

Resist or Comply: The Power Dynamics of Organizational Routines during Mergers

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The role of power and agency in the development of organizational routines is under-theorized. In this paper, we draw on an in-depth qualitative case study of a merger between two academic institutions, a college of art and a university, and examine the diverging responses of two organizational routines (admissions and budgeting) during the course of the merger to understand how power dynamics contribute to resistance/compliance of routines. Our findings suggest that the differences in routines' responses to a merger initiative can be explained by applying Bourdieu's theory of practice and by employing the concepts of field and symbolic capital to unpack power relations in the context of organizational routines, and to disclose why some routine participants can exercise their agency while others cannot. We find that (a) the field within which a routine operates and (b) the actors' symbolic capital and position-taking during change implementation shape routines' responses to organizational change initiatives.

Introduction

Change and stabilization of routines have enticed routine's researchers in the past (Cohen, 2007; Feldman, 2003; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Nelson and Winter, 1982; Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Traditionally, routines have been viewed as inherently stable entities recursively – or even mindlessly – enacted by routine participants (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2015; Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011). However, recent conceptualizations of routines as generative systems have shown that change, like stability, is an integral aspect of routine dynamics (Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Rerup and Feldman, 2011). Adopting this perspective, authors have closely examined how interactions between ostensive and performative aspects of routines result in change (or stability) by discussing the role of agency in altering performances *vis-à-vis* structural features crystallized in routines in principle (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011).

Despite the clear reference to power, the notion of agency carries, our understanding of how

power dynamics affect routines remains limited. In the embryonic discussion of power by Pentland and Feldman (2005), power tensions are confined to the struggles between ostensives (i.e. structure), which embody managerial interests, and the performances, which represent the very enactment of a routine by its participants (i.e. agency). It has been argued that, through agency, routine participants may consistently change the performances of routines which may then result in permanent (as opposed to idiosyncratic) changes of routines (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2015). However, while an appealing concept in discussing routines' change, agency, in itself, does not suffice to explain why certain actions can be actualized while others cannot. For instance, although Howard-Grenville (2005) argues that formal and informal authorities as well as access to resources are the sources of power in changing routines our knowledge about why and under what conditions these factors contribute to the agency remains limited. To explicate the role of agency in routines' development, one has to demonstrate it independently from its realized outcomes (i.e. change/stability of routines)

explaining why some routine participants can exercise agency while others cannot.

Further, in the routines literature, power dynamics are mainly discussed within the immediate context of organizational routines by exploring the role of (powerful) 'individuals' (Howard-Grenville, 2005) or discussing 'group dynamics' (D'Adderio, 2003; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010) in enacting and changing routines. According to Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville (2011), this predominantly originates from routine scholars' focus on capturing and analysing routines *in situ*. However, this 'zooming in' (Nicolini, 2012) conveys the pitfall of ignoring the broader context within which routines are embedded and from which they receive influence.

In this paper, we seek to contribute to the growing body of literature on organizational routines by offering a framework that explains how power dynamics contribute to the change and stabilization of routines. We seek to explore this question in the context of a merger that disrupted the status quo of the existing routines providing a suitable and revelatory context for researching their power dynamics. We present a longitudinal case study of a merger between two public sector organizations (a university and an art college) where the merger partners endeavoured to centralize 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 organizational routines: they are repetitive (both daily and annually), they include recognizable patterns of interdependent actions, and they are carried out by multiple actors across organizations (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). While one routine became fully centralized, attempts to centralize the other routine failed.

We draw on Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1992) since it explains how power is distributed and enacted within a social sphere. In particular, we adopt two of his relational concepts, namely field and symbolic capital. While mobilizing the notion of 'symbolic capital' allows us to better explain what enables actors to exercise their agency in relation to one another in the context of organizational routines, an application of 'field' explains how actors can mobilize their power in relation to the broader context of organizational routines. Our findings suggest that

the characteristics of the 'fields' that surround routines as well as those of the 'symbolic capital' of routine participants shape the development of multiple understandings of organizational routines. This, in turn, creates opportunities for routine participants to accept or negate the changes originating from merger by conforming to/deviating from their performances of the routine in principle.

Power dynamics of organizational routines

Historically, routines were known for their role in enabling stability and handling uncertainty within rationally bounded organizations (Coombs and Metcalfe, 2002; Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958; Nelson and Winter, 1982; Simon, 1991). However, recent studies have demonstrated that routines and their internal dynamics can be sources of change in organizations (Feldman, 2004; Feldman and Pentland, 2003).

