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### Organizational routines during mergers

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## Sub-theme 3 (SWG): Routine Dynamics, Innovation and Creativity

### Organizational routines during mergers: A Bourdieusian perspective

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#### Abstract

Extant routine literature mainly examines the endogenous change and stabilisation of organisational routines, while routines' responses to exogenous/radical changes are less explored. In this article, we argue that Bourdieu's theory of practice offers a useful lens to understand how power dynamics evolve subsequent to change introduction in organisations. We draw on an in-depth qualitative case study of a merger between two academic institutions (Edinburgh College of Art and the University of Edinburgh) and examine the diverging responses of two organisational routines. Our findings suggest that routines' responses to organisational change are shaped by (a) the field within which a routine operates and (b) the actors' symbolic capital and position taking during change implementation.

**Keywords:** Organisational Routines, Bourdieu, Ostensive-Performative Cycle, Symbolic Capital, Field

## **Introduction**

Endogenous change in organisational routines tends to be incremental with relatively limited political disputes over the routines performance(s). In the absence of forces for radical change, change and stability of routines become mutually constitutive as, on the one hand, ostensive patterns of flexibility emerge (Turner and Rindova, 2012) and, on the other hand, actors' embeddedness in the wider organisational cultural and technological structures allow persistence of flexible routines over time (Howard-Grenville, 2005). Due to the gradual nature of these changes, window for conflict remains relatively narrow and despite nuances in performances of individuals or groups, incremental changes do not significantly disrupt participants' shared understanding of a routine (Dionysiou and Tsoukas, 2013; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010). As such, conflicts are handled through (tacit) negotiations of meanings and performances, power remains balanced, and routines operate as a truce between managers and routine participants (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010).

In contrast, radical exogenous organisational changes, such as mergers, put routines under pressure to adapt to new settings and result in the amplification of the conflicts, which in turn, lead into the re-formation of the routines (Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010). As a result, consistency in past experiences as well as occupational structures of mundane, everyday organisational work are likely to be disrupted (Feldman, 2000; 2003). It is, therefore, imperative to understand how routines (as mid-level organisational constructs) develop in response to those exogenous changes, and what role power dynamics plays.

However, our understanding of power dynamics of routines resulting from the introduction of radical changes remains limited since a) the power dynamics are merely

discussed within the immediate context of organisational routines, and b) the discussion of power is driven by the structure-agency duality. In the embryonic discussion of power by Pentland and Feldman (2005), power tensions are confined to the struggles between ostensives, which embody managerial interests (i.e. structures), and the performances which represent the very enactment of the routines by participants (i.e. agents). Following such view, other routine scholars have delved into various aspects of power in routines change over time by exploring the immediate context of the routine where all changes emerge endogenously and more powerful individuals (agents) are able to promote and project their very understanding of the routine vis-à-vis the designed routine (Howard-Grenville, 2005).

In this paper, we seek to contribute to the growing body of organisational routines literature by offering a framework that explains how power dynamics of routines evolve in the presence of exogenous change (merger in our case). We do so by drawing on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1992, 1977), deploying 'field' and 'symbolic capital' as two major concepts to explain our findings. We present a longitudinal case study of a merger between two public sector organisations (a university and an art college) where the merger partners endeavoured to centralise their practices and we examine two administrative routines (admissions and budget allocation) which responded differently to the merger initiative. These routines are chosen specifically since they embrace all features of the broadly accepted definition of organisational routines: they are repetitive (both daily and annually), they include recognisable patterns of interdependent actions, and they are carried out by multiple actors across the organisations (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). While one routine became fully centralised, attempts to centralise the other routine failed. This provides a valuable context for conducting research as extant literature offers little explanation as why two

organisational routines may behave differently when mergers occur. Our findings suggest the characteristics of the 'fields' that surround routines shape the development of multiple understandings (or ostensive aspects) of organisational routines while the symbolic capital of routine participants create opportunities for them to accept or negate the changes originating from merger by conforming/deviating their performances (or performative aspects) of routines.

### **Power dynamics of organisational routines**

Understanding change and stability of routines in organisations has enticed researchers for long. On the one hand, routines are known for their role in enabling stability and handling uncertainty within organisations associated with bounded rationality (Simon, 1991; Nelson and Winter, 1982; Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958; Coombs and Metcalfe, 2002). On the other hand, recent studies have demonstrated that routines in themselves can be sources of change in organisations (Feldman, 2004, Feldman and Pentland, 2003).

Feldman and Pentland's (2003) seminal contribution was key in explaining how routines enact change and stability. Their conceptualisation of routine consists of two aspects: 'ostensive' and 'performative'. The ostensive is "the ideal or the schematic form of the routine. It is the abstract, generalised idea of the routine or the routine in principle" (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 101). The performative "consists of specific actions, by specific people, in specific times and places. It is the routine in practice" (Feldman and Pentland, 2003: 101). Due to the existence and continuous interactions of these two aspects, routines act as 'generative systems' whose representations (ostensive aspects) may differ from their actual performances (performative aspects) (Feldman and Pentland, 2003) which in turn results in continuous change in routines (Feldman, 2000; Hutchins, 1995; Orlikowski, 2000; Weick and Roberts, 1993). It has

been argued that the variety in performances of the same routine create the opportunity for departing from the standard practice of a routine or its ostensive dimension which may result in permanent change in organisational routines.

Contributions made over the last decade have significantly increased our understanding of routines and their power dynamics. Feldman and Pentland's (2003) discussion of power highlights the tensions between the ostensives, presumably designed by managers, and the performances that are enacted by routine participants. According to them, changes in routines rely on the individuals who can "turn exceptions into rules" (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, p.110). The ostensive aspects of routines provide opportunities for senior managers to exercise power, whereas the very enactment of routines enables the routine participants to reflect on their actions and make decision on how to alter the performative aspects of the routines. In this sense, routines operate as a basis on which actors with different sets of interest can collaborate (Pentland and Feldman, 2005).

