **Conclusions and Future Research**

Due to the use of communicative methodology, this article provides a general analysis of the aspects that enhance creativity in the work environment. The analysis resulting from a specific case study makes it possible to capture the characteristics that previous literature presents regarding the promotion of creativity. The study of Lacol cooperative revealed different aspects, which are relevant for creativity dynamics in the work environment, such as its organizational elements and its internal dynamics, in addition to the analysis of the workspace where these synergies are generated. The verification of the 16 key elements that have been chosen from the literature raises new lines of research on creativity in the workplace

and its impact on economic and social outcomes. This article proposes a general framework from which several new lines of research, detailed below, can be drawn. In the specific case of Lacol, it is interesting to study more thoroughly the physical space element, since Lacol will soon change its location and this may change how the partners manage space and use it to facilitate a participatory and creative structure. This implies understanding the limitations that a limited space presents and how professionals try to circumvent these limitations in a creative way.

At a general level, we have observed the relevance of certain aspects such as the role of friendship in relation to the organization of the company. Previously, Chiavenato (1999) highlighted the role of friendships or enmities in the company to promote a working environment conducive to interact with other organizations. This is a research line worthy of more attention. In our case, friendship was not a dimension to be studied, however, through the narratives of the interviewee, we observed that it is a very important element to be able to carry out projects of these characteristics. Additionally, our study shows that friendship among the members of Lacol enhances the creative environment and facilitates the successful development of elements that have been previously identified by the literature. Therefore, as a result of this research, we thought it would be interesting to follow this line of research and analyze the impact of friendship on creative dynamics. Then, it is worth highlighting the profound debate that exists in prior literature from various disciplines on the concept of creativity. There are many researchers that today are concerned about the social impact of their research. Along this line, another area worth of being further studied is with regards how creativity in the workplace may be linked to the social impact of the economic activity carried out that is for instance on employees, clients, and the community.

Finally, the analysis of more case studies in this same line of research would broaden the literature to which we contribute. We suggest studying cooperatives that are success stories, as they serve as a reference to analyze their entire trajectory and identify those elements that have hindered their success, and at the same time, understand the organizational practices and structures that have allowed them to transform and overcome problems. In this way, we can contribute to cooperativism and creativity on a theoretical and practical level.

Moreover, future research could overcome the limitations of the present study. In this study we have focused on one case study and we have conducted only two interviews with one informant. Future research could extend the fieldwork by approaching more cooperative members or by engaging with the cooperative for a longer period of time. Also, the relation between the cooperative with other external agents (e.g. clients, politicians of Barcelona city council or College of Architects) could be also of interest in order to explore their perspectives and whether the organizational creativity of the cooperative could modify dynamics in other institutions.

## References

- Amabile, T. M. (1996). *Creativity in context: Update to the social psychology of creativity*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Amabile, T. M. (1998). How to kill creativity. *Harvard Business Review*, 76(5), 76–87.
- Amabile, T. M. (2012). *Componential theory of creativity*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Amabile, T. M., Goldfarb, P., & Brackfield, S. C. (1990). Social influences on creativity: Evaluation, coaction, and surveillance. *Creativity Research Journal*, 3(1), 6–21.
- Armstrong, E. A. (2002). Crisis, collective creativity, and the generation of new organizational forms: The transformation of lesbian/gay organizations in San Francisco. In M. Lounsbury & M. J. Ventresca (Eds.), *Social structure and organizations revisited*