Feldman and Pentland's (2003) seminal contribution was key in explaining how routines change. Their conceptualization 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, generalized idea of the routine or the routine in principle' (Feldman and Pentland, 2003, p. 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, p. 101). Due to the existence and continuous interactions of these two aspects, routines act as 'generative systems' whose actual performances (performative aspects) may differ from their representations (ostensive aspects) (Feldman and Pentland, 2003). This, in turn, results in continuous change in routines (Feldman, 2000; Hutchins, 1995; Orlikowski, 2000; Weick and Roberts, 1993).

Feldman and Pentland's (2003) discussion of power highlights the tensions between the ostensives, presumably designed by managers, and the performances 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 a routine provide opportunities for senior managers to exercise power by shaping those understandings, whereas their enactment

enables routine participants to reflect on their actions and make decisions on how to alter the performative aspects. 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 more powerful actors can ‘alter the situation so that meanings in the situation are consistent with their own definition of the situation’ (Cast, 2003, p. 188). This implies an ability of more powerful actors to align the ostensive aspects of a routine (the shared understandings held towards a routine by various participants) with their very understanding of it. Exploring changes in a ‘road mapping’ routine, Howard-Grenville (2005) argues that the position and experience of routine participants affect the degree to which they can influence the change process of that routine. She finds 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 aspects of routines should they hold the resources enabling them to exploit the ambiguity developed in uncertain conditions. For instance, discussing the disputes over a ‘pricing’ routine, Zbaracki and Bergen (2010) document the process through which a marketing department’s understanding of the routine prevailed over 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 remain areas for further inquiries. Foremost, extant research has been largely focused on power relations between individuals or groups discussing factors such as access to resources, organizational positions and inter-personal dynamics (Dionysiou and Tsoukas, 2013; Feldman, 2004; Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010). Potential for change has been understood mainly through the agency of actors and the degree to which the agency exercised is

permitted in the immediate context of a routine. Although it has been argued that the shared interpretation of routines among its participants is affected by the ‘organizational schemata’ – a set of shared values, assumptions and frames of reference which determine how organizational members interpret and act (Labatut, Aggeri and Girard, 2012; Rerup and Feldman, 2011) – little is known about the broader context within which routines operate.

Thus, an inquiry into the power settings, which condition the broader environment, can enhance our understanding of the changes in routines and their embeddedness (Howard-Grenville and Rerup, 2015; Parmigiani and Howard-Grenville, 2011), an approach that can explain how routines operating in different structural arrangements respond to the change initiatives. This will supply a theoretical tool to understand power dynamics beyond the explored managerial–employee conflict of interests in the enactment of routines (Nelson and Winter, 1982; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010).

Bourdieu in organization research

As mentioned above, understanding power relations that surround organizational routines and that may originate from outside organizations should be placed at the core of our inquiry. With its particular focus on power and change dynamics, Bourdieu’s theory of practice offers a useful lens in organizational studies (Bourdieu, 1977; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Özbilgin and Tatli, 2005; Whittington, 2006). The relational approach that Bourdieu offers enables us to understand (1) how the wider conditions of routines that originate from outside the immediate context of routines affect the ostensive and performative aspects and (2) the ways through which actors accrue, mobilize and exercise their agency to project their understanding of a routine as the dominant ‘ostensive’ and manipulate the ‘performative’.

We find two elements of his theory, namely ‘field’ and ‘symbolic capital’, of particular interest in examining the power dynamics of organizational routines. Fields are ‘structured spaces of positions (or posts) whose properties depend on their position within these spaces and which can be analysed independently from 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 organizations, and which forms of capital are recognized 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 organizations, they may also determine how routines can be enacted and what they can/should mean. For example, in a study of change in diversity management, Tatli (2011) demonstrates how manipulation of the field of 'equal opportunities' to 'diversity management' in an organization contributes to a significant change in recruitment routine decreasing the employment of female and minorities.

Despite the fields' influence on actors' behaviour, Bourdieu argues that fields, by themselves, cannot fully determine agents' actions who 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. One of Bourdieu's contributions is his extension of the concept of capital from economic capital (or mercantile exchange) to 'symbolic capital' which may appear in cultural, social, scientific and literacy capital forms (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008; Moore, 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). Therefore, Bourdieu argues that, akin to economic capital, symbolic capital is a mechanism for exerting power.

Organization scholars have explored the mechanisms through which symbolic capital enables actors to exercise power in organizational contexts (Kerr and Robinson, 2012; Vince and Mazen, 2014). Although not discussed explicitly, the literature implies that symbolic capital can affect how routine participants enact or resist changes. For example, Battilana (2006) argues that individuals with lower social status but with ties with higher status people are more likely to conduct change, which suggests the significance of social capital in both enabling and negating changes. Symbolic capital can also affect the development of ostensives through affecting the way routine

participants make sense of a routine and develop ostensives, particularly in the disrupted context of change. For example, exploring the sense-making process for three different actors tasked to implement changes in the National Health Service in England, Lockett *et al.* (2014) argue that actors' social (interpersonal relationships and the resources embedded within them) and cultural (knowledge and skills) capital shape their sense-making during change implementation.

