

Food for thought: How curiosity externalization is fostered through organizational identity[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Curiosity has increasingly been deemed to hold pivotal influence over the ventures founders create. While this growing body of knowledge has helped us understand the origins of a venture, what is less well understood is the process by which individual curiosity gets externalized to the organizational level. Yet, the externalization of curiosity has been recognized as central for rallying organizational members behind innovation initiatives. To understand how curiosity externalizes and thereby translates into a venture's collective property, we conducted an in-depth case study of Rasmus Munk and his two Michelin-starred restaurant Alchemist. Our empirically grounded process model draws attention to the pivotal role identity mechanisms assume in externalizing curiosity in a venture: Promoting originality through *de-familiarizing the familiar* at the individual level is counter-balanced by *familiarizing the unfamiliar* into a coherent venture story at the organizational level.

“You can’t look at places like Alchemist as normal restaurants. It’s not a place you go to socialize. Alchemist is a place where you can reflect on our limitations as humans, both physically, emotionally and spiritually.”

Ferran Adrià for *Forbes* (Troitino, 2020)

1. Introduction

Over the past ten years, research on entrepreneurship has progressively pointed to curiosity taking a pivotal role in venture creation (Arikan et al., 2020; Bosman et al., 2019). Curiosity, defined as the desire to better understand novel, complex and/or uncertain stimuli through cognitive and/or sensory exploration (see Lievens et al., 2022; Litman, 2005; Litman, Collins, et al., 2005), surfaces in diverse ways in this context. While Arikan and colleagues (2020) theorize how curiosity affects the pursuit of opportunities, Tolentino et al. (2014) point to curiosity being a decisive factor in pivoting and adapting ventures over time. Studies have even pointed to curiosity as likely being the single strongest predictor for venture creation (Bosman et al., 2019; Rudolph et al., 2017). Some of the most significant disruptions to established industries have started with the simple question ‘what if...?’, making

curiosity “a fundamental motive” (Kashdan & Fincham, 2002, p. 373).

While prior work on venture creation highlights the central role of founders’ curiosity, what is less well understood is how their curiosity externalizes, meaning, distributes to become a collective property at the organizational level. Hence, two areas worth exploring can be formulated: (1) how the externalization process unfolds so that founders’ curiosity is extended to other organizational members, and (2) how other organizational members eventually bring in their curiosity to drive venture success.

When looking at the curiosity literature, insights are similarly scant, with Lievens and colleagues (2022) calling for a detailed study of the externalization process of curiosity. Indeed, only a relatively recent stream of work has started investigating curiosity externalization, with most studies focusing on how curiosity spreads throughout communities like contagion. In this line of work, curiosity externalization is achieved by rallying individuals behind innovation initiatives to engage in open collaboration projects (e.g., Franzoni & Sauermann, 2014). For instance, curiosity is portrayed as a strong motivator within hacker communities in driving collective and continuous engagement (Flowers, 2008). While this initial work provides essential insights, its transfer to the organizational context is limited, and the externalization process that unfolds between the individual and organizational levels remains vaguely

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understood. Against this backdrop, we further explore the externalization process that allows curiosity to become a collective property by asking the following research question: *How and why does curiosity externalize from the individual to the organizational level to function as a collective property?*

We explore this research question through a qualitative in-depth case study of Rasmus Munk and his two-star Michelin restaurant Alchemist. Beyond its rapid recognition by the Michelin guide, Alchemist continually pushes the boundaries of the culinary industry, making it a relevant setting to study the role curiosity takes in maintaining the ability of an organization to develop and reinvent itself continuously. As the epigraph highlights, Alchemist is recognized as a unique organization that aspires to drive curiosity internally and equally in its customers. In the words of Rasmus Munk, Alchemist is about *Holistic Cuisine*, which he defines as “multi-layered. It draws upon elements from the world of gastronomy, theatre and art, as well as science, technology and design, in order to create an all-encompassing and dramaturgically driven sensory experience” (Alchemist, n.d.-a) “[for which] the only prerequisites are curiosity and presence of mind” (Alchemist, n.d.-b).

Based on our analysis, we develop a process model that illustrates the externalization of curiosity at Alchemist. We uncover a strong dependence on curiosity externalizing as an essence of Rasmus Munk and, by extension, Alchemist’s identity. To date, the connection between curiosity and identity has received limited attention, and when it has, it has focused on how internalized curiosity surfaces (e.g., Karwowski, 2012). Implicitly though, the link between identity and curiosity has not only been invoked by the organizational literature (e.g., Bechky, 2020) but also by some of the most exploratory companies, such as Dell, Disney, GE, Merck, and Nike, who claim curiosity as a value of their organizational identity (Lievens et al., 2022, p. 179). Consequently, the present study theorizes how identity functions as a conduit connecting internalized (i.e., individual level) and externalized (i.e., organizational level) curiosity, thereby making three key contributions.

First, our process model systematically describes ‘how’ curiosity externalizes in the organizational context, allowing it to become a collective property. By functioning as a foundational value to Alchemist’s identity, curiosity facilitates a process of Integrating, Interweaving, and Imprinting to connect individual activities, thereby creating a collective fabric that drives organizational-level results. Through the development of this model, we answer calls in the literature on curiosity to adopt a multilevel lens to investigate the relationship between internalized and externalized curiosity (Lievens et al., 2022). Further, we also extend current research that has highlighted the role of internalized curiosity in driving change and novelty (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) by shifting the spotlight to the role collective curiosity takes and how it is fostered within the organizational context.

Second, we contribute to our understanding of curiosity through a novel perspective on the relationship between the familiar and the unfamiliar in the workplace. Whereas the departure of our current curiosity understanding takes the knowledge of the individual as a given, our process highlights the importance of resetting the starting position to negate existing individual knowledge (i.e., de-familiarize), thereby creating a level playing field that allows different contributors to engage with their curiosity and jointly create new knowledge (i.e., familiarize). In doing so, we provide evidence showing that curiosity dynamics of *de-familiarizing the familiar* and *familiarizing the unfamiliar* are pivotal in the externalization process, particularly in contexts where diverse domain experts work in a transdisciplinary fashion (Nicolescu, 2014) to integrate diverse contributions (Feuls et al., 2021). As such, we provide one possible answer to ‘why’ curiosity may externalize.

Finally, in studying the relationship between identity and curiosity, we contribute to identity literature by showcasing how organizational identity may simultaneously function as a means of stability and change. More specifically, our findings point to organizational identity encouraging deliberate instability by questioning the status quo (i.e., acting out Alchemist’s curiosity) while simultaneously imbuing stability by asking

organizational members to integrate developments into the overarching narrative of the organization (i.e., manifesting Alchemist’s identity and further developing it). In doing so, we contribute to the longstanding discussion as to how and when organizational identity can be adaptive over time, as well as to the ability for identity to function both as a stabilizing and disruptive dynamic within the organizational context (Bojovic et al., 2020; Cloutier & Ravasi, 2020). While current literature sides with one or the other dynamic, our findings point to identity not necessarily being either/or but both.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Individual curiosity at work

Litman (2005) calls curiosity an appetitive desire for something that promises experiences of reward (Berlyne, 1960; Loewenstein, 1994). Similarly, it has been defined as an affection that “motivates exploration for the inherent joy of taking interest in new experiences or obtaining new information” (Lievens et al., 2022, p. 183). These views describe a *diversive* form of curiosity “associated with broader and often more indirect forms of exploration” (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 211). Individuals high in this form of curiosity “play with new ways of framing their situation” (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 216) and are motivated by the desire to achieve a new and aesthetically more pleasing way of understanding (Litman, 2005). Thus, a connection is made between curious exploration and the pursuit of satisfaction by acquiring new knowledge. At the same time, psychometric studies (e.g., Litman, 2008; Litman & Mussel, 2013) have shown that curiosity can also motivate behaviors aimed at reducing negative emotions resulting from the undesirable experiences of feeling deprived of information (Lievens et al., 2022). Individuals high in this *specific* curiosity, thus, are driven by “the acquisition of substantive facts” (Litman, 2005, p. 806), seeking “details and more concrete cues” (Harrison et al., 2011, p. 216) to correct mistakes or solve problems (Crowe & Higgins, 1997), and thereby achieving novelty by filling knowledge gaps (Loewenstein, 1994). Thus, *diversive* and *specific* curiosities refer to individuals’ experience of the relation between the familiar and the unfamiliar. However, they play specific roles in this dynamic: *diversive* curiosity expands the boundaries of the familiar. In contrast, *specific* curiosity helps us deal with the unfamiliar.

Finding a balance between the familiar and the unfamiliar, as well as using open forms of exploration to leverage the benefits of each, are an essential part of individual curiosity. In entrepreneurial contexts, for example, “uncertainty itself becomes part of the pleasure of doing the work” while, at the same time, “these contexts require that individuals have the ability to engage with puzzles, surprises, and novelty” (Lievens et al., 2022, p. 190). In areas such as the visual, performing, and culinary arts, like any work that aims to be novel, curiosity is a source of inspiration and idea catalyst (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003; Kashdan & Fincham, 2002). For example, innovation policy research suggests that groundbreaking scientific inventions in the medical (e.g., Rosenberg, 2009) and lighting industries regularly result from dynamic and inter-disciplinary work between curious scientists and engineers (Sanderson & Simons, 2014). For this dynamic to occur, however, individual curiosity needs to be externalized between co-workers and, more broadly, at the organizational level. Furthermore, how exactly individual-level curiosity relates to organizational-level curiosity, particularly in entrepreneurial ventures, calls for further exploration.

2.2. Externalization of curiosity at work

Meta-analysis research has demonstrated that curiosity is the strongest predictor of entrepreneurship (Rudolph et al., 2017) and, unsurprisingly, a central attribute of an entrepreneurial mindset (Zappe et al., 2018). As noted above, individual curiosity tends to receive considerable attention, with a focus on the founder’s curiosity. Founders or leaders of entrepreneurial ventures are often depicted as curious,

constantly questioning, and unsatisfied with answers (Dyer et al., 2008, p. 323). Nevertheless, the effects of curiosity do not shape only individual-level behavior; curious founders impact their entire organization. Research has shown, for example, that curious founders widen an organization's search breadth and depth, or, in other words, the types of knowledge used to innovate and the elaboration of the knowledge in question (Hahn et al., 2019). Most importantly for our study, founders' curiosity fosters followers' curiosity and motivation to explore, learn, and create.

Lievens et al. (2022, pp. 201, 204) argue that curiosity inheres in an “emergence” process that unfolds over time and gives rise to “organizational dynamics and organizational forms of curiosity.” A few qualitative studies have alluded to the importance of a multilevel view of curiosity (e.g., Elsbach & Kramer, 2003; Harrison & Rouse, 2014). Notably, Kashdan, Disabato, and colleagues (2020) have recently proposed a multi-dimensional measure of curiosity that moves beyond the individual level and includes overt and covert social curiosity sub-factors. In follow-up research, Kashdan, Goodman, et al. (2020) have found four workplace curiosity dimensions to predict considerable variance in outcomes such as innovation, job satisfaction, job crafting, and work engagement.

This new evidence shows that multilevel models and research can help us explain the complexities of how individual curiosity externalizes to organizational curiosity (Lievens et al., 2022). The emphasis on externalization brings to the fore curiosity as a social and organizational practice rather than as a purely internalized phenomenon. In doing so, it invites us to reflect on what precisely the externalization of curiosity entails in an organizational context and what concepts can help us bridge the gap between this phenomenon's personal (internalized) and collective (externalized) forms.

3. Method

This study applies an inductive, single in-depth case study method to build theory from Alchemist's detail-rich context (Edmondson & McManus, 2007; Gioia, Corley, et al., 2013). Alchemist has been chosen to study our research question for its revelatory quality of how and why curiosity can function as a collective property within an organization (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Siggelkow, 2007). The centrality of curiosity to Alchemist is not only evident from the organization's self-declaration but equally through the actions organizational members take as well as the official recognition of Alchemist's curiosity by external observers (Lee, 2022). In adopting an interpretivist perspective, our focus is on the faithful representation of the founder and the organizational members' experienced curiosity (Gioia, Corley, et al., 2013), providing access to underlying cognitive, motivational, psychological, and sociological processes, which are otherwise hard to capture (Eisenhardt et al., 2016).

Founded in 2019 by head chef Rasmus Munk, Alchemist is a Danish gastronomic startup located in Copenhagen, which has created the boundary-pushing culinary concept of Holistic Cuisine. Within a record time of seven months after opening, Alchemist was awarded two Michelin stars and has since made it onto St. Pellegrino's Best 50 Restaurants in the World list. According to Rasmus Munk, Alchemist has “a holistic approach extending beyond the plate to create thought-provoking, aesthetical, emotional and gastrophysical meal experiences” (Brønnum & Munk, 2019, p. 32). This approach is further supported by a gigantic planetarium dome where dining guests are surrounded by “artful projections creating and enhancing moods and messages” (Archival data). As much as Rasmus Munk encourages curiosity in his customers, he also furthers persistent curiosity in how Alchemist creates and recreates its experience. This curiosity spans beyond the boundaries of haute cuisine. It encompasses inspirations from his in-house R&D team, collaborations with some of the world's leading institutions, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and other industry projects with the arts and music.

