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ACCOUNT SERVICE AND CREATIVE PERSONNEL:
INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AND DIALECTICAL TENSIONS
IN ADVERTISING AGENCIES

BY

ASHLEY PHILLIPS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master of Science

Major in Communication Studies & Journalism

Specialization in Communication Studies

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2017

ACCOUNT SERVICE AND CREATIVE PERSONNEL:
INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AND DIALECTICAL TENSIONS
IN ADVERTISING AGENCIES

This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the Master of Science in Communication Studies & Journalism degree and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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Date

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, mom, and dad for providing me with endless love, support, and encouragement throughout this intellectually challenging part of my life. To my peers who became my close friends and sounding-board for all my ideas, frustrations, and successes. To Barb Kleinjan, without her I would have never had confidence in myself to pursue a graduate degree in the first place.

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ABSTRACT

ACCOUNT SERVICE AND CREATIVE PERSONNEL:
INTERPERSONAL CONFLICT AND DIALECTICAL TENSIONS
IN ADVERTISING AGENCIES

ASHLEY PHILLIPS

2017

Account service and creative personnel have oppositional perspectives and motivations that often lead to interpersonal conflicts while working together on client projects. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of interpersonal conflicts in advertising agencies. The researcher used relational dialectics theory as a lens for analyzing the dialectical (i.e., oppositional) tensions experienced by account service and creative personnel as well as the praxis patterns (i.e., techniques) used to manage those tensions.

After conducting in-depth interviews with five account service and five creative personnel ($N = 10$) from full service advertising agencies in the Midwest, an analysis revealed that research participants discussed a variety of conflicts between account service and creative personnel during the client project process. Overall, interpersonal conflict stemmed from methods of communication, direction of the project, lack of respect, and working style.

Research participants also experienced six main dialectical tensions including: openness vs. closedness, individual vs. collaborative work time, ideal vs. real, stability vs. change, defend vs. accept, and subjective vs. objective. Participants described five praxis patterns that they use to communicatively manage those dialectical tensions: emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other, alternating between poles, source-

splitting, framing tensions as double binds, and framing tensions as complementary.

Based on participant responses, framing tensions as complementary was the most constructive way to manage dialectical tensions because it contributed to an advertising agency culture of mutual trust and respect.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Account service and creative personnel in advertising agencies often experience interpersonal conflict while working together on client projects, and researchers argue that the conflicts are due to their oppositional perspectives and motivations. The oppositional nature of this working relationship means account service and creative personnel's communication during conflict may reflect their opposing viewpoints, which is indicative of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics theory (RDT). The interpersonal conflict that exists between account service and creative personnel and the way they communicate during conflict can offer specific insights into how to change and improve their working relationship, which is vital to advertising agencies' success. For these reasons, I have identified the nature of the conflict between account service and creative personnel and analyzed potential dialectical (i.e., oppositional) tensions that exist in this context.

To begin, chapter one includes an introduction about conflict between account service and creative personnel, gaps in the previous literature, and the purpose of my study. In chapter two, I review research from major topical areas associated with my study and explain RDT, perspectives and motivations of account service and creative personnel, as well as types of conflict and dialectical tensions in advertising agencies. In chapter three, I explain my research method; and then in chapter four, I explain the major findings of my study including types of conflict, dialectical tensions, and praxis patterns used to manage tensions in advertising agencies. Finally, in chapter five I discuss the

practical implications and limitations of my study as well as directions for future research.

Introduction

Organizations often have complex hierarchical structures with various departments and communication channels in order for day-to-day operations to be successful. These departments employ a diverse group of people who have different objectives and responsibilities within their positions; but in order for employees to reach individual goals, they must communicate with other employees across departments. This convergence of varying personalities and goals leads to intraorganizational conflict, which is defined by de Gregorio, Cheong, and Kim (2013) as “a state in which incompatibilities or disagreements among departments and other functional units are perceived to exist” (p. 19). Intraorganizational conflict is unavoidable, but the ways in which employees communicate during conflict can lead to positive or negative outcomes.

Advertising agencies, like other organizations, have “traditional” organizational departments such as human resources and accounting; but two main departments in an agency are the account service and creative department (de Gregorio et al., 2013, p. 19). The account service department is focused on communicating with clients, coordinating and managing the work among the agency’s departments, and ensuring the agency is meeting clients’ goals within set deadlines. On the other hand, the creative department is responsible for creating the messages, images, and content of clients’ advertisements and advertising campaigns. These two departments have a common goal, which is to create effective advertising the client is happy with; but their job responsibilities, organizational

structure, and attitudes toward and perceptions of each other are vastly different and cause conflict within the agency (de Gregorio et al., 2013).

The working relationship between account service and creative personnel is extremely important because client work emerges from the communication between individuals in these departments. Account service employees receive instructions and goals from clients, they relay that information to creatives, creatives then design the ads, clients provide feedback, and account service people must communicate the revisions to creatives. It is absolutely necessary for account service and creative personnel to work together and be in close contact with one another in order to complete clients' ads and advertising campaigns that meet clients' deadlines and expectations. Oftentimes, creatives want to take risks with ads and broaden their skills as artists, while account personnel aim to please clients' more conservative views, and conflict arises when creatives' work must go through a lengthy approval process where rejections and revisions are common (Kover & Goldberg, 1995). Likewise, creatives have a much more specific skillset compared to account people who must have a broad knowledge base of all agency and client operations (Vanden Bergh, Smith, & Wicks, 1986), which influences how both groups of people complete tasks for their job. The varying perspectives and motivations of account service and creative personnel is a major factor that contributes to conflict between these departments.

Since conflict is inevitable between account service and creative personnel, it is imperative that advertising agencies understand the impact of conflict on the agency itself. Advertising agencies can be a stressful workplace environment because of the ever-changing nature of advertising, and conflict among members of agencies' main two

departments adds even more stress and hostility to this fast-paced working environment. Ultimately, the conflict between account service and creative personnel can hinder the success of client work (de Gregorio et al., 2013). If clients are unsatisfied with the agency's work, the agency can lose that client, resulting in decreased revenue for the agency; and if we do not understand the underlying dialectical (i.e., oppositional) tensions between account service and creative personnel as well as the ways they communicatively manage those tensions, the agency's overall success is at risk.

Statement of the Problem

Even though both the account service and creative departments work together to reach the same client's objectives, they have different job responsibilities and personality characteristics that can cause conflict between people within these departments. The account service department of an advertising agency "attempts to balance and represent the interests of both clients and their own agencies" (de Gregorio et al., 2013, p. 19). In essence, the account service person is the "middle man" responsible for communicating with clients, advising on strategy with clients, and managing internal agency departments. They are the client's advocate and must oversee the creative work to ensure it is in-line with clients' goals; but they are also the agency's advocate and must be able to pitch the agency's creative ideas to the client, which can be an overwhelming task (Kover & Goldberg, 1995). Account service personnel are responsible for creating structure within the agency such as setting and maintaining deadlines, budgeting, creating creative briefs that guide clients' creative work, approving creatives' work, and using research to guide campaign strategies (de Gregorio et al., 2013). These structural guidelines and approval

methods are often not well-received by the creative department and are sources of conflict between account service and creative personnel (Kover, 1995).

In contrast to the account services department, the creative department is responsible for “developing message content and creating the materials by which to deliver that content” (de Gregorio et al., 2013, p. 20), and it includes people like copywriters and graphic designers. The creative department personnel are sometimes referred to as “creatives,” and creatives are often characterized as quirky individuals (Hackley & Kover, 2007) who like taking risks and have a difficult time getting their work approved due to account managers and their clients’ trepidations (Kover & Goldberg, 1995). Clients are usually much more cautious in regards to advertising design and content (Kover & Goldberg, 1995), and since the account service person is the voice for the client, they usually err on the side of caution as well, causing tension between the account and creative departments. Creatives often need flexibility and freedom to be able to brainstorm and develop their ideas, but the formal structures of deadlines, meetings, research criteria, etc. set by account service personnel inhibit and restrict their creative process (Hackley & Kover, 2007), causing tensions as well. Creativity is hard to assign a set of procedures to, but advertising agencies are businesses that must cater to clients’ needs. Oftentimes clients need justifications for the creative team’s strategic decisions (Kover & Goldberg, 1995), and when account service people set standards and communicate the clients’ needs with creatives, conflicts arise.

Since clients are the driving force of an advertising agency’s success, they are central to the account service and creative department’s work. More and more, organizations want proof that their advertising was effective and their money was well

spent in terms of return-on-investment (ROI) or other measurement techniques (Ambler & Roberts, 2008). However, from my personal experience, sometimes advertising campaigns have intangible goals such as “increasing awareness” or “building brand loyalty” that make it difficult for advertising personnel to measure the effectiveness and/or monetary value of ads or advertising campaigns. Not to mention, people are inundated with advertising messages daily (Ha & McCaan, 2008); and clients put a tremendous amount of pressure on creatives to consistently produce attention-grabbing, innovative work that cuts through the clutter (Kover & Goldberg, 1995).

Additionally, clients’ expectations and strict deadlines often interfere with creatives’ artistic process. However, account service personnel are advocates for their clients and must enforce their client’s rules, which oftentimes means rejecting creatives’ more daring ideas (Kover & Goldberg, 1995). These factors create a volatile, high-stress environment for account service and creative personnel because they disagree about how to complete client work, and that type of organizational environment is a breeding ground for conflict. Conflict between these two departments can negatively affect internal agency relationships and client work, ultimately leading to high employee turnover, decreased client retention, and decreased revenue for the agency (de Gregorio et al., 2013).

Background and Need

Since interpersonal conflict has the potential to be a major problem in advertising agencies, many research studies in the field examine conflict either within one department, between/among other departments, or between the agency and the client. Beginning with conflict within one department, on the account-service side of the advertising agency, previous literature focuses on the conflict between account team

members (Hackley, 2003) and account service people and clients (Henke, 1995; LaBahn & Kohli, 1997; Wackman, Salmon, & Salmon, 1987). On the creative side, previous literature emphasizes conflict between creative team members (Oliver & Ashley, 2012), as well as the conflict that creatives have when managing their personal and professional identities (Hackley & Kover, 2007). These studies illustrate the differing perspectives and personality characteristics of account service and creative personnel, but none of them analyze the oppositional nature of conflict between these two departments and/or how their differing perspectives affect the communication process.

Prior research has focused on conflict within one department as well as conflict between the account service and creative departments. Many creatives used the word “hate” to discuss relationships with account service people (Hackley, 2003, p. 69); and there is often a “suits vs. creative subcultural divide” in advertising agencies (Hackley, 2003, p. 71), which indicates how common and volatile conflict between these two departments can be. Vanden Bergh et al. (1986) listed areas of conflict between account service and creative personnel like advertising strategy, deadlines, access to client information, etc. but did not provide any information as to how these groups of people communicate during conflict. Similarly, de Gregorio et al. (2013) examined the causes and consequences of destructive and constructive conflict between account service, creative, and media departments in advertising agencies but did not explore how those variables may be oppositional in nature and/or how they affect communication among the departments.

Intraorganizational conflict in advertising agencies is an important research topic, but because clients are the driving force of an agency’s work and success, the relationship

between agency personnel and clients is heavily researched as well. Wackman et al. (1987) and Henke (1995) found clients' dissatisfaction of creative work and account management is the main reason why clients switch advertising agencies. Conflict between the account and creative employees can negatively affect client work and relationships (de Gregorio et al., 2013), which could cause agencies to lose clients. Again, it is useful for agencies to know what conflicts cause clients to switch agencies, but there is still no information regarding how the communication between account service and creative personnel during conflict affects their work.

The bulk of the literature regarding agency relationships and conflict emphasizes how conflict should not be viewed negatively because it can lead to positive results (de Gregorio et al., 2013; Oliver & Ashley, 2012, Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). Because of this mindset, researchers have made significant strides in identifying types of conflict within agencies. Although identifying types of conflict is useful, it still does not reach the root of the problem, which is communication. If account service and creative personnel ignore conflict because they do not understand how to effectively communicate their needs to each other, their needs will remain unfulfilled. Erbert (2014) notes suppression of individual needs can decrease job satisfaction and increase destructive conflict, which is why communication between these two groups must be explored.

While it is helpful to know the varying beliefs of account and creative team members and how that affects their department's work and relationships with clients, the previous studies do not provide suggestions as to how employees should communicate with each other when those tensions arise. However, using RDT to analyze conflict between account service and creative personnel addresses this gap in the literature by

identifying types of dialectical tensions, which help explain the nature of the interpersonal conflict, and analyzing how people communicatively manage the dialectical tensions that arise (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Many types of conflict can occur in interpersonal relationships, but RDT specifically looks at the contradictory nature of individual wants/needs (i.e., dialectical tensions) that can lead to conflict. More importantly, RDT operates under the assumption that contradictions lead to change in relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), and if account service and creative personnel understand the dialectical tensions that exist in advertising agencies, they will be able to communicate more effectively, and ultimately, change their working relationship.

