CARVING OUT THE PRODUCT MEANING –
from Pre-emptying to Embodying

Åsa Öberg and Roberto Verganti

School of Innovation, Design and Engineering, Mälardalen University, PO Box 325, 631 05 Eskilstuna, Sweden, asa.oberg@mdh.se and
Department of Management, Economics and Industrial Engineering
Politecnico di Milano, Piazza L. da Vinci 32, 20133 Milano, Italy, roberto.verganti@polimi.it

ABSTRACT

When companies stay within the existing thinking frame of a product they risk to miss an important aspect, namely the *meaning* of it. By describing products in terms of function or visual appearance they tend to *surface* the product rather than *deeply understand* the reason of using it, its "why", i.e. its meaning.

To compensate for "locked in" interpretations of products many different approaches have been proposed, like deBonos hats (deBono 1986), "design thinking" (Brown 2009) and user innovation (von Hippel 2005). These approaches often result in a vast amount of ideas about *solutions* aimed at improving functionality, but they hardly dig into the interpretation of product *meaning*. They appear effective in innovating solutions, the "how" of a product, but: are they adequate as well when it comes to innovating the meaning of a product, its "why"?

This paper explores what happens when firms move innovation deeper, and instead of innovating a solution for an existing problem or meaning, they want to change the product meaning. In particular it focuses on the *process* of innovation of meaning, and its differences with more traditional and well-known processes that aim at innovate solutions. It tells the story of four companies that went through several stages of reflection on product meaning. Our objective is to detect the nature of the process of innovation of meaning and understand if it aligns with the basic principles of problems solving that has been proposed by innovation literature in the last decade.

By digging into the stories of meaning driven innovation projects of these firms, we unveil that: (1) the process of innovation of meaning differs substantially from the process of innovation of solutions; indeed, its principles are mostly opposite than to what is stated from innovation literature focused on problem solving. (2) The process of innovation of meaning evolves along four major phases: from a silent *evolving* of interest, to a conscious *pre-emptying* of existing beliefs, an iterative and multifaceted *conversing* and finally the *embodying* of the new proposed meaning. (3) These four phases are in line with the dynamic of change processes explored by scholars who have received less attention in the innovation literature. And these are researchers who have addressed change in humans and society from the perspective of the interpretation and search for meaning: philosophers of hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ricoeur), leadership (Scharmer), human disciplines (Hekkert). Aligning the process of innovation of meaning with different domains of knowledge is both a confirmation of the need for new approaches within innovation research - and an invitation to search for new frames of within the same. The aim of this study has been to propose and spur research to understand no only how to find new solutions, but also, how to create products and services that give new meaning to people and businesses.

INTRODUCTION

Fall 2013. Innovation Lab, an ongoing decade-old research project, has just launched their learnings and findings in the book *"Discontinous Innovation – Learning to Manage the Unexpected (*Augsdörfer, Bessant et al. 2013) The illustration on the front, a pink box drawn with chalk on a black background, tells us to "think outside the box". The title in yellow on the dark background shines to the reader like neon lights at night, attempting to capture the spectator's attention.

The book describes innovation in three stages, searching for triggers, selecting from those ideas and implementing the ideas. There are also three key influences described; the innovation strategy, the support, and the pro-active linkages. In addition, the authors stresses reflection on how activities takes place and how to change the "core operating mechanisms" to keep pace with a shifting environment. At first glance everything looks quite structured.

Innovation seems to be a bundle of processes and dynamics that we need to handle for the sake of - whom? First line in this book gives the answer. It is "*…pretty clear that any organization which fails to change what they offer…will find it difficult to survive"*. The book is about surviving, as a company.

But, behind the offers of a company, or rather, in front of these offers, stands a person. A human who will take in a certain product and service, feel it and value it. If feeling happy, satisfied or inspired this person might return to the product once again. Because she or he likes it. If soaked in disappointment, annoyance or being bored out, the product will not get into the hands of her or him again. There is an important value here, in the hands of the human. Her feelings and actions, in the end, are what really matter to the life of a company. What is meaningful to her, will, in the end, drive her decisions. This will, inevitably, touch the core of company in a good or less positive way. With this in mind, a valuable part of innovation would be to learn about how humans find meaning in things.

There is no discussion about meaning and its connection to innovation in the black book. By meaning of a product we refer to its purpose, "why" people buy it and use it. In this book the product meaning might be there, not outspoken, but a quick glance at the table of content gives the feeling that this is a book about what tools to use when searching for solutions, not for meaning. It's about starting from a problem and trying to solve it: by strengthening, fixing, implementing and fighting. There is othing about understanding humans. Or reflecting deeply on the meaning of a product. It's a good book on finding a better "how", but not on finding a meaningful "why".

This book on discontinuous innovation is not alone in its approach. In the last ten years the practice and discourse around innovation (in the business and design arena) has been dominated by one perspective: the focus on solutions. The perspective assumes that users have a need or a problem, and that they search for the best *solution*. Innovation therefore comes from a process of "creative problem solving" where organizations innovate (1) by *understanding* the user needs (what problems customers currently have), and then (2) by *creating ideas* to better solve those problems. Studies have therefore focused on methods to improve the creativity of organizations, both internally (like brainstorming and design thinking), and externally (as in open innovation or crowdsourcing). In common, these methods, contain one

underlying assumption, namely; that the most difficult thing is to find a great solution. The higher the number of ideas, the bigger the chance to find a better solution to users' problems (Kelley 2001, Chesbrough 2005, Surowiecki 2005, Brown 2009, Martin 2009, Lockwood 2009, Kelley and Kelley 2013).

There is however a different level of reflection that has been absent from the discourse on innovation: the level of meaning. Different research domains (including psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology) have shown that people is, and has always been, in *continuous search for meaning*. If looking close, their need or problem spur from them trying to answer a question. Or, said the other way around; what they find purposeful in life drives their questions and in the end what they look for, their needs. The paradigm of creative problem solving, with its focus on solutions, has looked at meanings just as an input: meanings are embedded into the user needs, and these just have to be understood, not to be innovated: its methods, consequently, capture how people *currently* give meaning to things. Instead, meanings do *change* and may be innovated. Actually, people become *passionate* especially when they discover a *new purpose*, a new possibility for giving meaning to life.

This article gives attention to innovation of meaning, and in particular its process. Instead of discussing the innovation of the "how" of products, it stays in the question of "why". Research on the process of innovation of meaning is at its infancy. There are only a few early explorations of how businesses and designers can create new product meanings (Verganti 2009, Öberg and Verganti 2011, Hekkert 2011, Jahnke 2012, Verganti and Öberg 2013). This article aims at contributing to this embryonic stream of studies by investigating the nature of the process of innovation of meaning. Our perspective in particular looks at the *wholeness* of the process (rather than focusing on specific steps of methods) and tries to give *structure* to our understanding of this process by addressing three research questions:

(1) to which extent is the process of "creative problem solving", is also adequate to finding new meanings? Does the framework for innovating solutions apply also to innovating meanings?
(2) if not, what other themes, different than those suggested by the paradigm of creative problem solving, recurrently occur when firms embark on a journey of innovation of meaning?
(3) what other frameworks aligns with these themes? How may they support our understanding of the dynamics of innovation of meaning?