3.1. Data collection

Our research team became aware of Alchemist due to connections within the industry, resulting from the second author's prior career in the field of haute cuisine. Between 2020 and 2022, the first and second authors engaged in data collection, including two rounds of interviews, archival data collection, and on-site observations in October 2020. Given our interest in how and why curiosity externalizes from the individual to be collective property, our data collection followed a process theory approach, giving particular attention to events and actions temporally unfolding (Langley, 1999). To that end, we sought to capture a dynamic view of Alchemist through process-related questions in our interviews, collected archival data that outlined the process of past dish creations and ongoing activities (including successful and failed dishes), and observed the way organizational members at Alchemist interacted with each other. These data collection efforts allowed us to reconstruct curiosity dynamics unfolding at the individual and collective levels, captured by manifestations at the surface level, and equally through detailed descriptions of the underlying motivation. Table 1 summarizes the data sources and their use in the analysis.

Table 1
Data sources used in Alchemist's case.

Data Types	Details	Use in the Analysis
Interviews	21 interviews with the following 15 informants: 3D Animator & Designer Assistant Head Chef (2x) Chef / R&D Kitchen (2x) Chef-Entrepreneur (2x) Creative Director Executive Fermentation Assistant Floor Manager Gastronomic Scientist General Manager Head of Communications (4x) Head of Pastry Head of R&D (2x) Sound Designer (2x)	Capture case study organization, founder, and staff interpretations of curiosity, and identity-related narratives. Collect information about retrospective and current events, projects, and processes that have marked the role of curiosity as a driver of identity (trans-) formation at Alchemist. Triangulate observations and substantiate interpretations of curiosity and identity-related events.
Media Coverage	Magazine and newspaper articles, videos, podcasts, Alchemist's website, Instagram and Facebook pages, as well as Rasmus Munk's Instagram and Facebook pages.	Capture identity and curiosity representation to outsiders. Collect detailed information about curiosity as a driver of Alchemist's identity.
Other Archival Sources	Images, renderings, menu descriptions, R&D and concept presentations, and scientific articles from the R&D department shared by Alchemist's Head of Communications.	Capture internal interpretations of Alchemist's strategy, vision, and external communication. Familiarize with context, identity- and curiosity-related narratives towards outsiders and triangulate the respondents' interpretations and observations.
Observations and Informal Conversations	Approximately 60 h of observations in all dining rooms and back-of-house areas of Alchemist, participation in food preparation in the kitchen (incl. informal conversations with several chefs), exploration of technologies used, and total immersion in a 50-course dining experience and a kombucha and kefir tasting session.	Familiarize with the context of Alchemist and its members. Capture the discourses and dynamics between different units, both front- and back-of-house, that constitute the organization.

3.1.1. Interview data

We conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim 21 interviews with 15 informants, each lasting between 60 and 210 min. The selection of interview partners followed theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) to include interviewees who were deemed most knowledgeable about the underlying logic of Alchemist's curiosity dynamics. Beyond detailed insights by Rasmus Munk, the final sample included interviewees from all of Alchemist's departments, such as audio, visual, front of house, R&D, kitchen, and communications. An initial interview guide was developed based on (1) the current literature on curiosity and prior professional experiences, as well as (2) publicly available information relating to Alchemist. This interview guide included questions such as, "Would you describe yourself as a curious person? If so, what triggers your curiosity?" to capture the individual level. In contrast, questions like "What happens at Alchemist once an area for new development has been identified? Can you walk us through the process?" focused on understanding collective dynamics. As illustrated here, we adopted a 'courtroom interview style' that explicitly asked interviewees to provide factual evidence and contextual examples to their reflections (Graebner & Eisenhardt, 2004, p. 371). As interviews progressed, we started to notice recurring references to Alchemist as to "who they were" and "what was important to them" or "why people joined." To take advantage of these emerging themes, we modified our interview guide (Spradley, 1979), incorporating questions that would lead to a better understanding of "who" Alchemist was to employees and how that understanding was potentially influencing their curiosity within the organization. In sum, these interviews allowed us to gain valuable insights into Alchemist's distinguishable values, norms, and beliefs and how these function as a framework within which curiosity unfolds.

3.1.2. Observational data

The two first authors engaged jointly in a week-long visit, comprising roughly 60 hours of non-participant observation at the offices and restaurant of Alchemist. This data would allow us to contextualize information gained from interviews and capture real-time interactions unfolding before us. For instance, our visit to the R&D kitchen allowed us to see the development and interaction around ongoing projects that had yet to develop into dishes. Butterflies, the espoused organizational symbol of Alchemist, were trialed to be developed into a dish (which has since been put on the menu), motivated by the thought that no one had ever identified them as a potential food ingredient. For all observations, written notes were taken and jointly discussed at the end of each observational day to ensure the accuracy of our interpretations. The observational data collection also included a complete immersion into Alchemist's experience, including its 50-course dinner and accompanying beverage flight, allowing us to connect the information and perspectives gathered from the back of the house with the customer-facing orchestration of their story, helping us develop a more holistic understanding of Alchemist's curiosity process.

3.1.3. Archival data

Complementary to our observations and interview data, we were granted exclusive access to archival documents of both public and non-public nature. Public documentation generally encompassed press material, menu descriptions, and explanations of dishes, as well as articles written about Alchemist by third parties. Non-publicly available material included strategic projects, concept descriptions, the organization's employee handbook, ongoing research (e.g., material science and chemical reactions), and anticipated collaborations. This material provided was classified into two distinct information sources: (1) information approved to be used in the analysis and to function as material support in our paper, and (2) information made available for us to support our understanding and analysis of the processes unfolding within Alchemist but excluded from direct display in the paper due to their sensitive nature (e.g., ongoing projects and planned

developments).

3.2. Data analysis

To arrive at our process model, we followed the tenet of grounded theory, with a focus on theorizing the curiosity process unfolding within Alchemist (Gehman et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2013). We performed a continuous iteration to remain loyal to the research focus, the collected data, and the extant literature (Eisenhardt et al., 2016; Gehman et al., 2017; Gioia, Corley, et al., 2013). With a strong focus on the temporality of events and interactions, this analytical approach allowed us to move from our raw data to a parsimonious representation of a recurring process – one we term *curiosity externalization* – (see Fig. 2), which will be further defined and analyzed below. While the analytical process in this type of research is never strictly linear, we will outline the four broad steps taken sequentially to provide transparency about how we arrived at our process model.

3.2.1. Step 1: Visual mapping of Alchemist

The initial step of our analysis was characterized by visual mapping, integrating perspectives provided by the different data types available on the curiosity process we had identified at Alchemist, both at the individual and organizational levels. For instance, we detailed the different creations that had been developed at Alchemist, from the initiation (i.e., who brought in the inspiration and what triggered the curiosity) to the scientifically motivated process of experimentation unfolding before dish design was concluded and further experimentation around audio and visual developments may become necessary. To accompany these visual maps, we created vignettes of how steps related to each other, which organizational members and/or external partners were involved, and how the exploratory process unfolded over time. For some developments, we were granted access to thick descriptions (Langley, 1999). Alchemist had also published papers that provided us with an outline of the thought processes and motivators behind steps taken in the developmental path of different research projects. Through this process of visual mapping and thick descriptions, different lines of potential study emerged regarding how and why curiosity emerged at the individual level and then externalized to become collective property. For instance, given the scientific approach to their developments, routines emerged early as a potential venue for analysis. However, these routines were incomplete and hard to replicate between our identified developments. The perspective we felt surfaced most strongly concerned the importance of Rasmus Munk's self-definition and what he and others perceived Alchemist to stand for – its identity. Whether we were informed about what motivated curiosity or learned about how a project was integrated or terminated, identity became an omnipresent reference in justifying how creations at Alchemist had to be reflective of its central and distinctive features to fit the narrative (Mmbaga et al., 2020; Snihur, 2016). In other words, the founder's identity was "the filters through which information and experiences [were] deemed relevant, or not" (Foy & Gruber, 2022, p. 480). The persistence of the identity angle appearing throughout our data and the centrality of it initiating and guiding actions within Alchemist motivated us to study its relation to curiosity further, especially considering how organizational identity may function as the conduit to externalize curiosity to the organizational level.

3.2.2. Step 2: Identification of first-order themes at Alchemist

The second step of our analysis focused on applying first-order coding. We did so against the backdrop of identifying distinct actions that could lead us to understand how curiosity was triggered and subsequently externalized at Alchemist, as well as pointers to the understanding and role of identity within Alchemist. We open-coded the raw data, staying as in-vivo with our codes as possible. As we reviewed initial in-vivo codes, determining the first overarching themes, one of the first aspects that caught our attention was the distinct functions that the

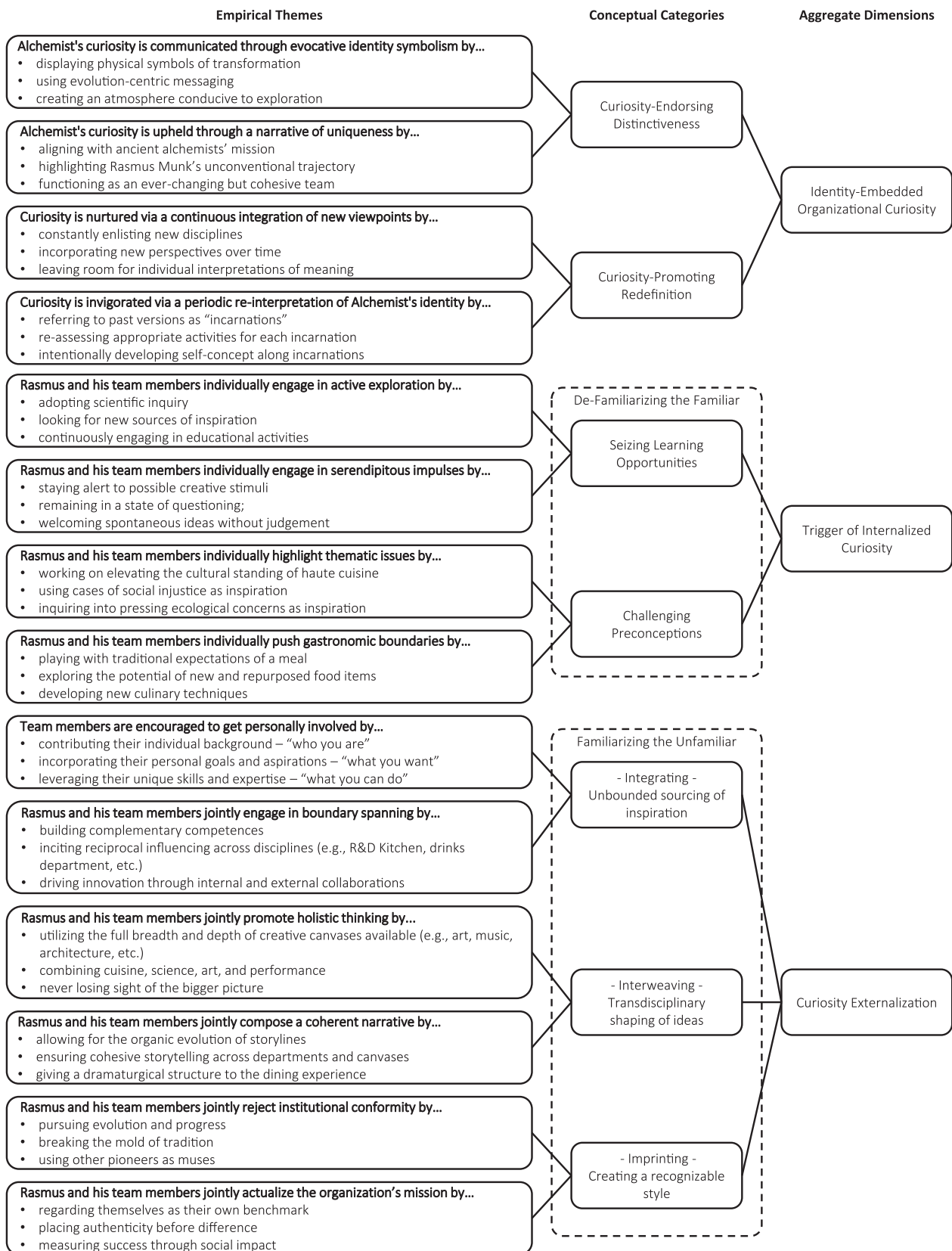


Fig. 1. Data structure.

individual and organization assumed concerning curiosity. While individuals were given seemingly infinite freedom to initiate projects at Alchemist, a strong request for the unconventional and a learning imperative became dominant throughout our codes. Contrarily, while also driven by curiosity dynamics, the organizational level was characterized mainly by integrative efforts to turn projects into internally (e.g., does the project have a unique signature) and externally (e.g., can it be incorporated into the dramaturgical story) consistent developments that fit the Alchemist universe. In response to the identity narrative developing, we further engaged with the identity work literature, as our findings mirrored the pursuit of “forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising” self-meanings (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002, p. 626; see also Caza et al., 2018). To that end, our data pointed to Rasmus Munk’s identity directly influencing Alchemist’s development, using it to transmit his messages (Cardon et al., 2009), to know which priorities to set (Knox & Casulli, 2021), and how to position himself and Alchemist in society (Powell & Baker, 2017). Linking our insights on Alchemist’s curiosity to the emerging identity work narrative, we found that identity implicitly affected the founders’ curiosity in directing his motivation for what he wanted to explore further (Harrison, 2016; Karhunen et al., 2017). When it came to understanding the Alchemist universe, the data firmly pointed to a dynamic tension that resided around a clear understanding of who or what Alchemist was while at the same time rejecting an overly narrow definition. As such, while Alchemist’s identity seemed uniquely identifiable, it was evolutionary. For instance, one theme, communicating through evocative identity symbolism, developed around evolution and transformation, choosing Alchemist as their name (i.e., people historically dedicated to turning lead into gold) or highlighting the butterfly (i.e., the animal known for transformation) as Alchemist’s symbol.