In conclusion, it emerges from this review that Bourdieu's ideas are suitable for the study of power dynamics of organizational routines as they extend the very understanding of power beyond hierarchical positions and to the broader context within which a routine operates. While for Rerup and Feldman (2011) schemata are mainly an organizational concept which reflects organizational cultures, values and belief systems, for Bourdieu, field (which also determines actors' capital) is a borderless influence which surpasses the cultural context of organization and affects the power dynamics through which routines are enacted. The concept of symbolic capital is of significant value in this study too, as it demonstrates how actors can wield their power in relation to organizational routines within the fields that surround those routines.

Research design

Research setting

The findings of this case study can best be understood in their original setting. Because of the merger, the art college (the smaller organization) was undergoing a major organizational restructuring, specifically in its supporting administrative tasks. Accomplishing the merger required the art college to centralize most of its administrative activities within the university's central services in order to achieve economies of scale from the merger. Due to the merger of two different attitudes and ways of carrying out daily tasks, the clash of the organizational routines became a significant practical concern for everyone involved in the merger. This particular context provided the chance to investigate the structural variations inherent in the routines of the two institutions during 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 during

the course of the merger. The two administrative routines are carefully chosen from the pool of all studied routines, as they are representative of the two holistic categories of administrative routines undergoing change: the changed routines and the stabilized ones. 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 centralization, resulting in the adoption of the old college admissions routine in the new art college.

Data collection

Following extant theory induced from the in-depth study of organizational routines within a single organization (Feldman, 2000; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Leidner, 1993; Pentland and Rueter, 1994; Turner and Rindova, 2012), this paper closely examines the flexible and/or persistent use of routines over time. Longitudinal qualitative data were collected by the first author over 24 months, tracing in real time the restructuring of the art college administration, in particular the budget allocation and admissions routines from the pre-merger preparation stage (5 months before the official merger date) to the post-merger integration era.

Interviews. Consistent with routine scholars' suggestion that studying the ostensive aspects of organizational 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 organizations (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). We conducted 39 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 1).

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 (familiarization stage) (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As we progressed in the interviews we asked the respondents how the changes in routines unfolded,

and we let 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 a 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, and to provide further details where relevant.

Data analysis

We started our analysis by writing a thick story of the restructuring of the art college's budget allocation and admissions routines (Jarzabkowski, Lê and Feldman, 2012; Langley, 1999; Pentland, 1999). In the next stage, attempting to unravel the underlying structural relationships from the narrated case study (Pentland, 1999), we scrutinized the case story in the light of our research question. Specifically, we looked at how administrators iterated between the abstract understandings of the budget allocation and admissions routines (ostensive aspects) resulting from the multiple pressures for consistency and change and the emerging performances of the routines (performative aspects). We also explored the implications of these iterations in (re)shaping the routines in the art college post-merger.

We went through multiple rounds of analytical interpretations (Locke, 2001) paying particular attention to the relations of power (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) in the context of socially constructed 'normalcies' in organizational life (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips, 2006, p. 228) whilst using tables and graphs to examine various constructs and theoretical relationships (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2007; Graebner, Martin and Roundy, 2012; King, 2004; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Pratt, 2008, 2009).

Table 1. Interviews and Interviewees

	Organizational or merger project's role	Organization (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 Programme 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			39	2225		

HR, human resources; PG, postgraduate; UG, undergraduate; Admin, administration; Dir., director; Crp., corporate; HoS, Head of School; ACE, School of Arts, Culture and Environment. P, personal interview; E, email.

Following other research (e.g. Feldman and Pentland, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Jarzabkowski, Lê and Feldman, 2012; Levinthal and Rerup, 2006; Rerup and Feldman, 2011; Turner and Rindova, 2012; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010), we identified performances as typical patterns of action that people took in conducting daily activities relevant to routines. The representations of performances in this paper are mainly based on the real-life story telling by our informants, complemented by the observations of the first author during the study period. As such, our understanding of the performances relied on the accounts given by administrators based on the concrete examples they provided. We also identified ostensive aspects as the abstract understandings of conducting the routines in the old and new art college. These ostensive aspects, like any socially distributed

understandings, are multiple and are likely to be distributed unevenly (Feldman and Pentland, 2003).