Study Purpose

Advertising agencies are much like other organizations in that conflict is inevitable; but the fast-paced culture of advertising agencies produces an even more volatile working environment (de Gregorio et al., 2013), especially for account service and creative personnel. These groups of people have varying job responsibilities and personality characteristics, which often lead to conflict. Account service people are primarily the client's advocate and maintain structure within an agency while creatives design the content of ads and adhere to the standards set by account service people (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). Clients put added pressure on these two departments with their high demands for creative work (Kover & Goldberg, 1995) and measurement of advertising effectiveness (Ambler & Roberts, 2008) which leads to increased stress and conflict when account service and creative personnel must work together to meet the clients' objectives.

Most of the literature regarding conflict between account service and creative personnel answers the “what” question in that it examines *what* the causes of conflict are and *what* positive or negative outcomes exist. However, previous studies have not explored the root of the problem, which is communication. We need to examine this by analyzing the oppositional nature of the conflict that is occurring between account service and creative personnel and *how* they communicate during conflict. One way to address these questions is to analyze conflict between account service and creative personnel through the lens of RDT (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), which emphasizes the contradictory tensions that exist in the discourse of interpersonal interactions. Thus, in the current study, I identify the types of dialectical tensions that occur during conflict and explain how account service and creative personnel communicatively manage those tensions. Chapter two includes a review of the literature about RDT, account service and creative personnel perspectives and motivations, and advertising agency conflict and dialectical tensions. The following chapters offer an explanation of this study’s research design and results as well as a discussion of practical implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Review of Research

I begin the literature review with an explanation of relational dialectics theory (RDT). Then, I discuss the generalist and specialist perspectives as well as the extrinsic and intrinsic motivations of account service and creative personnel and show how they are dialectical and can cause interpersonal conflict. I review research about conflict in advertising agencies, make connections between those types of agency conflict and dialectical tensions, and explain how people have managed tensions in organizations in previous studies and apply that to the advertising context as well. Finally, I pose the research questions for the study.

Relational Dialectics Theory

Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) relational dialectics theory (RDT) takes a dialogic approach to interpersonal and family communication, and is based on Russian cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism theory (Bakhtin, 1981). RDT operates under the assumption that communication is constitutive and is a meaning-making process that constructs the social world (Baxter, 2004). With this approach, relationships are not separate from communication; rather, relationships are like containers where communication can be located (Baxter, 2004). RDT focuses on contradictions and the "dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996, p. 8). "Contradiction" usually has a negative connotation because it indicates there is a discrepancy in someone's actions; but from a dialectical perspective, it is free from any negative connotation (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

In order to fully understand the role of contradictions in RDT, the definition must be broken down into two parts. First, “unified oppositions” exist when two aspects of a phenomenon are both incompatible and interdependent (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). For example, in personal relationships, individual autonomy and relational connection are unified opposites because people want to feel independent at the same time they want to feel connected to another person (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). RDT functions using a “both/and” principle where people want *both* autonomy *and* connection (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996).

Second, “dynamic interplay” refers to the tensions between the unified oppositions; but from a dialectical perspective, this tension is not a negative or positive force (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Rather, this tension between contradictions is simply an ongoing, push/pull process that can lead to “aesthetic moments” (i.e., incidents that unite participants through dialogue) in personal relationships (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). According to Bakhtin (1981), social life is a result of “a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” (p. 272), the centripetal (i.e., forces of homogeneity) and the centrifugal (i.e., forces of difference). Therefore, from this theory, relationships can be viewed as conversations created by the contradictory interplay of centripetal and centrifugal forces that can lead to change (Baxter, 2004).

RDT assumes people are both actors and objects of their own actions in that people simultaneously act and react when communicating with others. In other words, people communicate the contradictions they experience, but these contradictions subsequently affect their communicative actions (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). Each

communicative interaction is based off both distant and proximal utterances, and the way people respond to, or manage, these interactions is known as praxis patterns. Baxter (2007) states that distant utterances refer to spoken utterances from the past or not-yet-spoken utterances from people not present during the conversation; whereas proximal utterances refer to spoken utterances during the present conversation or not-yet-spoken responses of people present during the conversation. In other words, utterances are like chain links that create the entire chain of discourse, with each “link” connecting and building on one another. The important assumption of RDT is that “an individual’s utterance is less an index to his or her mind and more a site of multiple discourses at play” and communicators take all of these utterances into account when acting and reacting during conversations.

When managing dialectical tensions, Baxter (2007) stresses that tensions do not exist for communicators to achieve monologue (i.e., unity). If these competing discourses end with a unified result, then only one authoritative point of view is represented, and that is not the purpose of identifying communicative differences. From a dialogic perspective, researchers should look for tensions in discourse and analyze how speakers negotiate those struggles (Baxter, 2007). While it is important to know the types of dialectical tensions that exist, it is also critical to understand how people communicatively manage those tensions (i.e., praxis patterns). Baxter and Montgomery (1996) discuss three main praxis patterns people typically use when responding to dialectical tensions. For example, if an openness vs. closedness dialectical tension is present in a relationship, people will manage that tension by either alternating between the two “poles” of the tension (e.g., sometimes openly sharing information), emphasizing

the importance of one pole over the other (e.g., always openly sharing information or rarely sharing information), or using one pole to achieve the other pole (e.g., sometimes openly sharing information only to be able to keep some information private).

In addition to common praxis patterns, Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identify three main internal dialectical tensions of interpersonal relationships which include openness vs. closedness (i.e., sharing information), autonomy vs. connection (i.e., independence and dependence), and certainty vs. uncertainty (i.e., stability and change). They also identify three main external dialectical tensions such as inclusion vs. seclusion (i.e., including family members, friends, etc. into relationship decision making or not), conventionality vs. uniqueness (i.e., following conventional relationship norms like getting married, having kids, etc. or following a unique path), and revelation vs. concealment (i.e., choosing to reveal private information to those outside the relationship). Clearly, more dialectical tensions exist than just the originals that are commonly identified and studied, especially depending on the situation or sample under question. For example, researchers have identified tensions like being fair vs. doing what is right, profit vs. affordability, and progress vs. continuity, which occurred in communication about family farm succession planning (Pitts, Fowler, Kaplan, Nussbaum, & Baker, 2009). Also, researchers identified a more is better vs. less is better tension couples struggled with when discussing money (Romo & Abetz, 2016).

Although RDT is commonly used to analyze family and romantic relationship contexts like the examples above, it is an interpersonal communication theory that has been applied to organizational contexts like hospice care (Gilstrap & White, 2015) and prisons (Tracy, 2004) as well. Gilstrap and White (2015) found hospice nurses experience

an authoritative-nonauthoritative dialectical tension when they “perceive their expertise is ignored or rejected in light of patient and family preferences for care” (p. 528).

Additionally, Tracy (2004) found prison officers experience a nurture vs. discipline dialectical tension when they feel empathetic for inmates, even though they know they must remain detached in order to discipline them. These studies show dialectical tensions can be unique to an organizational setting depending on the type of role one has within the organization. Whether the dialectical tensions are more external like the communication between hospice care nurses and patients/family members or more internal like the prison guard’s emotional response, both can be problematic. Since account service and creative personnel have contradictory perspectives and motivations that lead to conflict, RDT is a beneficial theory to use to analyze the interpersonal communication between these two types of people.

Individual Differences that Prompt Conflict between Account Service and Creatives

Account service and creative personnel have two major differences in their individual perspectives and motivations that impact how they complete their job responsibilities. Account service people have a generalist perspective, meaning they have a lot of knowledge about many parts of an agency (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). On the other hand, creatives have a specialist perspective, meaning they have in-depth knowledge about their specific craft (Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). In addition, account service people are extrinsically motivated while creatives are intrinsically motivated. Extrinsic motivation is when people are motivated by external rewards like money or awards, whereas intrinsic motivation is when people are motivated by internal rewards like personal satisfaction or a sense of accomplishment (Hye Jung, Jin Nam, & Sun

Young, 2015). The following section includes a review of how these individual perspectives and motivations exist in account service and creative departments and lead to conflict as well as explain how these differences are contradictory, which means dialectical tensions may be present in account service and creative conflict.

Generalist and specialist perspectives. Vanden Bergh et al. (1986) argue that account service people have a generalist perspective because they know a little bit of information about many jobs within the agency, while creatives have a specialist perspective because they have in-depth training about their specific craft. This major difference creates conflict and lack of understanding between the departments. In their study, they asked account service and creative personnel to answer questions regarding their perceptions of working relationships and conflict with people in their department and outside their department. The creatives in this study reported that the account service people do not understand their job, do not know when to leave them alone to work, and do not share client information with them. Similarly, Hackley and Kover (2007) stated that creatives often prefer to work alone because they need space to think and often resist the structure set by account service people. According to Vanden Bergh et al. (1986), account service people perceived creatives to have egos because they do not accept constructive criticism and have trouble sticking to the advertising strategy, while Hackley and Kover (2007) noted that creatives said they understand creativity and advertising better than account service personnel.

The opposition of the generalist and specialist perspectives can cause the types of conflict identified above, because account and creative people approach their job responsibilities differently. For example, account people with a generalist perspective

could assume creatives do not need to know many details about the client, which in turn, makes creatives with a specialist perspective perceive account people as being unwilling to share client information. Also, if creatives with a specialist perspective think they understand advertising better than account people with a generalist perspective, account people may perceive this as creatives having inflated egos. The generalist vs. specialist perspective can also be viewed as a type of dialectical tension and follows the “both/and” principle of RDT (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), because in order for the agency to be successful, the agency must employ people with *both* the generalist perspective (account people) *and* specialist perspective (creative people). Since these two groups of people with contradictory perspectives are working together, their competing desires cause conflict within the agency and indicates RDT is a useful way to analyze their communication during conflict.

Extrinsic and intrinsic motivations. In addition to having varying perspectives, account service people are extrinsically motivated while creatives are intrinsically motivated (Hackley, 2003; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Oliver & Ashley, 2012). Hackley (2003) stated that account service personnel attempt to meet clients’ goals (extrinsic) and use consumer research to drive advertising strategy. Since account service people are motivated by clients, they manage and enforce formal agency structures like meetings and deadlines to ensure work meets clients’ expectations. In contrast, Hackley and Kover (2007) found that creatives’ work is driven by the creative process and the ability for ads to resonate with and inspire consumers (intrinsic). Copywriters reported that they try to empathize with a brand or service in order to write copy for ads (Kover, 1995). Creative leaders mentioned they seek “individuals who [are] driven by their own curiosity to

discover solutions” (Oliver & Ashley, 2012, p. 340), which shows how important intrinsic motivation is for creatives. Although both account service and creative personnel are not solely extrinsically or intrinsically motivated, their job responsibilities require them to be predominately motivated either extrinsically (clients) or intrinsically (creative process).

Since account service personnel are extrinsically motivated by clients and agency executives (Kover & Goldberg, 1995) and creatives are intrinsically motivated by their curiosity and drive (Oliver & Ashley, 2012), this causes conflict between the two departments. For example, creatives will be intrinsically motivated to take risks and develop creative advertising; but if clients want more conservative advertising, account service people will be extrinsically motivated to abide by those guidelines. This leads to rejection of the creatives’ work, work that feels like it is a personal extension of themselves (Hirschman, 1989); and creatives’ response to that rejection could eventually lead to account service people perceiving creatives as being unable to accept constructive criticism, which was an important conflict area in the Vanden Bergh et al. (1986) study. Extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are opposites that both guide account service and creative personnel and is another dialectical tension that appears in advertising agencies, which again, shows that RDT would be an effective way to analyze the communication between these two departments.

Advertising Agency Conflict and Dialectical Tensions

Since the perspectives and motivations of account service and creative employees are often oppositional in nature, this can lead to conflict, because they approach client projects with those varying perspectives. Much of the literature discusses agency conflict

as either being constructive or destructive (de Gregorio et al., 2013; Harris, Ogbonna, & Goode, 2008; Song, Dyer, & Thieme, 2006). Destructive conflict is a “state in which departments and personnel disagree and feel negative about their working relationships as a result of their particular conflict dynamics” and constructive conflict is a “state in which departments and personnel disagree but feel better about their working relationships as a result of their conflict dynamics” (de Gregorio et al., 2013, p. 21). De Gregorio et al. (2013) identified greater centralization with top management (i.e., how authority is distributed across the organization), greater internal volatility (i.e., how much change the organization experiences), greater psychological distance (i.e., how different members’ goals, values, culture, etc. are), and greater formalization (i.e., how clearly defined roles and procedures are) were the antecedents to destructive conflict. In regards to constructive conflict, de Gregorio et al. (2013) found high levels of team spirit (i.e., how much trust and pride exists) was the only antecedent to constructive conflict.