In line with established practice, our coding process was iterative, revolving around thematic clarity and contrasting our codes with the relevant literature on curiosity and identity (Eisenhardt et al., 2016). Particularly as we were moving to higher levels of abstraction and aggregation of the initial codes, the third author engaged as a more detached discussant, functioning as a sounding board to assess label clarity and resolution of disagreements. As such, the third author assumed the role of the devil’s advocate to ensure we stayed faithful to the material at hand and would not impose existing constructs onto the inductive process (Gioia, Corley, et al., 2013), a process sometimes referred to as ‘interviewing the interviewer’ (Dörfler & Stierand, 2021). Furthermore, we used the complementarity of the research team (i.e., a former chef and researchers from the field of creativity, curiosity, and identity) to engage in bracketing, allowing us to suspend any presuppositions or prior experiences on the data and its analysis.

3.2.3. Step 3: Abstraction towards second-order categories and aggregate dimensions

At this point of the analysis, we started to move away from clustering data around coherent themes. We focused on the process dynamics that connected them, motivating higher-order conceptual categories and aggregate dimensions (Charmaz, 2006; Suddaby, 2006). Most evidently, we became aware of two curiosity dynamics that we termed de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar, respectively. We noticed a distinct separation in de-familiarizing dynamics initiated at the individual level while familiarizing dynamics operated at the organizational level. As this part of the analysis was increasingly informed by extant literature, we drew on existing labels where appropriate for this study. For instance, at the organizational level, we distinguished the defining characteristics of organizational identity – distinctiveness, centrality, and endurance (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Kreiner et al., 2015), informing our second-order category as Curiosity-Endorsing Distinctiveness and Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition. Given that our coding pointed to curiosity as a central feature of Alchemist’s identity, allowing for a surprising simultaneous stability and dynamic endurance did not remain a relevant code. In sum, aggregating our

initial empirical themes into higher-order categories and dimensions reflected the multi-level nature of our data, pointing to distinct dynamics unfolding between the individual and organizational levels. Fig. 1 summarizes the data structure that captured our analytical course, from empirical themes to conceptual categories and aggregate dimensions.

3.2.4. Step 4: Development of a process model

In the last step of our analysis, we established theoretical links between the identified categories and aggregate dimensions. We understood that identity dynamics operate as a guiding framework within which the curiosity externalization process is unfolding. Rather than actively guiding the curiosity process, identity is a backdrop that promotes and restrains curiosity. Surprisingly, the curiosity process never seemed to start with familiarizing the unfamiliar – though this is the directionality most definitions in extant literature highlight (e.g., work on epistemic curiosity; Litman, Hutchins, et al., 2005). On the contrary, the initiation was driven by a motivation to rethink what we know and question the appropriateness of the status quo, hence de-familiarizing the familiar. Complementarily to the dynamics unfolding at the individual level, we identified externalized curiosity channeling how individual initiatives would be developed into an appropriate extension of the evolving Alchemist universe, familiarizing the unfamiliar.

Throughout our data collection and analysis process, we took measures to ensure credibility and rigor in conduct. First, we used different data sources to gain a holistic understanding of Alchemist and triangulate perspectives (Fachin & Langley, 2017; Pratt et al., 2022). Specifically, archival data helped us achieve a more factual reaffirmation of our interpretations. They allowed us to triangulate insights gained from our interview data to ensure that our representations are authentic and to mitigate common biases of retrospective sensemaking or impression management, often involved in interview-based data collection (Bansal et al., 2018). Second, following acknowledged practice in process studies, we combined real-time and retrospective data to increase dependability in our theoretical development and minimize researcher idiosyncrasies (Langley, 1999; Leonard-Barton, 1990). Finally, we asked experts on the academic side to review our theorizing. We circled back our insights to the members of Alchemist to seek their feedback on whether they would see our process model capturing their lived experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4. Findings

“Alchemist is a universe in which our interactions with others are marked by respect, dignity, joy, and curiosity. These four core values are employed to create unity within our team.” (Archival data)

Alchemist is an organization characterized by profoundly ingrained curiosity - not least due to its founder Rasmus Munk and his multi-disciplinary team. Whether their curiosity surfaces through the projects Alchemist undertakes, the collaborations they initiate and maintain, or the inspirations they feed off - Alchemist is synonymous with curiosity. However, not every organization created by a curious founder and scaled by curious employees manages to turn this curiosity into a collective property, leading us to the following research question: *How and why does curiosity externalize from the individual to the organizational level to function as a collective property?*

We identify a distinct process that describes how identity at Alchemist acts as a catalyst for the externalization of curiosity from the individual to the organizational level. This process is embedded in (1) Alchemist’s organizational identity and encompasses a sequence of (2) triggers to internalized curiosity, followed by (3) three distinct steps that allow for curiosity to externalize to the collective level. In doing so, Alchemist follows a unique process of de-familiarizing the familiar at the individual level before familiarizing the unfamiliar at the collective level (see Fig. 2). On the one hand, the triggers received at the individual level

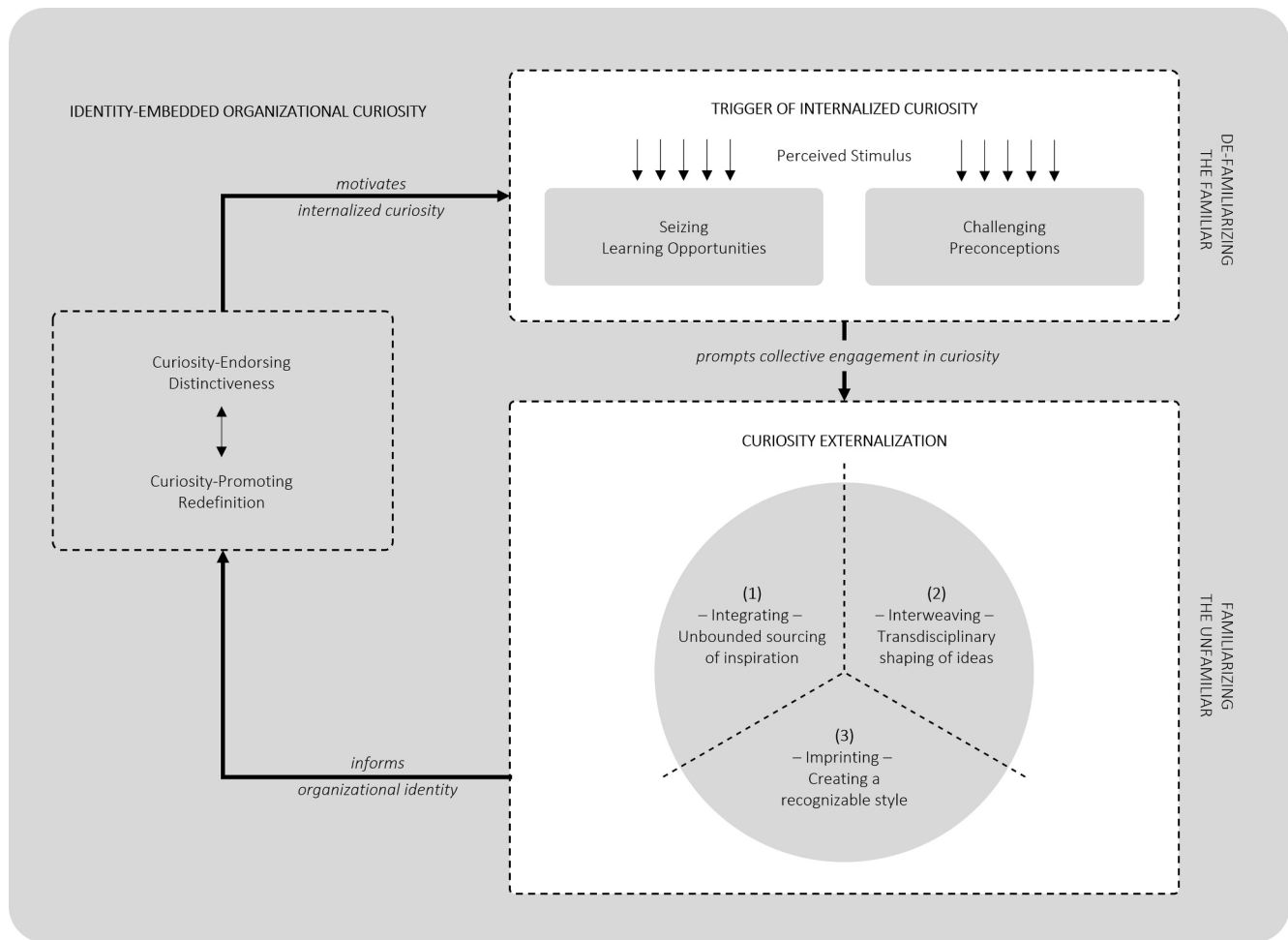


Fig. 2. Process model of curiosity externalization.

are approached from an unfamiliar angle through a process of de-familiarizing the familiar, rendering otherwise familiar topics more interesting and exciting. On the other hand, familiarizing the unfamiliar is the reverse process. Here the collective takes the unfamiliar encountered and fostered on the individual level and, by aligning it with and embedding it into Alchemist as an organization throughout the curiosity externalization process, makes it a familiar element of the organizational curiosity. In the following, we use the conceptual categories outlined in Fig. 1 to present our empirical observations at Alchemist.

4.1. Identity-embedded organizational curiosity

Rasmus Munk, as the founder of Alchemist, plays a leading role. In particular, his vision of Alchemist lays the foundation for its organizational identity in which curiosity is centrally embedded. Thus, Rasmus Munk was also the first to externalize his curiosity, a process that now encompasses all other Alchemist members. Table 2 summarizes Rasmus Munk's values, norms, and beliefs and how they are reflected in Alchemist's organizational identity.¹ Furthermore, our findings show that two distinct processes are responsible for how curiosity is embedded in the identity fabric of Alchemist: 1) Curiosity-Endorsing Distinctiveness, and 2) Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition.

4.1.1. Curiosity-endorsing distinctiveness

This process entails, on the one hand, the different ways in which Alchemist communicates curiosity through *evocative identity symbolism*, and, on the other hand, how Alchemist's curiosity demands a *narrative of uniqueness*.

The communication of Alchemist's curiosity through evocative identity symbolism is done in various ways. One example is through displaying physical symbols of transformation. Alchemist's organizational identity finds a symbolic reminder of curiosity in almost every detail. The organization's butterfly logo is widely recognized as the ultimate signal of transformation. Indeed, transformation is a guiding principle in many of Alchemist's details:

"Why butterflies? It's always been a metamorphous animal for Alchemist, and I used it as, I was quite inspired by the way they transform and the beautiful, the aesthetic of the butterflies." (Chef-Entrepreneur)

Likewise, Alchemist uses evolution-centric messaging that is intended to reach the audience through the gradual development of a lived experience. This experience is not intended nor created to only evoke positive emotions. As Rasmus Munk explained, experiences at Alchemist should be cathartic:

"...I'm not that happy for people who are saying this was the most amazing experience in my lifetime and everything was great. Then it probably didn't touch them as much. So, when we touch guests and

¹ The identity dimensions in the left column of Table 2 follow the work by Brewer and Gardner (1996) and Fauchart and Gruber (2011) who applied these dimensions to reflect the impact of identity on venture formation.

Table 2

Translation of Rasmus Munk's identity dimensions at Alchemist.