- (Research in the Sociology of Organizations, Vol. 19, pp. 361–395). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Bass, B. M., & Avolio, B. J. (1994). *Improving organizational effectiveness through transformational leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Beverland, M. (2007). Can co-operatives brand? Exploring the interplay between cooperative structure and sustained brand marketing success. *Food Policy*, 32(4), 480–495.
- Boden, M. A. (2004). *The creative mind: Myths and mechanisms* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London, UK: Routledge.
- Brophy, D. R. (1998). Understanding, measuring, and enhancing collective creative problem-solving efforts. *Creativity Research Journal*, 11(3), 199–229.
- Chiavenato, I. (1999). Administración de recursos humanos [*Human resources management*]. Madrid, Spain: McGraw Hill.
- Choi, H. S., & Thompson, L. (2005). Old wine in a new bottle: Impact of membership change on group creativity. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 98(2), 121–132.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). London, UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cox, T. H., & Blake, S. (1991). Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness. *Academy of Management Executive*, 5(3), 45–56.
- Csikzentmihalyi, M. (1999). Implications of a systems perspective for the study of creativity. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.), *Handbook of creativity* (pp. 313–338). Cambridge, US: Cambridge University Press.
- Davis, J. P., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2011). Rotating leadership and collaborative innovation: Recombination processes in symbiotic relationships. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 56(2), 159–201. doi: 10.1177/0001839211428131
- Dellas, M., & Gaier, E. L. (1970). Identification of creativity: The individual. *Psychological Bulletin*, 73(1), 55–73. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/h0028446>
- Ekvall, G. (1996). Organizational climate for creativity and innovation. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(1), 105–123.
- European Commission. (2013). *Ethics*. Retrieved from [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/89888/ethics-for-researchers\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/fp7/89888/ethics-for-researchers_en.pdf)
- Flecha, R., & Ngai, P. (2014). The challenge for Mondragon: Searching for the cooperative values in times of internationalization. *Organization*, 21(5), 666–682.
- Flecha, R., & Soler, M. (2014). Communicative methodology: Successful actions and dialogic democracy. *Current Sociology*, 62(2), 232–242. doi: 10.1177/0011392113515141
- Flick, U. (2004). Design and process in qualitative research. In U. Flick, E. von Kardorff, & I. Steinke (Eds.), *A companion to qualitative research* (pp. 146–152). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Florida, R. L. (2002). *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ford, C. M. (1996). A theory of individual creative action in multiple social domains. *Academy of Management Review*, 21(1), 1112–1142. doi: 10.5465/AMR.1996.9704071865
- Frick, B. L., & Brodin, E. M. (2014). Developing expert scholars. The role of reflection in creative learning. In E. Shiu (Eds.), *Creativity research. An inter-disciplinary and multi-disciplinary research handbook* (pp. 312–333). New York, NY: Routledge.