We have addressed these questions by studying in depth the journey of four companies that have gone through the process of innovation of meaning. Our reflection and learning is structured as follows. We start by clarifying, very briefly, the object of our study: product meaning and innovation of meaning, and how it differs from the innovation of solutions. Then, we move into the *process* of innovation of meaning. In order to understand the dynamics of this process of innovation of meaning, we first introduce and summarize the major findings produced by the dominant stream of studies: the process of "creative problem solving". Next, we illustrate our empirical cases of companies that have conducted projects of innovation of meaning, and address the three questions: do these cases align with theories of "creative problems solving"? If their behaviour is different, what are the

main themes that instead characterize the process of innovation of meaning? We then make the summary of these new themes into a comprehensive framework of the process of innovation of meaning, and connect this framework to other theories that have been mainly overlooked by innovation management literature. The paper ends with a discussion of the implications of our findings for research, education and practice of innovation management.

INNOVATION OF MEANING - WHAT IT IS AND WHY IT IS RELEVANT

People search for meaning. Whenever they do something in life, there is a meaning behind: there is a purpose, there is a *"why"*. And they use products and services that support this search for meaning. For example, they switch on light bulbs because it makes sense to welcome home friends in a bright shiny room; they use fast robots with the purpose of improving productivity of a process. Firms often assume that meanings exist "out there" in the market. That people have a pre-defined purpose, a need. And search for new solutions, a new "how", to serve this existing purpose better and better. A brighter lamp, a faster robot.

But people are not only in search for new solutions to existing problems. They are also in search for *new* meanings, for new "whys"; because their life keeps changing; and, because they are delighted by the discovery of new directions, by an expansion of what they can do and feel. And when they are offered a new "why" that makes more sense, they fall in love.

For example, families nowadays invest more in candles lasting only 30 hours, such as Yankee candles, rather than in long-lasting electric bulbs, not because they want to illuminate, but to dim light and perfume a room when welcoming friends. Hospitals buy slow robots like the DaVinci system, the leading prostatectomy device, not to replace doctors and increase productivity, but to help them during complex operations (see Öberg and Verganti, 2012 for an study of the robotic industry).

Innovation of meaning has always happened. In the past, however, it occurred more slowly, so that businesses had time to observe changes in how users gave meaning to things, and react. Slowness also implied that it happened more rarely: after a shift in meaning, competition could, for years, focus on performance improvements.

Nowadays instead, innovation of meaning happens rapidly and frequently. First, because in this world in continuous turmoil, the life of people keeps *changing*: people are not simply doing the same things better; they are continuously exposed to new problems, in their private life and in their profession. Sociologists as Anthony Giddens (1991), philosophers as Umberto Galimberti (2009), anthropologists as Claude-Lévi Strauss (1978), psychologists as Carol Dweck (2012), they all agree that we live in a society where, contrary to the past where the questions of life where clearer, people now search for *new* meaning as they need to work out their role for themselves. In this context what makes people really passionate is a not solution; is the *discovery of a new meaning*.

EXISTING THEORIES FOR THE INNOVATION PROCESS: THE FRAMEWORK OF "CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING"

What is the process of innovation of meanings? Research on the process of innovation of meaning has just taken its first stumbling baby steps. We wish to contribute to these reflections by asking a fundamental preliminary question: to what extent can what we already know about innovation processes help us understand the

dynamics of innovation of meaning? Or, in other words, do the existing theories of innovation management (that have been primarily developed to understand the process of innovation of solutions) provide an adequate framework also for the process of innovation of meaning?

The question is reasonable, since in front of a new topic it is wise to see if the existing theory still work before looking for new frameworks. Yet, the question is challenging, since to provide an answer we need to first identify what existing theories says about innovation processes. As we all know, the theory of innovation processes is extremely rich and broad. It has even unfolded within different research domains, from innovation management (like Clark and Fujimoto 1991, Ulrich and Eppinger 1999, and more recently Kelley 2001, Brown 2009, Martin 2009 in the stream of design thinking), to design theory (Galle 2002, Bayazit 2004), from engineering design (Pahl and Beitz 1988) to organizational change (Lewin 1947), from marketing (Moon 2011) to strategy (Kim and Mauborgne 2005).

The possibility of providing a multifaceted and comprehensive picture of theories of innovation processes is far from our reach here (and probably far from any reach in any means…). In addressing this question we therefore necessarily need to simplify the complexity of the existing contributions. Still, this is a step to be taken, with all the limitations that we have as researchers. In this effort to summarize the existing body of theories, we therefore take a clear specific perspective: across the enormous variety of studies and contributions that have explored the process of innovation (of solutions), it is still possible to identify a few basic themes that are transversal to the main theories, and that have become extremely popular especially in the last decade. In particular, our perspective indicates that innovation theories, that have mainly focused on solutions, look at innovation as the result of a process of "creative problem solving". In other words there are common traits in the significant variety of contributions: innovation emerges because users have a need or a problem, and they search for the best solution. Innovation therefore implies to understand what problems customers have, and then to create ideas to better solve those problems.

The concept that innovation is about solving problem is well rooted in the seminal studies and theoretical pillars of the field. A very well structured and rich argumentation of this perspective is illustrated in the Doctoral Thesis of Markus Jahnke (Jahnke 2013) which tracks the roots of "innovation as problem solving" back to the studies of Pólya (1945), which suggests four phases to address problems: understand the problem; devise a plan; carry out the plan; look back. Jahnke recognizes this perspective also in the 1946 studies of Genrich Altshuller, the inventor of TRIZ and the "theory of inventive problem solving" (Altshuller 1984). This strong focus on the problem went shortly coupled with the creative capabilities of humans and embedded in "creative problem solving" methods (Gordon 1961, Osborn 1963), that opened the door to the creation of a "science of design" whose major contributor is by far Herbert Simon with his analysis of decision making processes (1969). This perspective that innovation is about creatively solving problems has silently permeated the design and innovation management literature that followed. Even if with different nuances (like Schön's contribution in more than problems we should talk about uncertain problematic situations; Schön 1983) most of these contributions still assume that innovation is a solution to a more or less defined problem to be understood (Dorst 2011). In other words innovation is about the "how", not the

"why". The highest pick of this perspective of innovation as "creative problem solving" is reached in the last decade within the school of "design thinking" (Kelley 2001, Brown 2009, Martin 2009, Lockwood 2009, Kelley and Kelley 2013, Liedtka 2014), where innovation implies to get close to users to *understand* how they give meaning to things (rather than innovate) and then to creatively generate ideas to address this existing meaning. Ideas that can be generated internally, through methods such as brainstorming, or, as advocated by the recent developments in the field of open innovation and crowdsourcing, by communities of external players (Chesbrough 2005, Surowiecki 2005, Von Hippel 2005). To summarize, within this rich stream of studies on "creative problem solving", we can recognize four major themes: Unfreezing, Naïveté, Communication, and Outsourcing.