More recent contributions extend the understanding of power dynamics in routines by explaining which individuals and under what conditions can change routines. Dionysiou and Tsoukas (2013) argue that power is an integral part of routines' change in organisations. More powerful actors can "alter the situation so that meanings in the situation are consistent with their own definition of the situation" (Cast, 2003: 188). This implies the ability of more powerful actors to align the ostensive aspect of a routine (the shared understanding held towards routine by various participants) with their very understanding of it. Conversely, actors with limited power are either unable to change routines or rely on their (informal) alliances with more powerful actors to filter those changes within organisations. Exploring changes in a 'road mapping' routine, Howard-Grenville (2005) argues that the position and experience of the routine

participants affect the degree to which they can influence the change process of a routine. She, moreover, argues that routines embedded in technological structures are more likely to be affected by actors who have access to resources (e.g. knowledge and expertise), while routines embedded in cooperative and cultural structures are more influenced by individuals with informal and formal authority to change patterns of interactions.

Research also suggests that as well as individuals, groups can alter the ostensive aspect of routines should they hold the resources enabling them to exploit the ambiguity developed in uncertain conditions. For instance, discussing the disputes over 'pricing' routine, Zbaracki and Bergen (2010) document the process through which a marketing department's understanding of the routine dominated that of the sales department by adopting the abstract language of 'economics'- a language less accessible to sales people.

From the above it follows that while extant studies have contributed to our understanding of power relations that affect routines, there remains areas for further inquiries. First, there has been overwhelming emphasis on routines within single organisations and their change within relatively stable wider organisational settings. This, to a large extent, has resulted in exploring incremental changes of routines (with the possible exception of Zbaracki and Bergen's (2010) contribution). Focusing on the conditions where routines undergo radical change can enhance our understanding of routines behaviour in more turbulent conditions. Understanding routines development in response to these changes are important to understand as, on the one hand, they reflect the strategic reorientation of an organisation (Salvato and Rerup, 2011), and, on the other hand, the very re-formation of routines may enable the wider structural or

schematic change within organisations (Rerup and Feldman, 2011;Spillane, Parise and Sherer, 2011).

Second, our understanding of power dynamics of routines is still underdeveloped. Extant research on power dynamics of routines has largely focused on individuals or groups power relations discussing factors such as access to resources, organisational positions, and inter-personal dynamics (Howard-Grenville, 2005;Dionysiou and Tsoukas, 2013;Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010;Feldman and Pentland, 2003;Feldman, 2004). Potentials for change have been understood mainly through the agency of actors and the degree to which the exercised agency is allowed in the immediate context of routine. A query into the power settings, which condition the broader environment, can enhance our understanding of the changes in routines; an approach that can tell if and how routines operating in different structural arrangements respond to the change initiatives. This will not only give a further explanation of how power dynamics affect routines but also supplies a theoretical tool to understand power dynamics in addition to the agency and structural position of actors.

### **Bourdieu in organisation research**

As mentioned above, understanding power relations that surround organisational routines and understanding routine responses to radical changes that originate from outside organisations should be placed at the core of our inquiry.

With its particular focus on power and change dynamics, Bourdieu's theory of practice has received increasing attention in the field of organisation studies over the last years (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008;Özbilgin and Tatli, 2005). It enables analysing the mid-level dynamics of organisational routines through examining power relations beyond structure-agency duality and by allowing the scrutinising the context of the social fields



and historic capacities of individual actors (Whittington, 2006; Bourdieu, 1977; Jarzabkowski, 2004).

We find two elements of his theory namely 'field' and 'symbolic capital' of particular interest in examining the power dynamics of the organisational routines. Fields are "structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently of the characteristics of their occupants (which are partly determined by them)" (Bourdieu, 1993 p.72). Field determines what values are institutionally acceptable, promoted, or shared, which claims to competence are legitimate (Lave and Wenger, 1991), or even considered, in organisations, and which forms of capital are recognised as the sources of power. Each field is governed by its own set of rules, which are taken for granted by all agents regardless of their position. In organisations, fields set the conditions for routines, determine who is accountable to whom for which tasks, and how routines should be enacted in organisations across positions. They may as well project how deviation from the agreed-upon rules may be penalised and how agents should react to such deviations from standard practices.

In addition to vertical structures that govern routines, routines are exposed to a broader set of values and beliefs that can well extend beyond the realm of organisations and can affect the power dynamics that surround them. Recently, authors have discussed how shared interpretation of routines among its participants are affected by the 'organisational schemata' (Rerup and Feldman, 2011; Labatut, Aggeri and Girard, 2012): a set of shared values, assumptions, and frames of reference which determines how organisational members interpret and act – a concept which resonates with Bourdieu's characterisation of field. According to Rerup and Feldman (2011), organisational schemata affects actors' interpretations of routines at a higher level.

However, for Rerup and Feldman (2011), Schemata is mainly an organisational concept which reflects organisational cultures, values and belief system, while for Bourdieu, field is borderless influence of which surpass the cultural context of organisation. Whereas organisational schemata the actors' interpretations in their very organisational context, extending beyond organisational boundaries, field affects the power dynamics through which routines are enacted. In a study of change in diversity management, Tatli (2011) demonstrates how manipulation of the field of 'equal opportunities' to 'diversity management' in an organisation contributes to a significant change in recruitment routine decreasing the level of female and minorities recruitment.