According to Kover and Goldberg (1995), creatives dislike that account managers have considerable power because their creatives’ work must be approved by them (centralization) as well as the constant uncertainty regarding changes, evaluation, and approval methods of their work (internal volatility). In addition, Hackley and Kover (2007) discussed how account service employees have a more bureaucratic view and creatives have a more artistic view that impacts how they evaluate work (psychological distance). Lastly, Hackley and Kover (2007) also found creatives often resist the structure and systems like consumer research and copy testing used by account service personnel to manage and control the agency’s work (formalization). These specific examples of centralization, internal volatility, psychological distance, and formalization show how

destructive conflict exists in advertising agencies and illustrates how strained the relationship between account service and creative personnel is as well. However, they do not offer any suggestions regarding how agencies can increase constructive conflict.

Since centralization, internal volatility, psychological distance, and formalization do not impact the levels of constructive conflict (de Gregorio et al., 2013), it is possible that constructive conflict is its own, separate construct rather than simply being destructive conflict's opposite (Harris et al., 2008; Song et al., 2006). Framing agency conflict as either constructive (positive) or destructive (negative) fails to take into consideration employees' individual thoughts and actions that lead to conflict in the first place. Baxter and Montgomery (1996) note a contradiction must be "the dynamic interplay between unified *oppositions*" (p. 8), which means the constructive and destructive conflict the literature discusses may not be contradictory in nature. However, the ways account service and creative personnel communicate during conflict (i.e., dynamic interplay) are most likely dialectical because of their oppositional perspectives (generalist vs. specialist) and motivations (extrinsic vs. intrinsic).

Due to these oppositional perspectives and motivations that lead to agency conflict, RDT is the most beneficial theory for analyzing the communication between account service and creative personnel. Although RDT has been frequently used to study family (Baxter, 2006; Pitts et al., 2009) or romantic relationships (Fox et al., 2014; Romo & Abetz, 2016), Erbert (2014) studied the extent to which employees in a variety of organizations perceived the five dialectical tensions of independence vs. dependence (i.e., control of work), judgment vs. acceptance (i.e., acceptance of work ideas/evaluation), openness vs. closedness (i.e., sharing information/ideas), stability vs. change (i.e., work

environment), ideal vs. real (i.e., quality/type of work that must be accomplished) and found that all of these tensions were ranked in the moderate range of importance. Erbert (2014) also identified that 49% of conflicts were perceived as dialectical, which shows RDT is a practical framework for analyzing organizational tensions and not just family or romantic relationship tensions.

All five of those dialectical tensions (independence vs. dependence, judgment vs. acceptance, openness vs. closedness, stability vs. change, ideal vs. real) are evident in advertising agency conflict between account service and creative personnel, meaning RDT would be effective to use in this specific organizational context (Erbert, 2014). For example, creatives have said account people do not know when to leave them alone to work (Hackley & Kover, 2007; Vanden Bergh et al., 1986), which is an example of independence vs. dependence. Vanden Bergh et al. (1986) also found account people think creatives do not accept constructive criticism (judgment vs. acceptance) and creatives do not think account people share client information (openness vs. closedness). The uncertainty in advertising agencies regarding employee and client turnover (de Gregorio et al., 2013) and/or evaluation, approval, and ownership of creative work (Kover & Goldberg, 1995) is a source of conflict (stability vs. change). Not to mention, Hackley and Kover (2007) state creatives have a “preference for the superior values of art and literature” (p.68) and, *ideally*, want to showcase that in their work; but in *reality*, their risky, creative ideas often get rejected by account managers because their clients have a more conservative viewpoint (Kover & Goldberg, 1995).

To date, advertising agency research has simply identified types of conflict like the examples above and offered vague implications like engage in “respectful conflict”

(Oliver & Ashley, 2012, p. 340), “increase separation between the parties” (Kover & Goldberg, 1995, p. 60), or “encourage positive conflict” and “reduce negative conflict” (de Gregorio et al., 2013, p. 29) to help solve the problem. However, RDT can examine conflict more deeply and provide practical implications by analyzing how people manage the dialectical tensions that exist in organizations. For example, Tracy (2004) used RDT as a model to analyze prison guards’ responses to dialectical tensions in their organization and found they communicatively manage tensions multiple ways. First, guards framed them as contradictions by selecting one pole over the other, used source-splitting (i.e., one guard chose one end of the pole while another guard chose the other end of the pole), and/or vacillated between both poles. Second, guards framed tensions as pragmatic paradoxes or double binds where guards felt they were not able to escape the tensions because, for instance, the poles were framed in a paradoxical way in which to obey is to disobey and vice versa. Third, guards framed tensions as complementary dialectics where one pole was used as a means to reach the other pole, which Baxter (1990) found is correlated to higher satisfaction compared to using other forms of framing when managing contradictions. Understanding these types of praxis patterns would be beneficial for advertising agencies as well because it could answer questions regarding how to decrease destructive conflict and increase constructive conflict.

The studies that identify types of positive or negative conflict in advertising agencies do not examine how account service and creative personnel react to conflict. This is a major gap that must be explored because the way they communicatively manage tensions could have positive or negative implications. Since advertising agencies have forms of dialectical conflict, it is likely account service and creative personnel manage

tensions by framing them as contradictions, pragmatic paradoxes, and/or complementary. Studying the nature of their interactions, instead of just the types of conflict, between these two groups of people by using RDT can offer more in-depth insights regarding how communication can help change the relationship between account service and creative personnel. Thus, after identifying types of interpersonal conflict research participants experience, it will be important to know what dialectical tensions exist and how agency personnel manage those tensions, which leads to the following research questions:

RQ1: What interpersonal conflicts do account service and creative personnel experience when working together on client projects?

RQ2: What dialectical tensions do account service and creative personnel experience during interpersonal conflict about client work?

RQ3: What praxis patterns do account service and creative personnel use to communicatively manage dialectical tensions surrounding interpersonal conflict about client work?

Chapter 3

Method

The method section begins with an overview of my in-depth interview research design and constructivist approach. Then, I discuss how I recruited the sample and characteristics of the sample of account service and creative personnel. In addition, I explain my semi-structured interview guide and discuss how I used a mix of inductive and deductive thematic analysis to analyze the interview transcripts. Throughout the explanations of my research design, I examine potential limitations and benefits of the design.

Research Design

I used an in-depth interview design to conduct constructivist research because my study operated under the assumption that individuals construct meanings of their experiences as they interact with the world around them, and communication is a part of that meaning-making process (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Constructivist researchers ask open-ended questions and rely on inductive data analysis because they want to “generate meaning from the data collected in the field” (Creswell, 2014, p. 9). Constructivist researchers also acknowledge their own backgrounds and how past experiences affect their interpretations of participants’ responses (Creswell, 2014, p. 8). Since my bachelor’s degree is in advertising, my interpretation of the transcripts was important when analyzing the results because I understand the advertising industry more than the average individual. The principles of constructivist research align with RDT’s assumption that communication is constitutive (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) as well as my personal views as a researcher, which is why I chose to conduct a qualitative study.

Prior research about RDT guided this study, but the semi-structured interview guide contained general questions and probing questions regarding account service and creative personnel's experiences with conflict so I could learn about the dialectical tensions and praxis patterns that exist in this specific context. Previous researchers have identified many types of dialectical tensions and praxis patterns in regards to family communication (Baxter, 2006; Pitts et al., 2009) and romantic relationships (Fox, Osborn, & Warber, 2014; Romo & Abetz, 2016). Additionally, Erbert (2014) identified five dialectical tensions (i.e., independence vs. dependence, judgment vs. acceptance, openness vs. closedness, stability vs. change, ideal vs. real) that people from a variety of professions perceive to exist in organizational conflict. It was important for me to know the previously identified tensions, especially in organizational settings, so I could recognize them as I was conducting interviews and analyzing the data.

An in-depth interview design was the best option for this study because asking open-ended questions where participants could discuss their personal experiences produced detailed, first-hand accounts of agency conflict (Creswell, 2014), which led to understanding *how* individuals in these two departments communicate during conflict. A quantitative study would have only been able to quantify the frequency of dialectical tensions or perceived importance of dialectical tensions during conflict, and that type of study could not provide answers to my research questions. Since prior studies have not investigated the nature of dialectical tensions in advertising agencies, it was better to interview account service and creative personnel so I could understand the existing dialectical tensions and how personnel communicatively manage those tensions. Many researchers use qualitative studies before developing quantitative methods, especially in

situations where a theory or context is unexplored (Creswell, 2014); and because RDT is commonly applied to family and romantic relationship issues, there is still a gap regarding RDT's role in various organizational settings. This in-depth interview design produced qualitative data that can be a springboard for additional RDT studies in organizational contexts and provide deeper insights into account-creative conflict that is currently absent from the literature.

Research Participants

Research participants included only individuals who had been in their current position for at least a year to increase the likelihood that they had encountered interpersonal conflicts within the agency. I also used a combination of account service and creative personnel, keeping the two groups equal. Media buyers, social media strategists, web developers, and other employees at advertising agencies were not included. Since advertising agencies have different titles for employees working in the account service or creative department, I had research participants identify their job title and job description during participant recruitment. Keeping in mind that participants with the title of "project manager," "account service coordinator," "account executive," etc. were common client-oriented positions, while participants with the title of "graphic designer," "copywriter," "creative director," etc. were common creative-oriented positions.

I used nonrandom purposive sampling to gather the sample, because this allowed me to identify research participants based on their availability and key characteristics (Creswell, 2014). Research participants were recruited by emailing (Appendix A) and/or calling CEOs, owners, directors, etc. of full service advertising agencies from

Midwestern cities. A full service agency is defined as an agency that can provide clients with all the services they need for an entire advertising campaign including research, marketing plans, design, production, media placement, and campaign evaluation (Solomon, Cornell, & Nizan, 2013, p. 35). In the email and/or phone call, I asked for *only* account service and creative employees to participate in the interviews and listed example job titles like the ones I listed above. I also mentioned that each advertising agency that participates would receive a document outlining the common types of interpersonal conflict and dialectical tensions I found as well as practical strategies for employees regarding how to communicate when those tensions arise as an incentive to participate.

Random sampling was not used because the sample criteria were specific; therefore, I had to research and contact the agencies using purposive convenience sampling. I decided against including “boutique” agencies in my sample because those agencies have a smaller client size and are much more specialized and creative-focused than full service agencies (Cummings, 1973). I also could have included media buyers, social media strategists, web developers, and other agency employees in my sample, but those job duties do not align with account service and creative personnel’s. Since previous literature indicates how perspectives and motivations of account service and creative personnel are often opposites, I was only interested in understanding the dialectical tensions and praxis patterns of those two groups. Even though I only included participants from those two departments and cannot generalize the results to other working relationships in the agency, including other agency employees would have caused validity threats to the study.

The number of participants in qualitative research depends on the nature of the study and participants available (Gaskell, 2000), and I had five research participants per group from various advertising agencies ($N = 10$) with two participants maximum from each agency. Since my study required research participants to answer questions about organizational conflict, which is often a difficult subject to discuss, interviewing a total of 10 participants was an achievable sample. Although my sample was small, O'Reilly and Parker (2012) discussed how an adequate sample size for a qualitative study includes participants who will be able to answer the research questions, and my purposive sampling technique ensured I interviewed research participants from different agencies who work on a variety of client projects, work closely with the account and creative team as members of either one of those departments, and have encountered agency conflict.

The final sample included males ($n = 3$) and females ($n = 7$) who were between the ages of 24-56. The Midwest advertising agencies they worked for ranged in size. Some agencies were small and had one location with 10-20 employees, while others were larger and had multiple locations with 20 or more employees at each location. Participants also had varying years of job experience. They had between 1-16 years of experience in their current position, but their total experience in the advertising field spanned 2-32 years. All research participants were Caucasian and obtained a bachelor's degree, and one participant obtained a master's degree.

Instrumentation

I conducted 30-45 minute semi-structured interviews with full service agencies' account service and creative personnel. Since the interview guide contained questions pertaining to agency conflict and potential conflicts with superiors, I wanted to avoid a

“chilling effect,” which is when people may withhold information during interpersonal communication (Knapp & Daly, 2011). Therefore, I interviewed the research participants individually and out of the office in neutral locations either face-to-face or over the phone and provided confidentiality by not including their names or employer information in the results. I asked the research participants when and where they would feel most comfortable being interviewed and offered public location suggestions like a coffee shop, restaurant, etc. I did not want to impose on their work week, so I offered to interview them on the weekends as well. I ended up conducting six face-to-face and four phone interviews before I stopped collecting data after I reached saturation, which is when no new categories need to be created to account for the data and new cases do not add any new information to the current categories (Creswell, 1994; Frey et al., 2000; Holton, 2007). Corbin and Strauss (2015) stated “a researcher could go on collecting data forever” before they reach saturation, but that “eventually, a researcher has to say this concept is sufficiently well-developed” (p. 14). Thus, I collected enough data to have well-developed themes that answered the research questions.