Identity Dimensions	Description	Rasmus Munk (individual level)	Alchemist (organizational level)
Basis of self-evaluation	Curiosity - Curiosity in the context of Alchemist is about having a boundaryless thirst for knowledge combined with the willingness and open-mindedness necessary to acquire that knowledge.	"I think when I see something, I think that is original or like something that is new or have a new approach to something, then I think it's quite interesting. And I'm on it before it even is something that is maybe taste good." (Chef-Entrepreneur)	"I'm like a sponge [...] that tries to suck as much knowledge out of it as I can for bettering my understanding of the world and art. It's very much about learning from it and also being here, because this place reveals stuff about art and [...] how it can work on grander scales." (Sound Designer)
	Perfectionism - Perfectionism describes the detail-oriented nature of Rasmus Munk and his team. Before it is used in the dining experience, any element (e.g., food, music, visuals, service processes) is perfected in all of its aspects.	"The tough part has been to draw it and dream it, but then you need to build it as well, and to be hands on at the construction site everyday has been challenging both for me but also for the construction [...]. I think they think I'm really a pain in the ass." (Archival)	"At Alchemist, you should feel that you receive the tools necessary to improve your expertise. In turn, there is a clear expectation that you possess a deep insight into and understanding of everything the guest encounters in the restaurant". (Archival)
	Holism - Holism means that Alchemists' experience aims to be all-encompassing, integrating all the senses and multiple artforms. An output is only considered successful when it fits into the overall experience and "feels right" to everyone, organizational members and guests.	"In the 17th century music was merged with theatre to create a whole new art form: opera. With this update of the Alchemist universe, I feel that we have come one step closer to integrating gastronomy and art." (Archival)	"It is supposed to feel right for everyone. It's to feel rightful for Rasmus, it's supposed to feel right for Lena, it's supposed to feel right for you guys, me including. I think that's the true art. If everyone agrees that, "Oh, this sounds like a spooky forest." (Sound Designer)
Frame of reference	Non-conformity - Rasmus Munk and his team see themselves as pioneers, and thus take inspiration from and refer to other pioneers (e.g., Ferran Adrià, Marco Evaristi). They seek to push the boundaries of the conventional and the 'already done.'	"He wrote on this article that he didn't want to ever put it up again, the art piece, because it created too much hate and damage. I thought it was quite interesting, so we would like to make homage to that art piece, but without of course showing it in a blender, because he had said that he didn't want to have that going anymore." (Chef-Entrepreneur)	"We often encounter environments and systems that seem prepared for anything but people. As if the encounter had been theoretically prepared, instead of practically. At Alchemist we want this encounter to be ruled by practice, not theory." (Archival)
	Inspired by others - The team at Alchemist understands that boundaryless curiosity will lead into unknown territory, and thus seek to learn from and refer to acknowledged experts and peers alike in their quest for knowledge and novelty.	"Ever since I was in culinary school Ferran Adrià has been my biggest gastronomical influence. Having the opportunity to cook for him in my own restaurant was a dream come true." (Archival)	"Me and Louisa's role is to pull him a bit in that direction so it's understandable. But it doesn't work if he doesn't pull in the other direction doing crazy stuff and like, "Ah, okay, well maybe it doesn't fit in, but..." And that makes it dynamic and that makes it more fun." (Head of Communication)
Basic motivation	Social responsibility - Social issues are central at Alchemist. Everyone there shares a strong sensibility and feels responsible for contributing to the wellbeing of society and the planet.	"I do a lot of humanitarian work and I had an organization called skew [...]where we do Christmas for families, with kids who have a little hard time in life. We do that every Christmas Eve, the whole day." (Chef-Entrepreneur)	"We are participating in a project where we during the next 6 months will try to improve the quality of snacks served at the cancer ward at Righshospitalet (The National hospital) here in Copenhagen." (Archival)
	Business responsibility - Munk is serious about his role as a business owner and prioritizes the wellbeing and development of his team. Likewise, all employees put the collective first to ensure success of their peers and the restaurant alike.	"So, it's been developing from the start. We closed down the old space, I didn't fire any staff, so all of the staff is there still, and they were processing and working on the new dishes." (Archival)	"To exercise hospitality with care often means putting yourself aside in favor of others. We believe that this approach gives so much back that everybody wins. We are hosts for the sake of each other and the guest." (Archival)

we really can feel that they leave with a catharsis that is more than just the food, that's the best for me." (Archival data)

Another example of how Alchemist embodies curiosity is through evocative identity symbolism that creates an atmosphere conducive to exploration. In line with the name's inherent symbolism, Alchemist sets itself apart through the play with dark and mystical elements in its visual appearance. Particularly in the context of Nordic cuisine, characterized by bright, delicate, and minimalistic features, Alchemist is a sharp contrast. The purpose of this dark and mystical appearance, as Rasmus Munk points out, lies in the fact that:

"The darker and [more] mystical the universe is around you, the more you discover yourself, the dishes, and the experience ... I think for me it encapsulates you in a setting where you lose a little bit time and space".

Moreover, Alchemist invites reflection about established assumptions in this time and space. Its front door is an illustrative example (see Table 3). A piece of art created by Maria Rubinke, the door is called 'I found myself within a forest dark' and is inspired by the Hieronymus Bosch painting 'The Garden of Earthly Delights.' Interestingly though, the purpose of evocative identity symbolism is not to contrast others or to be the anti-thesis to the Nordic movement in gastronomy. In fact,

organizational members of Alchemist take pride in creating their own space, which they describe as "entering their universe" (see visual evidence and description in Table 3).

Furthermore, the second process to foster distinctiveness entails upholding Alchemist's curiosity through a narrative of uniqueness, which is achieved through different activities, such as aligning with the ancient alchemists' mission. This alignment is visible in Alchemist's deep-seated values of curiosity, disruption, and evolution that make this place unique, not only in the eyes of external observers but equally in those of its employees. The name 'Alchemist' clearly signals the organization's *raison d'être*, with the organization's internal narrative repeatedly referring to ancient alchemists as a source of inspiration (see Table 3).

Another example of how Alchemist's curiosity is upheld through a narrative of uniqueness is the emphasis on Rasmus Munk's unconventional trajectory. Doing so helps Alchemist as an organization to concretize its identity as a place representative of the free spirits of artists, which Munk identifies with just as much, if not even more, as the traditional role of 'chef':

"Personally, I don't like much the 'Chef' definition, since it represents only one of my duties here at Alchemist: I am the co-owner and I supervise the activities of R&D, interior design, VFX, tableware and

Table 3
Exemplary quotes of second-order categories.

Conceptual Categories	Empirical Themes	Textual Evidence	Visual Evidence & Description
Curiosity-Endorsing Distinctiveness	Evocative identity symbolism	Identity-Embedded Organizational Curiosity	
		“So, my idea was at Alchemist, we’re always working in the concept - that it has never been a dish - about the metamorphoses because of course, like a lot of the marketing visuals for our Alchemist is like the butterfly. And even like, they, once were, when they were opening, it’s like the worm making the morphosis and going out and all this kind of thing.” (Head of R&D) “In the same way as the ancient alchemists sought to fuse philosophy, natural science, religion and the arts to create a new understanding of the world order, the aim of Holistic Cuisine is to redefine and broaden our understanding of the concept of dining.” (Archival data)	 “This room and that giant door just kind of like opened on its own this is like a, feels like you’re in a theater or an illusion, no idea what to expect.” (Archival data)
	Narrative of uniqueness	“The shallow idea of alchemists is that they wanted to turn lead into gold, right? [...] But [they] wanted to change the perception of the world. And [...] they had the idea that if you succeeded to change inside yourself, if you reached a higher level inside, you could also affect the outside world.” (Head of Communications) “Rasmus Munk was born in 1991 in the town of Randers in Jutland – predestined, he says, ‘to become either a mechanic or join a biker gang.’ Fine dining and intricate cooking were far away from Rasmus’ culinary upbringing [...]. Thanks to a friend, who persuaded Rasmus to join him at catering college, his life took an unexpected turn.” (Archival data)	 “Do you want to join us at the R&D department at Alchemist? We are currently working on topics like insects, by-products from the seafood- and wine industry, food waste, invasive plant and animal species, 3D printers, sensory analysis and alchemy. We are looking for interns to join the team [...] learning and using new top equipment in our test kitchen in an interdisciplinary environment. Every intern will have his/her own research project as well as working and helping the R&D team.” (Archival data)
	Continuous integration of new points of view	“[Rasmus is] setting up this multimedia publishing artistic team. He’s sort of, I think not really consciously, but sort of setting, building something that’s more than a restaurant. We have a composer on the payroll.” (Head of Communications) “It is maybe a dream, but we really want to have that dream with people. I like when people say ‘it’s a dream to be here.’ Because it’s not only our dreams, but we’ve built a dream together with the team.” (General Manager)	 “But the reason that we can have such an ambitious nonalcoholic menu is partly because [...] the restaurant manager, is very interested in alcohol-free pairing.” (General Manager)
Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition	Periodic large-scale re-interpretation	“There is some plan with Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra to do something in the next incarnation.” (Head of Communications) “Since the original restaurant opened in 2015, Munk’s philosophy has evolved. He credits that to time spent in Japan and an increasing appreciation for art. Patrons will still find disruptive dishes, but Munk has another moniker for his cooking: holistic. He thinks of it as an experience that stimulates the mind as well as the palate by incorporating theater, art, and technology.” (Archival data)	 “The second new installation room is completely and utterly bright pink with tacky decorations in every possible shade of the color. [...] I suspect I share an inner yearning to break free with most people in the world during the pandemic. Even though I understand why the restrictions are necessary – it has been challenging for me that outside commands and authorities are dictating and changing my life’s work. The Pink Room was a way to channel this’ [...], says Rasmus Munk.” (Archival data)

clothing production, performance and communication. Basically, a form of eclecticism which I find particularly adapt to a contemporary cook: more cultured and involved” (Archival data)

Rasmus Munk sees the mindset of artists as similar to that of chefs of his caliber because both “have big visions in most of the things they’re doing, and not get compromised or limited in a way.” Furthermore, Ramus Munk’s trajectory and the free artistic spirit it creates help Alchemist to function as an ever-changing but cohesive team:

“I see it as this space rocket that we’re all trying to go up into space, and it’s not like we’re climbing the same ladder. It’s more like we’re all trying to hang onto this ship that’s flying upwards. And we’re all trying to fix this ship and make it better as we go because we all want to go to the moon.” (Sound Designer)

Like other iconic artists, Alchemist as an entity endures, yet concurrently further develops through permanent Alchemist-distinctive change that is driven by curiosity.

4.1.2. Curiosity-promoting redefinition

This process deals with how *new points of view are continuously integrated* to nurture Alchemist's curiosity, and second, how Alchemist's curiosity is invigorated by a *periodic re-interpretation of Alchemist's identity* on a large-scale.

Continuously integrating new points of view is achieved from different angles. For example, Alchemist sets itself apart from most other haute cuisine restaurants by constantly enlisting new disciplines. Alchemist's employees come from diverse disciplines and include audio and visual specialists, a theatre dramaturge, dedicated kombucha and kefir experts, and an entire R&D team. However, the difference regarding who Alchemist is does not merely lie in the fact that Alchemist has multiple disciplines under one roof; it is about how people think about Alchemist and their role in its success:

"His remit isn't just about the slavish adherence to some kind of aesthetic ideal, but of trying to solve world problems in a holistic way. To this end, a large part of his budget for the restaurant has gone on hiring around 50 experts – food philosophers, sound designers, dramaturges and scientists – to consult on the finer details, with some surprising answers." (Archival data)

Another activity used to continuously integrate new points of view is literally and consciously incorporating new perspectives over time, which helps Alchemist in the longer run to widen and readjust its identity and its view of Holistic Cuisine:

"They were thinking about having a dish made from a waste production from blue fin tuna. And I was like, No! I don't think that's a good idea. [...] And we had a big discussion, and I was very intent on. Because [...] it doesn't tell a story that we want. We don't want to put the world's most endangered fish on our menu, even if it's a byproduct of them catching it for somebody else because that's sort of increases the value." (Head of Communications)

Finally, leaving room for individual interpretations of meaning supports the early stages of the ideation process when words are missing to achieve a precise description of the idea at hand. Alchemist's sound designer explains a typical encounter with Rasmus Munk, who was talking to him about a new idea. In such moments, understanding becomes a bi-directional process within which different viewpoints and perspectives are contrasted:

"I will look at him, I'll try to determine what that emotion is inside of him. I will just... It's kind a lot about reading him, like when he says 'mysterious,' is he referring to a mysterious Disney Forest or a mysterious horror forest? and I won't ask him that specific question, but I will kind of ask leading questions that will reveal more about what the emotion is that he wants." (Sound Designer)

Finally, Alchemist's curiosity is invigorated by periodically re-interpreting its identity on a large scale to enable Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition, which is done by referring to past versions as "incarnations," meaning that part of the Holistic Cuisine concept is the creation of periodic themes, but also the acknowledgment that what Alchemist currently is, is still evolving. For instance, the Head of Communications pointed out that their "theme for this incarnation of Alchemist is diversity, so that's the major theme."