As the power dynamics interested us the most, we deployed Bourdieu's categorizations and specifically explored the data through the concepts of 'field' and 'symbolic capital' through which we could pinpoint the areas where actors' acceptance/resistance of change developed. We defined field as a higher order structure that determines which positions afford what type of actions. Two relatively independent fields affected the researched routines. The admissions routine in the new art college was predominantly influenced by the 'art field'. The budget allocation routine, contrariwise, was under the influence of the 'economics field', while the influence it received from the art field vanished post-merger. We

also, in line with Emirbayer and Johnson (2008), defined symbolic capital as ‘capital in any of its [cultural, social and economic] forms in so far as it is accorded positive recognition, esteem, or honour by relevant actors within the field’ (p. 12). However, as the economic capital, in the way it is treated in other studies as associated with wealth, did not play a significant role in our findings, we excluded it from our analysis of symbolic capital and only focused on social (i.e. relations) and cultural (i.e. knowledge and competences) forms of capital within the fields. Therefore, the symbolic capital of the actors in both fields was captured by their *recognized* knowledge and expertise in the (dominant) field within which the routine was enacted (cultural capital) and their connections with the actors who were the source of legitimacy in their respective field (social capital).

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. Consequently, the presented theoretical framework in this paper has undergone several major revisions.

Emergent findings

Pre-merger settings

Prior to the merger, the art college, by far the smaller organization, 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; a way of teaching which is expensive to run:

Art colleges are incredibly expensive to run. You can't have a high staff–student ratio. It is very intensive teaching, big studio spaces, you need the latest equipment. (If9/In1/C)¹

¹These 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 considerations, the names and positions of the informants were made anonymous and non-attributable.

The art college had hence developed bespoke 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. Because of this ethos, the art college was being run poorly from an economic point of view and hence was heavily reliant on governmental funds:

I think you can roughly imagine anywhere near 90% of all our income came from the undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, and from funding bodies; fundamentally from the funding council ... the college has been a small specialist institution; it has been funded with a premier fund, to keep the quality high and the numbers low. So I think from a financial point of view, we were not as sound as we should be. (If13/Int1/C)

On the other hand, the university, by far the larger and the more research-oriented institution, tended to take a historical, literary and theoretically informed academic approach, driven by scale economies. In this organizational setting, a broad range of scientific domains constituted a faculty base that could attract a large student body (Clark, 1998; Locke, 1989), with budget allocation systems that favoured single-discipline lecture-based programmes which could be offered to large cohorts of students. Thus, the university had developed a culture of ‘public management’, a ‘process orientation’ emphasizing efficiency, accountability and quality control (Ferlie *et al.*, 1996). This was achieved by centralizing various administrative processes and by developing integrative devices such as organization-wide information systems, common vocabularies and understanding of procedures, extensive codification of rules and regulations, and exhaustive definition of interfaces between various departments.

Pre-merger budgeting routine

The budgeting routine in the old art college was noticeably different from the one in the university. Being in a small institution, the budgeting routine participants were mainly following a one-off, bespoke approach in the old college in dealing with budget allocation tasks. Our observation of the pre-merger period, fuelled with informants’ insights from the post-merger interviews, indicated that the design and implementation of the

budgeting routine was not particularly efficient, economic, measured or even measurable:

One issue that struck me was when I was sitting at a budgeting briefing meeting pre-merger where this lady [from the art college] said: ‘we are different from the university, we have different standards, and we have got a different approach, we have a different philosophy almost’. But I think the implication was that ‘we don’t care about money, and we don’t measure everything to the *n*th degree. We are artists and we dress differently, look different[ly] and we are different’. (Inf18/Int1/U)

[for example] there wasn’t an equipment repair budget! What you will normally do, if you buy a big [expensive] piece of equipment, every year, you will put some money in the budget as maintenance, and money being kept aside for big outlays in a 5-year time. But that didn’t happen. You buy the equipment and think, that’s it! You don’t maintain it and you haven’t put money away to replace it. (If7/Int1/U)

Because of this, the budget allocation routine was primarily based on individual-level interactions among the higher-level staff, lacking any overall systematic approach to an economically sound and justified budgeting:

Everything was at really kind of individual levels ... this professor, or this department, wants to do such and such. And there would always be an exception made, or a ‘one-off’ bespoke model created for that issue. (If4/In1/U)

The university, on the other hand, had long adopted a standard budgeting approach, with detailed budgeting plans for each school and department within its wide structure, foreseeing all aspects of doing daily tasks throughout an academic year:

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)

Pre-merger admissions routine

The admissions routine in the old art college differed significantly from the one conducted by the university pre-merger. The art college admission

was based on the prospective students’ portfolios – their art work – as well as their academic grades. As a result, the academic staff in the art college were heavily involved in the admissions as core routine participants:

