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Strategy Formation amidst Multiple Interests: The Tensions and Orientations Shaping Organizational Trajectories

par
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Résumé

Dans cette thèse, j'explore la question de la formation des stratégies au milieu d'intérêts multiples. Le point de départ est que les organisations ne sont pas monolithiques, et la cohérence qui se dessine dans leurs actions au fil du temps (c.-à-d. les stratégies) prend forme dans un climat où des différends et conflits surviennent par rapport aux activités et aux priorités organisationnelles, et où des intérêts multiples, voire divergents, sont donc gérés.

Mon approche se distingue des perspectives de recherche qui associent la multiplicité des intérêts à la diversité des groupes socioculturels, car elle traite cette multiplicité de manière moins prédéterminée. Les membres des organisations ne sont pas décrits comme si leurs comportements étaient pleinement déterminés par les règles, les normes et les croyances du seul groupe auquel on les identifie. Ma recherche repose plutôt sur la reconnaissance du fait que les êtres humains sont rarement exclusivement identifiables à un groupe ou un autre. Aussi, tout comme d'autres acteurs sociaux, les membres des organisations seraient familiarisés avec différentes façons d'être, et de faire les choses – chaque membre ayant été socialisé dans divers ordres normatifs et cognitifs, et pas seulement celui qu'on associe généralement à sa fonction (*ou* sa profession, *ou* son sexe, *ou* son milieu social, etc.). Ils peuvent donc s'engager dans la vie organisationnelle de manière plus variable que ne le suggèrent nos catégories pré-données et, trop souvent, exclusives. Pour mieux comprendre les dynamiques internes à travers lesquelles les stratégies prennent forme, il semble donc nécessaire de se pencher sur ce que les membres font et disent *véritablement*.

Ma thèse s'appuie sur les travaux théoriques de Boltanski et Thévenot – notamment, Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006[1991]; Thévenot, 2001, 2006 – pour ce faire. Elle adopte donc une perspective onto-épistémologique qui permet de considérer le travail que les acteurs font en permanence pour construire le monde social, et l'influence des situations dans lesquelles ils se trouvent sur les interprétations qu'ils construisent et les conduites qu'ils adoptent. En étudiant des phénomènes d'importance organisationnelle sous cet angle, ma recherche prête attention à l'aspect politique, mais sans postuler des types de personnes catégoriquement distincts. À travers ses trois articles, ma thèse: (1) met en évidence un outil analytique – "*the moment of test*" (c.-à-d. le moment de mise à l'épreuve) – qui aide à ainsi analyser la formation des stratégies et, globalement, la production d'ordre à travers la (re)création des références

normatives et cognitives qui sous-tendent l'action; (2) étudie la manière dont les stratégies prennent forme dans les organisations au milieu des différends et conflits; et (3) révèle les effets de pouvoir de certains modes de formation - Foucault (1980, 1982, 2010) est également mobilisé pour cette analyse critique. En abordant ainsi le travail que les acteurs font qui sous-tend la coordination, et la formation de stratégies, ma thèse offre un nouvel éclairage utile pour la recherche et la vie organisationnelle. Ses contributions visent notamment à affiner notre approche de recherche sur le travail institutionnel, et notre compréhension de la formation des stratégies dans les organisations.

Mots clés : Boltanski; Discours; Épreuve; Formation des stratégies; Foucault; Intérêts multiples; Jugement situé; Ordres de grandeur; Organisations à but non lucratif du domaine du développement; Pouvoir; Production de rapports d'activités; Régimes d'engagement; Théorie des conventions; Thévenot; Travail institutionnel.

Méthodes de recherche : Recherche qualitative basée sur des entretiens, de l'observation non-participante, et de la revue de documents; Étude ethnographique; Recherche interprétative.

Abstract

This thesis research examines the puzzle of strategy formation amidst multiple interests. It starts from the premise that organizations are not monolithic settings, and the formation of consistencies of actions over time (i.e., strategies) often involves disagreements and conflicts over organizational activities and priorities, and thus the handling of multiple, potentially divergent, interests.

In contrast to research perspectives which firmly link multiplicity of interests to the diversity of socio-cultural groups, my research approaches such multiplicity from a less predetermined basis. Organizational members are not treated as if their behaviours were fully determined by the rules, norms, and beliefs of the group they are differentially identified with. Instead, my research rests on the recognition that human beings are rarely of exclusive distinct types. Thus, like other social actors, organizational members would be familiar with different ways of being and doing things – each member having been socialized in various normative and cognitive orders, and not just the one generally associated with his/her function (*or* profession, *or* gender, *or* social milieu, and so on). They may thus engage in organizational life more varyingly than our pre-given exclusive categories suggest. To better understand the internal dynamics through which strategies form, then, a closer attention to what organizational members *actually* say and do seems warranted.

My research builds on the theoretical works of Boltanski and Thévenot – in particular, Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006[1991]; Thévenot, 2001, 2006 – to carry out such investigation. It thus adopts an onto-epistemological viewpoint which takes account of the work that actors have to continuously do to construct the social world, and the influence that the situations they face have on the interpretations they construct and the conduct they adopt. In studying organization-related phenomena from this viewpoint, my research attends to the politics involved, without taking actors to be of exclusive distinct types. Through the three papers constituting this thesis, I: (1) elaborate on an analytical lens (i.e., 'the moment of test') which makes it possible to study, in this manner, strategy formation, and more broadly the production of (social) order by creating or recreating the normative and cognitive backgrounds constraining and enabling actions; (2) examine empirically how strategies actually form in organizations amidst disagreements and conflicts; and (3) highlight the power effects of

particular patterns of formation – a Foucauldian lens is also mobilized for this critical analysis (i.e., Foucault, 1980, 1982, 2010). In approaching the work that actors do to organize concerted action and strategy formation in this way, my research provides some key insights relevant for a number of lines of research, and also organizational life. It makes important contributions which can help refine our approach to institutional work research, and our understandings of strategy formation in organizations.

Keywords : Boltanski; Conventionalist theory; Discourses; Foucault; Institutional work; Multiple interests; Nonprofit Development Organizations; Orders of worth; Power; Pragmatic regimes; Reporting; Situated Judgment; Strategy formation; Test; Thévenot.

Research methods : Qualitative research with interviews, non-participant observation, and documents review; Ethnographic study; Interpretative research.

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To my father

whose love for people and ideas

taught me about seeing with an open mind

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What is a road travelled if not an opportunity to grow? In walking this doctoral path, I have had the good fortune to meet, talk with, and work with many exceptional human beings who have given me the encouragement and support to continue to grow intellectually. They have helped in many ways all through this journey – some by giving me the inspiration to embark on this demanding yet most rewarding project; others by providing remarkable professional support; and still others by offering many beautiful spaces to engage in richly nourishing conversations and to recharge my batteries. This enviable support has immensely shaped my journey, and contributed to making it a truly memorable and enriching experience. And, for this, I am most thankful. I can only hope that the few words that follow, while succinct by necessity (to avoid the 'dreaded overlong'), will convey the full extent of my gratitude to each and all.

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Introduction

In our contemporary societies, strategy seems a rather common organizational phenomenon. The term has visibly become a staple in organizations as varied as private firms, public sector agencies, and nonprofit organizations (e.g., Bryson, 2010; Carter, 2013; Lewis, 2007; Porter, 1996; Rumelt, 2011). In these settings, organizational members often know of and tend to view strategy as a self-evident feature of organizational life; and one would most likely hear therein casual references to strategic plans, goals, or activities. What's more, aside from talking up strategy, members often engage in actions which contribute to strategy formation. Indeed, in numerous organizations, senior and middle-level managers – in some cases, aided by consultants – participate in the elaboration of strategic frameworks and plans; and some are also involved in the periodic review or re-definition of the organizational orientations officially laid out in these documents (e.g., Dominguez *et al*., 2009; Grant, 2003; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Whittington *et al*., 2006). More broadly, beyond strategy formulation, organizational members (and in this case, an even wider group) usually take part in, and may hence influence, the implementation of their organizations' official orientations and portfolio of activities (e.g., Hrebiniak, 2006; Miller, Wilson, & Hickson, 2004; Sonenshein, 2010). They may even develop new activities, more or less fortuitously, which come to constitute new organizational orientations and shape the trajectories of their organizations (e.g., Burgelman & Siegel, 2008; Pascale, 1984; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). Clearly, what we overall recognize as strategy would be manifest in all types of organizations, and it also seems that strategy would form, more likely than not, through the actions of many actors.

Hence the question – how may this be? How do strategies form considering the potentially broad array of views that a wide group of actors may bring forth? The fact that multiple, and potentially divergent, views may arise and affect organizational affairs and directions hardly seems unproblematic in relation to strategy.

Indeed, one may argue that strategy is, perhaps, most characteristically associated with the generation of consistent actions over time (e.g., Araujo & Easton, 1996; Chia & Holt, 2006; Inkpen & Choudhury, 1995; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). That is, when we think of strategy in organizations – whether designed, pursued or realized – we tend to recognize it in consistency

of actions, or at least view such consistency as its basic expression. Strategic plans, for example, typically project and promise this consistency. These plans, so carefully designed in countless organizations, present the official intentions for the years ahead, and generally stipulate that the preferences and priorities so set will be steadily implemented (e.g., Glaister & Falshaw, 1999; Ocasio & Joseph, 2008). They hence offer to view coherent courses of action, and convey a commitment to the so-defined orderly organizational trajectories. The analytical tools and techniques commonly drawn upon for the design and implementation of these plans – newer and older alike, such as the SWOT analysis (Andrews, 1987), Five Forces (Porter, 1985), Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan & Norton, 1996), Key Performance Indicators, Strategy Canvas (Kim & Mauborgne, 2002), to name only a few – equally suggest that consistency of actions is an important premise. Indeed, these tools and techniques are used not only to help articulate goals and activities which are congruous with the environments that the organizations operate in, but usually also with a view to support onward implementation (e.g., Gunn & Williams, 2007; Tapinos, Dyson, & Meadows, 2005).

In the same way, generally when we think of the choice of a market position as an organizational strategy, the idea of consistency is not far removed. Such position, which an organization may elect in the hope of gaining a competitive advantage in its industry, presupposes in fact the pursuit of coherent future activities. As Porter (1996: 64) notes, it would otherwise be "nothing more than a marketing slogan that will not withstand competition". Strategy, this author adds, "demands discipline and continuity" (Porter, 1996: 78), and the creation of a distinctive strategic position carries the assumption that a tailored set of activities will be pursued over time. Consistency in future organizational actions is often implied, if not outright declared, in the positioning choices that organizations make.

When strategy is instead recognized in past actions and the direction or commitment these suggest, it is quite clearly for the consistency noted in organizational actions. Take for instance the recent debates over McDonald's Canada's unpackaged nuts which played out in the media. What spurred these debates was the introduction in early 2017 of a new McDonald's dessert with non-separately packaged nuts. This seemingly minor event led to an outcry and several calls for boycott, as consumers and journalists called it a deplorable reversal of the company's

nut-free strategy[1]. While McDonald's stated that its restaurants were never meant to be a nut-free environment[2], its previous long-standing use of pre-packaged nuts for its meals and desserts certainly suggested as much. For many of its customers, this was a corporate policy, and importantly a distinctive product/service offering which attracted families dealing with nuts-related allergies who thus worry about potential cross-contamination when eating out – and this visibly helped McDonald's secure that market segment. Hence, for many onlookers, the move to unpackaged nuts was tantamount to a change in strategy (moreover, an unsavory one). Thinking of strategy in this way, in other words as a pattern – "specifically, a pattern in a stream of actions" (Mintzberg, 1987: 12) – is of course not just the doing of unhappy onlookers. Research has also shown that within organizations, members themselves may come to identify, in the activities implemented over time, consistencies of actions that have shaped their organizations' trajectories and which they recognize as strategies; and some are then even taken on as official organizational strategies (e.g., Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013; Porac, Thomas & Baden-Fuller, 1989).

In sum, strategy is commonly associated with consistency of actions over time; and the more explicitly so when it is understood as an organizational phenomenon which plays out over time, and gives shape to organizational trajectory. Thus, whether viewed as that which is defined beforehand in well-crafted strategic plans, positions (or others) and implemented as is – making thus the official intentions actual – or the pattern that forms despite or in the absence of such intentions (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), strategy is often related to consistency of actions over time.