Despite the fields' influence on actors behaviour and their recognition in their social settings, Bourdieu argues that fields cannot, on their own, fully determine the agents' actions as they develop 'strategies in relation to such fields' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). This makes the whole process of replication of social structures fuzzy and variable. The set of possible strategies available to each actor in the field is largely driven by the level of the 'capital' they hold in relation to other positions occupied in the field. Capital may include a range of different types of resources that actors possess and can put into operation at any given time and at any given field. As such, capital may appear in financial, legal, informational, political, or any other forms (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). According to Bourdieu, the possession of capital "allow[s] possessors to wield a power, or influence, and thus to exist, in the field under consideration instead of being considered a negligible quantity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992 p.98).

Organisation scholars have explored the mechanisms through which capital enables actors to exercise power in organisational work context (Vince and Mazen, 2014; Kerr and Robinson, 2012). Similarly, symbolic capital can affect how routine participants

enact or resist changes. For example, Battilana's (2006) argues that individuals with lower social status but with ties with higher status people are more likely to conduct change, which suggest the significance of social capital in both enabling and negating changes. Symbolic capital can also affect the development of ostensive(s) through affecting the way routine participants make sense of the routine and develop ostensive(s). Research suggests that social positioning of actors affects their sense making process; an aspect which directly links to how routine understanding develop in organisations. Exploring the sensemaking process for three different actors tasked to implement changes in National Health Service in England, Lockett et al. (2014) argue that actors' social and cultural capital shape their sense making during change implementation.

In conclusion, from this review of Bourdieu's relevance to organisational research, it appears that Bourdieu's ideas are suitable to the study of power dynamics of organisational routines. The relational approach that Bourdieu offers enables 1) to understand how the wider conditions of routines that originate from outside the immediate context of routines affect its ostensive and performative aspects and 2) to understand the ways through which actors accrue, mobilise and exercise their capital to project their understanding of routine as the dominant 'ostensive' and manipulate the 'performative'.

## **Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to build theory around routine changes through analysing the case of a merger (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2003). Since the merger necessitated managing change in the presence of both internal dynamics of organisational routines and external change forces, this setting, we believe, provided an institutional configuration that differs considerably from that which has informed most

previous research on the change and stabilisation of routines as generative systems. This made the setting ideal for extending the existing body of routine theory about how an exogenous change may affect the ostensive-performative dynamics of routines and what role power dynamics play in accepting or resisting the change impetuses.

### ***1. Research Setting***

The findings of this case study can best be understood in its original setting by the appreciation of the differences in the ethos of the two physically adjacent institutions. Prior to the merger, the art college, by far the smaller organisation, was well known for its pedagogical methods including practice-based disciplines in contemporary art. These disciplines are concerned mainly with tacit, experiential and embodied forms of knowledge gained through and understood by the acquisition of practices and one-to-one pedagogical teaching in studio spaces. The art college had hence developed customised approaches, systems and structures to support these aspects of its educational provision, ensuring that the distinctive culture of an 'art college' education was nurtured and allowed to thrive. On the other hand, the university, by far the larger and more research-oriented institution, tended to take a historical, literary and theoretically-informed academic approach than was the case at the art college. As a result, the university had developed a culture of 'public management', a 'process orientation' emphasizing efficiency, accountability and quality control (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald and Pettigrew, 1996). This was achieved by centralising various administrative processes and by developing integrative devices such as organisation-wide information systems, common vocabularies and understanding of procedures, extensive codification of rules and regulations, and exhaustive definition of interfaces between various departments.

Because of the merger (or the take-over as it was not a meeting of equals), the art college was undergoing a major organisational restructuring, specifically in its supporting administrative tasks. Accomplishing the merger required the art college to centralise most of its administrative activities within the university's central administration services in order to achieve economies of scale out of the merger. Due to the merger of those two diverse attitudes and ways of carrying out daily tasks, the clash of the organisational routines became a significant practical concern for everyone involved in those activities. This provided the chance to investigate the structural variations inherent in the routines of the two institutions during the course of the merger. In this paper, we focus only on two administrative routines, namely the 'admissions routine' and the 'budget allocation routine' of the new art college, which developed differently in the due course of the merger. While the 'budget allocation routine' of the university was fully adopted (absorbed) by the art college, the 'admissions routine' from the art college resisted the centralisation, resulting in the adoption of the old college 'admissions routine' in the new art college.

## ***II. Data collection and analysis***

Following extant theory induced from the in-depth study of organisational routines within a single organisation (Leidner, 1993; Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Feldman, 2000; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Turner and Rindova, 2012), this article closely examines the flexible and/or persistent use of routines over time. Longitudinal qualitative data was collected by the first author over 24 months, tracing in real time the restructuring of the art college administrations, the budget allocation and admissions routine particularly, from the pre-merger preparation stage to the post-merger integration era.

*Interviews:* Consistent with routine scholars' suggestion that studying the ostensive aspects of organisational routines draws on varied 'informant accounts' that

'summarize multiple performances across multiple performance conditions' (Pentland and Feldman, 2005; Turner and Rindova, 2012), we analysed informant accounts from different hierarchical levels of these organisations (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We conducted 38 in-depth interviews with the key players who were involved in the merger process (mainly high level managers) as well as the students and academic and administrative staff who were affected by the merger between the two academic institutions (Table I).