There has to be an assessment of the portfolio. We would split the process between the academic registry and the schools, and the schools [the academic staff] would assess the portfolios independently. The registry staff would assess the academic qualifications, and then [if successful] it comes to the next stage that we were going to invite some students who then come for an interview; they would then need to bring a bigger, more detailed portfolio, which would then go through an assessment again [by the academic staff]. (If6/Int1/C)

The university mainstream admissions process, on the contrary, was solely based on applicants’ academic attainment, which stayed as an administrative process in the admissions office. This routine involved only administrative staff as the central routine participants, who only consulted with the programme directors at near-final stages, in order to conclude the lists of incoming students. Here, the economies of scale rationale dictated the centralization of the admissions routine of all schools in the university.

Change introduction

On the day of the merger, all processes related to the old art college administration ceased. It was intended to have centralized processes and systems to support the college administrations as a part of the university from the first day after the merger. Hence, the budget allocation and admissions routines were also to be integrated into the university’s support systems:

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 ... they would try to centralize whatever is possible. (If1/In1/C)

Despite the top-level efforts to rationalize the merger impetus as an academic 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:

While the fundamental objectives of the merger are academic, merger should ensure that, within future funding constraints, the art college's academic strengths can be maintained and enhanced in a way that would prove extremely difficult in the current and anticipated economic and public funding environment. (merger proposal, p. 7)

At its roots, the merger favoured cost saving and increased performance through developing economies of scale and 'standardization' (i.e. adopting university norms). As a university manager 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)

As our observation of the merger progressed, we became increasingly aware of the coexistence of the varied ethos and methods in conducting daily routines in the merged institutions and the existing tension between the underlying rationales for directing those organizational routines in the new art college. The old art college was viewed as being run badly by the university higher authority and that message was sent across clearly to the art college administrative staff, while the performance of the art college administrations were widely labelled as 'bad and unacceptable':

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.' (If8/In1/U)

The clashes between various understandings of the ways of conducting organizational routines among the routines' participants (multiple ostensives) created difficulties in conducting those routines in the newly merged organization, and it quickly became 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 from the art college side. 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 accept the way the university was conducting the daily routines and the understanding behind them:

I would say there's been a merger between a large organization and smaller organization. Inevitably, it is the large organization systems, processes, procedures, that would apply in the small organization. So, inevitably, it's for the art college to become as university-like as it can, and as quickly as it can. (If19/int1/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. (If8/In1/U)

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, the art college administrative routines and practices were abandoned to a great extent and the 'forced assimilation' (Haspeslagh and Jemison, 1991) was pursued by the university.

*Compliance of the budgeting routine:
the dominance of the economic field*

One of the organizational routines in the art college that fully conformed to the change following on from the merger was the budget allocation routine. Given the cost-saving motivations of the merger, it was not surprising that the 'economic field' dominated the budgeting routine, a routine that is inherently about increasing efficiency of resources and was under significant pressure to comply with the requirements of that field.

Throughout the merger, the budgeting routine (and its participants) in the art college was seen as incompetent, floppy and sporadic, and 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 the university]. (If9/In1/C)

There was no visible resistance, however, on behalf of the routine participants to counter the change. Against their will, budgeting staff at the art college were physically relocated to the university central budgeting department and were mapped into their new roles in the centralized budget allocation processes within the university system. The art college was more reliant on single individuals and their wide range of capabilities, while the university was more reliant on its centralized systems and detailed procedures, thanks to the depersonalization of tasks and very high level of specialization and standardization. Therefore, the staff lost their autonomy in conducting the routine and became firmly restricted by the new routine, while their job specifications became narrower and ‘less interesting’:

They used to have a broad range of applicable capabilities and a broad range of things to do. Now, they come into a bigger, incomparable organization with what they used to. Now, instead of doing so many things, they are more focused. So instead of pushing them to the edge of their capabilities, they have been limited, or delimited, to one core element of their capability that sometimes is not their favourable core. (If12/In1/U)

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)

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. Thus, the art college budgeting staff suffered from shrunk autonomy (symbolic capital) and losing direct contact with their academic colleagues (who sustained their legitimacy throughout) which limited their ability to resist the introduced changes.