The semi-structured interview guide (Appendix B) included several question categories with the following questions: (1) background information (e.g., “Describe a typical day at your job”), which served as ice-breaker questions and provided detailed information about the context of the participants’ jobs, (2) client project decision making (e.g., “What roles do account service and creative employees take during client project discussions?”), (3) client project process (e.g., “Explain the typical process when working on a client’s project from beginning to end”), (4) client project tensions (e.g., “What contradictions or tensions have you regularly experienced while working with an account

service/creative person on a client project?”), (5) conflict management (e.g., “What specific strategies did you use to manage those contradictions or tensions?”), (6) general communication dynamics between account service and creative personnel (e.g., “Describe communication with the account service/creative employees”). Other than probing questions, those questions were the primary questions on the interview guide. At the end of the interview, I asked participants to fill out a short questionnaire (Appendix C) asking demographic questions like name, job title, agency name, gender, race, age, length of time at their current position, and educational level, reminding them that their information would be kept confidential and none of their responses would be able to be tied to them.

Another approach to conducting this study would have been a survey measuring the frequency of dialectical tensions in agency conflict or perceived importance of dialectical tensions in account service and creative personnel conflict. However, this context is unexplored, and it was more beneficial to understand the types of dialectical tensions that exist in advertising agencies and how people communicate during these tensions before researching variables that may or may not exist in this context. Using a semi-structured, in-depth interview process was the best option for the study because it allowed me to gather detailed answers about research participants’ experiences, which would have been impossible to collect if I had conducted a quantitative study.

Analysis

After transcribing the interviews, I used a mix of inductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and deductive thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014). I selected a grounded theory approach because I wanted to be able to describe the emerging data (Holton, 2007). The

overall analysis of the transcripts was an iterative process where I identified emerging themes in the data (inductive) while, simultaneously, compared the data to established dialectical tensions and praxis patterns (deductive). Specifically during the deductive process, I compared the data to tensions such as independence vs. dependence, judgment vs. acceptance, openness vs. closedness, stability vs. change, and ideal vs. real (Erbert, 2014) as well as praxis patterns like alternating between the two “poles” of the tension, emphasizing the importance of one pole over the other, using one pole to achieve the other pole, (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996), and framing tensions as pragmatic paradoxes/double binds (Tracy, 2004). I chose inductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and deductive thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014) because it is a common method used for qualitative RDT studies, and I was able to report personal examples of agency conflict, identify new dialectical tensions in this context, and describe how account service and creative personnel communicate when these tensions arise.

Since the interviews took place over several weeks, I analyzed the 65 pages of interview transcripts throughout the data collection phase. First, I read through the transcripts several times to gain an overview of the data. Then, during the open-coding stage, I answered questions like, “What is actually happening in the data?” and “What category does this incident indicate?” (Holton, 2007) by making code notes about what I was seeing in the data (Creswell, 1994). Specifically, I made theory notes about the theoretical properties of the data (i.e., RDT, dialectical tensions, and praxis patterns) and self-reflective notes that expressed personal insights about the data (Creswell, 2014; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Finally, I created themes that described the commonly occurring

content (Creswell, 1994) regarding interpersonal conflict, dialectical tensions, and praxis patterns.

While analyzing the transcripts, I identified dialectical tensions present in the communication between account service and creative personnel (internal) as well as their individual job responsibilities (external). For example, a creative said,

A lot of the times we're not in the meetings so the [account person] will say to the client, 'Ya, that cell phone picture from six years ago will work great,' and then we'll have to go back and say this is the wrong format, this, this, and this, so there's some back and forth there.

This was a thought unit that I coded as an openness vs. closedness dialectical tension relating to the communication between account service and creative personnel. I also coded for dialectical tensions that related to participants' job duties/roles. For example, another creative said,

I can't really say that I know any creatives who love brainstorming sessions because they feel put on the spot. And asking me to come up with something brilliant under pressure, you know, let me get back to my office; and I'll get back to you.

This signaled an individual vs. collaborative worktime dialectical tension present in the creative's job responsibilities. Participants discussed dialectical tensions present in communication and/or their job responsibilities that led to conflict, and both types of situations were coded and included in the results because they were managed in different ways.

In a previous RDT study, researchers analyzed explicit disclosures, which occur when respondents express “simultaneous, competing desires in response to a question” (Pitts et al., 2006, p. 66). I identified explicit disclosures as well, and in the study’s context, an example of an explicit disclosure is an account executive who said, “I’d say the creatives would always say that they want more information. I’m sure that’s their number one gripe.” This was coded as an explicit openness vs. closedness tension. Pitts et al. (2006) also analyzed implicit disclosures, which are competing desires that may emerge across individual interviews. An example of an implicit disclosure in this study’s context is an account executive who said designers should approach their work as a “commercial artist,” while a creative said he views his work as his “baby.” This was coded as an implicit subjective vs. objective tension.

Before finalizing my themes, I reviewed the transcripts and revised and/or discarded themes using a constant comparison method of line-by-line coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). “The purpose of constant comparison is to see if the data support and continue to support emerging categories” (Holton, 2007, p. 277). Therefore, I examined each new piece of data to determine how it is the same or is different with the current themes (Creswell, 1994). I used this constant comparison method until I produced exhaustive categories that explained all the data in my study (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000).

Chapter 4

Results

After conducting face-to-face and phone interviews with five account service and five creative employees from full-service advertising agencies across the Midwest using a semi-structured interview guide, I transcribed and analyzed the interviews using a mix of inductive (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and deductive thematic analysis (Creswell, 2014). To maintain participants' confidentiality, I changed participants' names and other potentially identifying information like unique job titles. I have also omitted any specific client names, agency names, types of client projects, or agency lingo/terminology in the results. The results are presented in order of the research questions, and first, I will discuss the interpersonal conflicts experienced by account service and creative personnel and then the dialectical tensions and praxis patterns used to manage those tensions.

Table 1

Research Participants

<u>Name</u>	<u>Job Title</u>	<u>Gender</u>
Nicole	Designer	Female
Ryan	Designer	Male
Mike	Copywriter	Male
Andrew	Creative Director	Male
Jessica	Creative Director	Female
Sarah	Account Executive (AE)	Female
Kate	AE	Female
Alicia	AE	Female
Mary	AE	Female
Shelby	AE	Female

Note: All names have been changed for confidentiality purposes.

Interpersonal Conflicts Between Account Service and Creative Personnel

Research question one asked what interpersonal conflicts do account service and creative personnel experience when working together on client projects. To review,

intraorganizational conflict is defined by de Gregorio, Cheong, and Kim (2013) as “a state in which incompatibilities or disagreements among departments and other functional units are perceived to exist” (p. 19). More specifically, interpersonal conflict is conflict that occurs between two people, and participants discussed a variety of conflicts between account service and creative personnel during the client project process regarding methods of communication, direction of the project, lack of respect, and working style. Most participants naturally described how they communicate and/or manage these conflicts as they were describing the interpersonal conflict itself, therefore, their conflict management techniques are explained as well.

Starting with methods of communication for day to day interactions, account service personnel said they prefer email because they can keep a record of client and internal agency communication. Account executive (AE) Sarah said, “It’s becoming more of an email world because then you can have a record of what you tell people.” The creatives expressed that they understood why account service prefers email, but overall, they said they would like to have more face-to-face conversations, which designer Ryan discussed.

I prefer to meet in person, but I know a lot of people are different. When it comes to a project, I’d prefer to sit down and talk face-to-face and get all the information with them, rather than shoot back four emails that takes four times as long.

Creative director Jessica said she likes to use Slack, an instant messenger type program for businesses, because “then it doesn’t clog up your email.” However, creative director Andrew had the opposite opinion.

I have my email. I'm going to check that regularly, so if that's how you want to get in touch with me, do that. I don't want to have another thing to check, so I think Slack is redundant to email, and I've pretty much stopped using it.

Although methods of communication may not directly spark interpersonal conflict between account service and creative personnel, *how* a message is communicated can lead to project conflicts later on. Many participants discussed that when starting a client project, the AE meets with a client and then writes a creative brief that guides the direction of the client project. This process differed among agencies because some of the AEs interviewed write the creative brief alone while others write it with a few other employees. AE Kate, who usually writes the creative brief alone, said,

Sometimes the creative team needs a lot of direction, and as account service we just don't get a ton of direction so we kind of have to have the creative team, not really guess, but be more creative and give them the flexibility on a project that has more 'white space.'

Conflicts may arise at this point depending on the thoroughness of the brief, which is what Andrew discussed.

I think there's a misconception that if you're on the creative side of the business you just want a blank slate. 'You can do whatever you want. Go.' That sounds really sexy, but in reality, I think most creatives want to be put into a box, but they don't want the box to be too small so that there's no way to move around, it's too confining.

If there is ambiguity in the creative brief, it might lead creatives to interpret the brief differently, and AE Sarah said, "There are sometimes where designers get ideas in their

head that just aren't the right idea." However, it is difficult for creatives to understand the "right" idea if it is not clearly explained in the first place. To mitigate this type of conflict, AE Alicia said that their creative brief is put together by a "three-headed monster" made up of the account service person, creative director, and researcher responsible for that client project. This method was effective for her agency because including key people from various departments at the beginning of a project allowed everyone to have a clearer idea about the project's direction since they wrote the creative brief together.

If account service personnel and creatives disagree on the direction of a project, creative director Jessica said, "Sometimes final say is a conflict. Hopefully you can get around this by having a good creative brief and a good research brief up front to base it off of, but it still pops up from time to time." Designer Nicole said conflicts over the project direction usually do not happen at her agency because "There's a lot of trust there," and that "It's more about sitting down and going back to those why/what if questions like, 'Ok, *why* do you want to go in that direction?' Similarly, AE Shelby said, "I never approach something like, 'I don't like that.' I'll just say, 'Hey, can you tell me your thoughts about *why* you laid it out this way?' Allowing creatives to justify their work and show how it is based on consumer research and achieves the client's objectives described in the creative brief could decrease conflict surrounding subjective decision-making that leads to an arbitrary revisions process.

If project deadlines are missed and/or agencies go over a client's budget, more serious conflict can occur. AE Sarah explained a direct communicative approach when confronted with these more serious conflicts and said,

I think [conflict] more often happens where we're in a panic mode of, 'what are we going to do? How did this happen? How do we make sure this doesn't happen again?' And trying to figure out whose problem it was, and making sure that whoever did something wrong doesn't do it again.

Compared to AE Nicole or Shelby, who try to manage conflict by asking "why/what" open-ended questions, Sarah's style is more aggressive by trying to find the source of the problem in order to place blame on the individual/s responsible. This can be problematic because it can decrease trust among members of the team, and ultimately, lead to more conflict.

In addition to trust, copywriter Mike discussed how important respect is in the relationship between account service and creative personnel,

Almost all of the conflict that we have in this industry comes down to a matter of respect. When people feel like their knowledge, their skill level, their experience, what they know about the client, the industry, what the research says, stuff like that is not being respected, that's when things go downhill.

AE Alicia also expressed the necessity for respect,

I have a really good feel for [the creative team's] work process, and we get a long really well. They respect my attention to detail, and they value that aspect of it.

We just have to respect each other's roles. If they had an issue with something I was doing, I would adjust.

However, not all AEs are as flexible and responsive to the creative team's needs like Alicia is, and copywriter Mike described a constant source of conflict stemming from one AE who would bring in work for the creative team late on Friday

afternoons and expect it to be done on Monday. The creative team would then have to stay late on Friday and work over the weekend to finish, meanwhile, they discovered that the AE had that job on their desk for most of the week and waited until the last minute to pass it on. Mike said, “Timelines get to be a matter of respect...creatives just hate it when everything feels like a crunch for time.” Timelines for a project may be short already, and in Mike’s example, the AEs working style exacerbated the problem, which is what creative director Jessica discussed as well.

In account service, you have to be organized, detail-oriented. You have to have that sense of urgency to push the team forward. Certain people we’ve had in that role have been more laissez-faire about it and more laid back. The team gets confused because of that or the creative team ends up working until midnight. Unlike the AE at Mike’s office, some AEs choose to work with the creative team after hours if there is a short deadline. AE Kate said,

If I know the [creative team] is working on something of mine, I like to stay at the office because if they’re doing something for my client and they walk past your office and you’re not there they’ll think, ‘Oh, must be nice to be account service and do 8-5.’