Unfreezing - Mum's wake-up call
  According to traditional theories of change, the first phase in an innovation process implies to *recognize the need for change*. Without this awareness, there is no innovation. Probably, the most significant contributor in this regard is Lewin (1947), whose model postulates that *before* any change may occur, the motivation for change must be generated. One should therefore re-examine her assumptions at the beginning of the process. Lewin's change process therefore is shaped around three phases: unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Change is preceded by an unfreezing phase where the organization is prepared to accept that change is necessary. This implies to break down the status quo before building up a new approach.
We find similar arguments more specifically in the literature about product innovation. Especially when investigating the reason why incumbents often fail to address major technological transitions (above all, the studies of Clayton Christensen: Christensen and Rosenbloom 1995, and Christensen 1997). Incumbent are blind to signals from competition and market, and this blindness prevent them to address change. A reinterpretation of the context therefore must anticipate the innovation process. It is also interesting to notice that this process of unfreezing is typically considered to be led top-down. The organization needs to be made aware of the need of change that top management has first to recognize. Which is mirrored by the consistent finding that the development of new solutions benefit from top management support (Montoya-Weiss et al. 1994). It's like the organization is sleeping and it needs its mum (the top leaders) to call for a wake up in order to start innovating.

Naïveté - The beginner mind
  The second common theme in the literature of creative problem solving is that innovation requires a "beginner's mind" (Brown, 2009). In other words, innovation is more likely to come from people who are not experts in a field and therefore are free from pre-conceptions (Dunbar, 1995; Lehrer 2010). The assumption is that a beginner can address the problem with a clean mind (Sutton 2002). If the existing solution is "inside a box", beginners, who do not know where the box is, are more likely to search "outside of the box" (Kelley 2001). This perspective has created a spur of interest about the contributions of outsiders to innovation (Chesborough 2003). The implicit assumption is that, in front of solutions and problems, that do not require an aesthetic or cultural interpretation but just the pragmatic identification of optimal ideas, a naïve mind does really exist; indicating that it would be possible to find someone who addresses a problem without pre-conceptions and pre-understanding.

Communication - Innovation as a process of reduction of uncertainty

The third theme looks at innovation processes from the perspective of *information processing*. In other words, innovation is considered as a process of reduction of uncertainty (from the initial uncertainty about market needs and technological feasibility to the end product finally released to the market). And, in line with classic organization theory, reduction of uncertainty requires collecting, processing and sharing as much information as possible, in order to eliminate the sources of uncertainty (Galbraith 1973). Hence the intense stream of studies on cross-functional integration in product innovation, in particular between R&D and marketing (see Moenaert and Souder, 1990), or between product engineering and manufacturing (Gerwin, 1993), or with external partners (Clark 1989, Littler et al. 1995). Indeed, Clark and Fujimoto, in their wellknown study of product innovation in the car industry, structure their analysis around a model of innovation as information processing (Clark and Fujimoto 1991). And indeed, one of the most cited findings in the literature about creative problem solving concerns the importance of communication and teamworking (Khrisnan and Ulrich 2001).

Outsourcing - Innovation comes from the outside

Finally, one of the most recent mantra is that innovation comes from "others". These "others" may operate outside the organization as suggested by the paradigm of *open innovation* (Chesbrough 2005) and crowdsourcing (Surowiecki 2005); or, they may be inside the organization but in other areas, such as in the case of the diffused Innovation Jams proposed by IBM, that involve thousands of employees within the organization (Bjelland 2008); or, simply, others in the team (Sutton 2002). Whichever the case, a common theme is that a leader is not supposed to generate ideas herself (or at least this is not considered a relevant issue). What is relevant is that a leader supports her organization and outsiders to be creative and propose ideas. The implicit assumption is that what is difficult to create is a great idea. Once this is proposed, a leader may easily recognize its value even if she has not been involved directly into the creative activities and has not gone through the innovation process herself.

METHODOLOGY

Is the framework of creative problem solving (and in particular the four themes described above) adequate to understand the process of innovation of meaning? Or do we need a different, more appropriate, framework? In order to explore these questions, in the past five years we have studied firms that have engaged in projects of innovation of meaning (see Öberg and Verganti 2011, Öberg and Verganti 2012, Öberg 2012, and Verganti and Öberg 2013 for early empirical explorations). This article, in particular, focuses on four projects in four companies that have shown interest in this type of innovation and that wanted to apply it.

Given these projects have a significant impact on the long-term strategic path of these firms, we are not allowed to disclose their names in all cases, as we would also unveil their future innovation strategy. All companies, except one, the Polish furniture company Vox, have therefore been re-named. In this way we can provide important information on the dynamics of the process.

Instead of the real names of the companies, what will follow is the story of *ShineBridge*, a company within consumer goods, facing challenges with their younger customers, *Needles&Pins*, a worldwide player within the fashion industry, again in front of decreasing sales among their youngest customers. In addition we will present

a short story of *Trewig*, a furniture manufacturer and the official story of VOX. To protect our informants also these have been re-named, as in the case of *Mr Q* and *Mme O*.

The depth of the material collected during our study of these five projects is significant, since we have being walking through these projects together with the teams, with a double role as researchers and facilitators. We have observed and experienced not only their ex-post final learning, but also the challenges they have faced and how they addressed them during the process. This is very important since we wanted to have access to the dynamics of the process simultaneously as they unfolded, to avoid bias coming from ex-post learning that focuses only on the final outcome rather than on the various possible options that emerged along the way.

All the material collected has been tracked, coded, and then reinterpreted, first by the authors, then with other researchers at Politecnico di Milano, Italy and Mälardalen University, Sweden, from the perspectives of management, innovation and design. It has been read in the light of several theoretical lenses and to our own earlier findings. Finally, our reflections have been shared with the companies' team as well, to further check our interpretation with their perspective.

FOUR SKETCHES FROM THE CASES STUDIED
 In this section we will try to make simple sketches of the companies studied. We will point to situations that we have found important in the development of new potential meaning of products. The events described have been selected as a continuation of our earlier work on innovations of meaning and from our presence/participation* in most of these events. Therefore they mirror our standpoint of what could be significant in this context.

We want to make the reader aware that what is provided below are snapshots, cut out from a larger context, belonging to a company, its employees and its own process in the strive for new product meanings. These stories do not give justice to all the richness of the empirical material, and therefore, we advise the reader to remember that the stories must be seen as simplifications of reality. Our hope is that they might give some direction for further explorations.

Every story will be followed by a comparison to theoretical constructs and how these differ from our observations. We will also give a proposal of an emergent theme to consider when in the process of innovating meanings. After this empirical part of the paper we will provide a discussion of the four proposed themes and how they together deviate from the existing path of innovation management research.

* in the majority of these stories we have been a team of 3-4 researchers who have later analyzed and discussed the material and our findings.