Resistance of the admissions routine: the art field influence

While the budgeting routine complied with the dynamics that the economic field, empowered by the merger, imposed on the routine, the admissions routine responded differently to the merger. Despite the managerial desire and in the presence of an economic field, the university could not manage to change (i.e. centralize) the admissions routine of the old college:

The university does tend to do that [admission] 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 sorts of qualifications that don’t necessarily fit the university’s criteria. (If3/In1/C)

This became apparent soon after the merger as the admissions procedures of the university could not satisfy the admissions requirements of the art college, expected by the staff as well as the students in the art college – what they think the routine should be (the ostensive aspects). Therefore, the incompatibility of the admissions routines in the merged institution during the first weeks after the merger was threatening the success of the merger. The merged institution could not afford a drop in its total student applications number – a factor that serves as a success criterion in higher education assessment, and hence for the merger:

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 recognized 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. (If17/in1/C)

This would mean losing the best students as well as the prestige that the art college had in the art world:

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 centralization could not dominate the admissions routine in the same way as it did in the case of the budgeting routine. 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 only be understood through the lens 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 synchronization with the 'art world' suggests that unlike the budgeting routine, which was predominantly managing and allocating financial resources, the admissions routine was situated in the *field of art*. This meant that the economic legitimization that governed the centralization in the budgeting routine was irrelevant in the case of the admissions routine. The admissions routine would only be legitimate if it was aligned with the other practices that the art world would recognize as legitimate.

In addition to positioning the admissions routine within the field of art, the visible engagement

of academics would give the admissions staff a louder voice for expressing any disagreement with the routine changes. Academics remained an integral part of the admissions routine, and a source of knowledge and competency (i.e. cultural capital) – something very difficult to ignore:

... because there was an assessment process built into that [admissions routine], 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 mainstream 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 contribute to the resistance of the routine. Academics enjoyed the same level of recognition post-merger compared to the pre-merger period. In other words, academics retained their status and legitimacy (i.e. symbolic capital) in the arts field in both art college and university post-merger. Hence, a higher degree of resilience of the routine was created.

Eventually, despite the considerable level of managerial interest in harmonizing the routine with the rest of the university admissions, the art college admissions routine reverted to the form it had prior to the merger within the university structure (decentralized and relocated back to the college). Therefore, although the computer systems used by the admissions routine participants became integrated with the central university system, the routine stayed independent from the mainstream admissions in the university.

Discussion

We used a Bourdieusian lens to understand how power dynamics affect routines and we particularly examined a merger context. In our case, Bourdieu's theory held its promise and enabled us to develop 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.

An analytical model of resistance and compliance of the two routines

Figure 1 presents the process underlying the development of ostensive–performative dynamics in organizational routines in our case study. Because of the merger, routines became disrupted and the systems of accountabilities, actors' tasks and their positional power changed. As the findings suggest, for both routines, there were considerable negotiations around the meaning and ostensive aspects of the organizational routines in the first place. However, they behaved differently.

Given the significant impetus behind the merger to decrease cost and enhance performance, both administrative routines were under pressure to increase resource efficiency. However, this economic drive did not affect the two routines in the same way. Being affiliated with the economic field, the budgeting routine was violated more easily by the managerial desire behind the change. The routine participants held meetings and discussions to develop an understanding of what the other side meant by their routine as a way to appreciate the routine before modifying it for the future and to develop a unified ostensive. However, after a while, despite the negotiations, the ostensive aspects of the budget allocation routine in the university totally dominated that of the art college and shaped the performance of the routine in the college post-merger.

Our findings suggest that two factors contributed to this development. First, the budget allocation routine was much in line with the economic field as, after all, it was about resource efficiency. This meant that there was not much room for resistance for the routine participants as the field that embedded the routine was already aligned with the merger impetus. The routine participants were receptive to the change because given their expertise they could appreciate why the changes had to be made. Second, the routine participants lost their symbolic capital as they became less autonomous and more single-purpose. Moreover, because of the relocation, they lost their direct connections with the academics who were not, after all, a source of legitimacy in the economic field. This meant that the routine

participants could not mobilize their power within the new settings to resist the change.

The admissions routine, by contrast, developed a different path. Unlike the budget allocation, the tensions between the multiple understandings of conducting the admissions in the two institutions pre-merger did not resolve post-merger, as the merger could not accommodate differences in both understanding and enactment of the routine. As a result, the pre-existing ostensive in conducting the admissions never disappeared throughout the change implementation and the routine participants remained loyal to their original interpretation of the admissions routine in the old college.

The following factors contributed to these observations. First, the routines had to remain in sync with the art field while at the same time receiving influence from the economic field. After all, the admissions had to recruit the best students in the discipline who would be attracted to other universities had the college discarded its way of recruiting students. This would mean some loss for the university as student tuition fees were one of the main factors contributing to the university income. Therefore, although the admissions routine was rooted in the art field, which meant that the cost-saving rationale was less effective in bringing about changes in the routine, and centralizing it, the routine, as a whole, would become less profit making had it adopted the university's centralized admission.