Thus, how may we account for such consistency when we acknowledge the existence of multiple views within organizations? Organizations, as noted previously, comprise a collection of people who may be workers, middle or senior managers, or even (ad hoc or in-house) consultants. These people also have different professional training, upbringing, life and work experiences, worldviews, and so on. They may thus not always see things identically, or

[1]. See articles published in Canada's leading newspapers and media (i.e., *The Globe and Mail*, Carly Weeks:"McDonald's Canada adding nuts to menu, angering many with food allergies", published on Jan. 17, 2017; *Financial Post*, Hollie Shaw:"Nut controversy casts shadow over McDonald's launch of all-day breakfast in Canada on Feb. 21", published on Jan. 26, 2017; *CBC News*, Karen Pauls: "People with allergies outraged by McDonald's nut decision", posted on Jan. 18, 2017; *Radio Canada International,* Lynn Desjardins: "McDonald's Canada no longer nut/peanut safe", posted on Jan. 18, 2017).

[2]. See McDonald's "Media Statement: Allergen Policy" posted on Jan. 23, 2017 (http://news.mcdonalds.ca/en-CA/Media-Statements/Media-Statement-allergen-policy).

interpret their environments uniformly, or even understand in the same way what it is that they are trying to do as an organization or how it should be done. Such potential diversity of ideas, opinions and understandings constitutes a non-negligible challenge for strategy formation. Hence, how do organizations come to produce consistencies of actions over time? This is, in its basic form, the puzzle which I set out to explore through this thesis research.

Strategy formation and the problem of multiplicity

In starting from this premise, I follow in the footsteps of numerous valuable scholarly studies which have aptly challenged work that treats orderly action as a given and assumes "a unitary voice within the firm" (e.g., Andrews, 1987[1971]; Barnard, 1938; Bower, 1970; Cyert & March, 1963; Denis, Langley & Rouleau, 2007; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982: 25; Pettigrew, 1977; Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003; Selznick, 1957; Thompson, 2008[1967]; Whittington, 2003). These studies, while grounded in a wide range of theoretical and empirical perspectives, have in common their emphasis on the multiplicity of views constituting organizations and which makes it highly unlikely that concerted action would be automatic. They clearly show that the wants, desires, motives, stakes, or interests that members have do not naturally converge. They rightly point out, for instance, that competing demands, ideas and values often impinge on goal setting and strategy formulation; misconceptions and different interpretations of organizational priorities are far from rare, and influence strategy implementation and, even more broadly, organizational actions; adaptations to changes in the external environment are not immune to internal squabbles or conflicts; and the streams of actions that form over time owe to the management of multiple views within organizations.

Many of these remarkable studies, however, portray the internal dynamics through which strategies form as the attempts of *sharply contrasted* members to achieve dominant influence. Their emphasis on the stark differences in view goes hand in hand with a common (even if often implicit) acceptance of the idea that the organizational world primarily consists of distinct *self-consistent* individuals or groups. Thus, whether members are conceived in terms of personal ambitions, or along social, cultural, professional or functional lines, it is essentially a case of each with his/their own anchored views. For the production of consistent actions at the level of the organization then, it seems, all that remains problematic is what dealings occur

between these discrete, firmly defined, actors. Yet, seeing actors in this way – as if pre-given characterizations are indisputable tangibles – leads to ignore nuances. In fact, it obscures the fact that human action is continuously evolving, and action coordination is actually an ongoing accomplishment (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006[1991]; see also Emirbayer, 1997; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This, I argue, is not merely of fringe importance, but a critical point. Strategies form out of what members do, and to grasp these doings through seeing individuals or groups' actions and views as pre-given, overshadows the possibility of a more complete understanding of the dynamics at play.

This research eschews such a priori representation of the internal dynamics of organizations. Through a conceptual discussion and empirical analyses, it investigates strategy formation and the acknowledged multiplicity of views by recognizing "situated judgment" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000). In other words, my research relies on an understanding of social relations which is more open to the possibility of variations, creative adjustments and new developments. So, while organizations are certainly designed to channel the actions of the collection of people they comprise, they are here not construed as settled arrangements "characterized in terms of spheres of activity, systems of actors, or fields" (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006: 18). Thus, while organizations are indeed structured to pull together the actions of members working in various departments, occupying different positions, and/or coming from different backgrounds, these "differences in activity or milieu" are not presumed to match the differences in view (ibid). Rather, multiplicity of views is seen here – more in line with a relational point of view (Emirbayer, 1997) – as arising in situation and action; and it is fundamentally inseparable from actual contexts that necessarily shift over time and space. A key approach for apprehending this multiplicity, then, is to give primacy to the process, and pay attention to members' unfolding argumentative engagement through which coordination is actually accomplished (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). In exploring strategy formation in this research from this viewpoint, I seek to take fuller account of the flows and flux of organizational life, and provide insights into as yet under-examined aspects of this rather common organizational phenomenon.

As noted above, my research comprises both a conceptual and an empirical part. The former serves to flesh out the conceptual tool that helps orient our gaze towards the dynamical aspects of human action. This tool – "the moment of test" – makes it possible to

take account of situated judgment, and examine systematically the unfolding process and how it continuously contributes to the production of social order (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). This is the main thrust of the first paper. The second and third papers, both empirical studies, build on this conceptual base and draw on longitudinal data collected in nonprofit development organizations in Dakar (Senegal). In the second paper, I study how strategies form amidst multiple interests in these organizations; and, in the third, I examine the process of formation and its consequences from a critical perspective. The three papers are briefly introduced below.

The three papers constituting this research

Thus, the first paper discusses the theoretical works of Boltanski and Thévenot (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001), and specifically draws attention to the notion of test. "Moments of test" help us (researchers) study what actors *actually do* without pegging them to pre-given categories. As Boltanski and Thévenot suggest, these pre-given categories, in effect, obscure the important work that actors "have to accomplish here and now in order to construct the social world, to endow it with meaning, and to confer on it a minimum of firmness" (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 212). A focus on moments of test thus makes us attentive to how actors' situated doings come to create and recreate the meanings and practices that structure social life. These moments make manifest the interpretations they construct of the world, and how they try to overcome their differences in view so as to get on with their joint action. Put simply, moments of test allow us to "*follow the arguments and criticisms of the actors*" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 218) and take account of the richness of the process through which concerted action is produced (see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 356). Relatedly, they help us bring to light the background references (or modes of thought) sustaining actors' interpretations and actions, and which may be reproduced, challenged or changed through the process.

In this first paper, the significance and distinctive contribution of the "moment of test" as an analytical lens is highlighted in relation to institutional work. The paper shows how the "moment of test" can help better study and understand how actors' actions may contribute to the creation, maintenance or disruption of institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

The second and third papers concern more specifically strategy formation, and draw on longitudinal data collected through an ethnographic study of nonprofit development organizations (NDOs) based in Dakar (Senegal). Both papers use the "moment of test" as a locus of analysis that makes it possible to study the *dynamic* production of concerted action. The organizations studied were selected for several reasons. Nonprofit development organizations of the developing world, and in fact NDOs in general, constitute a broad and diverse group of organizations which aim to bring about positive change in the lives of those living in developing countries. They operate in a sector which is regularly exposed to competing ideas and ill-defined concepts about development and poverty alleviation (e.g., Lélé, 1991; Lewis, 2007). At the organizational level, this often means that different practices may be found, and different understandings of the meaning to give to particular development terms, concepts or approaches may coexist and influence strategy (e.g., Bebbington *et al.*, 2007; Lewis, 2003). What's more, participatory management is generally favorably looked upon in these organizations (e.g., Lewis, 2007), and they are thus settings which provide openings for organizational members to voice their opinions, put forth ideas, and debate multiple concerns. In short, these NDOs may be viewed as settings that are "'more pluralistic' than others" (Denis *et al*., 2007: 180), that is, "organizations which are characterized by the co-existence of a variety of logics or rationalities" and markedly so (ibid: 183). Finally, for being located in a developing country (i.e., Senegal), the NDOs studied evolve in a different business environment – with different logistical, political, economic, and cultural opportunities and challenges (e.g., Collier & Pattillo, 2000) – which may lead to less highly institutionalized and scripted strategy processes. For the above reasons, these NDOs[3] represent a particularly fitting setting for studying how strategies – i.e., consistency of actions over time, and not just 'strategy design' – form amidst multiple interests.

The second paper examines the process of strategy formation. It focuses on how organizational members orient their organizations' actions, and the ways in which consistencies of actions (i.e., strategies) take form in studied organizations. The third paper then takes up this question from a critical perspective, by drawing on Foucault (1980, 1982,

[3]. My interest in studying NDOs in Senegal also stems from the fact that there still is very little management research carried in Sub-Saharan Africa. Yet, the more than 40 countries constituting that region of the world house numerous organizations where strategies are designed, pursued, and/or realized. By selecting this empirical setting, my research also responds to Mintzberg (2001: 770)'s plea to "open up our thinking to (...) new places in the world" – they are "part of this "globe" too" – for this stands to enrich our collective understanding of management practices and processes.

2010). It studies the conditions of strategy formation – i.e., the power relations involved in the production of such consistent actions over time – and explores the desirable and undesirable effects that this has on studied organizations.

The structure of the thesis

The next chapter presents in more detail the viewpoint on social relations which underpins this thesis research on strategy formation amidst multiple interests, and the specific theoretical frameworks mobilized to carry it out. The three papers then follow, each with its literature review, detailed methodology, findings and/or contributions. Paper I (the conceptual paper) is entitled: I*nstitutional work and the notion of test*; Paper II: *Emergent strategy formation: Of coping and patterns*; and Paper III: *Legitimacy fuelling marginality?: Reporting in nonprofit development organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa*. The last chapter, i.e., the conclusion, summarizes the research contributions and brings forth some broader theoretical considerations and implications for researchers and practitioners.

Theoretical and methodological framework

When we acknowledge the existence of multiple views within organizations, the formation of strategies presents a puzzle. The making of decisions relating to organizational goals and priorities can no longer be treated as unproblematic; and even when goals and priorities are officially set, the idea that these surely determine the actions that members take in their everyday work, and organizational trajectories over time, no longer holds. Clearly, differences in view would influence direction-setting and implementation, and in fact more broadly the ongoing flow of activities. How then is consistency of actions achieved over time? In other words, how does strategy form, considering that organizations indeed often house multiple views?

UNPACKING THE PUZZLE: STRATEGY AND THE MULTIPLE INTERESTS WITHIN ORGANIZATIONS

Research into how an organization – viewed as a collection of people – produces consistent actions over time is, of course, not new. As noted by Hafsi and Thomas (2005: 509), similar inquiries can be traced back to the early days of strategy research when the achievements and trajectories of organizations came to be examined in relation to the challenges of "collective action". In other words, the senior managers, managers and workers who make up organizations were then more readily considered as members whose diverse views could affect the scope of activities and the directions of organizations. Andrews (1987 [1971]), for example, in his notable book *The Concept of Corporate Strategy*, states emphatically that members' values would inevitably be implicated in strategy formation. According to this author, managers and workers alike would bring into their work their personal preferences or aspirations, and their special interpretations of the organization's goals (ibid: 53-63; 83-96). Recognizing this potential influence, Andrews adds, will contribute to a better understanding of strategy and, from a practical standpoint, help senior managers better define their organizations' strategies and take action for successful implementation. Similarly, differences in perspective have been highlighted as a common organizational occurrence in studies where strategy is presented as the consistency of actions that is realized without prior explicit formulation. Mintzberg and Waters' 1985 seminal article on deliberate and emergent

strategies, for instance, point to the case of the National Film Board of Canada in the 1940s to 1960s where strategies formed rather unintendedly amidst differing views, and even heated debates in the case of the production of films for television (ibid: 265-267). Clearly, the notion that organizational strategies – i.e., strategies designed and implemented, or realized otherwise – would form amidst a multiplicity of views seems rather well established. What is however puzzling is *how* this is achieved.

The administrative forces that reform divergent interests

One way that this puzzle has been examined – which could perhaps be described as a traditional approach – visibly rests on the assumption that members' views essentially reflect stable individual or group interests. These interests would be the reason for their actions, and they would make up the preferences that members have and which they unambiguously follow. What's more, they would be knowable in advance. Hence, provided that senior management learns to recognize them, it is argued that these multiple interests could be reliably anticipated, controlled, and in effect made to align with the official organizational strategies. Individuals, for instance, are commonly assumed to possess personal preferences which would constitute stable features of their personalities, and determine their perceptions, judgments and choices (e.g., Andrews, 1987). Each individual would then bring into the organization a seemingly exclusive want of wealth, prestige, career advancement, or job security – to name only a few – which could be ascertained, for instance during recruitment or periodic strategy reviews, and productively channelled to support organizational goals. Equally, where interests are attributed instead to social groups – for example to certain professions (e.g., accountants) or organizational functions (e.g., middle managers) – it is implied that they are a fixed property which makes the behaviours of those pertaining to these groups rather set and predictable. Not unlike the interests attributed to individuals, these group interests, it is suggested, could be made to align with organizational preferences and priorities (e.g., Thompson, 2008 [1967]).