Unplugging the mind - How ShineBridge slowly caught sight of their existing beliefs and cleared them out
 October 2012, American East Coast. About 20 managers from marketing, research and development, up- and down-stream product development and design engage lively in a discussion about who they are. And who they want to be. "We are like canned beer, says a mid-age female manager, but we want to be like a bespoke

cocktail." People laugh and think together. It's the first meeting on a project to understand the existing as well as the potential meaning of one of the flagship products of the company. The managers try to find words and pictures to express how they feel they are, what the company and the product represent and whether this is what they want to be in the future. We are attending the meeting to share our research on innovations driven by meaning and engage in the discussion as well. During one of the breaks the project manager, German by origin, meets us up and discretely asks us what we think about the discussion. Will this lead us to find a new direction and meaning of our product, he asks? He looks worried, as it is hard to see any concrete result of the discussion. The room is full of flipcharts with drawings and words, coffee cups, mobile phones and laptops, colored pens and post its. The atmosphere is cheerful and indeed, there has been a lot of talking and discussing. Surely, we do not see any "new meaning" around. But, we agree that these discussions have spurred thoughts not thought before. Despite this somewhat disorganized situation, we stay hopeful that this kind of start, of sharing thoughts about what is - and could be - a meaningful scenario of their product, will drive the project forward.

A few months later, the discussion of meaning takes place again, this time with representatives from several American sites as well as the British office of *ShineBridge*. The setting is a telephone conference, in a studio full of TV-screens, outside London. We as researchers find ourselves in the middle of a bunch of people with different accents, time zones and cultural backgrounds, but all with the same eagerness to reflect on the meaning of their product. The atmosphere is light and animated, almost informal, and the group has many questions that spur several reflections, despite being partly a virtual meeting. But, even though people look caught on, we learn later that several of them have big wonders about what a meaning *really* is.

Back on the East coast, February 2013. Many of the managers now have got as a homework to think about new products and new meanings. About 70 proposals are slowly being attached to the largest wall of the conference room by all the 20 employees. Each manager takes her time to describe her way of relating to a new meaning of ShineBridges product, and the rest of us listen carefully. It's a long exercise. Slowly we start to see patterns and discuss the characteristics of the proposals in the home works. Reflection on the most important aspects of a new product, the so called "must haves", takes place and what could be considered as a new potential meaning is discussed back and forth, in the agenda and on the breaks. Also other characteristics, as the "delighters" get attention by the group. These are the less needed features, the pleasant, but not necessary, ones (see the KANO model, Kano et al, 1984). People share their reflections about what they find important for a new ShineBridge product and it turns out that what is obvious and a key characteristic to one person looks of less necessity of another. The most important themes connected to a new meaning are carefully selected by the group as a whole and come to serve as a fundament for next exercise. In teams the managers again try to propose scenarios of meaningful products. Once again, the different minds in every group get a deliberate chance to take out their own beliefs and assumptions of what has been and will be meaningful to the target group. It seems that the center of the discussion looks different to the everyday discussions among managers. Focus is on what is important and meaningful for a new product – not on what features, standards and functional solutions to adopt. The meeting continues with a plenary discussion at a big

table, sipping tea in the late afternoon and openly sharing thoughts and ideas as they appear in the minds of people. In this moment, a future direction of a vague but emerging meaning starts to take shape, but it is still not clearly carved out.

The group now wanted to discuss this potential new meaning with others actors, external to the world of ShineBridge. The reason for this was a need to have either a confirmation or a chance to adjust the assumptions behind this early work. But, as most companies in the phase of radically new product development, ShineBridge did not want to reveal these assumptions in an explicit way, as they could be the bases for the development of a new product meaning. Therefore, many hours were spent to clarify the assumptions behind the emerging meaning and, then, to "codify" the assumptions into more common themes. These were connected to the personality of a customer (through themes like "Me" or "Body") and to a more contextual level (through themes as "Us", or "Explore"). In this work of examining and fine-tuning the thoughts behind the potential new meaning, a big share o the work was about questioning and reflecting. The managers discussed among each other, over mails and in corridors, and in meetings repeatedly related to their own experience of the product by sharing examples from their personal life and beliefs. Several were the examples that pictured experiences as a child, as a teenager or as a parent. These hours, of sharing the minds of one and another, seemed to made space for previously not outspoken thoughts about meanings.

June 2013. The whole group of managers, with some leaving the project, others joining, now decided to leave the premises of the company and create a neutral meeting place, outside the company walls. They invited a wide spread of experts in fields close to ShineBridge products to discuss the themes. These experts (called "interpreters") were selected as actors approaching the same type of customers as ShineBridge's - but with other offers (see Altuna et al, 2014 for a richer description of the interpreters). The interpreters were asked to talk about their professional as well as personal experience connected to one of the themes. To further demonstrate their point of view, they were asked to bring a metaphor and song. With these components, the managers not only came to listen to several speeches, but also to listen to music of different kind, watching movies and commercials and encountering different objects. This multimodal approach seemed to enrich the discussion. By exposing the assumptions of the managers to new ears and eyes, they got into the spotlight and could be both discussed as well as questioned. When others, not knowing ShineBridge and its more than 100 year old history, discussed, they revealed new interesting facts, transferred new, unknown feelings and atmospheres and enhanced new and different constructs. In a later meeting, the German project manager referred to the meeting and said: "*Suddenly I got it! Not until this point could I clearly say what the meaning really was and what it could be*"

Even though there had been several moments of sharing own private thinking and reflection, the process of taking out existing beliefs seemed to continue. Late in the process, after the intense meeting of the interpreters and the clarification of meaning that followed, one last meeting took place. This time, to bring the reflection on meaning to a more tangible level. The managers once again, came to the workshop with a prepared homework, describing new products – this time spurring from the fundament of the well discussed and updated potential meaning. The meeting took off with a summary of the massive work of reflecting and discussing among the

managers, the interpreters and the researchers. A few, carefully selected words, or dimensions, were exposed on the wall of the room to describe both the "old", existing meaning as well as the "new" proposed meaning. Everyone in the room felt familiar with these widely discussed dimensions and the reasoning behind – except one. This was a newcomer in the project, the marketing manager, here named Mr Q, of the segment to be targeted, and he was puzzled by some of the selected words. With a mother tongue other than English, and with a Latin, more than Anglosaxon background, especially one of the words, looked very odd and difficult to him. On his request, the whole group had to reflect, about the meaning of this single word, why it was selected as the right word to use, and if there were not other words that could suit better. Once again the current, as well as the new potential meaning of the product, had to be discussed. By this questioning, not only the new participant had to sort out the "existing" meaning, but the whole group had to go through this process of questioning and reflecting again. *"Now that I said what I feel and what is my perspective, now I can discuss the other perspectives and we can move on,* Mr Q, exclaimed. It seemed, once the current meaning became clear to him, he could leave it and start to reflect, even take in, the new proposed meaning and join the project fully.

October 2013. So far, the story of ShineBridge had depicted several moments of taking out and expressing the thoughts on existing and new product meaning of the managers. There had been many moments of taking out the "taken for granted" assumptions. We have repeatedly seen the importance of this pre-emptying phase through the project. To wrap up the story, this pre-emptying phase looked important when finally launching the new meaning to the top executives. At the final presentation, all doubts from the vice president of the product, could be met by a strong conviction from both the late newcomer and marketing manager, Mr Q, as well as one of the designers. This, we believe, came as a result of the long and detailed discussion when Mr Q confronted the rest of the group. At this point, the new meaning had also been presented and embodied to a design bureau who naturally also asked, wondered and discussed with the now convinced managers before taking the meaning in.