Another way Alchemist invigorates curiosity is by re-assessing appropriate activities for each incarnation, showing how Alchemist is also actively reactive to outside changes to remain appropriate and impactful. The visual evidence and description in Table 3 illustrate how, following the pandemic, the 'Pink Room' was created (replacing a previous installation) to address the feeling of wanting to break free brought up by lockdown and confinement.

Finally, Alchemist also intentionally develops a self-concept along incarnations to enable Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition, as the following archival quote highlights powerfully:

"To Munk's surprise the little gesture worked. That dish in the middle of his dinner-meets-performance-art menu led to 1,500 people who dined in this tiny Copenhagen restaurant to become organ donors. 'That was quite amazing,' Munk says. 'It was a turning point for us, that this was possible to do with food.' Yet not everything Munk wanted to do was possible—not in that original incarnation of Alchemist at least. To truly merge food and theater, he'd require something bigger than his tiny restaurant. He'd need a grand stage to fit his outsized ambitions. So Munk shut down Alchemist in 2017 and has reemerged this month with a 50-course, multi-room, sensory overload of a restaurant that's art, activism and eating all in one." (Archival data)

While Rasmus Munk provides a clear picture of what Alchemist is, who they are as an organization, and thus what they do, there is space provided to allow organizational members to make sense of Alchemist and find their respective roles in its universe. Still, with all the clear demonstration of Alchemist's identity and its consistency among all activities, its guiding values, norms, and beliefs revolve around curiosity, originality, and transformation, which are volatile. As Rasmus Munk points out:

"You feel like now there's so much more that makes sense, and the puzzle... It's getting there. But I still feel like I miss thousands of the pieces in it [...] I don't know yet, and I don't hope I have the recipe now for where it ends, because then I don't think we are innovative enough."

Yet, he also cautions, "You cannot lose your soul in the process!"

4.2. Trigger of internalized curiosity

At Alchemist, the process of curiosity externalization begins with the triggering of internalized curiosity at the individual level. What anchors this process in the individual plane is that it triggers the different internalized curiosities of various individuals before they engage in the synergistic activities that characterize the process of curiosity externalization. Specifically, during this crucial precursor to curiosity externalization, Rasmus Munk and his team members individually engage in one of two sub-processes. Either they *Seize Learning Opportunities by engaging in active exploration and inciting serendipitous impulses*. Alternatively, they *Challenge Preconceptions by highlighting thematic issues and pushing gastronomic boundaries*.

Seizing Learning Opportunities refers to searching for ways to trigger one's curiosity by actively fostering them or letting them emerge more serendipitously. The former is activated through different self-motivated steps, such as adopting a scientific inquiry approach, actively looking for new sources of inspiration, or continuously engaging in educational activities. For example, the General Manager mentioned that, like scientists in a lab, individuals at Alchemist systematically investigate phenomena and "just try stuff. And then if it doesn't work, [they] just tweak it a little bit... and [...] try again. It's a lot of experimentation for sure." The team also makes a point to look for inspiration outside of other restaurants, in line with Alchemist's unconventional approach to haute cuisine, as the Creative Director explains:

"What is it out there that has something that's similar? We can learn from it. It's movies by Christopher Nolan. Inception... Everything by Christopher Nolan is crazy... when the film stops, you are more excited than in the beginning. Again, we try to be open for exploration [...] And we look outside, we look at who designed Björk's costumes that are amazing. And the art she's doing. Look at Björk, her stage prep, music, videos."

The license for blue-sky thinking encourages individuals at Alchemist to surpass the typical boundaries of their disciplines, which are not confined by typical cuisine-related topics. Instead, because of the

Holistic Cuisine approach, people from all departments can initiate and contribute to a process of curiosity externalization:

“So, it’s fun to see how food suddenly could be a form of art..., and inspire me to [say:] ‘Hey, maybe I should look at other art forms instead of just the things that I move around in’.” (3D Animator & Designer)

To keep abreast of this active approach to exploration, individuals continuously engage in educational activities. These can be sessions built around organizational members’ competencies and sessions that bring in external speakers, suppliers, or collaborators like researchers. These sessions aim to share insights about these experts’ respective fields, either to develop ongoing projects or provide yet another fruitful

ground that may spark ideas.

“I have scientists coming next week with aromas and smells. And there’s two scientific articles about... what they do with Nike. A shopping mall, where they had one aroma in one of the stores and another aroma in the other... the shoes were exactly the same, but they sold 88% more in one of the stores than the other one because the aroma was changed. Like, could you have an aroma in a lounge where all the food tasted 88% better? I think there’s so many things we haven’t yet discovered in the whole sensory experience. And I think that’s really what we want to achieve in the longer term.” (Chef-Entrepreneur)

Likewise, curious impulses can also come serendipitously, such as,

Table 4

Exemplary quotes of second-order categories.

Conceptual Categories	Empirical Themes	Textual Evidence	Visual Evidence & Description
Trigger of Internalized Curiosity			
Seizing Learning Opportunities	Active exploration	“Like you say, 90% on inspirations, reading scientific articles, work at MIT, I had the luck to work at IDEO in San Francisco for some months. From there, I get a lot of inspiration. Definitely not look at restaurants.” (Head of R&D) “So [the Floor Manager] has every month one of the staff with her, the whole month so the guy is trained, understand all the processes and then we ask them every month, at the end of the juice trial if they can come up with a juice. Then we can put it on a menu, or we can learn something.” (General Manager)	 “On one of previous visits to beyondcoffee.dk we saw how they reproduce their mushroom mycelium in PDA petri dishes [...] so the idea was quite simple: to create a dish where you eat the whole petri dish, including the raw fresh oyster mushroom mycelium.” (Archival data)
	Serendipitous impulses	“We don’t ever give answers. As one said, if you want to keep up, you have to have the right answers. And I’m saying, ‘yeah, yeah, sure.’ A better truth is, if you want to stay ahead, you have to have the right question. It’s always about the question. [...] The question is always, what is this? Where, where, how is it around the corner?” (Creative Director) “But the general dialogue is very fluid and [the Creative Director is] very open and it’s very much, I feel like more friends in some aspect. There’s a friendly tone to it, at least in the creative team, where it is we can talk about stuff and we can laugh about it and we can be like, ‘oh, do you want to hear this stupid idea I have?’ And they’ll be like, ‘yeah.’” (Sound Designer)	 “So Andy Warhol came maybe one week before we opened but we had a banana dessert, so before it was more about having a dessert with South American flavors. [...] Then somebody came walking past, saying that looks kind a lot like Andy Warhol. And Rasmus was like ‘that’s a good idea, let’s make it Andy Warhol.’” (Assistant Head Chef)
	Highlighting thematic issues	“What I combine with artists is that you are a very creative person and doing new stuff and also are recognized as an artist by the government and the culture section in the common - and chefs and field of food is not that. And that’s actually what we also want to see if we can achieve to, at the end of the day, get food on the same level as art and culture.” (Chef-Entrepreneur) “So in the winter time, we were actually researching about invasive species in Denmark. And two of the biggest culprits was jellyfish and Rosa Rugosa, like the [...] wild roses. [...] They grow everywhere here, especially around the coastal lines. They really have taken over. So we wanted to kind of do a dish based around that.” (Chef / R&D Kitchen)	 “The dessert is created to raise awareness about the importance of blood donation, which is an easy opportunity for almost everyone to actually save lives. 39% of all blood donated here in Denmark will be used in treating patients with cancer.” (Archival data)
Challenging Pre-Conceptions	Pushing gastronomic boundaries	“I think of it a little bit like a swimmer in a pool. They get much more speed if they can kick off something and that’s just sort of, we have this restraint, like let’s see if we can do something with it.” (Creative Director) “King Crab tail is something we will have today. We are doing a collaboration with a company called MS Donna. It is a Norwegian company, a sustainable Norwegian company that basically sends a King Crab to, say, most of the restaurants here. But what the difference is he’s giving us all the things he doesn’t sell.” (Head of R&D)	 “Rasmus Munk’s attempt to create the perfect omelet. After years at culinary school trying to create a perfect cigar-shaped omelet, and eating hundreds of bad omelets during his travels, he set his mind to creating the perfect rendition.” (Archival data)

for example, the case of naming the "Andy Warhol" dessert (see Table 4). Nevertheless, the individual must stay alert and open to perceive and recognize those impulses. For example, the Head of Communications mentioned the moment when they hired a dramaturge and Rasmus Munk encountered the world of theatre for the first time in his life:

"[S]he took him along to the Royal Danish Theater. And he was like, 'Okay, what is this? What's catharsis? When does that happen? And what is...?' So, he's really curious and open to a lot of different art forms."

Equally so, serendipitous impulses are more frequently encountered when in a constant state of questioning. This process implies staying reflective and reflexive about curiosity itself, which requires the team to be "curious about that which [they] do not understand or towards which [they] feel foreign" (Archival data). To foster these serendipitous impulses, individuals further cultivate a state of open-mindedness by welcoming spontaneous ideas without judgment, as explained by the Creative Director. Boredom is one such state that has the power to trigger the mind and welcome ideas:

"I try... [to] have at least one day when I'm bored for at least several hours. [...] And then that sense of boredom, it's extremely exciting. But then some weird ideas come up and the brain starts... to entertain itself and ask all sort of weird stuff." (Creative Director)

Challenging Preconceptions is a process by which Rasmus Munk and his team members individually either *highlight thematic issues* or *push gastronomic boundaries* to trigger their internalized curiosity. The first process includes examples such as elevating the cultural standing of haute cuisine, using cases of social injustice as inspiration, and inquiring into pressing ecological concerns.

Elevating the cultural standing of haute cuisine deals with the desire to demonstrate the importance that haute cuisine, with all its diverse facets and styles, be publicly recognized as a cultural heritage. At Alchemist, one can hear and feel everywhere that what they do is not about making "a tasty, good dish. It needs to be much more than that!" (Head of R&D). However, the activities of Alchemist or places like Noma and other haute cuisine restaurants, are only "recognized as a craftsmanship" (Chef-Entrepreneur), which is why it can still be "sensitive to call chefs [artists]" (Chef-Entrepreneur). Yet, recognition as cultural heritage would make it easier to acknowledge and elevate haute cuisine to an art form, so places like Alchemist could benefit from the same public support that, for example, museums receive:

"And it's funny [...] the tourists coming to Copenhagen, mainly [...] come for food and for gastronomy [...], but you don't get any cultural fees from the government to do something like that. But what they should do is maybe take the 10 best fine dining restaurants [...] and say you don't need to pay tax on food ingredients or whatever." (Chef-Entrepreneur)

The cultural significance of Alchemist's artistic qualities is recognized increasingly, also by the well-known Danish gallerist Bo Bjerggaard:

"I believe in the idea of giving the guest a unique and unexpected high-quality experience that makes use of other cultural disciplines as a qualified supplement to the culinary one. I'm looking forward to a thoughtful meal with a bombardment of the senses that ends with the right 'gut feeling' and where words are barely found sufficient to describe the emotion." (Archival data)

Alchemist's 'thoughtful meals' often highlight thematic issues by engaging with cases of social injustice as inspiration. For instance, the development of the dish 'Hunger' was set in motion by a campaign that Rasmus Munk saw when he was driving to work:

"...on the backside of a bus there was this horrible campaign about children dying of hunger and you could see the ribs... 'Can you

showcase that rib effect of these children in front of the guest? One-to-one showcase this naked kid?... [S]hould it be a silicone very realistic purpose? Or should it be more naked more hunger-ish [...]" (Chef-Entrepreneur)

Similarly, inquiring into pressing ecological concerns is another source of inspiration as the message of the dish 'Plastic Fantastic' illustrates:

"[It] comments on the fact that up to one third of all cod caught in Northern Europe contain plastic. Even in the Mariana Trench at 11 kms depth microplastics are found in the tiny shellfish who live there." (Archival data)

To further challenge preconceptions, Rasmus Munk and his team members try to push gastronomic boundaries individually. This boundary-pushing is practiced, for example, by playing with the traditional expectations of a meal. Gastronomy, in general, and classical French gastronomy, in particular, have influential and traditional institutional norms and boundaries about what a meal is and what it can and cannot entail. At Alchemist, these norms and boundaries are actively challenged, which does not mean that they are systematically denied but rather that their initial motivation and underlying rationales are examined and contrasted with different viewpoints, framings, or interpretations. Rasmus Munk and numerous team members highlight their need for these norms and boundaries as a form of curiosity springboard:

"For example, we are working now on disgust and gastronomy and how we can use the disgust sensory in an experience... Because we always eat for pleasure, but we can eat with disgust as well." (Chef / R&D Kitchen)

Often, this practice happens in liaison with exploring the potential of new and repurposed food items. For instance, human blood is usually not seen as food for human consumption within the traditional gastronomic boundaries. However, theoretically and technically, it can be a new food item. The following example impressively showcases how the curiosity of individuals at Alchemist can push any boundary, even to the extreme:

"We were thinking of doing dishes with human blood because here in Denmark, the blood bank throws out all the blood every two months; it's garbage. And I think Rasmus has a friend over there... they were talking whether this is actually legal to use it... because it's tested... it's blood that they would put in other people's bodies... And then we even put some boundaries in... 'Maybe it's too much?' It's just common sense for us... how many guests do you think will eat human blood?" (Head of R&D)

At times, new food items are also used in more indirect ways, for example, in the preparation process rather than as a full-blown ingredient:

"We are working with ants, but not for eating right now. Formica Rufa is the name of the ant, super famous in the North or Europe. They have an acid [...] you can collate with... So, we can try to figure out the technique on how we can make cheese with ants." (Chef / R&D Kitchen)

Moreover, repurposing food items is another way individuals at Alchemist push gastronomic boundaries. For example, rabbit ears are an unused by-product and were thus used to produce "a fruity spirit" (Archival data) named the 'fur martini.' In addition, developing new culinary techniques can be a powerful way to push gastronomic boundaries and challenge preconceptions. For instance, cherry lees, a residue from cherry wine and juice making, were used in a new technique-related experiment, which, to the surprise of the team members involved, turned the lees into butter.