**Table 1: Interviews and Interviewees**

	Organisational or Merger Project's Role*	Organisation (University or College)	No. of Interviews	Duration (in minutes)	Mode**	Timing (Pre- or Post-Merger)
1	Project Manager	U	2	60/60	P/P	Pre/Post
2	Project Officer 1	U	2	120/--	P/E	Post/Post
3	Project Officer 2	C	2	60/105	P/P	Pre/Post
4	HR Manager	C	1	70	P	Post
5	Head of HR	U	1	60	P	Post
6	Head of HR	C	2	60/--	P/E	Post/Post
7	Head of Registry	U	1	70	P	Post
8	Head of Registry	C	1	70	P	Post
9	Staff Union Member	C	1	60	P	Post
10	Head of PG Office	U	2	75	P/E	Post
11	Head of UG Office	C&U	1	60	P	Post
12	Operating Officer	Ext. Temp. for C	1	60	P	Post
13	Principal	C	1	50	P	Post
14	College Registrar	U	1	70	P	Post
15	Head of Admin	C	1	70	P	Post
16	Dir. of Crp. Services	U	2	90/70	P/P	Post/Post
17	HoS of Art	C	1	90	P	Post
18	HoS of Design	C	2	70/20	P/P	Post
19	Head of ACE	U	2	90/--	P/E	Post/Post
20	Head of College	U	1	60	P	Post
21	Joint Program Dir.	U	1	50	P	Post
22	Joint Centre Co-Dir.	U	1	55	P	Post
23	Joint Centre Co-Dir.	C	1	70	P	Post
24	Admin Staff 1	C	1	30	P	Post
25	Admin Staff 2	C	2	55/30	P/P	Post/Post
26	Admin Staff 3	C	1	60	P	Post
27	Admin Staff 4	U	1	70	P	Post
28	Admins Staff 5	U	1	30	P	Post
29	Student 1	C	1	60	P	Post
30	Student 2	U	1	45	P	Post
Total			38	2225		

\* Human Resources (HR), Postgraduate (PG), Undergraduate (UG) Knowledge Management (KM), Administration (Admin), Director (Dir.), Corporate (Crp.), Head of School (HoS), School of Arts, Culture and Environment (ACE)

\*\* Personal interview (P) and Email (E)

The interviews varied in duration from 30 minutes to two hours with an average of roughly one-hour length. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Initial interviews included broad questions that helped to draw a big picture of the merger and the intentions behind it (familiarisation stage)(Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As we progressed in the interviews we asked the respondents how the changes in routines unfolded, and we left them speak freely. We consistently asked them to describe the chronology of the events. Secondary interviews were more structured and focused, targeting the main challenges that occurred during the merger in order to satisfy the necessary theoretical sampling for the research.

*Observation and Archival Sources:* In addition to interview data, the first researcher had opportunities to attend few meetings of the merger integration working groups. We used the observation and insights contained in the field notes to supplement the transcribed interviews. We also analysed the minutes of all meetings of the integration working groups, public merger documentations, and published news, articles and university bulletins on the subject of the merger in order to enrich the research data. These data sources were mainly used to corroborate interviewees' statements about the budget allocation and admissions routines in this article, and where relevant provide further details.

To ensure accuracy and depth across different accounts offered by participants (Yin, 2009), we triangulated insights from 38 interviews, roughly 24 months of non-participant observation and the minutes of monthly meetings of the (pre- and post-merger) integration working groups with extensive analysis of secondary documents developed by the merger communities.

We started our analysis by writing a thick story of the restructuring of the art college's budget allocation and admissions routines (Langley, 1999; Jarzabkowski, Lê

and Feldman, 2012;Pentland, 1999). In the next stage, attempting to unravel the underlying structural relationships from the narrated case study (Pentland, 1999), we scrutinised the case story in light of our research questions. Specifically, we looked at how administrators iterated between the abstract understanding of the budget allocation and admissions routines (ostensive aspects) resulting from the multiple pressures for consistency and change, and the emerging performances of the routine in practice (performative aspects), and the implications of these iterations in (re)shaping the routines and their relevant relationships and activities.

To extend and complement extant routine theorisations, we used multiple theoretical lenses to analyse and interpret our data (Graebner, Martin and Roundy, 2012). We went through multiple rounds of analytical interpretations with particular attention paid to the relations of power (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2000) in the context of socially constructed “normalcies” in organisational life (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips, 2006 p.228). As a result, we were constantly traveling back and forth between the collected data, emerging findings, and extant literature (Locke, 2001), adhering to case study research design techniques (Eisenhardt, 1989;Yin, 2003) and used tables and graphs to examine various constructs and theoretical relationships (Miles and Huberman, 1994;King, 2004;Graebner et al., 2012).

Following other research (e.g.Feldman and Pentland, 2003;Howard-Grenville, 2005;Levinthal and Rerup, 2006;Turner and Rindova, 2012;Jarzabkowski et al., 2012;Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010;Rerup and Feldman, 2011), we identified performances as specific actions that people took in conducting daily activities relevant to the routines. On the other hand, we identified ostensive aspects as the understanding of conducting the routines in the new art college, either inherited from the relationships



and activities in the old art college or the newly shaped ones by the higher authorities from the university.

As the power dynamics that originate from outside the immediate context of routines interested us the most, we found Bourdieu's theory of power of particular relevance. By deploying Bourdieu's categorisations, and specifically exploring the data through the concepts of 'field', and 'symbolic capital', we could pinpoint the areas where actors' acceptance/resistance of change developed. We defined field as a higher order structure that determine which positions afford what type of actions. Two relatively independent fields affected the researched routines. The admissions routine in Art College was predominantly influenced by the 'art field' and the budget allocation routine was under the influence of the 'economics field'. We also defined symbolic capital as the level of relational resources that routine participants hold in both enacting routines and accepting/resisting changes.

Finally, following the methods of examining the validity of inductive inquiry, we checked the findings with key informants by asking them to reflect on the derived insights. The theoretical findings of this study have also been presented at a number of academic conferences. This enabled us to incorporate questions and comments in the process of theory development. Consequently, the presented theoretical framework in this article has undergone several major revisions through time.