For some scholars, formal measures would be the key to such alignment. Formal measures of course exist in organizations to place explicit limits on members' behaviors, so as to help channel their efforts and render their co-operation and joint-production less precarious (e.g., Cyert & March, 1963; Thompson, 2008). For example, planning guidelines (e.g., Grant, 2003),

or standardized planning procedures (e.g., Ocasio & Joseph, 2008), are put in place to keep strategy formulation within limits; and other measures are established more broadly to shape the context within which strategy forms – e.g., rules governing staff selection, reward and punishment (e.g., Bower, 1970). What is notable, however, is the central explanatory role that some studies give to these explicit limits in the generation of consistent actions over time. In this stream of research, formal measures are highlighted as what makes divergent interests fall back into line, and thus account for strategy formation.

Guth and MacMillan (1986), for example, draw attention to a variety of measures which, they argue, would help "secure positive and pervasive commitment to strategy on the part of middle management" (ibid: 325). Their analysis tellingly presents the anticipation of middle managers' self-interested behaviors and taking actions through these formal measures as the decisive factor in strategy formation. Ketokivi and Castañer (2004) similarly present the realization of strategy as depending mainly on formal measures. These authors suggest that membership in subunits invariably creates "a biasing effect" on members' perceptions and the goals they pursue (ibid: 356). For strategy to form, certain measures have to be introduced "at the source" – i.e., participation and communication at the strategic planning stage. These are expected to effectively reduce the likelihood that subunits will pursue their own interests onwards rather than official organizational goals.

For other scholars, it is senior managers' charisma, authority or other special shaping abilities which has a decisive effect on the alignment of multiple interests, and thus strategy formation. These special managerial abilities would reform the divergent views present in organizations, create harmony of purpose, and lead to consistency of actions over time. Charismatic leaders, for example, are said to be skilled at motivating others to follow them and, notably, to "transform the needs, values, preferences and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests" (Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993: 577). By inspiring members and reshaping interests, they "federate collective action around a vision" (Antonakis, Fenley, & Liechti, 2011: 376). This, it is suggested, means that strategies would form as intended since, by "leveraging" charisma, these leaders would secure greater unity for strategy implementation (Wowak, Mannor, Arrfelt, & McNamara, 2016).

In addition to charisma, senior managers' authority has also been cited as the reason for the formation of strategy in organizations that would otherwise be left vulnerable to divergent

interests. For sure, popular representations often endow these top managers with the ability to strongly influence members' views and actions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Porter, Lorsch, & Nohria, 2004). Some studies further suggest that, by dint of their authority, senior managers can in fact bring multiple interests into line and make members' actions cohere. Collins (2001: 71), for example, notes the "culture of discipline" that effective senior managers generate, and which allows organizational actions to be consistent over time without much need for hierarchy, bureaucracy or excessive controls. Thus, overall, this stream of research suggests that senior managers' unique abilities – whether charisma, authority or other – would determine "how issues are interpreted and acted upon" within organizations (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001: 521). These special managerial abilities would then explain how strategy can form amidst multiple interests.

In sum, under 'the traditional approach', interests are acknowledged as multiple and often divergent in organizations, but also readily treated as controllable. They are presumed to be attached to individuals or groups – i.e., stable and largely independent of context. They are also considered knowable in advance, and thus amenable to unity through the application of appropriate controls or managerial abilities. In fact, not unlike the variegated pieces of a Lego, interests are treated as set components that can be acted upon and effectively assembled or fashioned to create the desired shape. For the most part then, in this literature, enquiries into how strategies form amidst multiple interests have been confined to an investigation of these administrative forces – i.e., formal limits or senior management's special abilities – and often, in fact, to how some specific type would best bring into line the various interests that organizational members have, and yield the hoped-for consistency of actions over time.

The confrontations that settle extant differences of interest

Another set of research has addressed the issue starting from a different premise; one that notably questions the neat efficacy attributed to administrative forces in molding and controlling multiple interests in organizations. Instead, in this literature, the formation of strategy is conceptualized as a more distributed accomplishment and, inherently, a political process. Jarzabkowski and Balogun (2009), for example, in their study of strategic planning, show that the formal measures presumed to remove subunits self-interests and create unity around the organization's strategy – i.e., participation and communication during strategic

planning – are unlikely to deliver strategic integration. Rather, these authors suggest, it is the negotiations that settle "the divergent interests that people bring to that process" which enable the accomplishment of a common strategy (ibid: 1284). Their analysis proposes that the creation of strategy through planning ultimately depends on the political struggles that take place between groups with different interests.

On this view, it is through "the pulling and hauling that is politics" that strategy forms (Allison & Zelikow, 1999: 255; see also Pettigrew, 1977). In other words, it is the confrontations which occur between members committed to different goals, ideas or standpoints that give shape to the observed consistency of actions. In particular, this literature highlights the processes by which members reach coalition agreements (Cyert & March, 1963) as that which generates enduring courses of action. This, of course, does not mean that explicit organizational limits, or senior managers' special abilities, are denied a role in the strategy formation process. Formal measures, for instance, have been shown to structure the political processes at play, as they provided the rules and procedures on the basis of which (governmental) bargaining occurred (e.g., Allison & Zelikow, 1999). But, other studies have also shown that they may have only modest, or even no, structuring effects. In fact, established planning mechanisms may for instance fail to hold as members' negotiations during planning force changes in these very mechanisms (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009). Further, existing formal measures may even be openly challenged, or simply ignored – as was visibly the case at Enron, for example, in the early 2000s, in relation to their existing codes of ethics (Sims & Brinkmann, 2003). In short, from this perspective, it is neither assumed that administrative measures or abilities will be the deciding factor in strategy formation, nor that they will automatically mediate the process. Instead, it is the confrontation that plays out between individual members or groups which is placed at the heart of strategy formation.

These confrontations would occur, it is argued, because members typically seek to further or protect their interests. In effect, organizations would represent coalitions of interests (Cyert & March, 1963); and as Narayanan and Fahey (1982: 30) note "the essence of a coalition's task is to prevail upon the organization to accept its preference and proposed alternatives". Strategy then forms as the preferences of various coalitions or equally committed individuals come into confrontation, and their differences are settled through negotiations (e.g., Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982; Stone & Brush, 1996).

In studying strategy formation from this perspective, this stream of research aptly broadens the scope of inquiry beyond the administrative forces in place, and refreshingly draws attention to the political struggles through which consistency of actions is achieved.

However, in this literature, interests are still largely seen as the defining (i.e., essential) and thus pre-existing attributes of members. They are described, for example, as someone or some group's *own* interests; and mainly examined as the set positions that members *bring to* the confrontation process, and singularly promote and defend throughout (e.g., Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982). They are thus presented as *stable* preferences developed through prior socialization (e.g., Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), or deliberate mobilization around a core issue or desired outcome (e.g., Narayanan & Fahey, 1982). So, although in this literature interests are not considered easily controllable by management, they are – not unlike in the traditional approach – viewed as a fixed property of individual members or groups.

This has essentially meant that enquiries into how strategy forms amidst multiple interests have tended to focus overly on opposing parties with defining stakes fighting for dominance. As a corollary, although this stream of research helpfully brings to light organizational politics, and the ways in which members' political manoeuvres contribute to strategy formation, it also grossly overlooks more elusive yet important ways that members' engagement with their colleagues and environment (i.e., their contexts) influence their organizations' trajectories. Strategy, as a number of studies have shown, forms not just through overt contests and partisan triumphs. It can, for instance, take shape somewhat organically as members' actions, and apparent divergent interests, simply converge around a path (e.g., Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985) – hence without much self-seeking planning, or political manoeuvres to subdue others or rally them to 'one's interests'. Pors (2016) also offers a fascinating study of the implementation of a corporate strategy in the Danish school system which reveals that concerns that arose spontaneously from managers' discussion of the new strategy and which developed rather flexibly through their interaction – hence very differently from accounts highlighting pre-existing partisan positions brought to the process – may also affect consistency of actions over time. What this suggests is that we limit our gaze when we approach strategy formation solely as an investigation of the political struggles between members holding pre-existing, stable, interests. In effect, we risk discounting the very real

possibility that consistency of actions (i.e., strategy) may come from less set, unanticipated, and possibly more complicated confrontations of interests.

The tensions that reveal the accommodation of interests

In fact, interests need not be viewed as stable, and their confrontation consequently conceived as a clash between individuals or groups who have deep-seated preferences. As noted by a number of scholars (e.g., Hirschman, 1992[1986]; Moody & Thévenot, 2000; Rocha & Ghoshal, 2006; Swedberg, 2005; Whittle & Mueller, 2011), this is not the only, nor is it necessarily the more insightful, way of understanding interests and how they are involved in organized action. Rocha and Ghoshal (2006) in fact suggest that the conceptualization of interests as stable would be rooted in mainstream economics' assumption that people act in their own self-interest, which then makes interests a fixed property that determines behaviour (see also Swedberg, 2005). In strategy research (or even management, more broadly), while interests have been acknowledged as multiple, in the main, the concept has remained unpacked, and interests have been equally treated as "a fixed and essential driver of action" that distinctly characterizes individuals or groups (Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 429). So, in studies on strategy formation, they have been largely approached as if they were *stable attributes* which account for the views and actions of members.

Yet, a number of social science studies highlight the fact that it is a fallacy to consider interests fixed and context-independent (e.g., Moody & Thévenot, 2000; Moreira, 2005; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Moody and Thévenot (2000: 277), for example, convincingly argue that interests should be viewed "as an object of contention and variable interpretation rather than an objective unchanging motivation, as a grounded 'stance' taken at various points in the debate and elaborated upon in ways that are open to empirical review". In other words, rather than presuming that interests are stable, we should be attentive to the more flexible and dynamic way that 'interests' come into play and are handled by actors themselves in social settings.

This alternative approach that Moody and Thévenot (2000) put forward – see also for example Whittle & Mueller (2011); Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006[1991] – chiefly rests on the notion that *interests are created, contested, and re-created in the course of actors' interactions*. Simply put, 'what interest someone has, or does not have, in a particular issue' is not set, but is

constructed as actors argue for or against various interpretations of the situations they face. To illustrate: imagine a meeting in an organization during which one member implies that a proposed program is not in the organization's best interests, and only furthers the individual goals of those promoting it. Others may chime in and support, question, weaken, or even dismiss this claim. Ultimately, whose interests are being served is a matter that is brought up and negotiated in a particular situation – it arises in, and evolve through, members' exchanges about what to do regarding the proposed program. Thus, this approach in effect refreshingly brings to light the fact that *interests are attributed*; and the interests that actors ascribe to others or themselves "*can shift* fairly dramatically in the moment-by-moment unfolding" of their conversations (Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 429, emphasis added).

Importantly, it is this interest attribution and negotiation which is "fundamental to the process of organizing concerted action" (Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 428). As Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 11) note, for instance, "drawing attention to interests" to suggest hidden agendas is something that actors do in their "ordinary undertakings (...) when they seek to devalue" some account in favor of another (see also Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 425). It is thus the agendas, bias, motives, allegiances and so on, that actors suggest that they or others have which influence collective action; it is their handling of these interests – whatever form such handling may take – which contributes to shaping their actions and decisions.

Interest attribution and negotiation is however not presumed unconstrained. In other words, it is not considered a purely local production, but viewed as *simultaneously* shaped by the (local) situational context, and broader social structuring influences (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Moody & Thévenot, 2000; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Simply put, actors are not infinitely free in their choices of words and actions. Interest attribution and negotiation is also influenced by the larger social context – that is, the modes of thought that actors rely on to make sense of the world. These are widely shared social and historically constituted ways of thinking, which give meaning to human experiences. They provide the background references upon which actors rest their appreciation of what is appropriate or not – and for example whether some account makes sense, some proposal appears 'interested', or some action is fitting or not. Further, these modes of thought are multiple, and not attached to people, places or milieus. They may thus be *variously* relied on in practical situations as actors "work within

and around" them to "accomplish their practical actions" (Whittle & Mueller, 2011: 429; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

In sum, viewed from this perspective, 'interests' are involved in the production of concerted action, as part of the negotiation of meaning that actors frequently engage in. Thus, not unlike the political perspective (presented earlier), this approach treats seriously the confrontation of interests and the related negotiation process. But, very differently from it, it does not suppose that this confrontation amounts to a polarized clash between individuals or groups because of their (defining) stable interests. Rather, it remains open, and approaches it as a dynamic process during which actors may *variously* point to, and handle, multiple interests – as they promote or challenge some ideas, actions, and accounts of events – in their efforts to organize their actions. The confrontation reflects tensions between the modes of thought that actors rely on (and not necessarily partisan fights between committed individuals, coalitions, or social groups); and, the negotiation that actors engage in influences and shapes their collective action. In a way, interests are here perhaps more aptly described as actors' *unfolding concerns* whose accommodation comes to shape their joint endeavour.