- Gagné, F. (2015). De los genes al talento: la perspectiva DMGT/CMTD [From genes to talent: The DMGT/CMTD perspective]. *Revista de Educación*, 368, 12–39.
- Glaser, B.G. (2002). Constructivist grounded theory? *Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung*, 3(3). Retrieved from <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0203125>
- Gómez, A. (2017). Communicative methodology and social impact. In N. K. Denzin & M. D. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in neoliberal times* (pp. 166-178). New York, NY, US: Routledge Taylor & Francis:
- Gómez, A., Puigvert, L., & Flecha, R. (2011). Critical communicative methodology: Informing real social transformation through research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(3), 235–245. doi: 10.1177/1077800410397802
- Gómez, A., Racionero, S., & Sordé, T. (2010). Rethinking education for social cohesion: International case studies. *International Review of Qualitative Research*, 3(1), 17-43.
- Habermas, J. (1987). *Teoría de la acción comunicativa* [The theory of communicative action]. Madrid, Spain: Taurus.
- Haedicke, M. A. (2012). Keeping our mission, changing our system: translation and organizational change in natural foods co-ops. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 53(1), 44–67. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22363950>
- Hammond, M. M., Neff, N. L., Farr, J. L., Schwall, A. R., & Zhao, X. (2011). Predictors of individual-level innovation at work: A meta-analysis. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 5(1), 90–105. doi: 10.1037/a0018556
- Heras-Saizarbitoria, I. (2014). The ties that bind? Exploring the basic principles of worker-owned organizations in practice. *Organization*, 21(5), 645–665. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508414537623>
- Hunter, S. T., Bedell, K. E., & Mumford, M. D. (2007). Climate for creativity: A quantitative review. *Creativity Research Journal*, 19(1), 69–90.
- International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Cooperatives*. Retrieved from <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/lang--en/index.htm>
- Joanpere, M., & Morlà, T. (2018). Liderazgo creador de nuevas realidades. Respuestas cooperativas a los desafíos de la vivienda [Creative leadership to new realities. Cooperative responses to the housing challenges]. *Revista Internacional de Organizaciones*, 0(21), 127–147. doi: 10.17345/rio21.127-147
- Jossa, B. (2014). Marx, Lenin and the cooperative movement. *Review of Political Economy*, 26(2), 282–302. doi: 10.1080/09538259.2014.881649
- Jurik, N. (1998). Getting away and getting by: The experiences of self-employed homeworkers. *Work and Occupations*, 25(1), 7–35.
- Kemppainen-Koivisto, R., Siltavirta, K., Rusko, R., & Särkkä, S. (2015). Creativity with institutionalization: Cooperatives as an alternative way of starting a creative business – Cases from Finland. In B. Christiansen & J. Koeman (Eds.), *Nationalism, cultural indoctrination, and economic prosperity in the digital age* (pp. 221–240). Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-4666-8468-3.ch057
- Kontogeorgos, A. (2012). Brands, quality badges and agricultural cooperatives: how can they coexist? *The TQM Journal*, 24(1), 72–82. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1108/17542731211191230>
- Lacol (2018). *Cooperativa Lacol*. Retrieved from <http://www.Lacol.coop/>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Lister, R. (2017). *Citizenship: Feminist perspective*. Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.



- Mathisen, G. E., & Einarsen, C. A. (2004). A review of instruments assessing creativity and innovative environments within organizations. *Creativity Research Journal*, 16(1), 119–140.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education: Revised and expanded from Case Study Research in Education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Miron-Spektor, E., Erez, M., & Naveh, E. (2012). To drive creativity, add some conformity. *Harvard Business Review*, 90 (30), 1–2.
- Mumford, M. (2012). *Handbook of organizational creativity*. London, UK: Elsevier.
- Nemeth, C. J., & Nemeth-Brown, B. (2003). Better than individuals? The potential benefit of dissent and diversity for group creativity. In P. B. Paulus & B. A. Nijstad. (Eds.), *Group creativity: Innovation through collaboration* (pp. 63-84). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ohly, S. (2018). Promoting creativity at work – Implications for scientific creativity. *European Review*, 26(1), 91–99. doi:10.1017/S1062798717000576
- Oldham, G. R., & Baer, M. (2012). Creativity and the work context. In M. Mumford (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational creativity* (pp. 387–420). London, UK: Elsevier.
- Padrós, M. (2014). A transformative approach to prevent peer violence in schools: Contributions from communicative research methods. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(7), 916–922.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paulus, P. B., Dzindolet, M., & Kohn, N. W. (2012). Collaborative creativity-group creativity and team innovation. In M. Mumford (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational creativity* (pp. 295–326). London, UK: Elsevier.
- Pope, R. (2005). *Creativity: Theory, history, practice*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Reiter-Palmon, R., Wigert, B., & Vreede, T. D. (2012). Team creativity and innovation: The effect of group composition, social processes, and cognition. In *Handbook of organizational creativity* (pp. 295–326). London, UK: Elsevier. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-374714-3.00013-6>
- Runco, M. A., & Jaeger, G. J. (2012). The standard definition of reativity. *Creativity Research Journal*, 24(1), 92–96. doi: 10.1080/10400419.2012.650092
- Ruscio, J., Whitney, D. M., & Amabile, T.M. (1998). Looking inside the fishbowl of creativity: Verbal and behavioral predictors of creative performance. *Creativity Research Journal*, 11(3), 243–263. doi: 10.1207/s15326934crj1103\_4
- Rusko, R., Hietanen, L., Kohtakangas, K., Kemppainen-Koivisto, R., Siltavirta, K., & Järvi, T. (2017). *Educational and business co-operatives: The channels for collective creativity and entrepreneurial teams*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global. doi: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1823-5.ch013
- Sawyer, R. K. (2006). *Explaining creativity. The science of human innovation*. New York, NY, US: Oxford University Press.
- Shin, S. J., & Zhou, J. (2007). When is educational specialization heterogeneity related to creativity in research and development teams? Transformational leadership as a moderator. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 92(6), 1709–1721.
- Simonton, D. K. (2003). Exceptional creativity across life span: The emergence and manifestation of creative genius. In L. V. Shavinina (Ed.), *The international handbook of innovation* (pp. 293–308). Oxford, UK: Elsevier Science.
- Smith, P. R. (2018). Collecting sufficient evidence when conducting a case study. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(5), 1054–1048. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss5/2>