Our findings so far have shown how individuals at Alchemist go

through a process in which they need to de-familiarize themselves with the familiar with the things they take for granted and often use automatically. In what follows, we show how curiosity is externalized from the individual to the collective level. Our findings show that this process follows the process of familiarizing the unfamiliar, which is carried out by embedding new developments into a cohesive organizational identity.

4.3. Curiosity externalization

As much as Rasmus Munk is Alchemist, his vision for the organization is carried by the almost 100 people that permanently and temporarily support Alchemist in coming to life. Not surprisingly, in many ways, his curiosity and the ambition he has set forth have attracted many likeminded employees and collaborators that see and seek inspiration in what Alchemist is aiming to accomplish. This phase of the process consists of three distinct and consecutive phases: Integrating (unbounded sourcing of inspiration), Interweaving (transdisciplinary shaping of ideas), and Imprinting (creating a recognizable style).

4.3.1. Integrating – Unbounded sourcing of inspiration

This collective level phase is set into motion by *encouraging team members to get personally involved* and by Rasmus Munk and his team members jointly *engaging in boundary spanning*.

While these activities unfold at the collective level, the beginning of this Curiosity Externalization process is a phase that explicitly encourages team members to get personally involved by contributing their background (“Who you are”). For example, every new member of the organization is invited to bring in a rare ingredient from their home country to be displayed on the ‘taste wall’ of the R&D kitchen and potentially included in culinary developments. Rasmus Munk needs to foster a work environment within which organizational members are reminded of what Alchemist stands for while actively inviting them to participate in its evolution (see Table 5).

To encourage team members to get personally involved, they are also asked to incorporate their personal goals and aspirations (“What you want”). While many of the R&D projects are initiated by Rasmus Munk, it was explained and shown to us that projects also emerge from other team members. For instance, the visual team regularly experiments with ideas or is triggered by certain ingredients used, for example, in the R&D kitchen or the beverage department. Rasmus Munk, when he explained this phase of the process, said that he still does not “know if it’s completely the right way to do it” but that “a lot of the chefs that are working here now [are] coming with a lot of ideas.”

Finally, team members are encouraged to get personally involved by leveraging their unique skills and expertise (“What you can do”), which requires the openness to integrate ideas and the *praxis* to develop a systematic inquisitiveness further. At Alchemist, this is facilitated through a systematic agenda of studying each project from the ground up with the support of people with extensive expertise. Alchemist prides itself in likely having “the highest academic rate in any [restaurant]”:

“[E]ven the girl doing kombucha is writing a thesis. The composer, he’s been to the conservatory for four years... the booking manager, she has a degree in experience management, and another team member has a degree in food science, while some in the R&D kitchen hold degrees in microbiology.” (Head of Communications)

While multiple concurrent ideas evolve and get integrated into the Alchemist universe, the development of the overarching dramaturgical sequencing and the Holistic Cuisine concept must be brought together. This means individual curiosity needs to spill over to ignite the curiosities of other organizational members to motivate them to bring in their expertise. Only then do the individual pieces become one coherent entity.

Next to encouraging team members to get personally involved, Rasmus Munk and his team members jointly engage in boundary spanning. One way of doing that is by building complementary competences,

for example, by forming the right teams:

“I ... am very emotional and very creative. So I think it’s just that’s why we work together as a team very well because sometimes [the General Manager]... [is] extremely strategic... no way that she would just experiment with something before everything is done and ready. I am like, I can start 10 projects and then I will finish them up. So, I think that’s also the reason to be a part of the team, very important. You cannot be alone in this project.” (Floor Manager)

Another way to engage in boundary spanning is inciting reciprocal influencing across boundaries, which is not entirely new as a concept in the culinary arts. However, it is traditionally rooted in the kitchen, moving unidirectionally outwards to other disciplines if they have a support function for the kitchen. At Alchemist, this internal exchange of ideas and working together is practiced in a more multidirectional manner, which speaks to the organization’s ability as a collective to play ideas off each other:

“[I]t’s only us that limit ourselves right now to not take the next step on whatever that will be in some of the dishes.” (Rasmus Munk)

Thus, it is not uncommon to see this ‘cross-pollination’ of ideas at Alchemist through concepts or ingredients circulating throughout the organization. For instance, as detailed in Table 5, a particular type of cherry was introduced by one department. Its use has spread to other departments to the point where it shows up at multiple points in the menu. Lastly, Rasmus Munk and his team members jointly engage in boundary spanning by driving innovation through internal and external collaborations (e.g., with the Copenhagen Philharmonic for the ‘Lulu’ installation, see visual evidence and description in Table 5):

“I look a lot into the quotes and... written things by Aristotle. We’re working right now on research on Albert Einstein and Edison with light. It’s quite interesting to see some of those profiles... Andy Warhol... So, different artists, scientists as well ... some of them have been giving something really back to us... Philosophers like Vincent Hendricks. We had a couple of meetings with him, and he gave me his new book, and I read that, he’s quite inspiring as well. Because I think he brings something to me that I don’t know.” (Chef-Entrepreneur)

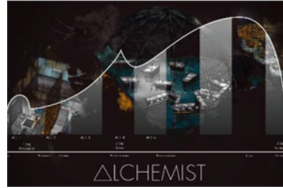
4.3.2. Interweaving - transdisciplinary shaping of ideas

This aspect of the Curiosity Externalization process is driven by, firstly, Rasmus Munk and his team members jointly *promoting holistic thinking* and, secondly, *composing a coherent narrative*. The former utilizes the full breadth and depth of creative canvases, for instance, art, music, and architecture. Rasmus Munk, as can be seen by the example of a mushroom dish shown in Table 5, “like[s] to be creative in other canvases as well... [not] only the plate,” and so ideas for the dish traveled through the Alchemist universe, in this particular case from the kitchen to the dome and back to the kitchen.

Likewise, combining cuisine, science, art, and performance, Alchemist focuses on an all-encompassing sensory experience, unlike traditional restaurants that focus mainly on the dishes and service quality. Here, the example of the dome with its “big screen to project ideas” (Head of Communications) comes to mind. Its unique aesthetic power, in combination with the food, sounds, and other stimulations, creates an inescapable impact on the senses and intellect where ideas are developing, as illustrated by the following anecdote about a guest:

“I think a few days ago... there was one of the guests who only managed to sit in [the ‘heartbeat’ projection in the dome] for five minutes and then she had to leave the room and wait until heartbeat was over. She asked: ‘Hey, could I get the vegetarian menu?’ when she came back. And then when she was upstairs to figure out with herself that, ‘Hey, all the vegetarian dishes I had were really good. I actually think I might be a vegetarian.’ It sparked something within

Table 5
Exemplary quotes of second-order categories.

Conceptual Categories	Empirical Themes	Textual Evidence	Visual Evidence & Description
Integrating – Unbounded sourcing of inspiration	Encouraging personal involvement	“When the old Alchemist closed down so obviously Rasmus took an R&D team for developing dishes and then [the General Manager] and our Head Sommelier and Wine Director, [...] they started thinking, ‘okay, we have one or two years with the window,’ and she made a little master plan to master the water kefir and kombucha.” (Floor Manager)	
		“My goal always with everything you will see in all the projects we were talking about, I push a lot on doing scientific articles. Right now, we are working on seven different scientific articles. Of course, they probably will take a year and a half or something like that. But we have [...] our in-house scientists, and she's fully dedicated to the articles.” (Head of R&D)	
	Enabling boundary spanning	“The fundamental formula of the restaurant meal has changed very little in the last 100 years – it basically works according to the same script everywhere. When I started to investigate how theatre can enrich gastronomy together with our Dramaturge [...] it dawned on me how similar the dramaturgy of a restaurant meal is to that of theatre. It made so many things in my identity as a chef make sense.” (Archival data)	
		“I think they're very open. I think they learn so much from our department as well. We brought the five state cherry to this house and looking, that we found the cherry is now using two or three times on the menu.” (General Manager)	
Interweaving – Transdisciplinary shaping of ideas	Promoting holistic thinking	“What I love about Alchemist is that we have created a space where you can be creative on more than just one canvas. That we through interdisciplinary collaborations and art can create a holistic dining experience that allows food to be experienced in different ways – also beyond the plate.” (Archival data)	
	Composing a coherent narrative	“But as the senses help us... like the feeling, aesthetics, the thickness of the wings as they spread and the wall. [...] And then we ask ourselves the question, technically, how is this? What is the reference? Can we do this different? Should we move that. And then technically, or logically, we go high level again. And then we say, what is this? If you think about it intellectually.” (Creative Director)	
		“... what, what kind of carrot is this? [...] But for 99% of all the people, this feels like [...] blah blah blah [...]. It doesn't go in. But when you tell a story about, ‘okay, I was out fishing and I got a cod and opened it up and there was plastic inside. And this is what you're going to eat.’ It's something you remember, right?” (Head of Communications)	
		And then, you begin to ask: ‘Why are we doing this? What is the purpose for this? And then, what are the benefits? And what do you lose, for example, with putting masks on all the front of house? And you lose a lot of the heart warm from the front of house [...] a lot of the translation from what are the kitchen is doing [...]?’ And what are we trying to say about the dish?” (Chef-Entrepreneur)	

her for her to help figure out something for herself.” (3D Animator & Designer)

In all this transdisciplinary shaping of ideas, it is important to actively work on never losing sight of the bigger picture, which means concretely connecting the dots between inspirations, but equally filtering out inconsistencies where individual parts may be exciting but

collectively do not align. These filters help to make the more controversial ideas palatable to achieve impact or reject them from the menu, as the Head of Communications remembered:

“He had a dish, which was like a frozen tartare, which apparently was a technique that was really, really hard to achieve... I couldn't even eat it; it tasted like cold iron... And I was like: ‘This is hard to

Table 6

Exemplary quotes of second-order categories.

Conceptual Categories	Empirical Themes	Textual Evidence	Visual Evidence & Description
Curiosity Externalization			
Imprinting – Creating a recognizable style	Rejecting institutional conformity	“Of course, there’s ambition to get Michelin stars, but it’s never been the overall ambition, because then we would have done it a lot easier for ourselves. 15 courses, not any actors, not any tongue, not anything to question if the mark gets nicer? And so on, so we will not change anything.” (Head of Communications) “I feel at least, the last couple of years, it’s important to have that frame on the restaurant and the industry and the table setting, the dishes, because then you can easier, I feel like it’s easier for me to break through it.” (Chef-Entrepreneur)	 “And then Marco Evaristti came into the restaurant and ate, and after he got this dish, and I explained to him it was actually inspired by him [...]. And then he was so touched that he said, ‘you need to do what you need to... You need to put it in a blender, you need to do my art piece further on here in the restaurant, it would be nice for me.’ And it was the first meeting for me with an artist, and he invited me to his atelier. [...] So, I [...] bought 15 blenders, and then from that day on we had it in his art piece from there.” (Chef-Entrepreneur)
	Actualizing the organization’s mission	“Because we use different knowledge about... We use art, we use knowledge from the kitchen. You use design engineering to create everything. So for me this kind of restaurant is in the Alchemist. There are no more restaurant like Alchemist nowadays.” (Assistant Head Chef) “Instead of trying to be different, we’re trying to be us.” (Creative Director)	 “[Guilty Pleasure] is a call to action. We want to create a movement in the European restaurant industry to make better choices when selecting chocolate – thereby putting pressure on retailers and chocolate brands to take action against child labour. [...]” (Archival data)

love. This is... it’s not... it’s interesting, but it doesn’t really taste good.’ There were so many people saying that it didn’t really taste good. So, that went off even though they’d invested a lot of research in it... if the taste doesn’t deliver, if the flavors don’t deliver, he can scratch it.”