My research on strategy formation amidst multiple interests adopts this approach. It offers an opportunity to study how, in organizations, multiple views come to produce consistent actions over time, without defining a priori and hence fixing in large part the internal dynamics at play. As Thévenot (2006a) notes, such an approach "leads to unorthodox views on politics" (see also Boltanski *in* Basaure, 2011: 362), in the sense that it makes possible a pragmatic study of the confrontation of views. Its rests on the recognition of "situated judgment", and its starting point is the process – not the actors apprehended through their presumed fixed goals or attributes. In so doing, it remains sensitive to the flexible and unanticipated ways that actors may engage with their contexts, while being influenced by multiple modes of thought.

Studying strategy formation from this perspective, thus, means paying attention to what organizational members *actually* say and do. In other words, the views that they expound and debate, the different concerns that these point to, the modes of thought grounding these, and how they come to more or less lasting agreements that shape their actions. This approach, I argue, allows a better examination of how consistency of actions comes to be, *in practice*. It helps examine how interests are handled, and bring to light the broader structuring influences

involved in the process. Lastly, it provides an apt opening for questioning the power relations at play – and, again, without limiting our view to presumed contests between entrenched 'interest groups'. I next present in more detail the theoretical frameworks I draw on, and specially highlight the core concepts that I use to carry out my thesis research.

INVESTIGATING THE PUZZLE: THE THEORETICAL LENSES ADOPTED

My research, thus, sets out to study strategy formation amidst multiple interests by building on an understanding of interests as the concerns – always contestable and changeable – that members put forth when performing organizational activities. In handling and varyingly accommodating these concerns, they come to shape organizational trajectories.

It draws on Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001, 2006b)'s pragmatist theoretical works which espouse this distinctive approach to 'interests'. These works – grounded in extensive empirical research, and a practice tradition – provide useful conceptual tools for the analysis of actors' handling of diverse views in concrete situations. They help study how actors come to reach agreement on what is going on (i.e., what matters), and orient their actions. They highlight the background references that actors' views rest on, and the fact that they are multiple and incommensurable (i.e., there is no ready basis for comparing or ranking them) – which creates the conditions for disagreement and conflict when several are drawn on in practical situations. These background references are 'the orders of worth'. These authors' theoretical works also shed light on a pivotal conceptual tool – the notion of test. My research builds on the latter conceptual tool, and the authors' framework for distinguishing various 'orders of worth' (presented in more detail below). In allowing a close examination of organizational members' actions and interactions – by which strategies form over time – these theoretical works help examine the process (i.e., the unfolding discussions or heated debates, and how they are settled), *and* identify the modes of thought (i.e., orders of worth) that their arguments rest on and those grounding their decisions and agreed-upon actions .

What's more, I was also interested in reflecting critically on the strategy formation process. In particular, in this research, it means questioning the power relations that the process is enmeshed in, and whether the outcomes so produced are beneficial to the organizations studied. For this critical analysis, I draw on the work of Foucault (1980, 1982, 2010) and his concepts of discipline and power/knowledge. These are particularly pertinent since Foucault's

critical work does not make the analysis of power relations contingent on the identification of individuals or groups with entrenched interests. My research, thus, investigates the ways in which power operates within the strategy formation process – by illuminating the processes and techniques sustaining the (re)production of modes of thought and ongoing concerted action – and analyzes the effects (more or less desirable) that are so produced. The Foucauldian concepts mobilized are also further detailed below.

Pragmatic regimes of engagement and Conventionalist theory

A central theme in the theoretical work of Thévenot (2001, 2006b) – here identified as the pragmatic regimes of engagement – and of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) presented in their seminal book *On Justification* (published in French in 1991) – here referred to as Conventionalist theory – is "the uncertain, pluralist and dynamical production of coordination" (Thévenot, 2006a: 111). As noted previously, this means that concerted action is viewed as produced through actors' interactional work, rather than determined either by external fixed constraints (e.g., formal measures) or internal stable dispositions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2006a). Importantly, the acknowledged pluralist nature of the process is grounded in the recognition of "situated judgment". As noted above, these authors suggest that multiple orders of worth exist which actors may rely on to make sense of the situation they find themselves in, and to coordinate their actions. This multiplicity is however not presumed to equate with group diversity, whether conceived of in terms of 'interest groups', social groups, or habitus (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001, 2006a). Indeed, orders of worth are "not attached to collectivities", as Boltanski and Thévenot emphasize (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 16). Rather, they propose that actors make judgment in situations; and each actor is able "to shift from one mode of adjustment to another" depending on the situations faced (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006: 16; see also Thévenot, 2001, 2006b). It is for this plasticity or *pragmatic versatility* – i.e., the fact that any actor can rely on several orders of worth – that multiple ways of thinking may be invoked in the same practical situation. To cite these authors:

> The problems raised by relations between different Orders of Worth "cannot be dismissed by associating the various worlds and the worths they manifest with different persons, cultures, or milieus, the way classical sociology treats relations among values and groups. (...). One of the chief guiding threads of our understanding consists, to the contrary, in the

observation that human beings, unlike objects, can manifest themselves in different worlds." (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 215)

Pragmatic versatility, thus, refers to the fact that the 'same' human being can, for instance, be a practising industrial engineer, the president of the staff association of the company where he works, a member of a task-force created to revamp the image of the company, and the father of a young child; and it is possible that in the course of a day (or even over just a few hours) he finds himself in situations where, to act in a manner that makes sense – i.e., in line with what is generally considered appropriate behaviour for those situations – he has to shift from one form of engagement to another[4]. Or, perhaps, said more vividly "the most inspired artist cannot let the inspiration of the moment determine his course of action in every situation; in order not to be perceived as mentally ill, he has to stand in line at the post office like any other customer" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 216). Similarly, even in a less public setting, while our inspired artist might have grown accustomed to using his bathroom primarily as a storage space for his artwork and supplies, he would probably shuffle things around when having guests over for dinner so that the bathroom may regain its normal usage, or alternatively offer explanations or apologies which basically acknowledge that the room is in a not-quite normal state (Thévenot, 2001). In brief, as these authors compellingly argue, this versatility – i.e., the ability to engage differently with one's contexts depending on the situation faced – is a defining feature of what it means to be a competent social actor.

Pragmatic versatility and the confrontation of views

As social actors then, human beings are often acquainted with various life situations and have acquired a sense of what is appropriate there. Most situations, however, are not without ambiguity, and the same set of circumstances can give rise to different interpretations. Said differently, those present may perceive different cues. Imagine, for instance, that the industrial engineer mentioned above were to attend a divisional meeting where they are to discuss a failing project. As he raises his hand to comment on the project, one of his colleagues might

[4]. This switching is however not associated with mere posturing, and in contrast to the sociological notion of 'roles' (and the idea that what actors do in public interactions is simply put 'impression management', as some readings of Goffman's inspirational work would suggest), an actor's various engagements are not here opposed to a supposed authentic self (see Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 220-222). Rather, from this perspective, actors' ability to switch denotes a plurality of self.

remark half-jokingly that those engrossed in image-building can hardly understand what is at stake here, showing in so doing that he identifies him as a member of the task-force, and further insinuating that concerns about publicity are inappropriate there. The industrial engineer, the task-force member, the President of the staff association, and the father, all "share the same body" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 218), and other participants in the meeting may always flag or denounce the undue influence of other ways of thinking that they associate with his other contexts of action. Alternatively, the industrial engineer himself, invigorated by his recent fatherhood and aware of the family status of his colleagues (these other plural selves), might detach himself from the back-and-forth flow of technical arguments, and exclaim: 'come on, we are all mothers and fathers, we can't just talk in terms of bottom-line, we have to give this project a chance for the sake of our children'. Of course, objects incidentally present in the meeting room might also be granted importance, which may bring into play other considerations. For example, a PowerPoint handout from an earlier all-staff meeting about an upcoming downsizing might be noticed by one of the participant in the divisional meeting, and held up as she notes 'it is clear that they want to cut costs no matter what, and our little project here, to improve the services we provide to the citizens of this town, does not matter anymore'.

What these examples points to is the fact that practical situations are rarely 'pure'. So, the pragmatic versatility that actors are generally capable of also means that they may notice different cues, and act in line with their understandings of the situation at hand. This is the reason why, as Boltanski and Thévenot's works specify, any practical situation may give rise to a confrontation of views. Those involved may indeed draw on different background references when they put forth ideas about what is going on, offer suggestions as to what needs to be done, or carry out actions seen as appropriate given their understandings of the situation faced.

Furthermore, these authors suggest that in those moments when different views come into confrontation – and more generally when actors realize that their understandings of the situation are not met – actors tend to give reasons and proofs to justify their accounts and claims and make their understandings more explicit[5]. These critical moments are the

[5]. As Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 37-38) note there is also the possibility that some actors may resort to 'violence' to bypass the need to justify their actions or views, and thus essentially try to impose their understandings or ways of doing things. This includes physical violence, and implicit or explicit threat of

"moments of test". The arguments and proofs exchanged then help make more visible the background references that actors' understandings rest on and relatedly the "worlds" and "worths" that they draw upon there. I now present these theoretical concepts in more detail.

The moments of test

The moment of test thus typifies a moment of confrontation of views when, in noticing discrepancies between their understanding of the situation faced and what they are experiencing, actors voice their concerns (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). It represents a catalytic moment in the process of organizing action, since actors' questioning unleash exchanges through which they try to move past the disagreement and establish what is going on and what to do. Reaching agreement allows "for the expected processes to be carried out, and for the situations to unfold correctly" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 40); in other words, it allows actors to carry on. It is worth noting however that the outcome of a moment of test is not considered knowable in advance. In fact, the significance of the 'moment of test' comes from the fact that action is approached in its relation to uncertainty – in other words, the moment of confrontation is taken seriously because there is always the possibility that a social process such as the production of concerted action would involve unanticipated developments (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot 2001). Focusing on the moments of test, thus, helps to capture the moment-to-moment work involved; and this brings us (researchers) closer to the dynamic aspects of such production.

Moments of test are instances when actors' understandings are 'put to the test', since what they see as the normal order of things (i.e., 'what ought to be', or said differently their sense of reality) is disturbed. They then try to make sense of the situation faced by challenging the incongruities noticed, and working to establish what is 'really' going on and what to do – in this sense, the order of things is also 'put to the test' in these moments. Indeed, the arguments and proofs that actors bring forth and debate may lead to maintaining, changing or redefining what they see as 'what to do' and hence their joint activities. Thus, their interactional work, as these moments unfold, also lets us (researchers) better see how they organize their actions in terms of the ways of thinking they rely on (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001).

violence, but also any act of bypassing the requirement to explain oneself. Although their theoretical framework does not explore such acts of violence, they do not dismiss such possibility (see also Thévenot, 2006b).

Boltanski and Thévenot also offer additional insights on the moments of test, which help explore these instances. Their theoretical works jointly show that these moments may appear in any situation, as actors notice discrepancies and try to resolve them so as to carry on with their activities. *Conventionalist Theory* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) concerns situations where actors' dealing with the discrepancies brought forth occasions public justification. In other words, their exchanges have to rise to a high level of generality that enables them to "converge in sorting out relevant and irrelevant items" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999: 361). Thus, the arguments and proofs that they put forth in these instances have to be publicly justifiable (i.e., legitimate), and they then tend to have recourse to more institutionalized ways to present and ground their views. In *Pragmatic Regimes of Engagement* (Thévenot, 2001, 2006b), in addition to the above instances, Thévenot highlights moments where noted discrepancies are handled without recourse to legitimate justifications. In these occasions, lesser levels of generality are enough. This means that instead of arguments and proofs that are valid in all generality, actors' references to familiar accommodations or looser explanations are sufficient to get them past the disagreement and to carry on[6] (Thévenot, 2001; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 348-349).

Moreover, as has been noted before, besides helping us (researchers) better appreciate the actual work involved in organizing concerted action, moments of test also allow us to study the broader structuring influences that contribute to shaping such action. It is worth noting that the idea that these moments – i.e., instances where actors realize that things are not as they

[6]. In *Pragmatic Regimes of Engagement,* Thévenot provides an extension to *On Justification* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) by illuminating various ways that actors engage with their contexts, including modes of engagement where actors' judgments and actions do not have to meet the requirement of public justification (see Thévenot, 1990, 2001, 2006). It highlights *two additional* regimes of engagement*: 1)* the regime of familiarity which concerns personal and local convenience (e.g., a couple where each person has his/her side of the bed); and *2)* the regime of regular planned action which depends on the functional capacity of objects (e.g., a homeowner preparing a bathroom for his dinner guests).