This act of discussing, asking and taking out your own beliefs is visible in all the projects in this study. Another example comes from the small interior company *Trewig*. In the beginning of their search for new meaning of their product they turned, not to the market, not to external inspiration, but – to themselves. In one of their first meetings, they fully focused on the values of each employee and her reflection of future scenarios. They did not enter the field of products and their features at all, but stayed close to what every individual believed in. This could be seen as another type of pre-emptying of minds as a preparation to take in new perspectives.

Proposal - From A Naïve Beginner's mind to an act of PRE-EMPTYING
As we can see, the stories above do not look like classic problem solving processes. *Problem-solving* theories address problems and solutions, not opportunity finding. These approaches do not describe any kind of pre-emptying phase but rather build "on top" of existing solutions. Also within the *design thinking*-discourse, the pre-emptying phase looks absent. Here, instead, the idea is to be open (naïve) and not question or criticize but to be "clean as a white sheet", and open to "external" inspiration. We cannot find any discussion about our pre-understanding. Also theories within

creativity, like brainstorming, emphasize the "cleaning of your mind, but focus is, once again, on idea-generation and not on meanings.

As discussed in the previous sections, existing theories on innovation management quite often use the expression "looking outside of the box" when in search for new solutions. Employees are, often by the cheers of their managers, encouraged to embrace that times are changing and to look outside the company walls for new ideas. Whole organizations are asked to "unfreeze", to leave "old ingrained" thinking behind. For example by turning to non-experts for advice.

But, in this hunt for creative minds, one important issue seems forgotten: Creativity is not a "common good". It does not come as a neutral asset. Instead, it comes from individuals and their personality. Their pre-understanding shapes the way they look at things and act as a "filter" when scanning ideas. No matter if being an "unfreezed" employee or an outsider without former knowledge of the product. This pre-understanding naturally steers the identification of ideas. Both the ones who will get attention - and - those that will be neglected.

Therefore, being aware of ones pre-conceptions and what they stand for - their meaning, is important in the process of taking in new perspectives. By articulating the pre-understanding, to "take it out", the openness to other perspectives might increase. Rather than starting a process on the command of someone who "wakes you up" and asks you to "think outside of the box" - we encourage a different process. Namely, starting from a search within yourself, catching sight of your own standpoints, to look "inside the box". To acknowledge that there is no naïve, empty, beginners mind – only a subjective and therefore potentially rich mind that likely would benefit from some pre-emptying before thinking new.

80 Days Around the world - The journey of Needles&Pins to meet people, listen and learn

From being considered as elegant temples in where one could find precious pieces of fashion, the stores of *Needles&Pins* found themselves in a worrying position. Their young customers looked less intrigued to enter the stores, resulting in a slow - but steady - decrease of sales of this high-end fashion brand. The innovation manager, Mme O, suspected that the stores did not speak the language of the younger generation and their habits of daily interaction with media and objects. The stores, welcoming guest with solid and tall doors and security guards and placing products as pieces of art in shiny shelves, looked far from the constantly changing life of people in their twenties. Mme O increasingly felt the need to change this retail experience: She and her team wanted to develop something new. They wanted to explore what could be the meaning of a future Needles&Pins store, no matter if in Frankfurt or Tokyo.

As in the case of ShineBridge they started off with a thorough mapping of personal thoughts and proposals of the atmosphere of a future Needles&Pins store. Being a multinational organization they organized not only one, but two meetings, each spanning 2,5 days, to take out, or pre-empt, the beliefs and pre-conceptions of the innovation team. After the first meeting on European land, the core innovation team transversed the Atlantic to repeat the exercise, now with an American set of managers. As a result, more than a 100 proposals of new product meanings from

about 30 managers illustrated the current "landscape" of innovative thinking. As researchers we had the chance to study the span of proposals, covering both deep new meanings and more functional and pragmatic solutions. Product meaning, we discovered once again, was interpreted very differently from person to person, from one culture to the other. Clearly, and reasonably, it was not the same concept to every participant.

Considerable amount of time were then spent to clear out different streams of proposals and the assumptions behind. Mme O and us, as the team of researchers, discussed back and forth the underlying questions of the wide spanning work. What quickly appeared were two very different set ups of understanding the brand and its potential new meaning. One European, maybe a bit short sighted version, probably due to belonging to THE country of origin. And one American, more distanced and "poetic" version of the brand. It was clear that the Needles&Pins, with European roots, was perceived quite different in the two countries.

With this at hand, Mme O and her team decided to leverage these differences. Instead of organizing one external meeting to "test" and "refine" the assumptions of the product meaning, two so called "Interpreters Lab" were planned. We noticed that much consideration was given to the place and host of these meetings. Once again the European team crossed the Atlantic to spend one dinner and a full day of work with seven invited guests at a high-end restaurant in New York, inspired and designed on the *present* culture of the country of Needle&Pins. The meeting was soaked in the current mood of the European country where Needles&Pins once was funded, despite being thousand of kilometer away from it. Its owner and host was one of the interpreters and gave a deep and emotional interpretation of his relation to the country. Due to confidentially we are not allowed to explain the richness and many perspectives discussed between the interpreters, but the setting, a restaurant and the several occasions to nibble some food and talk, informally and formally created a very open, intense discussion on many expected but also surprising subjects.

Now, about 40 days had past since Mme O and the research team started the reflection and discussion of a new meaning of the shopping experience. Several meetings had taken place, mostly over the phone, but also several physical. Mme O and her core team seemed to have a very direct and friendly discussion between their members, both on personal and professional matters, and it looked as if the climate for conversing was healthy and encouraging. Needle& Pins now continued their journey with moving domestic to attend the second interpreter Lab, this time in a museum and old, historic place. Nine national interpreters were invite to first, a dinner in a famous and culturally rich café, and then the coming day to share their interpretation of the assumptions of the managers, that, exactly as in the case of ShineBridge had been transferred to more general themes. The guests represented a few companies, but also a researcher, a monk and an artist. The meeting therefore blended commercial, cultural, philosophical and existential issues. Again, our research team perceived a rich, multifaceted discussion and several informal reflections, even wonders. To conclude, the two Interpreter Lab, had given a dense, deep, multilayered picture of potential new meanings of the stores of Needle&Pins. It spurred many discussions, mail conversations and talks at the coffee machines, both at the company, as such, but also for us as researchers, in our respective Universities.

The core team and Mme O now moved into one last intense phase of their journey. They invited their American colleagues to a 2,5 day long final exercise on a countryside farm in the home country of Needle&Pins. The setting was selected with care, and quite the opposite to the previous two more metropolitan meetings. The objective this time, was to make tangible the insights from the two Interpreters lab and its 16 experts. The procedure resembled the one of ShineBridge, containing new proposals of meaning, but in this case, belonging to a shopping experience. In between the formal agenda, there was time to socialize, take walks, play games and explore the farm as such. We noticed, again, the good atmosphere among Europeans and Americans, the small talks and the engagement in the core of the meeting, to clearly carve out the new meaning.