AE Alicia also chooses to stay late with the creative team and said,

There have been moments when the creative team has had to stay late, and I’ll stay with them. Even if I had my work done and they were staying late for one of my clients, I stayed with them. I’d pick up food for them, I’d pick up energy drinks for them, showing them that you’re in the pits with them. Sometimes as an

account person, there are times when I need to make sure my creative team is taking care of themselves before anything else.

Working after hours with the creative team is a sign of solidarity that builds a culture of trust and respect between account service and creative personnel. All the participants accepted that account service and creative personnel have varying perspectives and motivations that can lead to conflict, like creative director Andrew said, “There’s always going to be tension between the account service and the creatives. That’s just the nature of the business. You try to work together as a team and talk through to get past it.” In order to increase constructive conflict, which is when employees feel better about their working relationships after experiencing conflict (de Gregorio et al., 2013), agencies must foster a team mentality, rather than, a “suits vs. creative subcultural divide” (Hackley, 2003, p. 71). Building a team with mutual trust and respect could help reduce conflicts regarding the method of communication, direction of a project, lack of respect, and working styles in the future. The key takeaway from participants’ descriptions of interpersonal conflict is that account service and creative personnel often perceived conflict differently due to their oppositional perspectives and motivations. Thus, the following section explores more types of interpersonal conflict between account service and creative personnel by examining the dialectical tensions present and the ways they manage those tensions.

Dialectical Tensions and Praxis Patterns

Research question two asked what dialectical tensions do account service and creative personnel experience during interpersonal conflict about client work. I found that account service and creative personnel described six main dialectical tensions in

advertising agencies: openness vs. closedness, individual vs. collaborative work time, ideal vs. real, stability vs. change, defend vs. accept, and subjective vs. objective. Since each tension occurs during a specific part of the client project process, they are introduced in chronological order. Research question three asked what praxis patterns (i.e., ways to respond to or manage the tensions) do account service and creative personnel use to communicatively manage dialectical tensions surrounding interpersonal conflict about client work. I found five ways that employees communicatively managed the dialectical tensions: emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other, alternating between poles, source-splitting, framing tensions as double binds, framing tensions as complementary. The dialectical tensions were managed differently depending on the type of employee and/or situation, which is why both the dialectical tensions and praxis patterns are discussed in tandem.

Openness vs. closedness. Openness vs. closedness is one of Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) main internal dialectical tensions regarding the amount of information that is shared between two people in a relationship. Participants expressed this tension in terms of access to clients, most notably at the beginning of a client project. All the research participants described a similar process at the start of a client project where, at the initial meeting between the client and the account service employee, the objective is to understand the client's goals and set parameters of the project like budget and timeline. Most of the time, creative personnel are not present at this meeting like graphic designer Nicole stated, "The [account staff] sets up the client communication...sometimes the designers do talk to the client, but usually it's the

account executive. They're the ones that build the relationship and become their friend in the process."

From there, the account person writes a creative brief, sometimes without the help of any creative employees, explaining the details of the project. Then, the account person reviews that brief with members of the creative staff who will be involved with the project during an internal agency "kickoff" meeting. Creative director Andrew discussed a potentially problematic aspect of this process,

So, if the account executive (AE) is meeting with a client, they think they're being thorough, and in many cases they are. But then, once the AE comes back and does that kickoff meeting with the creatives, then here comes questions that they didn't anticipate. It's not that they're not smart people, it's just that they're looking at it through a totally different lens than we are, so naturally, we're going to have different questions that they won't be able to anticipate.

Graphic designer Ryan also described the frustration of not receiving information directly from the client,

A lot of the times we're not in the meetings so the [account person] will say to the client, 'Ya, that cell phone picture from six years ago will work great,' and then we'll have to go back and say this is the wrong format, this, this, and this, so there's some back and forth there.

The openness vs. closedness dialectical tension present here is not simply about having access to client *information*, as Vanden Bergh et al. (1986) suggested. Rather, it is about having direct access to the *client* especially during those preliminary project discussions. The creative employees interviewed would much rather have a creative employee present

during those client meetings to eliminate this “back and forth” process that wastes everyone’s time, and eventually, the client’s money.

As a whole, the account service personnel interviewed described “being accessible” or “available to answer questions” as a necessary part of their position. They are more than willing to share client information when asked but cite external agency factors as the reasons why creatives cannot be, or are rarely, present during client meetings, which AE Sarah described:

Not very often do design/creative folks work with clients, and the reason is we want them to be billable 40 hours a week the whole time they’re there. In dealing with clients and information like this, it gets to be a time-suck, and there also needs to be a relationship [with the client]...some of [the creatives] aren’t good at that.

Another AE, Kate, discussed a similar situation before her agency revised their procedures to include creatives in more client meetings and stated,

[The creatives] would see [the client] very sparingly, for different reasons because we either needed them to keep working on things production wise and wanted them to be more efficient...you know, every time you have another person in the room, that’s more dollars. It’s taking away from what the client could be doing.

As previously discussed, account service personnel are more extrinsically motivated by timelines, budgets, etc. (Hackley, 2003) which, in turn, influences their decision to remove creatives from client meetings. Account service personnel manage this openness vs. closedness tension by framing it as a double bind where there is not enough time, money, or employees to allow creatives to be present during client

meetings. On the other hand, creatives would rather see this managed in a complementary way where one pole of the tension is used to achieve the other pole, which designer Ryan mentioned, “When we’re super swamped, I understand [not attending meetings]. But if there’s a little bit of downtime, I think it would be very useful to at least have one designer in a lot of the meetings.” Kate offered a similar strategy from the account service point of view,

There will be some [meetings] that I make [the creatives] come to, but because they’ve wanted to be so involved on the front end, they’ve realized that they can’t get all of their work done *and* be involved with some of these smaller meetings...so it’s kind of the creative deciding.

Allowing creatives to attend some client meetings provides them with the opportunity to ask questions and receive the information they need to complete client projects, thus eliminating the need to go through the AE during every step of the project. Although this could cost the client more money up front because another employee is in the room, the client would eventually save money because the time spent communicating about a project, revising a project, or waiting for a response regarding the direction of a project would cost just as much, if not more, money in the long run. The reason why little change has occurred is because as the “middle man” in the agency, the account service employee is the gatekeeper of information between the creatives and the client and vice versa. Account service personnel occupy leadership positions and “own the relationship” with the client, and ultimately, have the decision-making power in the account service-creative employee relationship. With this power, the account service personnel

interviewed tended to emphasize the importance of one pole over the other (i.e., selected closedness over openness) due to a client's timeline and budget constraints.

Account service personnel might defend emphasizing the "closedness" pole of the tension by thinking as long as the AE is doing their job and making themselves available to answer questions, there is no need to have creatives in client meetings, even though creatives would prefer to have a seat at the table. AE Sarah was aware of this want and stated, "I'd say the creatives would always say that they want more information. I'm sure that's their number one gripe...I have heard some of our account people don't give as much information as others, and that's definitely a challenge." Her solution to that was, "If you need information then you need to ask [the account person] for it. Don't let them get away with not giving you the information, demand that you get it. I don't understand how that can be a constant problem."

However, for those creative employees, like Ryan, who are at the beginning of their career may not feel comfortable "demanding" information from senior AEs or bringing up new ideas in meetings, which is evident in the following responses:

Ryan: If it was my way, which I'm the youngest and least experienced person there, but I would say to have a checklist of questions to ask [during a client meeting], and if it doesn't apply, then don't ask. That way, you could get as much information in that initial meeting as possible, especially if a designer isn't there.

Interviewer: Have you ever brought that checklist up?

Ryan: I have not. Like I said, I'm the youngest so I try my best to stay in my own lane, but I think it's something that could try to be implemented. However, I don't

know if everyone would do it especially the people who have been there for a long time on the account side.

When attempting to manage this tension, some account service personnel discussed how creative employees who felt they were not receiving the client information they needed eventually bypassed the account service employee and contacted the client directly. Sarah stated, “I think some of [the creatives] have learned their lesson because it’s blown up on them a couple times. So, for the most part, I think they’ve learned to stay out of that if they can.” The designers Sarah was referring to were emphasizing the importance of the “openness” pole of the tension, which made them decide to bypass authority. This could cause the client to lose trust in their AE and/or be confused about who they should speak to at the agency. Instead of using this situation to evaluate everyone’s role in the agency and how the project process could be improved, Sarah framed it as a learning experience solely for the creatives and did not analyze the circumstances leading up to the event. Therefore, framing this tension in a complementary way and revising procedures that affect budget and timeline to allow creatives to have more access clients would be more constructive than emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other.

Individual vs. collaborative work time. After the preliminary client and project kickoff meetings, brainstorming is the next part of the advertising development process. Almost all creative employees interviewed explained the important balance between individual and collaborative work time, which is a new dialectical tension present in advertising agencies that was identified in the analysis. Creative director Jessica noted, “A lot of us work differently. Some people are better group thinkers; others are better individual thinkers. It’s this ebb and flow of big group, little group, alone time

until you get some creative options.” Andrew, another creative director, explained this process further:

It’s always best for creatives to work on teams, so a writer and a graphic designer come together, and rather than sitting down in a room and saying, ‘We’re going to create something now. Go.’ That’s not how I like to work. I would rather, and I think most of the people in my office are the same way where, after the kickoff meeting, it’s like, ‘Let’s split apart and think about this a little bit, and in three to four days let’s come back together with some ideas.’ Then we’ll share back and forth, which is where the magic happens. You take those ideas and you start to elevate them.

Copywriter Mike offered a similar explanation,

I can’t really say that I know any creatives who love brainstorming sessions because they feel put on the spot...and asking me to come up with something brilliant under pressure, you know, let me get back to my office; and I’ll get back to you.

Every creative employee that discussed this tension framed it in a complementary way where there needs to be both individual brainstorming time and collaborative working time in order to arrive at the best idea. Even though these creatives noted collaboration as a crucial part of a project’s success, once again, extrinsic motivators such as budget and timelines were mentioned as restricting creatives’ ability to work collaboratively, which Mike described:

Mike: Some of our best work happens when, say, a designer and I are working together on a project and coming up with ideas together. But, the nature of the beast is that doesn't always happen.

Interviewer: Why doesn't it always happen?

Mike: Because everybody has the projects they're working on. So, sometimes, short timelines...it's like, crank out the copy then send it off to design.

One AE understood the creativity-killing nature of short timelines and said, “[Creatives] need to be efficient, but they also need time just to think. And, when we can, we build that in,” which is something Andrew would like to see happen at his agency,

I think the work is going to be better once we readjust our schedules, budgets, and timelines to allow for multiple people to split apart, come up with ideas, and come back together. Then I think everybody, especially on the graphic design side of things, is going to have more job satisfaction because they're contributing to why they got into this business in the first place, which is to come up with ideas.

Creatives expressed that balancing individual and collaborative worktime fosters creativity and productivity, and an agency's culture and structure can impact this tension in practical ways. Nicole said her agency blocks off the hours from 9:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M. for individual work time so that creatives and account service staff have uninterrupted time to complete tasks. Ryan stated that the creative team is located downstairs and the account team is located upstairs at his agency, which “keeps the madness upstairs so we're able to work more freely downstairs.” Kover and Goldberg (1995) offered “increase separation between the parties” as a suggestion when dealing

with account service-creative conflict (p. 21), and depending on the agency, changes can be made to ensure a balance of individual vs. collaborative worktime.

Ideal vs. real. According to Erbert (2014), the previously established ideal vs. real dialectical tension refers to the quality/type of work that must be accomplished in an organization. In the case of advertising agencies, participants expressed this tension as managing the client's and the agency's timeline expectations throughout the project process. As previously discussed, creativity is hard to assign a set of strict guidelines and procedures to, and all the creatives interviewed discussed a struggle between their ideal project timeline and how the restrictive realities of a client's timeline can be frustrating and stressful. Clients have high expectations, especially regarding timelines, as copywriter Mike described,

Timelines are so tough because, in this day and age, advertising clients have gotten used to stuff that can be done at the drop of a hat, and their advertising agency can pull off a miracle. If their advertising agency isn't getting it done, they'll go and find someone who will. We can be wishful and lay down the law...but that's just not realistic.

Similarly, designer Ryan said deadlines are “a problem everywhere but especially with print jobs” and that “the turn around time is a lot more than people expect.” Designer Nicole also provided an example that sometimes she will be given five hours to work on a project because that is what has been budgeted, but she really needs 10 hours. Both participants discussed the need to educate the client and/or internal agency employees about design as well as the design process in order to manage timeline expectations, indicating these participants framed the tension in a complementary way in hopes to

achieve both ends of the tension. When confronted with this tension, both said they communicated with the client and/or agency employees to reach a sort of middle ground.