In the first regime, a moment of test might arise and be dealt with simply by finding a convenient accommodation (e.g., an unwelcome draft leads the couple to adjust their idiosyncratic sleeping arrangements). In the second regime, in a moment of test, such familiar arrangement would not be sufficient to get past a snag, and actors would have to rely on conventional arrangements (i.e., above the level of personal accommodation, yet below the level of higher generality where conventionalized or institutionalized ways hold sway). For example, a moment of test in the second regime, may involve the homeowner promptly re-arranging the bathroom – which he normally utilizes for storage – for the usage normally reserved for it, after noticing the bewildered look and the "where is the bathroom?" uttered by a guest as she peeks into the room. It is important to note that, although these examples occur in houses, these regimes are not reserved to the home space – even if they tend to occur less often in public settings. Indeed, in public settings, the discrepancies noticed and brought up often lead to exchanges where greater generality is expected so as to clarify (beyond individual singularities and convenience) what matters and what to do to coordinate actions.

should be, or instances of breakdown – bring to light that which is often implicit in social action is, of course, not new. It follows in the tradition of ethnomethodology and pragmatist research (Blokker & Brighenti, 2011; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000; Thévenot, 2001; see also Lamont, 2012)[7]. In *Conventionalist Theory* and *Pragmatic Regimes of Engagement*, Boltanski and Thévenot elaborate the moment of test as a conceptual tool fully grounded in their broader theoretical perspective concerned with the coordination of action. As noted previously, their theoretical works highlight the existence of multiple social structuring influences which may come into play in the process of organizing concerted action. These are made more visible during moments of test, since actors then tend to be more explicit about what they are trying to do or say. In so doing, as Boltanski and Thévenot note, actors help us (researchers) see more clearly the background references that they rely on. I next present these background references which range from the more personal to the more institutionalized – the latter being developed in detail by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) under the concepts of 'Worlds' and 'Worths'.

The background references, the Worlds, and the Worths

The background references elaborated in *Conventionalist theory* and *Pragmatic Regimes of Engagement* are collectively recognized references that actors rely on "to take hold of" their contexts (Thévenot, 2001: 66), make sense of their experience, and do what seems appropriate (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). They are "common resources" which do not determine action but are neither invented at will during interactions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 12). Rather, they are social and historically constructed, and actors become acquainted with them, and come to rely upon them, through their participation in practices, that is by learning "to behave naturally" in different situations (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 147;

[7]. There are, of course, important differences in the way these various schools of thought deal with the idea of a breakdown. What most distinguishes the 'moment of test' as articulated by Thévenot (2001, 2006b) and Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) is two-fold: a) the link to finely articulated background references (i.e., especially the Worths, and Worlds); b) the further specification of the breakdown in terms of the different kinds of 'moments of test' that may occur: i.e., differentiation based on the level of generality required (as explained above); and differentiation based on the burden of justification (i.e., a greater burden exists when the disagreement is about *the order of worth* that ought to apply versus *the state of worth* – in the former case, the order of worth is challenged, and in the latter it is not but there is disagreement about how it ought to be applied).

Thévenot, 2006b). Whether these background references sustain familiar practices[8] – e.g., 'sleeping on the left side of one's bed' – or what we more commonly refer to as (social) practices[9] – e.g., 'making a bathroom available for use'; or a more institutionalized one: e.g., 'doing monitoring and evaluation' – they make experience meaningful but also "limit the possibilities of action available" to actors (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 211; Thévenot, 2001). As noted previously, Boltanski and Thévenot's theoretical works do not subscribe to the view that background references reflect "internal determinations" that would dictate "the conducts of the agents in all circumstances, as if they were irreversibly inscribed *into them* and in *their corporeal habits* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 211; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). Instead, these authors offer that background references are variously drawn upon in practical situations, and may come into confrontation more visibly when there is a breakdown – i.e., during moments of test (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001).

What's more, Boltanski and Thévenot convincingly argue that these background references are related to "various conceptions of the good" (Thévenot, 2001: 59), that is they are grounded in a moral foundation. This is not to say that actors are seen as having "a benevolent disposition" or a tendency to do good at all times, and as such their interactions are basically presumed free of scheme, manipulation, or deceit[10] (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 27; see also Thévenot, 2001: 59). Morality is here not used in such limited sense of the word. Rather, the authors are drawing attention to the normative grounding of these background references, and thus the fact that they constitute accepted forms of valuing actions, ideas, people and things. Put differently, these background references allow actors to make relevant distinctions between what is (normatively) appropriate and what is not. Thus, when rendered more explicit

[8]. Familiar practices are defined as the regular conduct (or accepted ways of doing things) arising from idiosyncratic linkages with one's context. As the example provided shows, these practices are associated with the familiar regime of engagement.

[9]. Social practices are defined as accepted ways of doing things which, in contrast to familiar practices, are more broadly shared. As the examples provided show, these practices are associated: for the first example, with the regime of regular planned action; and for the second (i.e., the more institutionalized or conventionalized practices), with the public regime of justification.

[10]. In fact, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001) highlight the fact that moments of test are precisely moments when actors, engaged in a practical situation which has been revealed as not-quite-right, would unveil the machinations and other undue influences which they feel affect the course of action. They may for example denounce others' views as misleading, suggest that certain actions are self-interested, point to the imposition of unfair demands, note the incorrect application of the rules, highlight the disproportionate advantages granted to some actors, or allude to hidden agendas. These are examples of "critical operations" which actors ordinarily undertake which (whether they are or are not instrumental moves) come to shape their joint actions.

in moments of test as actors put forth their understandings of the situation faced, these common references make it possible to get past the discrepancies experienced and reach agreements by means other than physical force or coercion[11].

As indicated above, the background references that Boltanski and Thévenot specify in their theoretical works range from the more personal to the more institutionalized, depending on actors' mode of engagement with their contexts and the level of generality required to sustain concerted action (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999: 362-363). An example may be more telling. Let us imagine, then, that we (as social actors) are very close friends with a couple whose idiosyncratic way of sharing/using their kitchen we have become accustomed to, even if we view it as rather peculiar. If this couple, who both work in the same firm, were to re-arrange and use the office cafeteria in the same way, we would probably not consider such move appropriate. Further, if a disagreement were to arise between this couple and another employee over their peculiar utilization of the cafeteria, we would most likely understand why our friends simply stating that 'we like it like this' or 'this is normal usage' might not be enough to ease the tension, and why those involved in the dispute might start relying on more general principles and referring to the cafeteria, for instance, as a functional lunchroom (i.e., placing value on efficiency), or a place where to feed one's soul away from the work madness (i.e., placing value on creativity and mental voyage), or a space for everyone to feel welcome (i.e., placing value on inclusiveness). Evidently, the latter arguments – compared for example to the former 'we like it like this' – are of a higher level of generality and more readily meet the requirement of public justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 214-215; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999: 362-363). The general principles that actors rely on, when a higher level of generality is required, are the background references that Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) define in their seminal book *On Justification* under the related notions of "Worlds" and "orders of Worth".

Thus, the 'orders of Worth' provide the most legitimate common references upon which actors' judgments rest, and which allow them to ground the arguments they put forth, and size up (i.e., characterize and order) the views and actions, people, and things involved in the situations they find themselves in. They are highly institutionalized (or conventionalized) ways

[11]. As noted previously (see footnote #2), Boltanski and Thévenot's theoretical works do not dismiss the fact that actors may use violence to attain (forced) coordination. However, as they emphasize, "these borderline situations cannot be limitlessly extended", in other words, it would be to excessive, and most likely incorrect, to suggest that violence "can account for all situations" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 209; 212).

of thinking which give meaning to the social world. As the authors note: they are "present not only in the persons themselves, in the form of mental schemas, but also in the arrangement of adjacent beings – objects, persons, established arrangements, and so on" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 144). In this sense, they constitute modes of thought which actors have acquired (through participation in practices), but which are importantly also instantiated (or made manifest) in observable arrangements. In fact, the notion of 'Worlds' refers to the "universe of objects" associated with the general principle that defines each order of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 213). For example, in our contemporary societies, TV ads pointing to the shortcomings of a political party, a poster bearing the portrait of a mayoral candidate, and a line at a polling station are all objects and arrangements that we (as social actors) would almost certainly recognize as belonging to the same universe – hat is the realm of democratic processes grounded in the principle of equality and the importance of the general will.

On Justification (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) highlights six such worlds and the worths they are related to: the domestic, civic, market, industrial, fame, and inspiration worlds. The *Domestic World* relates to a way of thinking which values tradition and hierarchy. What is worthy (and thus appropriate), then, are the views and actions that reflect good manners, deference to elders or superiors, and so on; and relatedly the associated objects include such things as gifts, customs, ranks and titles. In the *Market World*, competition is the valued general principle. Taking advantage of opportunities counts as appropriate behavior, and so does, for example, getting ahead, or 'doing business' (i.e., deal-ing with emotional distance/detachment). Market goods (i.e., salable things or services), price, transaction, and material wealth objectify this worth. The *Civic World* grants primordial importance to the general will and solidarity. Worthiness is thus recognized in heeding the general will, or mobilizing for greater inclusiveness or equality (for example); and rights, voting booths, union chapters, and procedures are some of the qualified objects. The *Inspired World* centers on inspiration; and that which is spontaneous, emotional, original or ethereal constitutes what is appropriate. Forms of instantiation include arrangements that support the outpouring of inspiration. The *Industrial World* places value on efficiency, measurement, and technical expertise. Thus, what is worthy is that which is reliable, functional, professional, or able to yield results (without waste). Standards, quantities, criteria, methods, tables, graphs, plans, and so on, objectify this worth. Finally, in the *World of Fame,* the opinion of others is paramount. Fame establishes what matters; and the views and actions related to being recognized, or

attracting attention, for instance, are what is appropriate. The relevant objects then include things such as brands, public relations, promotional brochures, press releases, and public-opinion polls.

In addition to the above six Worlds, Boltanski and Thévenot together with other researchers have examined the formation of additional orders of worth. For example, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005 [1999]) identify a new World, the Connectionist World, which basically places value on forging connections through participation in time-bound projects. Lafaye and Thévenot (1993), and Thévenot, Moody and Lafaye (2000), point to the emergence of a Green Worth, which reflects the increasing reliance on 'the environment' as a source of legitimacy. Other Worlds may, of course, exist or form over time, given that these ways of thinking (and related arrangements) are social and historically constituted. In fact, the Worlds identified are not presented as an exhaustive set that would comprehensively describe social reality in all its aspects and universally. As noted by the authors, their model does not aspire to provide a "general theory of society" (Boltanski *in* Besaure, 2011: 370; Thévenot *in B*lokker & Brighenti, 2011: 392; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 209). Hence whether these worlds apply (or not) *in any* given context is a question whose answer is empirical. In other words, as the authors note, it is in closely examining actors' arguments in the contexts studied – and hence the background references these reveal – that we may gain a better understanding of which worths are involved in organizing social action there (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 210-211; 2006; Dodier, 1993: 558).

In sum, Boltanski and Thévenot's seminal work presented in *On Justification,* and the notable expansion through Thévenot's subsequent research on *Pragmatic regimes of engagement* (e.g., Thévenot, 2001, 2006b), offer a carefully constructed theoretical framework that permits "a pragmatic study of empirical conflicts" (Boltanski *in* Besaure, 2011: 362). More specifically, it helps approach the confrontation of views, through which action is ordinarily coordinated, from a perspective which does not presume that coordination hinges on fixed external constraints or stable internal determinations, nor construes it as the result of partisan struggles between 'interest groups' or social groups with distinct implicitly-shared cultural norms or schemas. Simply put, this framework provides an opportunity to study the *active* production of concerted action through a discursive approach which takes account of actors' interactional work and the broader structuring influences that *variously* sustain this process.