Needle&Pins journey to find a new meaning of the shopping experience, was about 80 days long. It could be characterized by the constant stream of curiosity and willingness to understand, by intense discussions, mails, wonders and reflections. Very central was the openness of Mme O and her core team, who gave a lot of input and personal reflection, sharing both jokes, laughter and personal issues. The journey as such is also worth mentioning, as it seems that the way it was designed enabled many, sometimes colliding perspectives. From European to American, from restaurants to museums, from Manhattan to countryside, from one profession to another. Also the employees, and their vast backgrounds, from store assistant manager to digital experience designer helped to compose a colorful palette of interpretations. We felt all the way through this journey a good climate for reflecting openly and share not still finished thoughts with a core team that looked safe and relaxed. One of our reflections is that this willingness to reflect, wonder, and linger around different interpretations might be a more common way within the fashion industry. There was not always a hunt for solutions. Maybe, the employees, fashion oriented as they are, felt closer and more at ease with less "rational", efficient thinking? Maybe, they are more used to be close to more alterative thinking, as fashion changes fast and can be difficult to adapt to.

Proposal - From Communicating to CONVERSING
In earlier sections, we have shown how other innovation management theories relate to external *networks* as an important source when wanting to improve existing products and/or meaning. And indeed external input is much needed. We cannot find, however, research on the theme of finding *new,* still not proposed meanings. As you will see later in this paper, philosophers give some advice when stressing the need of a *critical stance* to find new meaning, but do not provide any detailed descriptions on how to really *do* when discuss meaning. Valuable insights can be found in the discussion of *meaning making*, discussing the conversing part of meaning making, through hands-on work in a design/employee setting. But, there is no discussion about non-designerly contributions to meaning making, as in our stories above. Therefore, we want to present another emerging theme in the process of innovating meanings.

From the standpoint of innovation management being about carefully and systematically sharing information we want to move the debate to a less one-directional process. We want to put forward a more interactive process. By this, we refrain from the approaches where innovation is about eliminating uncertainties and instead, point to the importance of an embrace of the "uncertain" and the "unknown".

When in search for new meanings of products, we want to put forward and encourage several sources of "advise" - instead of eliminating many sources of information.

Innovative teamwork therefore, we believe, should consist of a debate, a discussion, a conversation and less of pure information giving. Because, meaning is something that is emerging between people, not something that is created by one single person, or company. New meaning, arise when several actors, with different perspectives, meet. The potential lies in moving from a simplified communication approach to a complex, but enriching, conversing one.

Building a Bed for Grandma - When Vox transferred the meaning of a bed from a prison to a joy

Piotr, CEO with many years in his business, felt the need to offer something new for his long and loyal customers. He wanted to innovate the segment for senior people facing changing life conditions. As a producer of furniture he wanted to ease the shift from an elderly couple leaving their home in favor for a new, smaller one. He had a vision of improving life in terms of furniture for the elderly generation, especially in the circumstance of a physically smaller home and maybe due to physical illness or reclining health.

With a large team of employees, covering sales people to research and development as well as designers, he throw himself into a process of searching for new meanings of furniture targeted to elderly. As in the cases of ShineBridge and Needles&Pins a 2,5 day long meeting was set up to make visible current mindsets and proposals of new potential meanings. Metaphors of movie titles were used to describe the identity of *Vox* today and the future. Several sketches were made by the designers on potential new tables, book systems and beds.

There was no doubt about the excitement of Piotr who spent considerable time with the research team to discuss and reflect on what could be the products to come. Piotr was also very active in all the phases to come. He personally invited several of the guests for the Interpreters Lab and carefully listened to their views of what a meaningful scenario could look like for the target group.

In the late phases of the project the insights where, as in previous stories, transferred to tangible product proposal, covering a range of both tables, shelves and beds. The underlying meaning contained the need to feel independent and capable and was most strongly communicated through the sketch of a multi-functional bed. A small team of employees gave life to the depressing situation of many elderly and ill people, lying alone in their bedroom, in need of rest, but closed off from the activities of daily life, taking place in the kitchen, living room or else where. They managed to transfer in a very strong and emotional way, how it felt like, being stuck, maybe even in a hospital bed, almost as a prisoner, instead of feeling life and being active. It seemed the participants of the meeting really felt the mood they small team wanted to convey. Their proposal was a "Living Bed", speaking the language of modern home interiors, including a bookshelf system, storing facilities, a TV screen and curtains in case of the need for privacy. It included all the necessities like storing books or medicines in drawers, exposing photos, and even offered some training equipment and an arrangement to keep a baby seat when having children visiting.

The bed was presented through some simple but clean sketches by the team. Together with their rich description they managed to embody a new meaning with a bed. From being a private, closed off, even prisoner like device, to a social, inviting and life enhancing one. The bed came to be the product that Piotr felt should be the one to produce. He clearly felt the new meaning as he had been active in every step, discussion and reflection of the entire project. He did not have to question the underlying assumptions as he had been there when the new meaning slowly grew stronger.

When studying the final product, its visual language is not far from the final drawings in the end of the meaning innovation project. It seemed that by being constantly present Piotr could embody, feel, the new meaning clearly, and therefore have the courage and confidence to start producing it. We call this act of "making something understandable" an act of "embodying" as it seems participants at a certain moment start to feel the new meaning, rather than being convinced by rational, or objective arguments.

This embodying takes places through out the projects in all three cases and is visible by the use of metaphors as movie titles, objects and music but also through narratives, like personal or made up stories. In addition many sketches seem to enrich the embodying of new meaning.

Proposal – From Outsourcing to EMBODYING

One of the themes described in the theoretical section stresses the need of "others" when being creative. As already discussed this implies that creativity is "out there" to be leveraged. And that managers can easily accept new concepts without being involved. This does not align with the findings of our studies of the process of innovating meanings. We therefore, once again, propose an opposite direction to the existing research.

The cherished and sought for "outsiders" discussed in the existing stream of innovation research do not match with our findings. We propose that instead, there is a need of "insiders" to understand and fully grasp the new proposed meaning. This is clearly visible in the case of Piotr and the new meaning of a "Living Bed" above. It looks difficult to passively accept a new proposed meaning – as in the case of Mr Q who needed to ask and take out his own pre-conceptions before taking new meaning in.

In addition, discussions about meaning never end but continue in different formats (with a commercial bureau or new internals for example). It needs to be represented, embodied, "made real", both within people and as something tangible as a metaphor – if to make sense to others.

From within - The Aha-moments hitting searchers of meaning, silently or all of a sudden

The stories of *ShineBridge*, *Trewig, Needle& Pins* and *Vox* contain many similarities. There is the recurring theme of *pre-emptying*, to take out ones own assumptions, beliefs, even hopes in the search for new meaning. There is the constant activity of talking, reflecting and discussion, here named *conversing*, often without a clear direction, unstructured – even looking a bit meaningless in moments. There is the

curiosity, the openness and willingness to share and learn coupled with the engaged strive in trying to find ways to explain meaning in terms of objects, movies, music, movies. To *embody* what could be a new meaning. But, there is also something more that we as researchers has observed, but still are puzzled about. We cannot clearly see where it starts or how it happens, but we will try to describe this observation anyway.

Proposal From Unfreezing to Evolving
In every story there are moments of someone having the feel or need of finding new meaning. Piotr clearly showed it in his Bed project. Both designers and project managers indicated it, even if in a vague way in the beginning of the ShineBridge project. Mme O expressed it early on, as a starter of her project. We have tried to pinpoint what it is that drives this need of change of meaning, but we cannot today explain one clear direction of this fuzzy theme.