- Soriano de Alencar, E.M.L. (2012). Creativity in organizations: Facilitators and inhibitors. In M. Mumford (Ed.), *Handbook of organizational creativity* (pp. 87–111). London, UK: Elsevier.
- Stake, R. E. (2000). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 435–454). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Sternberg, R. J. (Ed.). (1998). *Handbook of creativity*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Taggar, S. (2002). Individual creativity and group ability to utilize individual creative resources: A multilevel model. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(2), 315–330. doi: 10.2307/3069349
- Tan, A. G. (2013). *Creativity, talent and excellence*. London, UK: Springer
- Tavares, S. M. (2016). How does creativity at work influence employee's positive affect at work? *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 25(4), 525–539. doi: 10.1080/1359432X.2016.1186012
- Thorpe, R., Gold, J., & Lawler, J. (2011). Locating distributed leadership. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 13(3), 239–250. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00303.x
- Turner, D. W. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754–760. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol15/iss3/19>
- UNCTAD. (2008). *Creative economy report*. Retrieved from [http://unctad.org/es/docs/ditc20082cer\\_en.pdf](http://unctad.org/es/docs/ditc20082cer_en.pdf)
- Van der Heijden, H. R. M. A., Geldens, J. J. M., Beijaard, D., & Popeijus, H. L. (2015). Characteristics of teachers as change agents. *Teachers and Teaching*, 21(6), 681–699. doi: 10.1080/13540602.2015.1044328
- Williams, A., Ostwald, M. J., & Askland, H. H. (2010). *Creativity, design and education*. NSW: Australian Learning & Teaching Council. Sydney, Australia: Print National.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Zhu, Y.-Q., Gardner, D. G., & Chen, H.-G. (2016). Relationships between work team climate, individual motivation, and creativity. *Journal of Management*, 44(5), 2094–2115. doi: 10.1177/0149206316638161

### Author Note

Teresa Morlà-Folch is a PhD student and Assistant Professor at the University Rovira i Virgili. She mainly focuses on creative learning and teaching from a qualitative perspective. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: [teresa.morla@urv.cat](mailto:teresa.morla@urv.cat).

Mar Joanpere Foraster is a PhD student in Sociology at the University of Barcelona. She is focused on social creation of social sciences research, using methodologies that relate theories that help societies to overcome inequalities with the practices to apply them.

Eleni Papaoikonomou is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing. She has published various books, book chapters and articles in journals such as *Ethics and Behavior*, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Agriculture and Human Values* and *Journal of Macromarketing*. Her main research lines are about ethical consumption, collaborative consumption and cooperativism.

Copyright 2019: Teresa Morlà-Folch, Mar Joanpere, Eleni Papaoikonomou, and Nova Southeastern University.

**Article Citation**

Morlà-Folch, T., Joanpere, M., & Papaoikonomou, E. (2019). Promoting creativity in the cooperative work environment: A case study of the Lacol cooperative. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(11), 2722-2746. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol24/iss11/4>

---