Doing empirical research by building on Boltanski and Thévenot's works

In Strategy research, and the field of organization studies more broadly, the theoretical works of Boltanski and Thévenot here discussed have been used by a small but growing number of authors. In particular, studies have drawn on the orders of Worth articulated in *On justification.* These have been mobilized in empirical works to study conflicts over value and their outcomes in organized settings. For example, they were used to analyze important topics such as: the evolution of global value chains (Ponte, 2009; Ponte & Gibbon, 2005); the historical development of the Biotechnology industry (Kaplan & Murray, 2010); the 2011-2012 Quebec student conflict (Dionne, Mailhot, & Langley, 2018); maintaining institutional legitimacy through stakeholders' justifications (Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011); compromise building in industry/university research partnerships (Mesny & Mailhot, 2007); the shaping of the moral legitimacy of fracking (Gond, Cruz, Raufflet, & Charron, 2016); constructing shared purpose in cross-sectoral collaborations (Cloutier & Langley, 2017); middle managers' discreet resistance to organizational change (Fronda & Moriceau, 2008); institutional entrepreneurship as a process of conventionalizing accounts (McInerney, 2008); the knowledge dynamics involved in the production of clinical guidelines (Moreira, 2005); and the multiple facets of the strategic plans of Arts organizations (Daigle & Rouleau, 2010).

For this research, as noted previously, I draw on both the works of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001, 2006b), and take account of their pragmatist orientation – an important, yet often neglected aspect of their theorizing – to examine how strategies form amidst multiple interests. I thus mobilize the moments of test, along with the orders of worth, as research instruments to study how actors produce concerted action by managing the multiple views arising as they carry out their activities. The pragmatist orientation also means a keen attention to what actors *do* and *say.* This point is particularly well illustrated in the comparison that Dodier (1993: 561-563) draws between Boltanski and Thévenot's approach and those commonly used in dispositional sociology and in studies that treat 'interests' as pre-existing drivers of action. He notes (ibid: 563):

> "A commitment to dispositions or interests demands a sociological portrait of the inspector [i.e., the actor]. This is because his real concerns are a function of this portrait. But Boltanski and Thévenot ask us to (...) instead consider the series of specific problems that arise for agents as they make judgements about complex realities and events"; "for

> the assumption is that the inspector will have to adjust to the constraints of the situation and cope both with the unexpected emergence of objects (...) and the regime of action [i.e., the form of engagement] imposed by other people".

To sum up, studying the formation of strategy amidst multiple interests from this perspective entails paying close attention to how members make judgments about their hard-to-pin-down contexts and deal with arising concerns, and how this affects organizational activities over time. Thus, strategy formation is here approached as *a process unfolding through successive moments of test which produce consistent actions over time.* These moments would show the confrontation of views, and what members do and say to get past disagreements. They would also reveal the background references that they rely on in so doing, and those which sustain the agreements reached and the actions and decisions carried out. This approach then shares with Strategy-as-Practice an interest in understanding not only what members do that affect the formation of strategies but also the social embeddedness of such doings (e.g., Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara, 2010; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007). Finally, a focus on successive moments of test makes it possible to follow the work of organizational members, and take account of the situations that they face over time, and the various concerns raised and handled, which come to shape realized strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

As noted previously, my interest in researching the puzzle of strategy forming amidst multiple views also includes examining the process from a critical perspective: I now present the Foucauldian concepts that I mobilize to do so.

A critical Foucauldian-inspired perspective

Adopting a Foucauldian-inspired perspective provides an opportunity to take a critical look at the formation of strategy amidst multiple interests, and questions the power relations involved, while still viewing interests as constructed during actors' interactions. Further, this approach remains in line with the underlying assumption that human beings are usually competent social actors, and thus capable of experiencing and interpreting their contexts in a plurality of ways – i.e., the pragmatic versatility highlighted in the research works of Boltanski and Thévenot discussed earlier.

By contrast, when interests are treated as a fixed property of actors – and thus tied to their singularity – they tend to be construed as their 'true' preferences, which become entangled in power plays when confronted with the 'true' preferences of others; and whose non-fulfillment, then, is often, and perhaps too readily, explored as an expression of oppression or resistance depending on which individuals or groups are presumed 'powerful' and which ones are assumed 'powerless'. This latter point, of course, is not meant to suggest that the power relations present in society do not advantage some actors while disadvantaging others. Power relations may indeed produce inequalities, repression, and other highly questionable outcomes. The distinction being made here is rather that Foucault's extensive research work helps us move beyond subject-centered analyses of power, such as that presented above, and allows us to orient our thinking differently (e.g., Deleuze, 2012 [1986]; Foucault, 1982; Haugaard, 2003).

Indeed, Foucault (1982: 789) offers that "power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government"; and "to govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others" (ibid: 790). Power, thus, "is exercised rather than possessed" (Deleuze, 2012: 22); "it is diffused" rather than localized (ibid: 24); and it in fact "passes through the dominated forces no less than through the dominating" (ibid: 24). Consequently, a critical examination of power relations would not amount to identifying the actor or group of actors who supposedly 'hold' power or, more broadly put, "a central point or unique locus of sovereignty" (Deleuze, 2012: 62) from which power emanates and spreads out to control individuals or groups. It would instead mean, as Foucault (1982: 786) argues, beginning "the analysis with a 'How'": How, in the sense of "By what means is it exercised?" and what are the related effects?

What's more, Foucault's theses on power – and more generally his historical analyses – orient us towards an understanding of the present, and more specifically our present ways of thinking as contingent rather than tied to "some hidden essence", innate form of rationality, or permanent state (e.g., Allard-Poesi, 2010: 169; see also Foucault, 1980, 1982, 2010). Foucault, as Allard-Poesi (2010: 169) notes, "aimed to distinguish the different 'systems' through which we experience reality (things, others and ourselves)". These systems or modes of thought are multiple, and constituted historically. While certain modes of thought may become (for a time) dominant and others subjugated – i.e., the forms of knowledge sustaining them then viewed as

"low-ranking", "unqualified" or "even directly disqualified knowledges" (Foucault, 1980: 82) – actors are not presumed trapped inside one mode of thought in the sense that they would be able to "interpret the world only in a singular way" (Haugaard, 2010: 67; see also Townley, 1993). Rather, implicit in Foucault's research works is the notion that actors *are capable* of endowing reality with a plurality of meaning. Thus, in relation to power, Foucault emphasizes that it "is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized" (Foucault, 1982: 790).

This presupposition also means that a Foucauldian perspective does not aspire to peg down a hierarchy of modes of thought. The issue is not, for example, whether one way of behaving, reaction or comportment – borrowing from Foucault's quote above – is superior to the other options, more appropriate in that context, or fundamentally better. In other words, the questioning of the power relations involved in the production of social action is here less concerned with fixing on the transcendent importance of one mode of thought so that this may serve as an ultimate grounding for critique. Simply put, it does not for example seek to adjudicate on what is 'intrinsic' to a group of actors or what their 'real interests' are, and on this basis treat the other interests they may show or modes of thought they may rely on as signs of oppression. Instead, a Foucauldian perspective invites us to pay careful attention to the hierarchy (of modes of thought) revealed in what actors *themselves* say and do, question what is taken to be self-evident or intrinsically valid – and investigate the conditions of its existence – and examine the consequences of its being so regarded. Such certainties obscure the historically contingent nature of our modes of thought; and this reification has power effects.

Power/Knowledge and the reification of knowledge

For Foucault, power and knowledge are inextricably linked, in the sense that the operation of power always actualizes, organizes, or puts into circulation a knowledge, and a form of knowledge always implies the structuring of the possible field of action of actors (i.e., power) (Foucault, 1982; Foucault, 1980: 102; see also Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Haugaard, 2003; Townley, 2008). Take for example the idea so common in our today's societies that an

organization *must have* a 'corporate strategy', i.e., a designed strategy that plans its relationship with its environment and in the absence of which, it is implied, it would surely be without direction. This way of thinking, as Knights and Morgan (1991) convincingly argue in their seminal Foucauldian analysis of the discourse of 'corporate strategy', is rarely seen as an arbitrary convention. Yet, it is – much like the many ideas and practices that order our social lives – and it developed through specific (although not inevitable nor predetermined) historical processes.

This mode of thought, thus, the authors note, has spread out and developed as an essential understanding of organizations. It has transformed practices in organizations, such that members' actions are conditioned in a particular way. For instance, not only has it fostered the broad use of tools and techniques of 'strategic management', but it has, relatedly, shaped the ways that organizational actions are decided on and coordinated (e.g., ruling out what is not (made) consonant with the 'corporate strategy'). It has also modified divisions and relations within organizations, generating for example particular managerial hierarchies – which 'disable' some actors while 'empowering' others, i.e., the "credentialled experts" – as well as "inequalities of income and work conditions" (ibid: 263). Thus, the discourse of 'corporate strategy' feeds the operation of power. Credentialled experts, for example, are able to exercise power over others through the tools and techniques put in place, the rules developed, and the practices so perfected (ibid: 265). This operation of power contributes, in turn, to the reproduction of the discourse of 'corporate strategy'. Indeed, the practices it fosters and which are continuously implemented and reiterated, in effect, actualize and reinforce this mode of thought as meaningful and intrinsically valid (ibid: 270).

From this perspective, then, power is not the antithesis of knowledge; rather they are interdependent and mutually enwrapped (Foucault, 1980, 1982). Power in fact operates through the ways in which we make sense of the world and endow reality with meaning. In particular, it is "by linking meanings to truth or nature" that power is created (Haugaard, 2003: 105; see also Foucault, 1980: 93-94). In other words, ideas and practices become all the more potent as they are taken to be true, and hence seen as self-evident and the obvious way of doing things. Simply put, doing otherwise is then virtually heresy. By being so reified, these ideas and practices more readily structure action and induce appropriate forms of conduct.

Reification, thus, makes a mode of thought (and the ideas and practices it sustains) appear other than arbitrary. It turns what is essentially a historically contingent way of thinking into 'the way things *really* are'. Ideas and practices are made to appear as certainties – hence "not 'merely' a convention" – by being discursively constructed, for instance, as the way they have always been (i.e., use of tradition); the way they were meant to be (i.e., use of nature or God); or the way they 'objectively are' (i.e., scientifically true) (Haugaard, 2003: 102-105). So, for example, "If something is scientifically true", it is incontrovertible; then why deny it? – after all, "those who deny truth are the essence of irrationality" (Haugaard, 2003: 104). Reification, thus, rules out alternatives while making some actions and ideas the obviously valid.

Importantly, as Foucault shows, reification has power effects. For example, in his historical analysis of the psychiatric asylum where he brings to light the reification of the knowledge and practice of psychiatry through science, Foucault shows how this has rendered the 'doctor-patient couple' the exclusive therapeutic structure – other modalities having been stricken off, and denied legitimacy. As a result, the right of intervention of the doctor has been amplified, and hence existing power relations have been reinforced to the advantage of doctors (Foucault, 2010: 141-167). These effects were however not predetermined. Foucault's analysis does not suggest, for instance, that doctors set out to so prevail (Foucault, 2010). Reification, in fact, is not necessarily a will to power (Haugaard, 2003). And, the power effects produced are not automatically treated as the pre-planned outcomes of well-orchestrated schemes, or presumed to be inevitable (Foucault, 1980, 1982; Knights & Morgan, 1991). To see reification in this way would amount, as Gordon suggests, to mistakenly "identify[ing] realisation with effectivity" (Gordon *in* Foucault, 1980: 246).

In fact, from a Foucauldian perspective, while actors are clearly considered agents in the operation of power, they are not viewed as the 'programmers' or, said differently, those who yield the specific effects produced for having so prescribed and controlled the operation of power (Gordon *in* Foucault, 1980: 251; see also Foucault, 1980: 146-165; Foucault, 1982; Foucault, 2010: 51-75). Further, actors are neither viewed as helpless victims. Instead, as Foucault (1982) emphasizes "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight. Every power relationship implies, at least *in potentia*, a strategy of struggle" (ibid: 794, emphasis in original). This also means that power is not considered impervious to resistance; even if the power/knowledge interdependence makes resistance more difficult

(Foucault, 1982; see also Gordon *in* Foucault, 1980: 255-259). Overall, thus, as Knights and Morgan (1991: 254) aptly summarized it: the effects of power are to be understood "as the contingently produced outcome of the actions of subjects who could 'do otherwise'".

Disciplinary power

Power of the disciplinary type reveals deliberate and calibrated efforts to obtain a particular conduct from actors. In *Discipline and Punish* (2012[1975]), for example, Foucault highlights this often mundane yet important form of power, when he takes us through the changes from exemplary punishments (which were most certainly violent) to the use of a perfected form of surveillance in prisons starting in the eighteenth century. Compared with previous draconian corporeal punishments, the new non-physically violent way that prisoners were to be corrected seems overall rather plain and almost benignant. Yet, it provides for a continuous exercise of disciplinary power. It welds together ceaseless surveillance and normalizing judgment – i.e., the inspecting gaze which sees all, assesses, and classifies prisoners, and exposes and punishes nonconforming behavior – to condition prisoners' everyday form of conduct (Foucault, 1980: 146-165; Foucault, 1982; Foucault, 2012).