Based on participants' responses, timelines can be problematic because creatives are not in charge of setting their own schedule. Regardless of the agency's size or internal organizational structure, participants discussed how an employee such as a "project manager" or "traffic manager" uses a type of creative project management software that shows each employee's projects and schedule. The project/traffic manager is then responsible for assigning projects to creative employees who are available to work on them. In essence, the project/traffic manager is a "middle man" between the account service and creative personnel. This is an over-simplified description of the position, especially because creatives and account staff do discuss timelines face-to-face as well. However, as convenient as that program sounds, using software to estimate timelines that fit seamlessly into creatives' schedules is unrealistic when they are engaging in a flexible and unpredictable process like brainstorming. Creative director Andrew discussed this issue further:

Andrew: You can't force creativity, and that's always the hardest part of what we do, estimating how long it's going to come up with the winning idea. It could be an hour; it could be a week...and that's something where, if I need to be the bad guy I will. Then we need to get to the client and manage their expectations...most clients understand that it's going to be in their best interest if we wait a couple of days.

Interviewer: I'm assuming that time is such a big issue because more time equals more money?

Andrew: Yes, that is exactly right.

In Andrew's case, he mentioned using source-splitting to manage this tension because he allowed the account person to play "good cop" by advocating for the "reality" side of the tension while he played "bad cop" and advocated for the "ideal" side of the tension. This "good cop/bad cop" source-splitting technique was used by correctional officers when managing dialectical tensions at work as well (Tracy, 2004).

Interestingly enough, the only AE who mentioned this ideal vs. real tension was Sarah who said, "[Creatives] want more time, they want more budget. In an ideal world they'd love to go to all the meetings. It just doesn't work like that." Although Sarah recognized this tension exists, she frames it as a double bind where there is no middle ground. Thus, leading her to emphasize the importance of the "reality" side of the tension. Since account executives are often leaders and the "final decision makers" as described by participants, this means that creatives probably cannot influence much change when they want or need an extended timeline, and instead, are met with immense pressure to maintain strict deadlines, like Kover and Goldberg (1995) found. By framing this ideal vs. real tension as a double bind, like the example above, no changes can be made to the status quo. Instead, if it is framed in a complementary way where open communication between the client and/or agency employees about timeline expectations is encouraged, then progress can be made.

Stability vs. change. This internal dialectical tension is like Baxter and Montgomery's (1996) certainty vs. uncertainty; however, in this context it refers to creatives' tension to take risks when the client would rather play it safe. After the creative team has been briefed on a client project, they need to start producing concepts. Since

creatives are intrinsically motivated by their curiosity (Oliver & Ashley, 2012) and the ability for ads to resonate with and inspire consumers (Hackley & Kover, 2007), they enjoy exploring new ideas and showcasing edgier work to clients. Clients do not always appreciate risk-taking and offer their suggestions, which is when the revisions process begins. Many participants, both from account service and creative, cited revisions as the most conflict-ridden part of the client project process. Like creative director Andrew said, “Sometimes I like to say that I spend 30% of my time coming up with ideas and 80%, I know it doesn’t add up but that’s the idea, defending the idea and revamping it.” Andrew spends so much time revamping his riskier ideas because account staff, who are advocating for the client, do not approve it.

Some account people are better than others at this, like taking risks for example...essentially you do want [the client] to stretch their comfort zone a little bit because I’ve always believed that if you can walk into a client presentation to show them your work and you are comfortable that the client is going to approve it and love it, it’s probably not very creative.

Designer Ryan mentioned that many conflicts arise when clients try to fulfill an art director role and aid in the concepting process and said, “It would be like me going in and telling a dentist how to fill a cavity.” He later described how he frequently tries to “do something different” or “switch it up,” but the account service personnel will tell him to “tone it down or take a different route,” oftentimes without even showing his work to the client first. Copywriter Mike also has experienced this and said, “I’ve worked with AEs who have been into all kinds of changes, and you’re making these changes...then you find out the client hasn’t even seen it yet. By that point the creatives

are ready to strangle the AEs.” Ryan offered a way to manage this tension and said, “It would be cool to have two versions and show both [to the client], but that’s not how it goes.”

Other agencies do employ this strategy of creating two options and letting the client decide, which is AE Mary’s approach:

We usually find budget to do both concepts and we present those as: here’s option A and option B. But then, we utilize a third party to sell those so that we’re not overselling one over the other. We just bring it to the client and say, ‘Hey, here are two different directions that we really want to go with.’ And we ultimately let the client choose which direction they want to go.

Similarly, AE Shelby said, “Not everything is good to be compromised about, and at times, that’s when we go to the A/B concepts or options to the client.” This A/B options tactic is an example of managing the stability vs. change tension in a complementary way because creatives are allowed to satisfy both ends of the tension by creating a riskier idea and a safer idea, with the client as the final decision maker.

With account service personnel as the middle men, they provide quality-assurance and have the power to start the revisions process without the client even viewing the creative team’s work first. AE Sarah said, “I have really high expectations, and if it doesn’t meet my standards, it doesn’t leave the building.” This can result in creatives feeling like they have no control or ownership in what happens to their work, but giving creatives the opportunity to explain why they chose certain elements can decrease this tension, which is evident in Mike’s example, “We tend to have the best success when the creatives can articulate their position and say, ‘Here’s *why* I believe we should take this

kind of a creative approach,' and *how* that's actually going to affect [the client]."

Designer Nicole discussed the benefits of justifying her work directly to the client and said, "When you listen to the client about what their needs are and taking that into a visual representation and explaining *why* you did the things that you did, it just creates a new kind of communication; and the client is like, 'Oh, they get me. They understand what I'm going for.'"

Using a complementary approach and allowing creatives to design two options for a client, and then, letting them explain why they made certain decisions seemed to be an effective process for managing this tension. Kover and Goldberg (1995) found that creatives dislike the amount of power account staff have during the approval process, and participants discussed these frustrations when account service personnel were quick to shut down their concepts. One of the most powerful positions within the creative department is the creative director and he/she can be the one to express creatives' point of view and implement changes in regards to managing this tension more effectively, which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

Defend work vs. accept revisions. This is another new dialectical tension unique to advertising agencies that was identified in the analysis. However, this tension of deciding when to defend the creative team's work or accept revisions from the client is an external tension directly related to the account service role in an agency. Due to their middle man role, they are the ones who must present work to a client, receive feedback, then relay that feedback to creatives. They are also more extrinsically motivated by client goals (Hackley, 2003), which is why this was the most common tension mentioned by the account service personnel interviewed. Management of this tension can have detrimental

effects to an advertising agency like copywriter Mike described, “Revisions have long been the biggest project killer. Revisions can break budgets and timelines. They make people mad at each other, that sort of thing.”

It is important to note that the stability vs. change and defend vs. accept tension are essentially describing the same conflict/s account service and creative personnel experience during the revisions process. Both tensions are in response to the decision to take risks or not, but the role each participant fulfilled in the agency (i.e., account or creative) affected how they interpreted this tension, and in turn, managed the tension. While the creatives felt pressured between creating innovative work or producing similar work for a client, account service personnel felt pressured to either defend the creative team’s innovative work or accept the client’s revisions in their role as a middle man. Like Kover and Goldberg (1995) discussed, creatives often like taking risks, risks that can be shut down by the client or the account service employee speaking on behalf of the client, as AE Kate described,

As an agency, we can only push [the client] so far without the client getting upset, so you have to be careful with how far you push them. If you’re getting a lot of push back you might not be able to do what you think is best for the client, you might just have to do what’s comfortable. So, a lot of the times, that’s where creative and account service rub each other the wrong way.

Although this tension is experienced by account service staff, creatives recognize this tension exists for them, and are also aware of how AEs handle the situation. Mike said, “Sometimes the [account service personnel] literally walk in and ask the client to change

something, so I would say that proofing and revision process can get ugly depending on the way it's managed." AE Alicia summarized her approach when managing this tension:

Once we've presented to the client and start getting revisions, there are times when the client's opinion might not align with the creative team's; and I have to be the middle man to, at times, push the client. But we always say, tell them once, tell them twice; and on the third try, shut up and do the job. So, I can stand up for the creative team; and a lot of times, I have to balance both sides.

In this example, Alicia alternates between poles of the tensions by sometimes defending the creative team's work and sometimes accepting client's revisions. On the other hand, creative director Andrew, again, described a source-splitting approach when managing this tension:

Because the [AE] is the relationship manager, sometimes they don't want to ruffle the feathers of the client, so then they bring a guy like me in to play good cop/bad cop. So that way, if a client is bawking at an idea we're pitching them, then the AE doesn't have to be the bad guy and try to persuade the client that they should really like the idea.

Allowing the AEs to represent one pole of the tension and the creative director to represent the other may help save the account service-client relationship. However, it pits account service and creative personnel against each other because they are defending opposite ends of the tension.

Creative director Jessica discussed how this process can put a strain on the account service-creative relationship, "If a client is coming back with a lot of revisions, there can be some resentment from the creatives because they're doubting that account

service is pushing back and trying to defend and sell the work.” AE Mary mentioned a more complementary approach when managing this tension that may help mitigate these relationship strains,

It’s just trying to say [to the client], ‘Let’s compromise. Let’s make minor changes. Let’s fix the tone a little bit,’ but I will fight and say, ‘We’re not going to make these other bigger ones due to budget constraints or timing from the original approval.’

In Mary’s case, she fulfills both sides of the tension by accepting some revisions but not all. This appeases the client’s request for revisions but also respects the creative team’s time and effort, which is what Mike would have liked to see one specific AE do at his agency.

The AE said to the client, ‘Here’s the first draft. Take a look at it, and let us know what to change.’ And I was thinking, ‘Oh my god. We have a deadline.’ This was a really tight deadline. He needed to walk in there and say, ‘This is pretty much it based on what you’ve given us and when it needs to go out. Let us know if there’s anything egregious we need to change.’

According to Mike, the creative director’s role at an agency could have a significant impact on the way this situation is addressed. Mike discussed how he has worked at a couple agencies where the creative director was a “glorified copywriter and employee,” and that it is critical to have a strong creative director who can defend the creative team’s work when the account person is unwilling or unable to do so.

I think it’s important to have a creative director that can really be in a leadership position who is able to, in some ways, unify the efforts of the creative department.

Otherwise what happens is you'll have someone who is trying to fill the void. Sometimes it's a creative person that becomes the creative director; but sometimes it's an account person who has a strong personality and will step in, and essentially, become the creative director for better or worse.

AE Alicia also mentioned the leadership role her creative director fulfills,

If [my creative director] says, 'Listen, I really feel like this is the better option, this is what we're going with,' that's his job and his decision. At the end of the day, I'll give him my feedback; but if it's a creative battle, I'll usually let him make the final call.

Although expressed differently, both the stability vs. change and defend vs. accept tensions reflect a type of risky creatives vs. conservative client relationship. Since account service personnel serve as the client's advocate, they fulfill the client role when the client is not present. Therefore, these interpretations of the dialectical tensions during the revisions process ultimately pits creatives against account staff, even though they are working together towards a common goal. Based on participants' responses above, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation seemed to be a major factor in how these two groups of people interpreted and managed the tensions. Understanding those interpretive differences could lead to more constructive conflict management techniques because both groups would have increased empathy for and knowledge of each other's position in the agency.

Subjective vs. objective. Another new dialectical tension associated with the revisions process is not about whether to accept revisions or not, but rather, how those revisions are communicated to the creative team. Most account service personnel

mentioned that some creatives they work with are sensitive and do not accept client feedback well, which is what AE Kate discussed.

Some [creatives] are definitely more sensitive than others....you don't want to hurt their feelings when the client comes back and says this is the ugliest thing I've ever seen or this was not what I was thinking at all. So you have to be a little tactful.

Dealing with creatives' sensitivity was expressed as a dialectical tension between creatives approaching their work subjectively and account service personnel thinking creatives should be approaching their work objectively. This was an implicit disclosure across interviews because creatives discussed the subjective nature of their work whereas account service discussed the objective nature. The subjective vs. objective tension could be a result of the intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivations as well as the generalist vs. specialist perspectives of account and creative personnel because they influence how they approach client work.

Creative director Andrew described this subjectivity and how connected creatives can be to their work.

It's like birthing a child at that point because you spend so many hours thinking about it, thinking it through, and shooting it full of holes, and improving it. So, by the time you're done it's like, here's my baby.

All participants discussed their passion for their work and how they love how passionate their coworkers are, however, not all account service personnel tolerated creatives' passion and subjectivity during the revisions process. AE Sarah discussed that creatives should be more objective and said, "There are some [creatives] that have been

there a long time that will put up a fight for what they believe, and that's when I have to say, 'You're a commercial artist.'" In Sarah's case, she is managing this tension by emphasizing the importance of objectivity over subjectivity. Some account staff framed this tension as a double bind where the subjective nature of design cannot be objective or logical, which is evident in AE Shelby's statement, "We have one creative who is really creative but very sensitive. I feel that with creatives, their passion is built into that, not so much logic."