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 recognize the symbolic capital of the routine participants throughout the process, as in the new field they were absorbed into the wider community of the university's budgeting staff. This left 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 centralization. In fact, the introduction of the new ostensive did not fully translate into new performances, although the routine performance was temporarily altered. The engagement of the academics in the admissions process nurtured a higher-level symbolic capital for the admissions staff. Making decisions on who can be an artist and approving/rejecting applicants' claims to competence (Lave and Wenger, 1991) were

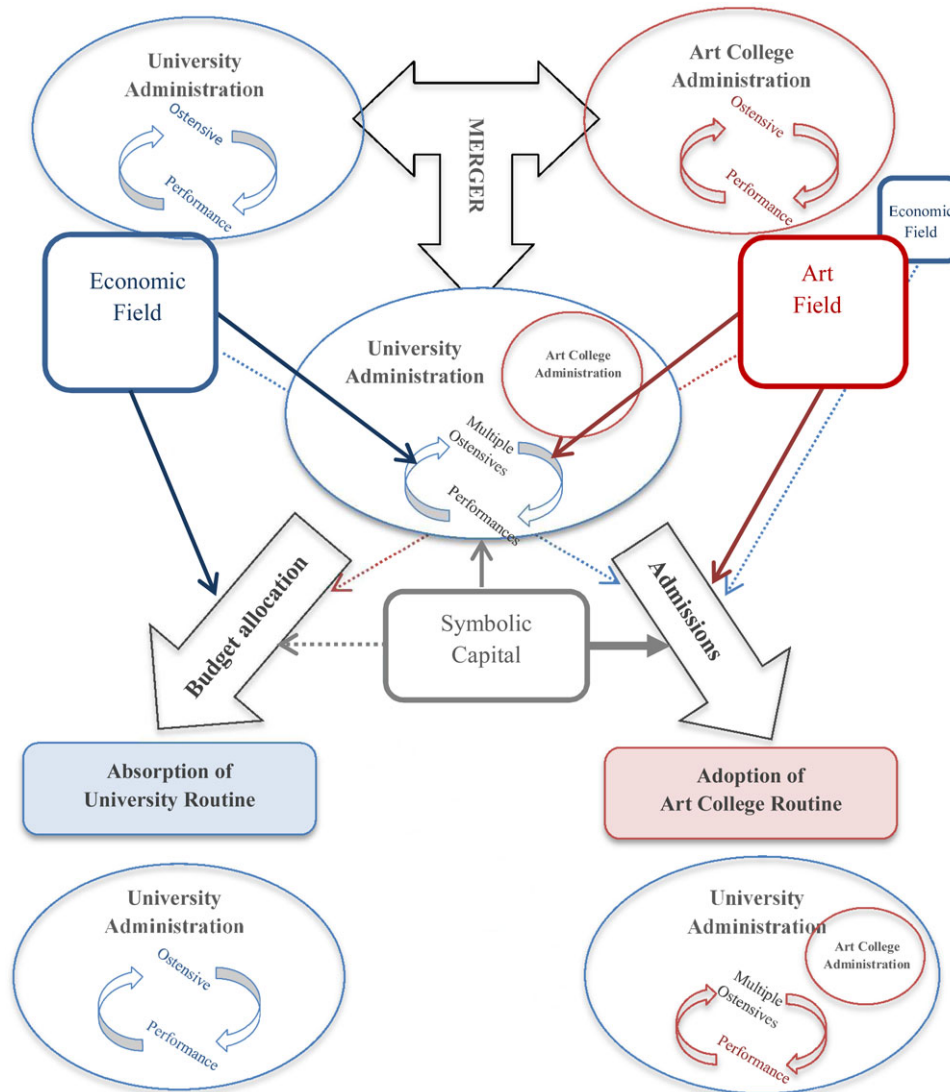


Figure 1. The ostensive–performative cycles in the merged routines

central to the admissions process and academics were the only legitimate source for that. Post-merger, the symbolic capital of the academics from the art college was equally recognized as they remained a legitimate source of power in the admissions routine. This put administrators in a better social position since they could negotiate the performativity of the routine against the prescribed ostensive. Therefore, although for a short period of time multiple ostensives governed the development of the organizational routine, the old ostensive prevailed after a while, and despite the temporal deviations of the routines’ performance the

admissions’ performances converged with the pre-existing ostensive from the old admissions routine in the art college.

Theoretical contributions and managerial implications

We began our research inquiry by asking how power dynamics affect the development of routines and we discussed the responses of two organizational routines to a merger initiative.