The specificity of disciplinary power is that it operates through the careful and deliberate socialization of actors. Through seemingly neutral techniques, it works to condition behavior and dins into actors 'what *really* is' – trying thus to establish what can be done, said or known in relation to a given matter. As Haugaard (2003: 106) notes "when actors are inculcated with routinized behaviour then the appropriate actions and reactions become virtually reflex". This is because enforced routine leads to the reproduction of the practices and ideas being inculcated; but, not just that. It often also results in the internalization of the modes of thought that sustain these ideas and practices. In fact, the disciplining of the body, as Foucault emphasizes, seeks to transform "the soul" (Foucault, 2010: 176-178; see also Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006; Haugaard, 2003). Power, he notes, "makes individuals subjects" not just in one way: it subjugates through control or dependence, but it also importantly shapes self-understanding (i.e., self-knowledge) (Foucault (1982: 781). So, for example, in the prisons discussed above, each individual subjected to the inspecting gaze would "end by interiorising [it] to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself" (Foucault, 1980: 155). Not surprisingly, the appropriate

form of conduct would then be reproduced simply as "a matter of routine" (Haugaard, 2003: 106; see also Foucault, 2012; Townley, 1993).

There clearly lies the potential efficacy of disciplinary power. The invigilated processes through which power is exercised would lead actors to (re)produce particular ideas and practices, *and* also ways of being (Foucault, 1980: 92-95; Haugaard, 2002: 181-187). Take for example the discourse of 'corporate strategy' (Knights & Morgan, 1991) discussed in earlier pages. Knights and Morgan (1991) show that those managers and staff "who accept the logic of the discourse" acquire a "subjective identity that is expanded, through participation in its reproduction" (ibid: 262). In other words, they then occupy specific subject positions, and learn to recognize themselves accordingly. The managers constituted as 'credentialled experts', for example, come to see and present themselves as others see them: i.e., "the element in the model of success that '*can make a difference*'" (ibid: 264; emphasis added). In such a context, the discourse of 'corporate strategy' is more readily reproduced and further institutionalized – with participation in its reproduction providing "a sense of meaning, identity and reality" to managers and staff (ibid: 269).

It is worth noting – as the above example may suggest – that while disciplinary power produces potent effects, these are not considered negative by default (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006: 249-250; Foucault, 2010: 380; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Townley, 1993). From a Foucauldian perspective, forms of power are not considered intrinsically liberating or invariably repressive[12] (Foucault, 2010: 204-205, 380; Haugaard, 2011: 164). In fact, power, overall, is not equated with repression. Rather, as Foucault emphasizes: the exercise of power "induces, it seduces, *it makes easier or more difficult*; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely" (Foucault, 1982: 789, emphasis added). Its effects may thus be objectionable or desirable. In fact, from this perspective, whether a power effect is reprehensible (or not) is a matter of evaluation, and more specifically a normative evaluation of the effects produced in a given context.

[12]. It is worth noting that a Foucauldian perspective does not deny the existence of physical violence and coercion; it just does not define them as forms of power (Foucault, 1982: 789). They are however clearly viewed as reprehensible.

Foucault's works on power, however, while clearly constituting social critique, do not make "the normative premises of his position explicit"[13] (Haugaard, 2010: 54). Hence, to ground my evaluation of power effects, I follow Haugaard (2010) in exploring undesirability in totalizing trends – i.e., in power/knowledge effects which foster "singular monological thought" (ibid: 72). The next section presents how the Foucauldian concepts discussed above are mobilized together with this complementary lens to critically examine the operation of power in the formation of strategy, and its consequences for studied organizations.

Researching power and its effects empirically with a Foucauldian-inspired lens

Foucault's power-related work has been extensively commented on, debated, and utilized in the field of management and organizations studies. Although, its mobilization for empirical studies varies in scope and depth, it is fair to say, following Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006: 229), that "something termed 'the Foucault effect' (...) has been noted"[14]. Foucault's influence is substantial in accounting research where his work has been drawn on, for instance: to reveal the historically contingent constitution of accounting systems (e.g., Hopwood, 1987); to question prevalent discourses (or modes of thought) that define (our contemporary idea of) accounting and the conditions of their existence (e.g., MacLullich, 2003; Miller & O'Leary, 1987); to examine the significance, and power effects of, apparently mundane – and supposedly neutral – echnical practices, control systems, or spatial configurations (e.g., Brivot & Gendron, 2011; Carmona, Ezzamel, Gutiérrez, 2002; Ezzamel & Willmott, 1998); and/or to highlight the construction of the governable and efficient person (i.e., a particular type of subject) as the power effect of a range of mutually reinforcing discourses (Miller & O'Leary, 1987). But, Foucault's work has of course also been used for notable empirical studies in other management areas – for example: to investigate human resource management (Townley,

[13]. The non-specification of the normative grounding sustaining the evaluation of power relations and power effects is not particular to Foucault. As Haugaard (2010: 52) notes, this is a broader phenomenon in the power literature where "most power analysis is enmeshed in either social critique or the defence of the *status quo* whereby the normative question has been woven into a tick fabric of empirical and sociological claims". In other words, many theorists – ncluding prominent scholars – conflate *is* and *ought* in their analysis (i.e., the empirical and the normative claims) and share insights that build on tacit assumptions about what is desirable or undesirable power.

[14]. As Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips (2006) further note, this does not mean that 'the Foucault effect' has always been viewed favorably (see also Carter, McKinlay, Rowlinson, 2002; Power, 2011). Foucault's work and reach has been criticized numerous times: an example being the famous debate opposing Neimark (1994) to Grey (1994) and Hoskin (1994) in accounting research where Foucault's reception has been particularly influential.

1993); refugee determination systems (Hardy, 2003); the constitution of members' identities in organizations (e.g., Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998; Grey, 1994); creativity and creative work (Brown, Kornberger, Clegg & Carter, 2010); educational rankings (Sauder & Espeland, 2009); or the widely acclaimed de-institutionalization of child labour (Khan, Munir, & Willmott, 2007). The reception of Foucault has, thus, certainly been broad, and his work has offered a research avenue into organizational issues and phenomena that brings to light the discursive formation of our ideas and practices, and their inescapable entanglement with power.

In the field of strategy (squarely defined), Foucault's work has been drawn upon for similarly oriented studies, and to offer analyses of strategy at both the macro and micro levels. Knights and Morgan (1991)'s research on the discourse of 'corporate strategy', discussed in previous pages, constitutes a fine example of the former. Micro perspectives, in contrast, have *approached* strategy *as it is practised* in organizations – while recognizing such practice as necessarily sustained by particular mode(s) of thought. For example, Ezzamel and Willmott (2008)'s research on the implementation of a newly formulated strategy in a global retailer helpfully reveals the practices enacted and way of thinking so reproduced, and their (unanticipated) power effects. Other exemplars are (among others): Kornberger and Clegg (2011)'s study of the formulation of a strategic plan for the city of Sydney which questions the knowledge mobilized and further legitimized through the process, and the performative effects of such strategizing; and Hardy and Thomas (2014)'s research on the new strategy of a global telecommunications company which shows how the multiple discourses associated with this formal strategy shaped it in intricate ways over time, and produced distinct power effects.

My critical examination of strategy formation also adopts a Foucauldian-inspired perspective which approaches strategy at the micro level while paying attention to macro-influences – i.e., the modes of thought (or discourses) that sustain strategy as it is practised – and the power effects so produced. Different from these other studies, however, my interest in strategy is not limited to formal (i.e., designed) strategies, but extend more broadly to realized strategies – whether they come about by design or not. As noted previously, this means a focus on how consistency of actions is produced over time. I thus draw on Foucault and, in particular, mobilize the Foucauldian concepts of power/knowledge and disciplinary power discussed earlier, to critically examine the ways in which consistent actions are produced

amidst multiple interests. More specifically, I use this perspective to study what governs such continued production – and in particular the conditions of its existence (e.g., what members rule in and out when carrying out their activities; the modes of thought this reveals and the hierarchy this shows; the processes sustaining enactment, including possible disciplinary techniques; and the (possible) struggles involved) – and also examine the related power effects.

To study these effects, I mobilize Haugaard (2010) as an additional analytical layer to ground the critique of power. As noted previously, power is not viewed as *inherently* desirable or reprehensible; rather any such evaluation is a matter of context and perception (Foucault, 2010; Haugaard, 2011). Importantly, Haugaard (2010)'s incisive discussion of the works of Foucault and other political theorists helpfully teases out a normative grounding for such evaluation. This author convincingly argues that totalizing trends – or when one mode of thought is being extended to everything – point to injustice, that is, they may produce normatively undesirable effects (Haugaard, 2010). Indeed, when one single way of making sense of the world is perceived as valid in a wide range of situations, there is the danger that actors relying with blind faith on such view would behave in a manner that disadvantage, or disenfranchise, others or themselves.

Imagine for instance an extension of the discourse of market competition to the management of hospital rooms or prison cells through which these would be viewed as any other investment. As Haugaard (2010: 71-72) illustrates, "while the logic of market forces has a place", when prison cells are viewed as a landlord might interpret a real-estate investment, and hence prisoners are taken for 'tenants', there is a risk that this conflation "will facilitate inhumane treatment, which the 'investor' will be blind to". This extension is judged undesirable, not because the prison environment is considered otherwise free of the influence of market considerations, nor because prisoners are presumed to have never been tenants in their previous lives – and hence the noted extension would amount to violating supposedly innate forms of rationality. Rather, it is objectionable because "a single set of meanings – those surrounding market competition" – has been reified, and is extended to situations or aspects of social life in which alternative ways of thinking are appropriate (e.g., seeing and managing prison cells as part of a social reform system, and/or as a service of general interest); and this is likely to produce objectionable effects (Haugaard, 2010: 71-72). What is unjust is the silencing

of other possible ways of thinking through such reification and extension, and thus the imposition of a singular monological thought on actors' engagement with the world (ibid: 72-73).

I follow Haugaard (2010) in grounding my critique of power effects in the understanding that totalizing trends signal an imposition of meaning which oppresses competent social agency – in other words, actors' pluralistic potential, that is, their usual ability to engage with the world variously (and hence draw on different modes of thought) depending on the situation faced. Thus, my critical examination of strategy formation adopts a Foucauldian discursive approach to the analysis of power which is complemented with Haugaard (2010)'s proposed normative grounding for distinguishing desirable from undesirable power effects.

To summarize:

My thesis research overall draws on two main theoretical perspectives to examine how strategies form amidst multiple interests, and critique the observed processes of formation. It starts from the understanding that strategies may form in organizations whether by design or not (e.g., Mintzberg & Waters, 1985), and the recognition that rather than constituting a fixed property of individuals or groups, interests are constructed and negotiated during actors' interactions (e.g., Moody & Thévenot, 2000; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Based on such premises, the formation of strategy is, perhaps, even more puzzling given the possibly more dynamic and unscripted nature of the process. The two theoretical lenses I adopt to explore the issue – Boltanski & Thévenot (2006[1991]) and Thévenot (2001, 2006b) on the one hand, and Foucault (1980, 1982, 2010) on the other – provide fitting conceptual tools which permit an examination of the processes that make concerted action possible, without presuming that this results from the management of actors' stable (defining) interests, or wholly intentional and predefined programs. Both theoretical perspectives also offer an opportunity to study the formation of strategy by taking account of broader structuring influences, i.e., the modes of thought (or discourses) that organizational members rely on to make sense of their contexts and orient their actions.

I thus draw on the theoretical works of Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001, 2006b) to examine *how consistency of actions is produced* over time through members' interactions, as they perform their activities and ordinarily deal with discrepancies and varied

arising *concerns* (i.e., interests) – a process that reveals the tensions between the modes of thought that they rely on. In this sense, strategy forms through their handling of such successive conflicts (big or small), and the agreements then reached (including decisions taken) which come to (re)define organizational directions. This perspective thus provides a rich framework for studying how strategy forms amidst multiple interests, by helpfully bringing attention to the critical operations done by members themselves. Yet, it does not make sufficient allowance for a critical examination of the conditions structuring such activity[15]. Put differently, it does not offer the conceptual tools for standing back and asking whether these operations may be impaired or somehow (unobtrusively) constricted, and what may account for members' reliance on particular modes of thought.

For this critical analysis, I mobilize Foucault (1980, 1982, 2010). A Foucauldian-inspired perspective makes it possible to question strategy as it is practiced, in terms of the conditions that shape what modes of thought are relied upon. It calls attention to the structuring of the possible field of action of members – e.g., whether the ways in which members handle their activities and disagreements point to modes of thought that are too readily accorded primacy – and the means by which such structuring is obtained. In other words, it allows an examination of how power operates within the strategy formation process. Further, this perspective helps investigate the implications and, with the help of Haugaard (2010), draw out the desirable and undesirable effects for studied organizations.