Other participants had different ways of managing this tension. Creative director Jessica said she does not "sugar coat things" but will "lead with the positives, then go into some of the criticisms or problems you see with it....I try to always base it on the research, the audience, the facts, and try to look at it objectively." AE Alicia also said, "All of our creative is led by insight," but she empathizes with the creative team when clients do not like an idea.

I have to credit the creative team because they're so passionate for what they do and they put their heart and soul into their projects; and the client will say, 'I don't love it.' And it's definitely a personal thing, and so in those instances, if I'm not in the office, I pick up the phone and talk to the creative.

In these examples, both Jessica and Alicia are framing the tension in a complementary way. They understand creatives' passion and subjectivity is a necessary part of the creative process, but they try to base designs off research and objectivity as much as possible too. They describe practical ways of communicating feedback such as communicating face-to-face or over the phone, rather than email, and starting conversations with positive comments.

Because some account service personnel assume creatives are sensitive, they feel they need to “be tactful” or “soften the blows” when relaying client feedback. However, all the creatives interviewed said they preferred honest, direct feedback. Designer Ryan specifically mentioned that he does not take client feedback personally and said,

I know everything I do they’re not going to like, so I try not to get too emotionally attached to my projects because I could work a week on something and show it to someone who hates it....I would rather [account service] just be honest with me, rather than try to sugar coat it.

Even though Andrew described his work as his “baby,” he said, “You can’t have thin skin in this business, and if you do, you’re not going to last...you have somebody calling your ‘baby’ ugly all the time, and if that’s going to really get to you, you should probably leave.”

The reason why the creatives interviewed preferred honest, direct feedback is because then they can understand exactly what needs to be changed and how to change it. Otherwise, like copywriter Mike said, creatives end up playing a “whack-a-mole game” trying to figure out what the client wants. AE Kate discussed how it is account service’s job to “pull information out of [the client]” and relay that information to the creative team. However, Mike said, “With that one-person buffer in between, then the creative team is trying to guess what it was the client was thinking. The creatives can’t see that person’s facial expression, can’t see their body language, can’t ask questions,” which leads back to the openness vs. closedness dialectical tension. This example shows that the way the conversation surrounding subjective vs. objective work is handled can awaken tensions from the beginning of the project, reoccurring in a cyclical pattern.

Since account service personnel assume that creatives approach their work subjectively and are sensitive, they manage that tension by dismissing creatives' feelings and emphasize the importance of objectivity in their jobs, frame it as a double bind, or frame it in a complementary way. If account service employees manage that feedback conversation by empathizing with creatives while giving direct and honest feedback, then it can be productive and motivate creatives as well as help them complete projects. On the other hand, if account service employees then it can repeat the process of tensions all over again until the project is completed.

Overall, account service and creative personnel expressed a variety of interpersonal conflict that they encounter deriving from methods of communication, direction of the project, lack of respect, and working style. Whether explicitly or implicitly stated, they described experiencing previously identified dialectical tensions such as: openness vs. closedness, ideal vs. real, and stability vs. change. Most notably, they described dialectical tensions such as: individual vs. collaborative worktime, defend vs. accept revisions, and subjective vs. objective that are unique to this context and have not been discussed in prior research. Depending on the type of employee and/or situation, account service and creative personnel managed dialectical tensions by emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other, alternating between poles, source-splitting, framing tensions as double binds, and framing tensions as complementary. The upcoming chapter explores the practical implications of these results, limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Account service and creative personnel have varying job responsibilities and personality characteristics that lead them to approach client work differently. Account service personnel have a generalist perspective and are more extrinsically motivated, whereas creatives have a specialist perspective and are more intrinsically motivated (Hackley, 2003; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). The relationship between account service and creative personnel is integral to an advertising agency's success because client work emerges from that relationship. However, a "suits vs. creatives" subcultural divide is present in agencies (Hackley, 2003, p. 71), and studies have shown that conflict is common between these two departments (de Gregorio et al., 2013; Vanden Bergh et al., 1986). Previous advertising agency research only emphasized the types of conflict experienced by account service and creative personnel but did not provide suggestions regarding how employees should communicate with each other when conflicts arise. The oppositional nature of account service and creative personnel's perspectives and motivations was indicative of relational dialectics theory (RDT), and RDT provided the specific framework necessary to analyze the nature of the interpersonal conflict between these two departments and fill the gap in the literature.

The purpose of this study was to identify types of interpersonal conflict, the dialectical tensions present in advertising agencies, and how agency personnel manage those tensions, which led me to the following research questions:

RQ1: What interpersonal conflicts do account service and creative personnel experience when working together on client projects?

RQ2: What dialectical tensions do account service and creative personnel experience during interpersonal conflict about client work?

RQ3: What praxis patterns do account service and creative personnel use to communicatively manage dialectical tensions surrounding interpersonal conflict about client work?

After interviewing five account service and five creative employees ($N = 10$) from full service advertising agencies across the Midwest, I found that methods of communication, direction of the project, lack of respect, and working style were common interpersonal conflicts experienced by account service and creative personnel when working together on client projects. Additionally, I identified six dialectical tensions that employees experienced in advertising agencies: openness vs. closedness, individual vs. collaborative work time, ideal vs. real, stability vs. change, defend vs. accept, and subjective vs. objective. Finally, account service and creative personnel communicatively managed dialectical tensions in five different ways: emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other, alternating between poles, source-splitting, framing tensions as double binds, and framing tensions as complementary.

Baxter and Montgomery (1996) identified internal and external dialectical tensions, and both types were experienced by advertising agency employees interviewed for the study. Openness vs. closedness, ideal vs. real, and subjective vs. objective were internal dialectical tensions because they occurred directly between account service and creative personnel. For example, creatives expressed that they wanted to have direct access to clients (openness) while account executives preferred to be the gatekeepers of client information and only share what was necessary (closedness). On the other hand,

individual vs. collaborative work time, stability vs. change, and defend vs. accept were external dialectical tensions because they occurred outside of that account service-creative relationship, but those tensions later affected communication between account service and creative employees. For example, account executives explained that they experience this tension between defending creatives' work or accepting revisions from clients. However, depending on the way account executives managed that tension and communicated revisions to creatives, creatives either resented or respected account executives. It is important to note that subjective vs. objective, individual vs. collaborative work time, and defend vs. accept were newly identified tensions that are unique to this advertising agency context.

Out of all the praxis patterns used to manage dialectical tensions (i.e., emphasizing one pole of the tension over the other, alternating between poles, source-splitting, framing tensions as double binds, framing tensions as complementary) framing tensions as complementary was the most effective technique because both poles of the tension were being fulfilled. For example, creatives liked when they could produce a riskier design (change) along with a safer design (stability) and present both to the client. De Gregorio et al. (2013) found high levels of team spirit (i.e., how much trust and pride exists) was the only antecedent to constructive conflict in advertising agencies. Because of this, they posited that constructive conflict is its own separate construct instead of being destructive conflict's opposite. Based on participants' responses, account service and creative personnel had more trust in and respect for coworkers (team spirit) if they personally managed tensions by framing them as complementary or if they had superiors and/or peers who managed tensions in that way. Therefore, instead of focusing on the

antecedents of destructive conflict to decrease destructive conflict and increase constructive conflict, focusing on *how* conflict is managed will be more beneficial because, as shown in this study, that is what affected account service and creative personnel's feelings towards peers and the agency the most. Much like destructive and constructive conflict, account service and creative personnel have frequently been placed at opposite ends of a spectrum. The dialectical tensions present in advertising agencies further illustrate this spectrum, and the praxis patterns can either perpetuate this "suits vs. creatives" mindset or unite the departments. These tensions are an inevitable part of agency life, but effectively managing them can place account service and creative personnel on the same team and promote positive changes within an agency's culture.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study is the small, regional sample size. Based on the specific sample requirements, I had a small population to recruit from, and I had to use purposive convenience sampling to recruit participants. The recruitment process was more difficult than anticipated because, after multiple phone calls and emails to advertising agencies, I had only recruited five research participants. After conducting those first interviews, a few participants ended up encouraging some of their coworkers to contact me. Therefore, some participants were unintentionally recruited by a snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2014). Since the sample size was small and participants were recruited from the same region, it could have biased the results of the study; but I was able to recruit five research participants from each group as well as gather in-depth responses from participants who have experienced interpersonal conflict with account service and/or creative personnel in advertising agencies.

Ideally, I wanted to interview every participant face-to-face, which is why I was recruiting employees from agencies within driving distance of Brookings, SD; but I had to interview four participants over the phone due to weather-related travel restrictions. I found that it was more difficult to establish rapport with research participants over the phone, and I was unable to see participants' nonverbal behavior (i.e., body language, facial expressions, eye contact, etc.). However, participants were still comfortable enough to disclose personal information about interpersonal conflict in the workplace, and I relied more on voice qualities (i.e., inflection, rate, pitch, etc.) to better understand participants' responses. Additionally, conducting phone interviews allowed me to extend the geographical area of my sample size; and although my sample size was small, I was able to reach saturation and generate numerous themes that answered my research questions.

Since my bachelor's degree is in advertising, my background provided insights into the agency world and allowed me to ask the right probing questions and have a deeper understanding of the interview transcripts. This understanding was helpful when interpreting the transcripts and identifying themes because there were advertising-specific themes others could have missed because they do not have the same educational background as me. For this reason, and because of the scope and time requirements of the study, I did not have additional coders review my themes, and I did not conduct member-checking (Creswell, 2014). My perspective could have biased the results of the study as well, but again, it was important that I was the one who conducted and transcribed the interviews as well as analyzed the data because of my advertising background.

In addition to those validity threats, my study operated under the assumption that participants experienced conflict with account service or creative personnel, and it relied on participants' self-reports of those experiences. Most participants were relaxed during the interview and felt comfortable disclosing information about workplace conflict. Additionally, all participants clearly articulated their experiences, and many discussed dialectical tensions without being prompted. However, this made it more difficult to differentiate between types of interpersonal conflict and dialectical tensions participants experienced because many were one in the same. Thus, research question one (What interpersonal conflicts do account service and creative personnel experience when working together on client projects?) was not answered as fully as research question two (What dialectical tensions do account service and creative personnel experience during interpersonal conflict about client work?), even though they were two separate parts on the interview guide.

When participants were directly asked to explain types of conflict they experience, most could not answer that question without ending on a positive note by discussing how they manage that conflict as well. It appeared that the younger participants with less experience in the advertising field were more apprehensive to discuss workplace conflict, and as a result, tended to "sugar-coat" their responses by praising their bosses, coworkers, and/or agency culture. At one point in time, I had to pause an interview and explain that I needed to, first, hear about types of interpersonal conflict before moving into conflict management techniques, but the participant still struggled because they were visibly nervous. This made it difficult to ascertain which praxis pattern was used to manage each dialectical tension because, at times, one praxis

pattern was expressed as an all-encompassing conflict management technique. However, this was a rare nervous reaction during the interview and is another reason why phone interviews became a good substitution for face-to-face interviews because they provided an extra layer of anonymity for participants.

Directions for Future Research

Many directions for future research exist, and specifically, researchers can extend this study by addressing and correcting the limitations, using a quantitative method, and/or analyzing the agency's organizational structure and processes that contribute to interpersonal conflict and dialectical tensions in advertising agencies. First, the limitations of the study can be minimized or eliminated by recruiting a larger, more diverse sample to increase the generalizability of the results. Future qualitative researchers could rely primarily on phone interviews and/or use multiple trained interviewers to conduct interviews with advertising agency employees from various regions in the United States. To minimize internal validity threats, researchers should have a few trained coders analyze the transcripts and test for intercoder agreement as well as conduct member checking with participants (Creswell, 2014).

Second, future researchers could use a quantitative approach because, now that I have identified dialectical tensions in advertising agencies, a survey could measure the perceived importance of those tensions to interpersonal conflict, which is similar to Erbert's (2014) study about dialectical tensions in organizations. A survey could also measure the frequency of the dialectical tensions I identified as well as determine what praxis pattern is most commonly used to manage each tension. A survey would be easier

to obtain a large, diverse sample and would produce generalizable results; however, it would not produce in-depth responses like a qualitative study.

Finally, the study revealed that research participants experienced interpersonal conflicts and dialectical tensions because of the structure and processes of advertising agencies (i.e., communication and project management systems, budget, timelines, etc.). One of the biggest takeaways from this study is that creatives expressed they wanted more time on projects, more opportunities for collaboration, and more direct contact with clients; and account service personnel recognized these wants existed. However, both account service and creative personnel cited external agency constraints such as timeline and budget as reasons why these wants could not be realistically achieved. Future research could examine the project/traffic manager position and how that internal “middle man” (between account and creative staff) for the agency affects the communication and relationship between account service and creative personnel.