## **Emergent Findings**

### ***Change introduction***

On the day of merger, all processes related to the old art college administration stopped. It was intended to have centralised processes and systems to support the college administrations as a part of the university from the first day after the merger. As well as

other administrative routines, the budget allocation and admissions routines were also centralised into the university's support systems. This was, in principal, in accordance to the merger plan to capture scale economies by reducing (or eliminating) parallel tasks in all administration activities:

“... in all sorts of areas which are attached to the operational departments or core university support departments, like finance, HR, registry, estates, maintenance and all of these big sorts of corporative things that they could get economies of scale in there; I think for some of the academic related things too; [however] they won't be as noticeable as those (operational ones); they would try to centralise whatever is possible” (If1/In1/C).<sup>1</sup>

Despite the merger managers' efforts to rationalise the merger as an initiative which was not purely driven by economic motivations (i.e. to save cost), the economic drive behind the merger was omnipresent in every aspect of planning and implementing the merger. At its roots, the merger favoured cost saving and increased performance through standardisation and developing economies of scale. As two of the university managers indicated:

“By drawing on support services offered by the university, the new college of art will be able to achieve administrative cost savings. Services will be integrated as far as possible in order to achieve efficiency and economies of scale” (If8/In1/U).

“Here [in the university] is a very, very clear understanding of the norm, and everyone gains a variant of flexibility to move fast. I think that's the biggest contrast for what I can see; there [in the art college] is less shared understanding of the normal, correct procedures” (If12/In1/U).

As our observation of the merger progressed, we became increasingly aware of the varied ethos and methods in conducting daily routines in the merging institutions and the existing tension between the underlying rationales for directing those organisational routines in the merged entity. The art college was viewed as being run badly by the university higher authority and the message was sent across clearly to the

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<sup>1</sup> These abbreviations are used here in order to better indicate the triangulation of our data sources (If= Informant; In=Interview; U/C=from University/College). The numbers are derived from the chronological order of conducting the interviews and they are not in accordance with the ordering in the table indicating interviews and interviewees. For ethical consideration, the name and the position of the informants were made anonymous and non-attributable.

art college administrative staff, while the art college administrations were widely labelled as 'bad and unacceptable' performances:

"People might say: Oh we did it like this [in the art college]. And the response is likely to be: Oh well, that's a very good reason we are not going to do it like that again. Your institution [the art college] was being run so badly that we cannot let those practices come in here. There is nothing wrong with you [your skills and capabilities] but the way you've been told to do things for the last ten years were so bad and you can't do it like that anymore" (If8/In1/U).

These clashes between various understandings of the ways of conducting organisational routines- and hence ostensives- among the routines participants created difficulties in conducting those routines in the new way in the recently merged organisation – in routine terminology, created clashing multiple ostensive aspects and, hence, necessitating divergent performances. It became increasingly clear that there was a need for change during the merger to avoid failures. However, our findings reveal that compromises had to be made unidirectionally and from the art college part. Although the change was not coercively imposed, art college staff had to understand – adapt their ostensive understanding - and be briefed about the benefits of the changes that they were going to make. In principle, the art college staff had to adapt their understanding and to accept the way the university was conducting the daily routines and the understanding behind them:

"It's a two way thing. We need to understand what causes them [art college staff] grief, what it is that caused them to go around with long faces, maybe it's the way that we do our business in the university. Do we need to explain it better? Do we need to explain the benefits to them better? Or do we need to understand from them that maybe their way of doing things was actually better than our traditional way of doing something?" (If13/In1/C).

"We tell the new art college how they need to adapt their old processes and adopt our processes. How much of that we need to do and then overarching all of that is training, linking together and making sure that again people can understand how to do their business when it's a new business, a business that we have been involved in for some time so that we can say 'we can help you'" (If8/In1/U).

This unidirectionality seemed even more acceptable by the administrative staff as the old college of art did not have the same level of 'standard' procedures and practices in

place for conducting basic administration according to the understanding of the university managers. Hence, the art college administrative routines and practices were abandoned to a great extent and the 'forced assimilation' was pursued by the university (Haspeslagh and Jemison, 1991), despite the initial reluctance from the art college staff.

### ***Conformation of the budgeting routine: the dominance of the economic field***

One of the organisational routines in the art college that fully conformed to the change perfectly following on from the merger was the 'budget allocation routine'. Our analysis suggests that the conformation of the budgeting routine happened because (a) the economic field recognised cost-saving as the only legitimate rationale for conducting budgeting, and (b) the routine participants had limited symbolic capital in this field given their being relatively homogenous mid-level employees whose symbolic capital was not significant, and was even shrunk, in the economic field, due to the merger as they were now budgeting staff like other university budgeting employees.

'Economies of scale' was the main rationale for merger, which channelled through the 'economic field' that governed budgeting. The modification of the budgeting routine was preceded by a set of meetings and interactions to marry the different understandings of how the routine ought to be conducted. Given the cost-saving motivations of the merger, it was not surprising that the 'economic field' dominated the budgeting routine; a routine which is inherently about increasing efficiency of resources, and was under significant pressure to comply with the requirements of that field.

The budgeting routine (and its participants) in the art college were seen as incompetent, floppy, and sporadic, which needed to be abolished:

"We sat at one meeting, for instance, just with the year budget to talk about. 'What would be the assumptions for going through the budget? What does each of the headings mean? What room for manoeuvre have we got?' The terminology is difficult! Because it seemed

that the few schools within the independent art college had not seen a budget before! And they were like, 'Could we vary that? Could we move that?' So, there were lots of very, very basic explaining and answering questions" (If4/In1/U)

Therefore, it had to be replaced by the 'good' practice of the university, which was not particularly viewed as a progressive initiative by the routine participants:

"I think a lot of the merger depends on not too much fresh air and newness. I think the sort of language being used is more about continuity, continuing good practice [of university]" (If9/In1/C).