The reader of the theoretical section has understood that current innovation research explain the importance of managers inspiring employees to act in different ways. New methods, as brainstorming, or Innovation Jams are applied on organizations that are suppose to accept change and unfreeze from present thinking. More rarely in literature we see the employee herself as the starting point of innovation. If the case, focus is normally on solutions to problems, not on proposals of new meanings. Employees are, for example, asked to "hand in ideas" in idea-boxes. One of the problems with these is that when ideas are not followed up, and as a consequence, people loose motivation and stops sharing their ideas.

What we have discovered is that, when innovating meanings, the individual is very important. In the starting phase of all the project we have studied, one of a few individuals seem to be inspired, feel the need for something and in search for new meaning. Their motivation for this is unclear. But personal.

So, the wake up of an innovation by meaning process looks different. First, it is not clearly visible when this wake up takes place. It looks almost invisible and hard to trace. It looks as a slow evolving process. If asking employees they cannot give a clear and straight answer to what happened when they decided to think differently or even when the moment occurred. If interested in a change of meaning of products, it looks like a personal discovery of something. An inspiration from elsewhere that slowly takes space, evolve and grow inside a human.

Therefore we must see this evolving theme as being not really a phase, as in situated in time. It is more than a wake up, characterized by a continuous process of slowly understanding more, sometimes implicitly, and sometimes as "Aha-moments", like the German project manager in the ShineBridge case. It seems, that not until the end of the project employees can fully see and capture the old meaning, needed to feel and embody the new meaning.

DISCUSSION
The analysis of the four firms that have conducted projects of innovation of meaning, enables us to address our research questions.

First, we wondered whether the framework of "creative problem solving", which has been developed by observing processes of innovation of solutions, is also adequate to

understand the process of innovation of meaning. As we have seen from the analysis of the cases, the four themes of creative problem solving (Unfreezing, Naïveté, Communication and Outsourcing) do not emerge as relevant in the process of innovation of meaning. Rather, the behaviour of the teams appear as moving often in an opposite direction:

- We could hardly recognize a preliminary *unfreezing* step in the process of the companies. Nor the call for a change came from a manager who was acting outside of the innovation team. Even when exploring, through our questions, what happened before we met the firms, we never detected a formal, or even unformal, preliminary phase where the organization was prepared to accept that change as necessary and break down the status quo.
- Members of the team are not *naïve* in their approach to innovation of meaning, nor they embark into a project with a clean empty mind. They have their pre-understanding, even if they come from different organizations (such as the external interpreters). Actually, the most effective participants in the reflections are those with a clear standpoint and perspective.
- The team is engaged in *communication*, but this exchange of information does not seem to be the main driver of the process. The most inspiring moments during the projects instead have been those where the team moves beyond plain information exchange and engages into critical debates. The quality and depth of the conversation seems to matter more than the quantity and breath of information.
- In none of the cases the innovation of meaning came as proposed by people external to the team. Actually, the most effective cases seem those where the team included also the top management of the firm, which implies that innovation of meaning can hardly be *outsourced* by top executives: you can outsource ideas, not interpretations.

Second, if the framework of "creative problem solving" does not appear as adequate to help us understanding the process of innovation of meaning, which other themes recurrently occur in our cases? Figure 1 illustrates the four themes we have observed in our empirical analysis, and compare them with the themes of creative problem solving

CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING		INNOVATION OF MEANING
Unfreezing	→	Evolving
Naïveté	→	Pre-Emptying
Communication	→	Conversation
Outsourcing	→	Embodying

Figure 1 – The framework for the process Innovation of Meaning
and its differences with the paradigm of Creative Problem Solving

- from Unfreezing to *Evolving*. A process of innovation of meaning does not start from a first phase in which the team recognizes that the current meaning does not make sense anymore. We could not identify a preliminary phase of breaking down the status quo. The recognition of the need for change and of the inadequacy of the status quo indeed occurred not at the beginning, but evolved along the entire process. As the teams developed the new meaning, they also recognized that the old meaning did not make sense anymore. Like in psychotherapy, where reinterpretation start from a malaise, not from a clear recognition of a problem. As a matter of fact, most teams were not even aware of what the current meaning was, at the beginning of the projects. They started articulate the "old meaning" meanwhile they were recognizing the new meaning. In other words, the recognition of the old meaning, of the status quo, is an output of the process, not an input.
- From Naïveté to *Pre-emptying*. When it comes to innovation of meaning, the "naïve mind" capable of searching outside of the box is indeed a naïve theoretical construct itself. Innovation of meaning in fact is based on aesthetic and cultural re-interpretation, and no innovator is a clean sheet in front of it, not even outsiders. Rather then searching for innovators with a beginner's mind (who hardly exist), organizations may instead acknowledge the existence of pre-understanding, and deliberately create actions to make this pre-understanding outspoken and shared within an innovation team.
- From Communication to *Conversation*. Innovation of meaning is not based simply on an exchange of information, but on a deep conversation within the team and with external interpreters. This conversation is based on critical reflections. It resembles a dialogue rather than a communication. The more is based on clear-cut perspectives, the more it likely produces new insights.
- From Outsourcing to *Embodying*. Meanings cannot be optimized, nor put on a scale; they are new interpretations based on personal judgment and values. Solutions can be outsourced, interpretations and visions cannot. Innovation of meaning therefore is embodied: we have to be there when the new meaning emerges, be part of the team. The stories reported above talk about top executives who succeeded in envisioning a new direction only when they went through the process together with their innovation team, brought their personal perspective, took a critical stance, wore the lenses of the interpreters, and were protagonists in putting the pieces back together in a new way, instead of waiting for their team presentation at a board meeting. Eventually, their new interpretation came from the inside, where external interpretations and their internal vision of the world reshuffled.

Finally, our third research question was: is there any other theory that aligns with these four themes (evolving, pre-emptying, conversations, embodying) and therefore may better support our understanding of the dynamics of innovation of meaning? We found similarities of these four themes with theories that have hardly made their way into innovation management.

A first stream that aligns with our themes is the field of hermeneutics. We have already pointed out in earlier explorations how hermeneutics can help in understanding the process of innovation of meanings (Öberg and Verganti 2011, Öberg 2012, Verganti and Öberg 2013). Similarly, this connection between meaning and hermeneutics has been thoroughly explored by scholars in design practice

(Markus Jahnke most of all, 2012 and 2013; Katarina Wetter Edman, 2014, with a special focus on services) and by scholars in branding (see for example Hatch and Rubin, 2006). As a matter of fact, hermeneutics is the philosophy of interpretation, and therefore is it a natural domain to search for frameworks for innovation of meaning. Indeed, the analysis of these latter cases further confirms that hermeneutics provide powerful lenses. In particular, the theme of pre-emptying is indeed at the core of the reflections of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1960) who underlines that knowledge is always situated in history, and therefore we always approach any interpretation problem with a filter: our pre-understanding. According to Gadamer, distancing from a matter (as in "jumping outside of a box" as suggested by creative problem solving) does not help in developing interpretations. Rather, interpretations emerge from the interplay between on the one hand our own horizon (who we are, our pre-understanding) and the horizons of others. A beginner's mind, that is, without a horizon, is not only impossible to find, but is also detrimental for the development of interpretations.