Additionally, since timeline and budget were major constraints, examining the project management software, such as Workamajig, and how it is used to estimate advertising timelines and budgets would be beneficial in understanding how these tools/procedures affect the communication and relationship between account service and creative personnel. As mentioned by research participants, project management software and instant messaging programs, like Slack, replaced face-to-face communication even though many creatives preferred face-to-face communication. Therefore, future research should examine how agency employees use these technologies for communication purposes as well. Once we understand these tools/procedures better, then they can be

revised to allow for more collaboration and communication between creatives and creatives, creatives and clients, and creatives and account service personnel.

Conclusion

Since RDT is commonly used to analyze family (Baxter, 2006; Pitts et al., 2009) and romantic relationships (Fox et al., 2014; Romo & Abetz, 2016), this study showed RDT can be used to analyze interpersonal coworker relationships within organizations. Although coworkers may not develop close interpersonal relationships with each other, they spend a large amount of time together; and in a creative field like advertising, employees must frequently work together and communicate ideas to produce work for a client. It is through this communication process that account service and creative personnel express their oppositional perspectives and motivations. Most likely, coworkers in other organizations experience the same phenomena, and RDT could be used to analyze those relationships as well. Additionally, this study closed the research gap by identifying the nature of the interpersonal conflict by examining *how* account service and creative personnel communicatively manage dialectical tensions present in advertising agencies. Based on the participants' responses, there are three main practical implications for improving the relationship between account service and creative personnel in advertising agencies.

First, advertising agencies should focus on building trusting interpersonal relationships among their employees. Creating policies that allow employees to interact informally out of the office and/or outside of work-related activities is a way to build trust (Johnson & Johnson, 1995). Activities could include hosting employee gatherings or retreats, planning holiday potlucks, celebrating birthdays, etc. Some research participants

also mentioned that they appreciate their individual performance reviews, and managers/bosses should conduct these employee reviews but allow their employees to conduct peer-reviews as well, especially if employees continually work with the same people in small teams. According to Six and Sorge (2008), organizations that train employees for their position, monitor their progress, and evaluate them at certain intervals provide stability and predictability for employees. In that study, evaluations were used to give employees compliments and provide support, and as a result, created a trusting work environment. In advertising agencies, reviews would provide employee support and allow employees to express what is going well and what can be improved regarding working relationships and agency policies. Some research participants even said that their agencies make employees take personality and/or communication quizzes, and those quizzes can help spark conversations about various working/communication styles to improve agency relationships as well.

Additionally, leaders of the agency should encourage their employees to develop a team mentality, especially if employees do not work in small teams, and instead, work with a variety of people depending on the type of client project. According to Oliver and Ashley (2012), creative leaders expressed a need for openness and collaboration among teams when managing the creative process, and the benefit to this flexible team environment “is the ability to integrate the spirit of creative problem solving through the agency, giving everyone a shared responsibility for ideas” (p. 338). This shared responsibility for ideas, in a sense, makes everyone on the team an “owner” of an idea because they have played a role in developing it. Therefore, because of this ownership, each team member is at risk if a project is not completed in time; and Malhotra and

Murnighan (2002) found that sharing risk is an important antecedent of developing mutual trust among team members. When account service and creative personnel are sharing risks, it is important to show signs of solidarity to maintain trust. For example, many creatives mentioned that they disliked when account service personnel were unorganized and did not pass off work to the creative team until shortly before a project deadline, creating a high-stress environment and causing the creatives to work after hours. Some account service personnel explained how they sometimes stay late with creatives who are working on their client's project, and a few account executives said that they will get food and bring it back to the office if it is going to be a late night for the creatives. Obviously, employees have families and obligations outside of work, but at least being available to the creative team via phone or email is a sign of solidarity. This team mentality would develop naturally if agencies worked to design a culture of trust and respect and encouraged showing signs of solidarity by employing some of these ideas.

Second, increasing face-to-face communication among employees would help decrease some interpersonal conflict. Email, instant messaging, and project management systems serve a productivity function and are still beneficial in advertising agencies; but there is a lack of nonverbal feedback (e.g., tone of voice, facial expressions, body language) when using these methods, which can cause misinterpretations and miscommunications (Hewitt, 2006; Karianne & Svennevig, 2006) and lead to conflict in the workplace (O'Kane & Hargie, 2007). In this study, creatives preferred face-to-face communication when discussing projects to avoid miscommunications about a project's direction that could result in future revisions. However, account service personnel

reported that they like to have a record of their interactions and preferred emailing. To appease both perspectives, advertising agencies could encourage employees to engage in more informal face-to-face meetings, and after the conversations, write notes about the interaction in the project management system and/or type an email reminder so that there is a record of the decisions made during those conversations. It may seem redundant, but it would decrease the amount of revisions in the future, thus, saving time in the long run. Whatever communication methods advertising agencies choose to use, they should train employees about the appropriate use of each communication platform to avoid the previously discussed consequences of computer-mediated communication.

Face-to-face communication is especially important in advertising agencies after mistakes have been made and conflicts ensue because some research participants expressed a more aggressive communication style and attempted to place blame on an individual employee during meetings by asking, “*Who* made a mistake? How are *you* going to fix this?” Instead, asking open-ended questions like, “How can *we* work together to fix this? What can I do to help you?” is less aggressive and reflects a team-oriented approach. Mikkelson, York, and Arritola (2015) found that effective communication is positively related to job satisfaction, motivation, and organizational commitment because it “helps create a positive work environment where employees feel valued and respected” (p. 348). Engaging in more face-to-face communication shows employees that relationship building is a priority of the organization, and according to Men (2014), employees feel more satisfied with their organization if superiors communicate with them face-to-face. Therefore, advertising agencies should train employees, especially those in

leadership positions, about effective communication strategies and encourage face-to-face interactions in order to build trust and respect among employees.

Third, reviewing and revising some agency procedures would allow creatives to have more autonomy and decision-making power throughout the client project process. Due to the account service department's responsibility of "owning" the relationship with a client and dictating the client's needs, they automatically fulfill a leadership role in the agency. However, the creative department should have some autonomy and decision-making power because, according to Lyman (2012), high-trust organizations respect employees' ideas and include them in the decision-making process. Also, Pearce and Ensley (2004) found that shared leadership in an organization leads to teamwork, courtesy, altruism, and helping behaviors. Since creatives bring a completely different skillset and perspective to their work, their ideas should be taken more seriously in order to build trust between account service and creative team members.

For example, some agencies have revised their policies so that creatives are invited to client meetings and can choose which meetings they can attend based on their schedules, and Wackman et al. (1987) found that clients like having accessibility to those key project decision makers. Some agencies automatically include two options in their clients' budget so that creatives can explore riskier design ideas while having a safer backup idea. These agencies also factor into the budget the individual and collaborative brainstorming time necessary for creatives to produce both concepts. According to Mitchel (1987), clients like when agencies disagree with them and offer different opinions because clients expect agencies to provide those insights, which is a benefit of allowing creatives to produce riskier work. At the same time, the creative department

must understand that they work for the client and that every client's budget, timeline, and design preferences can affect the project process. Every advertising agency culture, structure, and client project is different, so there is no "one size fits all" approach; but these are a couple suggestions that give creatives more opportunities to meet with clients, explore new ideas, and collaborate with more employees. At the very least, advertising agencies should evaluate their current policies by asking employees to anonymously complete a questionnaire and use those responses to guide policy revisions that would be the best fit for the agency.

Every participant expressed the importance of trust and respect in the account service-creative relationship, and these practical implications discussed by participants work to build a culture of trust and respect among advertising agency employees. The interpersonal conflicts and dialectical tensions identified in this study are a necessary part of agency life because the analysis of the interview data revealed that research participants perceived conversations initiated by conflicts or tensions actually led to better client work. However, the way people manage these conflicts and tensions can negatively impact working relationships, which in turn, can hinder the agency's success. As creative director Jessica said, "A great creative and account service team can be pretty unstoppable...those are the two most important roles. If you have those two people on the same page supporting each other, it's awesome. You can win every time." Overall, understanding the types of interpersonal conflicts and dialectical tensions present in advertising agencies and how account service and creative personnel communicatively manage those tensions can help change this relationship for the better.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Hello [insert name],

I am Ashley (Fuhrman) Phillips, South Dakota State University graduate student, and as part of my graduate degree requirements I'm conducting communication research about advertising agencies for my thesis. I will be interviewing account service and creative personnel about their agency experiences, so I can investigate how these two groups of people communicate while completing client projects.

These 30-45 minute, individual interviews will not interfere with work responsibilities as they will take place outside of business hours and out of the office. I'm specifically looking for research participants who have at least one-year experience in their current position and have job titles such as: account executive, associate account executive, account coordinator, designer, copywriter, creative/art director, and production artist. Media specialists/coordinators, digital coordinators, web/digital developers, consumer insights coordinators, and other agency employees are *not* eligible for interviews.

Since I am an advertising graduate from SDSU, I'm passionate about and plan to work in this field. Participating in this study will be extremely beneficial for advertising professionals because research participants will be able to provide key insights contributing to the understanding of working relationships and communication within agencies. As a token of gratitude for participating in my study, I will prepare a personalized summary report of my findings, keeping responses confidential, and give it to the agency for future use.

I would greatly appreciate if you disseminated this message to account service and creative personnel in your office. If volunteers have any questions and/or would like to set up a time to meet, please have them contact me directly via ashley.phillips@sdstate.edu or at 605.216.6977.

Sincerely,
Ashley Phillips

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Introduce yourself

Confidentiality: “Every response will be kept confidential, and no response will be tied to you when reported in my thesis.”

Recording: Have participant sign informed consent form

ICEBREAKER/BACKGROUND INFO

1. What is your job title?
2. Describe a typical day at your job.

CLIENT PROJECT PROCESS: RQ1 & RQ2

3. Can you explain the typical process when working on a client’s project from beginning to end?

*Screeners: Do you interact with members of the **ACCOUNT SERVICE/CREATIVE** (choose opposite of participant’s job title) daily or weekly?*

Screeners: Are you the one who typically initiates meetings between the account service and creative department?

If not, who is the person who usually initiates these department meetings?

COMMUNICATION DYNAMICS: RQ2 & RQ3

4. In general, can you describe how you communicate with the **ACCOUNT SERVICE/CREATIVE** (choose opposite of participant’s job title) employees when working together on a client project?

Probe: Do you have to change your communication style, or the way you speak to a coworker, depending on the person you’re communicating with?

Why or why not?

Can you provide an example?

CLIENT PROJECT DECISION MAKING: BACKGROUND INFO/RQ2 & RQ3

5. What roles do account service employees take during internal client project discussions?
6. What roles do creative employees take during internal client project discussions?

(If struggling with “roles,” reword and suggest parts of project people are responsible for.)

Probe: What role do you fulfill?

*Probe: On a day-to-day basis, how do you interact with the **ACCOUNT SERVICE/CREATIVE** (choose opposite of participant’s job title) during a client project?*

Transition to tensions, “While working on a client project, are there moments when the account service and creative departments don’t always agree?”

Probe: If so, explain what occurs?

Probe: Does an aspect of the project process result in more conflict between account service and creative employees?

Why?

*Probe: Do you change your communication style with the **ACCOUNT SERVICE/CREATIVE** (choose opposite of participant’s job title) if a conflict arises during a client project?*

Why or why not?

CLIENT PROJECT CONFLICT & TENSIONS: RQ 1 & RQ2

7. When working on client projects, have you ever encountered conflict where the account service department wants something that’s opposite of the creative department?

Probe: If yes, what oppositional or contradictory tensions have you regularly experienced?

If no, state example below and ask again.

(If struggling with “contradictions or tensions,” say: for example, employees can sometimes experience a tension between wanting to take risks and wanting to play it safe with client projects.)

8. When working on client projects, have you ever encountered conflict where the account service department’s working style is opposite of the creative department?

Probe: If yes, what oppositional or contradictory tensions have you regularly experienced?

If no, state example below and ask again.

(If struggling with “contradictions or tensions,” say: for example, employees can sometimes experience a tension between independence and dependence when working on projects, where some employees would rather not be micro-managed and others would prefer to receive a lot of instruction.)

Probe: What would you consider to be the most common tension that occurs between the account service and creative department?

Can you provide an example?

Probe: Does this/do these tension/s lead to conflict?

Why or why not? If yes: How often do these conflicts occur?

Probe: Does this/do these tension/s have any positive consequences?

Probe: Does this/do these tension/s have any negative consequences?

Explain.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: RQ3

9. What specific strategies did you use to manage those contradictions or tensions that occurred between account service and creative departments?

Probe: Does any strategy seem to be the most effective?

Why or why not?

Probe: When these tensions lead to conflict, do these conflicts get resolved?

Why or why not?

How do they get resolved?

Give participant the demographics questionnaire/thank the participant