Ultimately, Rasmus Munk and his team members have far-reaching ambitions. However, they also know that pushing the boundaries and driving innovation requires a palatable approach. That is, creations must “taste good also to convince the guests that innovation is a way forward.” (Chef-Entrepreneur).

The second Interweaving process, composing a coherent narrative, is achieved by allowing for an organic evolution of storylines, not forcing their integration into the experience until they make sense, as the example below demonstrates:

“...we have this Amber dish with the ant inside of it and we wanted to create this beautiful Amber universe, but we figured out it didn’t work on the dome due to colors and lighting and everything. But then the Amber idea returned later as a new idea for content where we have this mushroom universe... We want to have ants crawling around and then suddenly one of the ants gets entrapped in an Amber piece that falls down on it. So, you can make the connection with that.” (3D Animator & Designer)

Similarly, because Alchemist sees many radical, engaging, and often controversial creations come about, storytelling must be built cohesively across departments and canvases alike. Cohesion is considered in-depth, going as far as discussing the implications of staff wearing masks (as shown in Table 5) or creating an ambient audio mix specifically tailored to match all other aspects of the experience, as detailed in the quote below:

“Diners listen to 10 playlists as they move through the venue’s zones,” says Munk. “We worked with [our Sound Designer] to create an ambient mix of audio to fit the visual content and the dining

experiences taking place in each space and then use RSS Audio for distribution and control of the 16 zones or sources.” (Archival data)

Moreover, to further support composing a coherent narrative, a dramaturgical structure must be given to the dining experience (see visual evidence and description in Table 5). Like in other artistic fields, such as opera, theater, or performance art, a coherent narrative creates a specific internal consistency, forming a dramaturgical sequence. For this reason, Alchemist employs a professional dramaturge who advises on the most impactful and palatable narrative by skillfully combining the novel’s exuberance with the familiar’s comfort. For instance, the walls of the New York Room (part of the ‘Alchemist Experience’ during data collection; now changed), the first room the diners used to enter when starting Alchemist’s holistic dining experience, was painted by Lady Aiko, a Japanese street artist from Brooklyn, and were an illustration of New York’s diversity. In this room, a performer silently instructed the diners on eating the first impression, the term used for Alchemist’s dishes. The first impression, ‘Travel Paper,’ was an edible paper with quotes about current matters such as the murder of George Floyd. This coherent narrative continues throughout the entire dining experience:

“...a lot of guests... mentioned... sometimes... you nearly want to cry, because you are afraid of taking it in. Or it’s too challenging. And then a dish after it becomes like an omelet, or whatever, you have something where you’re just: ‘Okay, I’m back again...I understand this!’ And I think that I found out for myself, the balance between that is quite important. So, it’s not like eight dishes in a row where you are lost... tough night, yeah.” (Chef-Entrepreneur)

4.3.3. Imprinting – Creating a recognizable style

This Curiosity Externalization process describes how Rasmus Munk and his team members jointly *reject institutional conformity*, on the one hand, and how they jointly *actualize the organization’s mission*, on the other hand. Rejecting institutional conformity is achieved in diverse ways. One is by pursuing evolution and progress, which, at Alchemist, is

not just rhetoric but a tangible mission that permeates the process of decision-making, as the Head of R&D explains: “I will only accept [a proposition] if it has something new or feels like something that is completely different.”

Such an ambition often requires breaking the mold of tradition. Rasmus Munk and his team members want to create new things distinct from the trends and topics they observe not only in Nordic regions but worldwide, such as healthy foods, local sourcing, and extravagant ingredients. Most restaurants would focus on these trends and topics and often follow a predetermined set of recipes that they know would make them succeed with the restaurant guides and investors, as the Head of Communications pointed out:

“A couple of years ago, I did a Nordic review and went to all the top Nordic restaurants. And when I came to old Alchemist, I said to myself, ‘Finally! There is someone doing something different.’ I don’t know if it’s the Michelin that has damaged the industry in some way? ...with this like-minded road... Or investors? ... Because they think the stars are so important. But I mean, in every other industry you get people who challenge all the time the consensus, and the paradigms. But restaurants? No, not so much.”

However, how do Rasmus Munk and his team members try to achieve this pioneer position and can reject institutional conformity? By using other pioneers as muses. At Alchemist, the muses are not ordinary people but other pioneers. For instance, in 2000, Marco Evaristti, a Danish artist with Chilean roots, caused a stir with his ‘Helena’ installation. It consisted of ten plugged-in Moulinex blenders with living goldfish, encouraging visitors to press the start button to make fish soup. Rasmus Munk said that Evaristti “intended to educate society about the way we treat our animals.” However, he faced severe backlash and decided never to show the installation again. The installation inspired Rasmus Munk, who created ‘an homage to that art piece’ while respecting Evaristti’s wish never to use blenders again. In its place, the Alchemist team served a hake and cod-like ceviche in a fishbowl. Evaristti visited Alchemist and was very touched when he experienced Rasmus Munk’s culinary homage to ‘Helena.’ Following their encounter, Evaristti invited Rasmus Munk to his atelier and permitted him to recreate the complete installation for the dish (see description in Table 6).

Furthermore, to actualize the organization’s mission, Rasmus Munk and his team members consider themselves as their benchmark, which requires them to connect their drive for curiosity back to Alchemist’s overarching identity as the ultimate filter that every action needs to pass. This filtering typically involves values and ensuring that Alchemist’s identity-related values are commonly understood and lived. For example, Alchemist has issued a manifesto detailing the principles guiding Holistic Cuisine on how to challenge “the preconceptions of what a meal can be through innovative thinking, curiosity, and a persistent desire to break new ground” (Archival data) and has also broken down the expectations into an employee handbook. Nevertheless, contrary to examples of standard operating procedures, this booklet emphasizes the importance of not mindlessly following guidelines:

“Some of these [procedures] are guidelines, and some of them are hard rules, but never forget to use your head: there will always be exceptions.” (Archival data).

A further Imprinting activity to actualize Alchemist’s mission is placing authenticity before difference. As shown in the following quote by Rasmus Munk, what Alchemist does is different. However, the main driving force of said difference is a strong desire to stay authentic to Alchemist’s mission:

“We go against what is the hot thing to do right now, and that’s a chance to take, but for me it makes sense. If I should do the other things, it would not be me and my kind of cooking. I think it’s

important that you need to stay true to yourself and your own thing.” (Archival data)

Nevertheless, how can an organization know it has actualized its mission? In Alchemist’s case, this happens, for example, by measuring success through social impact. Along with the desire for originality and uniqueness comes a need to make a difference – to have an impact. In other words, all the “dramatic things and fun things and things that [are] over the top... [Rasmus Munk and his team do not] want to do [them] just for doing [them]” (Chef-Entrepreneur). Part of Alchemist’s mission is how food could function as ‘a means to an end.’ Rather than using gastronomic and culinary experiences to escape from reality temporarily, Rasmus Munk and his team try to create an immersion into what reality is all about – making people think about social and ethical issues:

“[W]hen it comes to minimizing food waste, the industry has come a long way. I see it as my mission to take the discussion further and highlight the bigger picture. If we can make people stop and think, we are on the route towards change. (Archival data)

Hence, the team at Alchemist strives for meaningful impact and innovative ideas that bring about change in palatable ways. Referring to the introductory part of the findings section, where we introduced and explained the individual-level process of de-familiarizing the familiar, we have now entered the collective-level process of familiarizing the unfamiliar. This process is critical as it allows all Alchemist’s organizational members to act on their curiosity, which eventually allows them to develop Alchemist’s narrative further jointly. To that end, the organization’s identity takes a significant role in allowing Alchemist to remain a place that is consistent over time while allowing for its reinterpretation and further evolution.

5. Towards a process model of curiosity externalization

Fig. 2 illustrates the relationships among our constructs and presents a process model detailing a stable yet evolutionary context encompassing two phases of curiosity externalization. Our model proposes that, first and foremost, Alchemist’s organizational identity provides the context which drives the externalization of curiosity. Through the interplay of Curiosity-Endorsing Distinctiveness and Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition, Alchemist’s Identity-Embedded Organizational Curiosity acts as a source of momentum that continuously launches and re-launches the process of curiosity externalization. In the first and individual level phase named Trigger of Internalized Curiosity, individuals perceive stimuli that lead to Seizing Learning Opportunities or Challenging Preconceptions. This first phase motivates a de-familiarization from the familiar. It sets into motion the second and organizational level phase called Curiosity Externalization. In this second phase, de-familiarizing the familiar elicits an organizational process of familiarizing the unfamiliar through three distinct sub-steps of Integrating, Interweaving, and Imprinting. Finally, the two phases of de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar instigate the evolution of the organizational identity they are set within. Therefore, our process model is iterative, for once the externalized curiosity informs the organizational identity, it revises the individually internalized curiosity of Rasmus Munk and his team and, consequently, feeds back into a new process of curiosity externalization.

Drawing on our findings, we infer that the first phase, the Trigger of Internalized Curiosity, is the impetus of an individual curiosity process that grows to the organizational level when de-familiarizing the familiar. As a phase, it is both distinguishable from the externalized curiosity phase and evolving. Hence, we imply that the more often curiosity is externalized, the broader the range of perceived stimuli becomes. Simultaneously, however, the filtering-out of triggers that are unlikely to lead to an identity congruence at the organizational level becomes more informed. As a result, the individual phase of the Trigger of Internalized Curiosity is about a destabilizing curiosity that calls into

question the familiar and opens the gates to the unfamiliar. Hence, this phase is not about achieving many triggers but rather high-quality ones.

The second phase externalizes the individual curiosity to the organizational level, where it develops into a collective property, aiming to familiarize the unfamiliar through the dynamics of a stabilizing curiosity. This stabilizing curiosity is achieved through three sub-processes: Integrating, Interweaving, and Imprinting. Through Integrating, organizational members' involvement comes into play, combined with the spanning of boundaries through multidisciplinary internal and external collaboration. Through Interweaving, holistic thinking and coherent narrative are ignited, and thus focus and structure are fostered. Finally, through Imprinting, organizational members ensure that its mission is pursued and that it actively rejects conformity, staying authentic to its values, norms, and beliefs, hence its organizational identity.

Both phases of de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar are embedded in the organization's identity. The organization connects internalized and externalized curiosity through Curiosity-Endorsing Distinctiveness and Curiosity-Promoting Redefinition. It facilitates a self-reinforcing curiosity process that writes and rewrites the overarching narrative of the organization's identity. Given what has been said, our model is holistic, for it unites the internalized curiosity of the individual and the externalized curiosity of an organization in a self-reinforcing process.

It is important when considering our model that the individual level should be regarded as embedded within the organization and, as such, that triggering the curiosity of individuals is not a process taking place in isolated minds (Williams et al., 2022). The externalization of curiosity depends on the cooperation between the individual and organizational levels because individuals in organizations interact with each other, trigger and maintain each other's curiosity, and build and transform identities with others (Beswick, 2017). Externalization is, therefore, not a linear and mechanistic process going from the individual to the organization but a synergistic one that depends on curious people working together towards a common goal and dynamic forms of shared organizational identity.

6. Discussion

This study has addressed the crucial question as to how and why curiosity may externalize in the organizational context. Our multilevel process model provides a fresh, nuanced, and crucial explanation of how individual curiosity externalizes into organizational curiosity and therefore addresses recent calls in the field (Lievens et al., 2022). Using a process lens allows us to contribute to the curiosity literature arguing for the importance of empirically examining the different dynamics of curiosity. It addresses the often-assumed unmanageable nature of curiosity (Harrison & Dossinger, 2017). In the following, we highlight our contributions to the curiosity literature while pointing to an important insight gained for studying identity.

6.1. Contribution 1: Process model of curiosity externalization

Our study contributes to a deeper understanding of curiosity and identity and the importance of their interplay at the individual and organizational levels. While the point of departure in our investigation is, in many ways, the founder's curious exploration of the culinary arts (e.g., Bouty et al., 2018; Stierand, 2015; Stierand et al., 2019; Stierand & Dörfler, 2016) and his entrepreneurial vision (e.g., see in Hahn et al., 2019; Lievens et al., 2022; Zappe et al., 2018), the case study itself brings to the fore what has recently been called externalized curiosity (e.g., Lievens et al., 2022) or the kind of curiosity that becomes a collective attribute and connects to ways of organizing and organizational norms.

A focus on the process of externalization itself invites us to go beyond classic outcome distinctions made at the individual level (e.g., Kashdan, Disabato, et al., 2020; Kashdan et al., 2018); instead, we can regard curiosity as a practice, deeply related to the (internalized) curiosity of

individuals, and yet developing a dynamic that goes beyond the persona of, for instance, a founder. In other words, our study theorizes curiosity as a process that drives change, novelty, and expression (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). Thus, our study builds on and provides empirical support for the distinctions made by Lievens and colleagues (2022) between internalized and externalized curiosity as spanning the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational continuum. In their framework, the interpersonal level bridges internalized and externalized forms by recognizing the double role of curiosity as a catalyst for interpersonal action and leadership. In doing so, we create the scope for the bi-directional relation between the curiosity of individuals and curiosity as an organizational practice.