Our findings contribute to the existing body of knowledge in two major ways. First, we extend

the existing understanding of routines by explaining and discussing the impact of the broader settings within which organizational routines are embedded. Those studies that explored power dynamics have either analysed the role of agency of individuals and groups in enacting changes in contextually embedded routines (Howard-Grenville, 2005; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010) or focused on the (mis)alignments between organizational interest and self-interest of powerful individuals or groups (Raman and Bharadwaj, 2012) in enacting routines. We found that the broader context within which routines are embedded matters both in how routines are enacted and how power dynamics affect them. Our findings are in line with Zbaracki and Bergen (2010) who argue that routine participants' interpretations of the field of 'economics' result in overt conflicts between departments which are latent before major changes occur. However, we add to their contribution by discussing how in organizations, even across similar professions (administrators in our case), the interpretations that actors draw from the broader fields in relation to a routine affect their understandings and enactment of that routine.

Our findings also contrast with those of Feldman (2003), who argues that routines' resistance to intended changes emanate from the inconsistencies between performances and the intended changes. In our case, budgeting routine complied with the intended change despite the significant discrepancies between the intended changes and pre-merger performances. Therefore, by proposing a framework – which links symbolic capital and field to ostensive and performative aspects of routines – we offer a different explanation as to why routines may resist intended changes when the status quo of a routine is disrupted. According to our findings, if the rationale of the change is in agreement with the field within which the routine is embedded, and routine participants do not have power sources (i.e. the symbolic capital) to resist the change, the routine may still change. However, if the field that dominantly embeds the routine is in disagreement with the change rationale, then the routine may resist the change subject to the availability of strategies to routine participants (symbolic capital). By linking the developments of routines to the broader context that embeds them we contribute to an understanding of the routines' embeddedness which is identified by Howard-

Grenville and Rerup (2015) as an under-theorized domain in routine studies.

Second, while previous routine research has mainly viewed the role of power from the employee–manager conflicts point of view and as a means to reconcile or suppress the conflicts (Burawoy, 2012; Nelson and Winter, 1982; Zbaracki and Bergen, 2010), our findings extend the current debate by signalling a more nuanced role that power plays in the development of routines in organizations. Feldman and Pentland (2003, p. 110) maintained that 'the ostensive aspect of a routine is aligned with the managerial interests (dominance), whereas the performative aspect is aligned with the interests of labour (resistance)' (see also Leidner, 1993). Our findings illustrate that the issue of control and power is not merely limited to the ostensive–performative tensions but also to the ways through which a routine interacts with a field that surrounds it, where interest would be only one aspect of actors' position-taking in the field (Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008). As a result, we argue that the strategies available to actors to deviate from the prescribed ostensives (embodied in their mobilized symbolic capital) and their position-taking within the fields matter equally. Moreover, although from past research we know that agency matters in how organizational routines are enacted (Jarzabkowski, Lê and Feldman, 2012; Turner and Rindova, 2012), there is not much discussion of where this agency originates from and how it is enacted. By using Bourdieu's relational theory of practice, our findings offer some insights about 'upon what' actors draw agency and 'how' they can enact it.

Our findings have managerial implications too. Mergers are found to be difficult to manage as they bring together different organizational cultures, norms and values. However, our findings suggest that one particular source of difficulty can be found in the synchronization of merging organizational routines. In particular, understanding how organizational routines are situated in their broader context and which fields are involved in their enactment can enhance managers' and routine participants' ability to identify the origins of conflict and to address them.

Limitations and future research suggestions

First, for simplicity, in this study we assumed that our pre-merger routines consist of a single

(dominant) ostensive aspect. However, these distributed understandings, like any socially distributed stock of knowledge, are not monolithic and are likely to disperse disproportionately; hence, multiple ostensives should be considered in studying all pre- and post-merger routines. Second, although we drew on Bourdieu's practice theory, using all the three cornerstones of his theory, namely habitus, field and capital together, can provide a more fully fledged picture of routines' changes and stability. Building on these, and by exploring the habitus of routine participants, future research can further analyse the multiplication, confrontation and negotiation of multiple ostensives throughout the course of organizational change. Third, we did not discuss our findings from the 'resource dependence' point of view (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003) which is a potential rival theory for our discussion of power. However, this theory would not adequately explain our findings because, according to resource dependence, the admission routine would have had to comply with the university's requirements due to the economic dominance of the university (i.e. the college resource dependence on the university). Our findings begin to potentially question this assumption, and we encourage future research to explore this avenue. Finally, in our research we focused on two organizations with different sizes, which could potentially mean more power from the larger partner. Future research is encouraged to explore conditions in the mergers of equals.

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