There were, however, no significant resistance on behalf of the routine participants to counter the change. Despite their will, budgeting staff at art collage were physically moved from the college to the university central budgeting department. The art college staff dealing with the budget allocation routine were mapped into their new roles in the centralised budget allocation processes within the university system in a 'fairly easy' manner. As the result of the mapping process, the staff lost their autonomy in conducting the routine, and became firmly restricted by the new routine, their job specifications became narrower, and 'less interesting':

"Staff were very disappointed to be moving into very defined roles where in the college they had a broader remit. I am going from being a free range hen to a battery hen. You had the run of the place but all of a sudden you are in this very small defined area and that's all you are going to do from then on" (If3/In2/C).

This standardisation was associated with the disempowerment of some admin staff that enjoyed a higher level of autonomy prior to the merger. The art college was more reliant on single individuals and their wide range of capabilities – hence more powerful admin staff -, while the university was more reliant on its systems and procedures, thanks to the depersonalisation of tasks and very high level of specialisation and standardisation – hence less powerful admin staff:

"They [in the art college] got more dependent on individual people. But you cannot do that within an institution like the university. There have to be a set of things that is the norm, policies that are the norm, and you can deviate from, you can respond quickly if something crops up. But it is very knowingly done as a deviation from the norm (If2/In1/U)".

“I think for the staff that have moved from the art college into the university, I think .... [t]hey are a bit going from a breadth of knowledge to a narrower field. .... Those were there for a long time, have got the breadth and the depth” (If5/In1/C).

These findings illustrate how merger decreased the autonomy of the budgeting staff as there was increasing pressure from the economic field to comply. Despite the variances in understandings of the budgeting routine, the art college staff could not project their understanding of the routine (their ostensive) to the newly introduced setting and the fact that they disliked the changes did not matter much in the change process because in the economic field the surrounded the routine.

The art college staff had limited symbolic power; they were mid-level admin staff in the university whose capital was not much recognised by the field post-merger. Prior to the merger, they were independent and their job was not only budgeting but to do a range of tasks. This means that they were not defined by their job description as budgeting staff. However, the merger transformed this; when they were mixed in the bigger community of budgeting staff, their symbolic capital shrank, as they became mid-level budgeting staff who were not different from the other administrators in the university and were not in the position to challenge the new routine. The merger decreased their symbolic capital meaning that they had limited power to exercise against the routine changes.

### ***Resistance of the admissions routine: the art field influence***

While the budgeting routine complied with the dynamics that the economic field emerging from the merger imposed on the routine, the ‘admissions routine’ responded differently to the merger. Despite the managerial desire, the university could not manage to change ‘admissions routine’ of the old art college:

“The university does tend to do [admission] that quite generically, which I know causes some problems for other parts of the university, that they are not hitting the right sort of markets, they are not speaking to the potential applicants, in the right sort of language. And that is one of the very distinctive elements of an art college, of an art and design

college, that people come from different sorts of foundation courses, into the university with all sort of qualifications that don't necessarily fit the university's criteria" (If3/In1/C).

This became apparent quickly after the merger as the admissions procedures of the university could not satisfy the admissions requirements of the art college and had no equivalent to replace it by their own way of doing things. Therefore, the resistance of the admissions routine to the change was threatening the success of the merger since the merged institution could not afford a drop in its total student application number which serves as a success criteria in higher education assessment:

"There have been problems with admissions at the new art college. I think that's disappointing because the art college had a very, very good system and it was recognised throughout the country. So, these kinds of things were disappointing, that there were aspects of really good practices that impacted directly on students that weren't kind of picked up upon because of the much smaller scale [of the art college]" (If17/in1/C).

"There have been some problems identified very, very quickly. And particularly for the undergraduates ... because they can't afford for the numbers to start dropping down as it was a very elite institution in the art world and they can't afford to lose that sort of prestige" (If19/In1/C).

Our findings suggest that the economic rationale of the merger could not dominate the admissions routine as it did in the case of budgeting routine; meaning the admissions routine received little influence from the 'economic field'. From the early days, admissions routine participants depicted the admissions routine (ostensive) as belonging to the world of art and creative industries: a world that was not receptive to economies of scale, and could be understood and exploited only through the filter of art college academia. Therefore, it was clear to the academic and administrative staff from the art college that there was only 'one way' of running the admissions and that was to remain in 'sync' with the rest of the art world:

"I don't know how else to do the admission; because then we wouldn't be able to sync with the rest of the art and design sector. You know, they can't afford to do that, because the whole purpose of the art college, now sitting within that university, is to build on that success, not to unpick it" (If21/In2/C).

"...there is no way around it in a creative industry such as art and design. Because it's clearly linked with other practices we do in the art colleges; things like continuity of fair assessment, or being aligned with other art colleges. We cannot afford any other kind of

admitting students since we will lose the best students out there in the art and design fields” (If25/In1/C).

This idea of synchronisation with the ‘art world’ suggests that unlike the budgeting routine, which was positioned in the economic field, the admissions routine was situated in the ‘field of art’ more than the ‘economic field’. This meant that the economic legitimation that governed the change in the budgeting routine was irrelevant in the case of admissions routine. The admissions routine would only be legitimate if it was aligned with the other practices that the ‘field of art’ would expect from artists. Therefore, the ‘cost-saving’ rationale, which largely drove the merger, was not as relevant in the case of admissions routine as it was in the budgeting case.