More importantly, we also break down the walls between these two levels and show that one expression of curiosity, individual or organizational, cannot be reduced to the other. Our data demonstrates this by the fact that founder curiosity not only feeds into but is also fed back by externalized curiosity and its identity-backed practices (for empirical support for either or both directions of curiosity, see Evans, 2020; Goldstein & Narayanamurti, 2018).

Our process model put forward here manages to unpack further the movement between internalized and externalized curiosity, between the individual ideas and explorations of the founder and his team members, and the 'curiosity as practice' approach of the entire organization. Thus, we build on three related but distinct and relatively recent streams of curiosity research. First, we contribute to research that looks at "curiosity as a catalyst for organizing collective actions" (Ma, 2023, p. 11), showcasing how curiosity brings people together and motivates them to achieve great things. Here, we add an overlooked yet vitally important aspect to understanding the catalytic power of curiosity, namely how curiosity becomes embedded in the organizational identity. In other words, not only how it externalizes from the individual to the collective level but how it manifests as a defining element of an organization's identity beyond the collective actions. Second, we also add to recent work on the experience and effects of curiosity (Polman et al., 2022), going beyond research that views curiosity as a goal. Polman et al.'s research bridges the literature on curiosity and nudging by focusing on individual behavior (2022). Our research, in contrast, demonstrates how 'experiencing curiosity' can have an externalization effect, setting into motion a process from the individual to the organizational level that nudges organizational members' curiosity to the extent that curiosity becomes an identifying characteristic of an organization's identity. Third, we contribute to research on the social side of curiosity at work (Thompson & Klotz, 2022) by adding fine-grained insights to our understanding of "how leader displays of curiosity affect followers" (Thompson & Klotz, 2022, p. 7). In particular, we empirically show how a leader's display of curiosity in a work context where novelty is center stage affects followers so that they regularly become 'curious leaders' themselves and thus externalize their curiosity to the organizational level.

Ultimately, individual-level curiosity is internalized not because its dynamic is internal to the mind but because it is continuously transformed through learning from one's curious exploration and that of others. This is a novel observation that contributes to the scant literature on founder curiosity, showcasing how individual curiosity can become a tool that brings into motion a process that can "influence group and individual action" (Lievens et al., 2022, p. 206), supporting the view that curiosity inheres an "emergence" process that unfolds over time and gives rise to "organizational dynamics and organizational forms of curiosity" (Lievens et al., 2022, pp. 201, 204).

6.2. Contribution 2: Two dynamics of de-familiarizing and familiarizing curiosity

In this paper, we introduce the notion of familiarization and de-familiarization and their relationship with each other as the overarching dynamics of why curiosity may externalize within the

workplace. The two processes of de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar relate to the order in which knowledge is created and absorbed. As our findings suggest, we have found dynamics of destabilizing curiosity originating at the individual level driven by a process of de-familiarizing the familiar. These individual-level dynamics are counter-balanced with dynamics of stabilizing curiosity at the collective level to familiarize the unfamiliar. These insights, in liaison with our contextual understanding of Alchemist as a place of practiced curiosity, support Hayek's understanding of curiosity as the process of not only driving the "unknown to the known and observable, but [...] from the familiar to the unknown" (1955, p. 215). The loop between internalized and Identity-Embedded Organizational Curiosity testifies to this recursiveness.

Prior literature has provided important insights into different curiosity dynamics, revolving around the motivational backdrop that triggers curiosity (i.e., I-D model of curiosity, Litman, 2005, 2008) or the type of curiosity that is triggered (diversive and specific curiosity, Harrison, 2012; Litman & Spielberger, 2003). Interestingly though, for all conceptual discussions of curiosity, an individual's existing knowledge pool, based on which every following curiosity dynamic is conceptualized, is assumed to be constant. In other words, a form of curiosity that starts with questioning an individual's existing knowledge state has not yet been conceptualized. Here, our paper makes a distinct contribution by highlighting how, in the case of Alchemist's curiosity, we see 'challenging' as a third form of motivation (next to interest and deprivation), which implies the desire to revisit an existing knowledge pool. In doing so, the motivation can be directional or exploratory, as in the case of specific and diversive curiosity.

This third form of curiosity plays a vital role in the curiosity externalization process, as it creates a level playing field that allows different contributors to engage with their curiosity and jointly create new knowledge. This contribution helps answer the call for a better understanding of the social interactions that require further comprehension to depict the externalization process (Lievens et al., 2022). As such, between the de-familiarization and familiarization process, we can notice and trace patterns within internalized and externalized curiosity. Our case study shows that the organization balances familiarity-questioning individual curiosity through communication, which makes the unfamiliar intelligible to a broader audience (Schneider et al., 1995). More than this, as we suggest, de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar are two sides of the same coin and feed into each other in ways that bridge the gap between the individual and organizational expressions of curiosity and are pivotal in creative work contexts like Alchemist, where diverse domain experts work in a transdisciplinary fashion (Nicolescu, 2014) to integrate different and diverse creative contributions (Feuls et al., 2021; Mainemelis et al., 2015).

6.3. Contribution 3: Identity as a means of stability and change

Finally, our findings also contribute to the organizational identity literature. We add a new perspective to the discussion on whether organizational identity is enduring or dynamic and, consequently, whether it facilitates organizational stability or change (Albert & Whetten, 1985; Chreim, 2005; Corley, 2004; Gioia et al., 2000; Hatch & Schultz, 2002; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). While research has traditionally pointed to an enduring and stabilizing characteristic of organizational identity (Albert & Whetten, 1985), more recently, evidence was provided that organizational identity can be evolutionary, allowing for change over time as members' interpretation of what the organization is and what it should be, emerges and further develops (Gioia, Patvardhan, et al., 2013; Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). While prior research has sided with either one or the other extreme, we contribute to this debate by highlighting Alchemist's organizational identity functioning as a means of stability and change. More specifically, our findings point to a continuous reassessment of what attributes are considered central and distinctive because of embracing curiosity as a core aspect of

organizational identity. However, with all "incarnations" being pursued, changes need to feed into a coherent narrative. As such, our findings speak to an assumption that Haslam and colleagues put forth that "generally speaking, human beings (and hence both organizational researchers and organizational members) are able to combine metaphors into more complex but coherent constellations of ideas through further conceptual blending and elaboration – that is, the fitting together of small metaphorical 'pieces' into larger wholes" (2017, p. 330). For instance, while most of Rasmus Munk's early inspirations stemmed from personally encountered topics, such as medical circumstances, Alchemist has evolved to address broader social and ecological problems. Similarly, by extending the team with profiles from the arts and creative industries and requesting their contribution to the development of Alchemist, their imprinting extends the definition of what Alchemist is and will be. Still, all potential alterations to the organizational identity need to pass the "filter of appropriateness" (March 1991) to ensure that Alchemist follows an evolutionary path that is internally consistent.

Another dynamic we identify in our case is the influence of other organizational members, above and beyond the founder, on developing the organizational identity. Founders have long been acknowledged as strongly influencing the formative process a venture undergoes. These choices are influenced by the identities founders assume (Crosina, 2018; Mmbaga et al., 2020; Wry & York, 2017; Zuzul & Tripsas, 2020). Nevertheless, it is not only the initial choices that founders' identities influence, but equally the identity an organization claims, and consequently, the perception as to what a venture stands for in the eyes of its organizational members (Miller & Wesley, 2010; Zellweger et al., 2013). As Ashforth and colleagues point out, "individual cognition about identity ('I think') facilitates the emergence of shared cognition ('We think')" (2011, p. 1146). While this line of research has predominantly highlighted the founder and senior management's influences on organizational identity formation and change (Gioia et al., 2010), much less is known about the influence that other organizational members may have in this process. While prior literature on identity imprinting reduces organizational members' role to "buying into" the organizational identity (Gioia, Patvardhan, et al., 2013, p. 164), our process model on curiosity externalization provides evidence that organizational members can be an active part in the continuous re-definition of an organization's identity over time. In fact, the centrality of curiosity to Alchemist's organizational identity allows members to directly affect how organizational identity changes over time by bringing in their values, norms, and beliefs.

6.4. Practical implications

Our findings affect how managers can help employees live out their curiosity. Not all organizations have a celebrated creator like Rasmus Munk, whose curiosity is highly developed. Although curiosity may not be as malleable or open to educational influences (Watson, 2018), our findings demonstrate how individual curiosity can be externalized to amplify organizational curiosity. The key to achieving this is creating an organizational identity that purposefully embraces endurance and dynamics, thus promoting a work environment that simultaneously embraces stability and change. As Ashforth and Mael have highlighted, "there are few conceptual bridges for linking macro- and micro-level structures and processes" (1996, p. 21). Identity provides such a conceptual bridge. Our findings offer two main practical implications in this regard.

First, our findings show that curiosity is not the same as creativity but a catalyst for creativity (Elsbach & Kramer, 2003; Kashdan & Fincham, 2002). As such, we suggest organizations focus on fostering curiosity as a more effective way to boost employee creativity, particularly in organizations outside the creative industries and without high-level creatives, for it takes away the immediate pressure to produce a creative output. Also, in creative contexts where the *grand* creator's "ideas can be brought into life only through the collaboration of other people,"

(Mainemelis et al., 2015, p. 426), fostering curiosity from the individual to the collective may keep the collaborators motivated.

Second, we see curiosity to have a practical implication as a vehicle to overcome what may be termed ‘discipline blindness.’ Our case shows that stepping outside the boundaries of the familiar allows for the space to solve practical problems. Disciplinary knowledge can help familiarize the unfamiliar, but it can significantly benefit from complementing the reverse process, which focuses on questioning knowledge. Knowing how to balance de-familiarization and familiarization processes as part of a curious approach to entrepreneurial challenges is the key attribute of Alchemist, as derived from our research, and could prove to be an excellent asset for other innovative ventures and their success.

6.5. Future research and limitations

Our study offers several directions for future research, some of which result from the study’s limitations. First, while our inductive analysis of Alchemist has offered us access to a case of significant curiosity (Simonton, 2014), our process model of curiosity externalization has relevance for other contexts, in particular those organizations belonging to the creative industries sector, including creative cultural occupations (Hearn & Bridgstock, 2014). Moreover, the constructs derived from our qualitative study, and the relationships between them, have the marker of transferability (Slevin & Sines, 2000) in the sense of being potentially applicable, with modifications, to a broader range of settings. Thus, we argue that our findings may be most likely transferable to contexts that require highly creative people, for instance, acclaimed architects (e.g., Bennis, 2003), film directors (e.g., Mainemelis et al., 2016), or designers (Stierand et al., 2020), who continuously practice their curiosity to catalyze and foster creativity. In these creative contexts, complementary findings might emerge, even if the micro-processes and practices and how highly creative individuals talk about them vary. Still, future research could explore the curiosity externalization process in less creative contexts, potentially bearing important nuances to our overall understanding of curiosity and how it unfolds as a process from the individual to the collective through different leadership practices (Feuls et al., 2021).

Further, our research looks at curiosity through a wide-angle lens, painting a panorama of curiosity as it emerges more broadly in an entrepreneurial venture by zooming in and out between individual and organizational levels. Future research, however, could build on our process model and explore, in a more fine-grained fashion, what roles, if any, the two curiosity functions of de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar play in the creative process and how they emerge and evolve. Such research could create significant and impactful contributions for both creative process research (Mainemelis & Sakellariou, 2022; Stierand & Dörfler, 2016) and process and practice studies more generally (Pyrko et al., 2017; Stierand, 2015; Vaara & Fritsch, 2022).

Finally, in the methods section, we highlighted the unusually revelatory nature of our case. However, as with any setting that provides a compelling case, it also entails a potentially ‘dark side’ to its interpretation. Thus, one additional limitation of our research is the lack of shedding light on the ‘dark side’ of curiosity and curiosity work because we have tightly focused on the process of curiosity externalization. As one of the interviewees phrased it, ‘holding onto a space rocket’ is exciting and cheerful. However, it can also evoke opposite emotions of pressure and panic. We thus encourage future research into the dark side of curiosity to extend this work, such as the recent study by Fath and colleagues (2022).

7. Conclusion

Empirically and theoretically, curiosity is essential for organizations, as it constitutes a foundational building block of creativity, innovation, and change. In formalizing the link between internalized and

externalized curiosity, we are pushing the boundaries of our knowledge regarding how curiosity may be turned into an organization’s collective property that can be managed. Further, by shedding light on the dynamics of de-familiarizing the familiar and familiarizing the unfamiliar underlying the process of curiosity externalization, we introduce a fresh perspective on why curiosity externalizes. By conceptualizing our insights on Alchemist in a multi-level process model, we hope to support managers in these efforts and encourage researchers to further this critical line of study.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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