Paul Ricoeur (1977), another philosopher of hermeneutics, provides further support to the need for conversations rather than communications. Ricouer, who reflects on the development of *new* interpretations (and therefore very close to our interest on innovation of meaning), underlines the need for a critical approach to interpretation. The search for new interpretations is not a convergent process of uncertainty reduction that may benefit for exchange of information, but a process of creation of "excess of meaning" (Jahnke 2013). This is what we observed in the dialogue with the interpreters. Not a divergent creative act, nor a convergent heuristic aimed at finding a definitive solution, but a vortex that moves deeper and deeper, by enriching our understanding of the meaning of things through an open dialogue. Hence the interest of Ricouer on the use of metaphors, which, by definition, are necessarily imperfect in describing a meaning ("*The dictionary contains no metaphor*" to quote Ricoeur), and therefore forces a continuous dialogue rather than pointing to a converging solution.

And indeed, metaphors were among the most powerful tools that the teams used to envision new meanings. Finally, studies by Mark Johnson support our theme of embodying a change of meaning. Johnson indicates that our understanding of meaning necessarily passes through aesthetic experiences, through our senses and body (Johnson and Lackoff 1999, and Johnson 2007). In other words, there is no change in meaning if there is no change in the interpreter, in the innovator.

Another field of studies where we can find analogies to our themes is leadership and vision building, and in particular Theory U, proposed by Otto Scharmer (2006). Theory U is based on the concept of *presencing*, where emergence of a new vision does not come from a rational process of optimization, but rather, by releasing ourselves from the level of the mind (based on seeing), to dive into the level of the heart (based on sensing), down until the level of the will. This deeper level is where the vision comes from: a dialogue from two inner-self: our current-self (that comes from the past) that we let go, and our future-self that we want to be. Theory U supports the idea that innovation of meaning does not require a preliminary act of unfreezing: only when one starts to envision a future she can also let the past go. The two things go along together, they are not in a sequence. It's an evolving process of releasing the past and embracing the future. Also, it supports the theme of pre-emptying: the dialogue and vision is activated only when one proposes her own vision

for the future. Only in that moment, he is ready to let the past go. Finally, embedded in Theory U there is the concept of conversing instead of communicating. Indeed, Scharmer observes that conversations happen only at the most superficial level of the process (which he calls "downloading": a powerful metaphor for communication as exchange of information). As long as one moves deeper in the U-shaped process of change, conversations turn into debates (where the personal horizon starts to emerge, but there is no real openness to question ourselves), into dialogues (based no a more empathic listening), into pre-sensing, where the conversation is aimed at generating visions by merging the several horizons (of the different interpreters and of past versus future). The conversations we observed in our project reflected this approach: people engaged into empathic reflections aimed at sharing one's own vision, fusing it with the others, regenerating a new interpretation. Finally, the importance given by Scharmer to the senses and to the self, rather than the mind (which only act at the surface of the process), is a strong support of our theme of the embodiment of the change of meaning.

The last stream that mirrors our reflections is in the field of aesthetic and psychology of experiences. In particular the model of Paul Hekkert (2011) for vision design. Hekkert's model visually reminds both the U theory of Scharmer (although the "U" is turned upside-down) and the detours proposed by Ricoeur. The journey of Hekkert brings the level of design from the product to the level of the interaction to, finally, the level of the context. Here is where meaning becomes manifest. According to Hekkert "*design is about looking for possibilities, and possible futures, instead of solving present-day problems*". Again here we do not find a preliminary phase of unfreezing: the detachment from the past comes along with the envisioning of the new. The steps that Hekkert suggests to move to the level of meaning, are steps aimed at pre-empting our perspective and be open to design new meaning. Hekkert describes it as a process of immersion, where our bodily presence is necessary to envision new possibilities.

CONCLUSIONS
  In this article we have explored the process of innovation of meaning. This is the process aimed at innovating the "why" of things rather than the "how". Innovation of meaning, which has always occurred, is becoming relevant in the current scenario, that is extremely complex and where the problems of people keep changing. Identifying a new meaning may nowadays be more important than finding a better solution for an old problem. Finding new meaning however may be also very challenging. Meaning is not an "add on" – not a label, "on-top" of a wrapped gift. The opposite, it is the core of product, the inside, the invisible, "the under the surface". It radiates through but is difficult to see, therefore difficult to discuss.

By studying cases of four corporations that have gone through the process of innovation of meanings for their products we have understood that:
- This process does not follow the dynamics of the existing theories that focus on innovation of solutions. In particular it does not comply with the four themes of "creative problem solving" (Unfreezing, Naïveté, Communication, and Outsourcing).
- Rather, the process of innovation of meaning appear to have a dynamics based on four different themes, to some extent antithetical to the themes of creative problem solving: Evolving, Pre-empting, Conversations, Embodying

The overall insight for managers interested in carving out the meaning behind their products is to see it as an act of immersing yourself and deeply engage in the interpretation. Meaning making involves the person per se and when meaning change – people change. This type of innovation is not to be seen as a fast tool forward, but, rather, the opposite. Contrary to recent innovation approaches (such as design thinking, brainstorming, or crowdsourcing) innovation of meaning does not happen through fast ideation processes based on numerous players. It takes time, commitment and personal reflection to come through. And also, it needs another language and mood than traditional problems solving. The current innovation language is often poor, limping, driven by the search for uncertainty reduction, efficiency, time to market, and lack of nuances.

And indeed, managers often lack the language for describing the human experience. Even in business schools, both students (who often have a background in economics or engineering) and scholars (same background) lack the necessary approach to address meaning that come from more "soft" worlds, as art and humanities (an indeed people with a background in the arts and humanities often feel unease in management environments). We do not absolutely mean that the next innovation managers have to get an MFA (Master of Fine Art), but that our approach to research and teaching in management cannot be stuck into the framework of problem solving, unless we miss other important dimensions of innovation.

Indeed, in our discussion, we show that similar reflections for innovation of meaning (Evolving, Pre-empting, Conversations, Embodying) have been sparsely developed in other fields. These are domains that, in the past, have not made their way in the discipline of innovation management: the philosophy of hermeneutics, the Theory U of personal development, psychology and aesthetics. We are therefore not alone in our early understanding of the process of innovation of meaning. But, why are these frameworks not still present in our scientific context? Our explanation is that the discipline have mainly focused on the search for solutions, where these theories are not relevant or do not apply. However, as soon as we move into the subject of innovation of meanings - most of our established and dominant theoretical framework (based on theories of design science, decision making, organizational change, technology management) lose their power. Instead, those theories that have developed in other fields and therefore rarely appear (as they would probably look weird, esoteric, even outlandish) become more central.

This has significant implications on both our research and teaching frames. If we keep considering theories based on rational optimization processes, information processing, change management, as the basis for our understanding of innovation, we will only be capable to understand, and therefore promote and sustain, one type of innovation: the search for new solutions for existing problems. We would leave an "outlandish" manager who dare to explore innovations of meaning, alone in her search for a proper process. Or, even, looking for other disciplines that could support her better.

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