In addition to positioning the admissions routine within the field of art, the symbolic capital of the routine participants enabled the resistance too. Unlike budget allocation, or any other administrative routine within the art college, which only involved a socially coherent set of staff in charge of conducting the routine (hence more open to domination), the admissions routine as well engaged the academic staff who enjoyed a high status in both the art college and the university. This would give the admissions staff a ‘louder voice’ for expressing their (dis)agreement with the changes in the admissions routine. Academics remained an integral part of the admissions routine – something very difficult to ignore:

“... because there was an assessment process built into that, the academic staff were quite heavily involved at certain periods of time in the year. In the university, the way of admission for most of the main stream subjects, it’s still with, as an administrative process, with their just school year academic attainment; that’s different” (If7/In1/C).

“...Academics were engaged with the application processes from the very first day with students. ... I believe that the academics will ensure that that [the admissions routine] doesn’t change!” (If5/In1/C).

Such alliance between the two groups of actors [academic and administrative staff in the old art college] would situate the admissions routine differently in the “art world”. Admissions routine heavily relied on the involvement of academics whose symbolic



capital in the academic environment was (a) not purely reliant on their economic capital and (b) enjoyed the same level of recognition post-merger compared to pre-merger period. In other words, the symbolic capital of being an academic was significant regardless of the ownership structure of the art college. Therefore, the fact that academics were involved in the admissions process would mean a higher degree of resilience of the routine.

Eventually, despite the considerable level of managerial interest to harmonise that routine with the rest of the university admissions motives, the art college admissions routine remained similar to what it was before the merger.

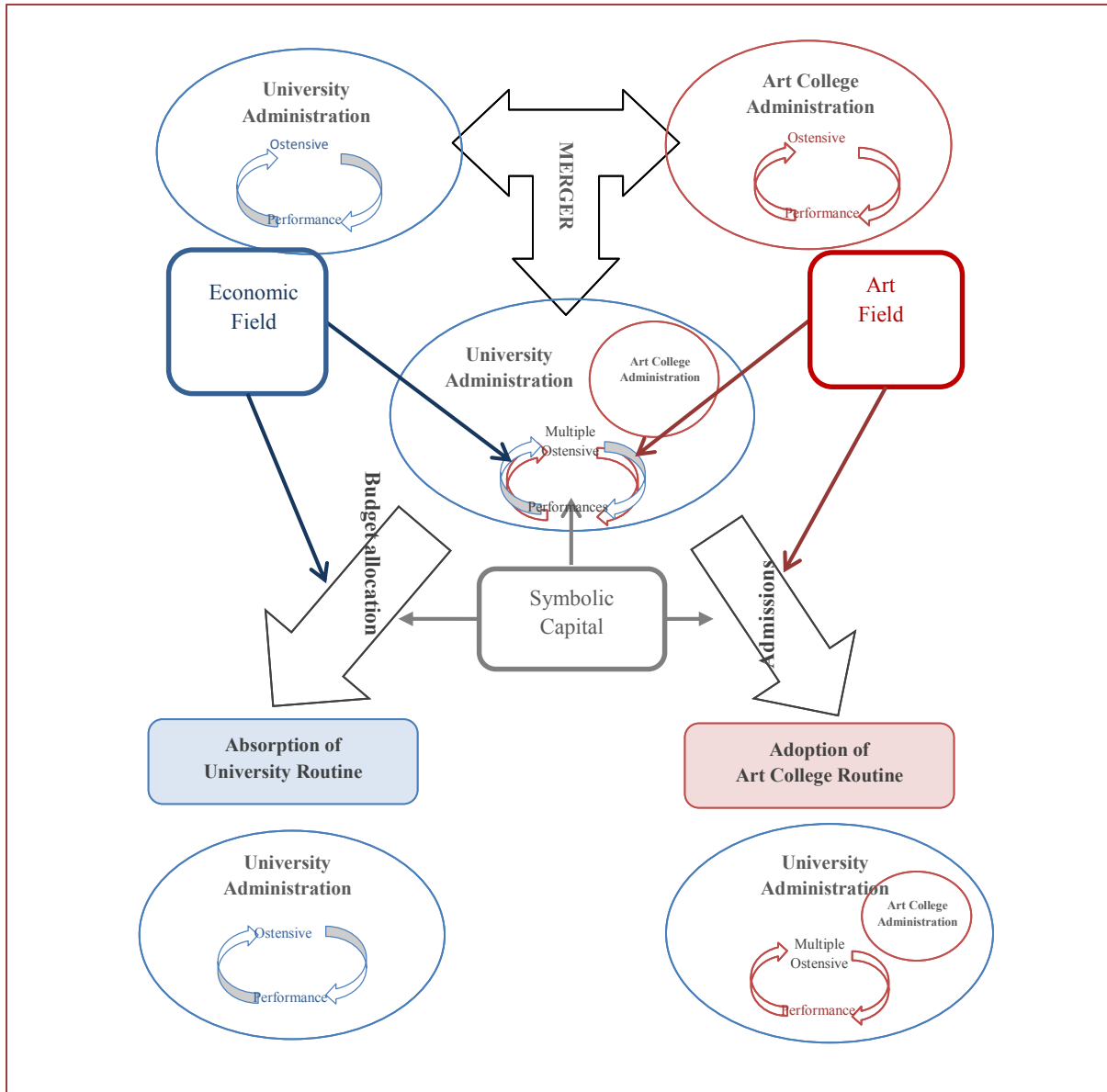
## **Discussion and conclusions**

We began our research inquiry by asking how organisational routines evolve in the presence of strategic change, and we discussed the responses of two organisational routines to a merger initiative. However, not many scholarly contributions have examined the divergent responses of organisational routines to imposed changes. More importantly, the impact of power dynamics that originate from outside the immediate context of organisational routines are less discussed. Despite the advancements made by various contributions to the field, there has been little theorisation about what makes routines more or less resistance in the presence of external change drivers. In particular, we know little about the power dynamics that can enable change or reinforce resistance of routines. Those studies that have explored power dynamics have discussed the agency of individuals and groups in enacting changes in contextually-embedded routines (Howard-Grenville, 2005) or have merely focused on the (mis)alignments between organisational interest and self-interest of powerful individual or groups (Raman and Bharadwaj, 2012) in performing changes.

We used Bourdeusian lens to answer why organisational routines respond differently to the same strategic change initiative. In routines terminology, this means how existing ostensives are affected by change and how performances resist or flex. In our case, Bourdieu's theory held to its promise and enabled developing an explanation of the dynamics of the two researched routines post-merger. In particular, we demonstrated that the field with which the routine is affiliated and the symbolic capital of the routine participants affect the routine responses to change.

Figure 1 presents the process underlying the development of ostensive-performative dynamic in organisational routines in our case study. Because of the merger, systems of accountabilities, actors' tasks, and their positional power changed, and the ostensive aspects of routines were exposed to change. As the findings suggest, for both routines, there were considerable negotiations around the meaning and ostensive aspect of the organisational routines in the first place. However, they behaved differently.

**Figure 1: The ostensive-performative cycles in the merged routines**



First, the ostensive aspects of the routines were affected by the field level change in two different ways. The routine responses were largely influenced by the fields within which the routines operated. Given the significant impetus behind the merger to decrease cost and enhance performance, both administrative routines were under pressure to increase resource efficiency and decrease cost. However, this economic

drive did not affect the two routines similarly. Being affiliated with the economic field, the budgeting routine was easier violated by the managerial desire behind the change. The routine participants held meetings and discussions to develop an understanding of what the other side means by their routine as a way to appreciate the routine before modifying it for the future and to develop a unified ostensive. This process, at times, entailed negotiations that resulted in a transitory development of multiple ostensives, i.e. the pre-merger budget allocation ostensive in addition to the newly introduced budget allocation routine. However, after a while, despite the negotiations, the ostensive aspects of the budget allocation routine in university fully dominated that of the art college.

The admissions routine, in contrast, developed a different path. Unlike the budget allocation, the tensions between the two ostensives did not resolve as the emergent field could neither accommodate the vested interests of routine participants across the two organisations nor did it dominate one ostensive over the other. The pre-existing ostensive never disappeared throughout the change implementation not least because the actors remained loyal to their interpretation of the admissions routine but also due to the fact that the ostensive remained in sync with the art field; a field which could hardly receive influence from the economic field. As the admissions routine was rooted in the art field, the cost-saving rationale was less inductive to routine change.

Second, the symbolic capital played a role in the way actors manipulated the performative aspect of the routine. The economic field that dominated the budgeting routine did not recognise the symbolic capital of the routine participants throughout the process, as in the new field, they were marginalised and absorbed in the wider community of the university's budgeting staff. This would leave little room for manoeuvre for the budgeting staff to 'develop strategies in relation to the field'.

Conversely, the admissions staff could leverage their symbolic capital and positioning in the field to resist the economic rationale for centralisation. In fact, the introduction of the new ostensive did not fully translate into performance, although the routine performance was temporarily altered. The engagement of the academic staff in the admissions process nurtured a higher-level symbolic capital for admissions staff. Making decisions on who can be an artist and approving/rejecting applicants' claims to competence (Lave and Wenger, 1991) were central to the admissions process and academics were the only legitimate source for that. Post- merger, the academics' symbolic capital was equally recognised, which was a source of power across the two organisations. This level of engagement put administrators in a better social position as they could negotiate the performativity of the routine against the prescribed ostensive. Eventually, the pre-existing ostensive dominated in the field and despite the temporal deviations of the routines performance, the admissions performance converged to the pre-existing ostensive.

These findings add to the current debate around the routine dynamics and power configurations as they signal a more distributed role power plays in routines' lives than the top-down logic. While Feldman and Pentland (2003 p.110) maintained that "the ostensive aspect of a routine is aligned with managerial interests (dominance), whereas the performative aspect is aligned with the interests of labour (resistance)" (see also Leidner, 1993), our findings illustrate that the ostensive aspects can diversify not only through managerial and/or labour interests but also through the way a routine interacts with a field that surrounds it (where interest would be only one aspect of their position-taking in the field) (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). As such, resistance of organisational routines does not purely rely on the conflict of interests, but also on the wider field that the routine belongs to, the symbolic capital of the routine participants

during change circumstances, and the extent to which designed change can affect the power structure surrounding a routine.

Our findings, moreover, extend the understanding of routines as truce in organisations (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010). Consistent with Zbaracki and Bergen (2010), our findings suggest that organisational truces can collapse when radical change is introduced to organisations, but we add to their contribution by explaining how power dynamics surrounding routines can prevent/reinforce the formation of truce. If the power structure is easily reshaped by the change initiative, a new truce is achievable. However, if the change initiative results in contrasting power structures – which according to our findings depend on the fields – routines may not emerge as truce, at least for a period.

### **Limitations and future research suggestions**

First, for simplicity sake, in this study, we assumed that pre-merger routines consist of single ostensive aspects. However, like any socially distributed stock of knowledge, these socially distributed understandings are not monolithic and are likely to be distributed unevenly; hence multiple ostensives. Building on this, and perhaps by exploring habitus of routines' participants, future research can further analyse the multiplication, confrontation, and negotiation of multiple ostensives throughout the merger. Secondly, there are also promising insights which can be derived from looking into the use of institutionalised resources, such as artefacts, tools, and languages, in organisational routines development. The comprehensive understanding resulted from such analyses can afford a fuller-fledged and finer-grained account of the phenomenon under study.

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