The next sections present the three papers which compose my thesis research, and through which I expanded on my main analytical lens (the 'moment of test') and explored my overarching question, i.e., *how strategies form amidst multiple interests*. Each paper provides a more detailed description of how the theoretical frameworks are mobilized and the methodological approach used (for the empirical research), and discusses the findings and theoretical contributions. As noted in earlier pages, Paper I is entitled: I*nstitutional work and*

[15]. This is not an oversight, however. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001, 2006b)'s theoretical works center on actors' critical operations which, they argue, have been neglected by streams of research in sociology and critical theory. They thus focus on the critiques (and criticisms) laid by actors themselves (including denunciations of undue influences, manipulation, oppression, abuse of power, etc.). But, they also acknowledge that such critical operations may be hindered by specific actions (i.e., violence, coercion, bypassing justification) taken by some of the actors involved.

What is being argued here is that, beyond the critiques voiced by actors themselves, and these acknowledged procedural impediments to such voicing, there may be structural constraints that skew actors' critical operations (even when these unfold unhindered) – for example, a consensus that freely develops may in fact point to the influence of a dominant discourse (mode of thought) which makes the actions that members consent to what is 'normal', hence unquestionably what is to be done.

the notion of test; Paper II: *Emergent strategy formation: Of coping and patterns*; and Paper III: *Legitimacy fuelling marginality?: Reporting in nonprofit development organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa*.

Chapter 1

INSTITUTIONAL WORK AND THE NOTION OF TEST

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Abstract

Institutional work concerns the way in which the activities of actors contribute to the evolution of institutions, whether through their creation, disruption or maintenance. In this paper, we argue that the notion of "test", as developed by conventionalist theory, provides an innovative lens through which to examine the nature of institutional work and the evolution of institutions. Conventionalist theory posits that constitutive value frameworks guide individuals' behaviors and provide the legitimating systems for their actions. It pays particular attention to moments of questioning of these value frameworks, and how they may affect existing legitimate practices and principles. Such moments of test provide a remarkable opportunity for understanding institutional work as they allow a close examination of three key dimensions associated with actors' questioning or reproduction of constitutive value frameworks: agency, relationality and temporality. We suggest that an analytical focus on moments of tests can foster more systematic attention to these dimensions, and productively contribute to ongoing research on how and why institutions may be disrupted, maintained, or created in a diversity of situations.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the study of institutional stability and change has gradually expanded from investigating the macrodynamics of fields to a concern with the varied actions that can affect institutions. The latter is the central focus of the "institutional work" perspective, which examines the "*purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions*" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 215, emphasis original). The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the conversation on institutional work by drawing on the notion of test from conventionalist theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Research to date has

offered an increasingly rich and contrasted view of the practices involved in institutional reproduction and change. However, as Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2011) recently noted, our understanding of the relation between agency and institutions is still incomplete. Questions remain regarding how and why institutional work occurs, and the relationship between human agency (micro-actions) and institutions (macro-influences). Our understanding of both the impact of more or less reflexive actions on institutional evolution and the ways in which actors' actions and reactions combine to affect institutional arrangements remains sketchy. In addition, as Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) suggest, relatively little is known about how different stages in the evolution of institutions start up and follow on.

We propose that a more systematic investigation of these questions may be achieved by examining the moments of questioning of institutional arrangements that punctuate institutional lifecycles. In these moments, actors seek to confirm or choose to confront the way in which institutional rules, norms or accepted beliefs are instantiated in particular situations. These are instances where the link between micro-level actions and macro-level principles are assessed in the empirical realm, and thus when institutional solidity and plasticity are assessed, and their confirmation or alteration is played out. We argue that the notion of test conceptualized by conventionalist theory (Boltanski & Thévenot [1991], 2006; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005) can valuably add to ongoing systematic research on institutional work. Tests are moments in which challenges to unfolding action may occur, and through which actors seek to confirm or readjust the conditions and principles shaping ongoing activities (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; see also Blokker & Brighenti, 2011; Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011). These are moments of malaise in which the principles underpinning actors' judgments and beliefs about what is appropriate for the situation at hand are made most visible through argumentative moves and reliance on material proofs.

Conventionalist theory proposes that human behavior is both enabled and constrained by socially and historically constructed legitimating systems labelled "Orders of Worth" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1991]; Jagd, 2007). This resonates with the view of institutional theorists, who consider that human action is embedded in institutional structures whose organizing principles (or "institutional logics") guide action while also being shaped by it (e.g., Friedland & Alford, 1991; Lawrence, et al., 2011; Thornton, 2002). Indeed, there are important similarities between conventionalist theory's "Orders of Worth" and institutional theory's "logics" –

defined by Friedland and Alford (1991: 248) as "a set of material practices and symbolic constructions which constitutes its organizing principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate". Orders of worth are multiple and incommensurable just as institutional logics are multiple and distinct. However, there are also differences in the way both these organizing principles have been articulated, as has been noted in recent studies (Cloutier & Langley, 2013; McInerney, 2008; Patriotta, et al., 2011). Notably, conventionalist theory has its origin in the analysis of social action and coordinating mechanisms. We are here particularly interested in conventionalist theory's notion of test, which affords a finer-grained examination of "critical moments" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999) in social life, and the micro-processes underlying the possible persistence or change of socially constructed legitimating systems (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Jagd, 2007; Thévenot, 2001). We find this conceptual grounding of the analysis – which focuses on the micro level without losing sight of macro-influences —particularly promising for the study of institutional work.

The paper begins with a brief overview of institutional work literature. It highlights the ways in which research undertaken so far has addressed the relationship between the actions of individual and collective actors and institutional evolution, and identifies areas that require further development. In the following section, we present the notion of test as conceptualized by conventionalist theory. We show how it may contribute to illuminating these under-explored areas and, in particular, how it may offer a richer account of agency, relationality and temporality in institutional evolution. We further illustrate the potential offered by the notion of test by discussing exemplary cases from conventionalist theory-inspired research. We conclude by inviting more empirical research in the institutional work tradition, drawing on conventionalist theory's notion of test.

1.2 INSTITUTIONAL WORK: ACTORS' ACTIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) locate the theoretical foundations of the notion of "institutional work" at the intersection of seminal studies that identify the importance of agency in understanding institutional processes (e.g., DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1991; 1992) and research in the tradition of the sociology of practice (e.g., Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984) which suggests that institutions are constituted through the actions of individual and collective

actors. From this perspective, the relation between institutions and agency may be manifested in various ways, since actors undertake actions—whether conservative or creative, deliberate or mundane—which can affect institutional practices, boundaries, organizational forms, institutional rules or meanings. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identify three broad categories of institutional work: "creating," "maintaining," and "disrupting" institutions. We now review each of these categories briefly and identify particular gaps where we believe conventionalist theory, and specifically the notion of test, might offer potential insight.

Creating institutions

A large number of studies in the institutional work tradition has sought to describe, explain and theorize about the influence of actors' actions and discursive moves on the creation of institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009). In general, research that deals with creative institutional work most often depicts instigating actors with high levels of reflexivity who manage, through strategic acts and even manipulative moves, to further their idiosyncratic interests or bridge other stakeholders' interests. For example, Maguire, Hardy and Lawrence (2004) investigate the introduction of new practices for consultation and information exchange in the HIV/AIDS treatment advocacy field, by highlighting the work of two individuals with instrumental motives (institutional entrepreneurs) in creating and promoting the widespread adoption of these practices at the field level. Weber, Heinze and DeSoucey's (2008) study of the creation of a new market segment reveals a not dissimilar skillful mobilization of strategies by a coalition of activists to foster new practices. Intentional strategic actions by individuals or collectives also seem prominent in accounts of institutional work involved in legitimating previously marginal practices within a field, such as health care (e.g., Reay, Golden-Biddle, & Germann, 2006), or in transforming extant practices by promoting new meanings and rules, as in Munir and Phillips's (2005) study of the work of Kodak in legitimating the roll-film camera and in Garud et al.'s (2002) research on standard-setting in the information technology field.

Thus, in most studies, protagonists' actions are presented as more deliberate and strategic than not. Yet, Lawrence, Hardy and Phillips's (2002) research on inter-organizational collaborations suggests that the emergence of new practices may not be planned occurrences but rather "second-order" effects. Similarly, Delbridge and Edwards (2008) show that field-

level innovation in the superyacht industry emerged rather fortuitously from the pragmatic engagement of an interior designer with industry players. It is thus important for a better understanding of institutional work not to overlook these more nuanced cases, and to study agency implicated in the construction of new practices and meanings in its varied forms, including those where intentionality appears to be less pronounced.

Another important issue—that has so far received limited attention in research on creative institutional work—is how actors' *actions* and others' *reactions* to new introduced activities combine to affect institutional creation, and influence resulting institutional arrangements. Institutional studies have traced the actions of particular individuals or groups in relation to the institutions being created (e.g., Maguire, et al., 2004; Weber, et al., 2008), and the moves and countermoves of proponents in an attempt to appease, bypass or defeat opposition to the newly created practices (e.g., Garud, et al., 2002; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). However, the varying forms of actions and reactions, and in particular the context and ways in which they combine to affect institutional creation trajectories, has received scant attention. The few studies that have examined the complex interweaving of actions and reactions suggest that processes of institutional formation are not just led by powerful instigators but are also usually shaped by more or less active responses, and even pragmatic actions developed in those particular contexts (Lounsbury & Crumley, 2007; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012; Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). We suggest that an analytical approach that would allow a more systematic examination of how actors' actions play out and combine in support of institutional change or stability—which may involve promotion, negotiation, accommodation, and refinement among multiple actors—would help to improve our understanding of institutional work. As we will show later, we think that the notion of test from conventionalist theory may be of particular utility here, as well as for addressing more fully the varied forms of agency brought to bear in situated interactions.

Maintaining institutions

Compared with research on institutional creation, the investigation of actors' efforts associated with the persistence of existing institutional arrangements has received relatively limited attention (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2008; Suddaby, 2010). Generally, this line of research has been concerned with work involved in "supporting, repairing or recreating the

social mechanisms that ensure compliance" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006: 230). For example, research on the development of regulative mechanisms such as standards (e.g., Garud, et al., 2002; Slager, Gond, & Moon, 2012) has described maintenance work as operating alongside creation work, as standards promoters strive to monitor the proper application of institutional prescriptions. Likewise, accounts of socialization activities (e.g., Dacin, Munir, & Tracey, 2010; Zilber, 2002) have mainly addressed active and deliberate strategies to foster institutional reproduction. More recently, practice-oriented research on institutional maintenance has highlighted a different kind of work that consists in actors' pragmatic problem-solving behaviors as they seek to accomplish their ongoing activities, and may take the form of passive maintenance (Sminia, 2011) or conscious accommodation of some degree of variation in practice performance (Lok & de Rond, 2012). However, forms of maintenance work such as these generally remain under-explored.

Again, we think the notion of test could be of particular interest in better conceptualizing and understanding the various forms of agency involved in institutional maintenance. Maintenance work appears to range from the more muscular reaffirmation of threatened institutional rules, norms and values through control work aimed at ensuring the proper use of accepted templates and procedures, to even more subtle forms of maintenance work where some variation is tolerated. All these are instances where different combinations of actions and reactions are at play, the systematic examination of which, we argue, stands to provide additional insights on maintenance work, and how and why it occurs.

Disrupting institutions

Disruption work is defined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) as actions aiming to attack or undermine the mechanisms that stabilize institutions. To our knowledge, empirical research on disruption work as the primary phenomenon being studied has been rare. Exceptions include Maguire and Hardy's (2009) study of the actions of individuals in problematizing the use of DDT and the particular meanings it promoted, which effectively undermined the regulative, normative and cognitive pillars sustaining this widespread practice. The bulk of research on the work of actors in disrupting institutional arrangements has, however, tended to address disruption in conjunction with other types of work. For instance, Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen and Van de Ven (2009) examine disrupting work which took place as a new institutional logic was

introduced in a utility company, leading to simultaneous disruption and maintenance work. Concurrent disruptive and creative work is also illustrated in Leblebici, Salancik, Copay and King's (1991) research on the creation of mass-broadcasting media as field players sought to question and challenge the values underlying the financing of radio programs.

Overall, disruption work presented in the extant literature equally appears to concern mainly disruptive actions that are highly intentional and even strategic. Yet, Oliver's (1992: 564) analysis of deinstitutionalization, defined as "the process by which the legitimacy of an established or institutionalized organizational practice erodes or discontinues", leaves open the possibility that work that would lead to deinstitutionalization might include not only the intentional and highly deliberate assault on institutional foundations, but also more gradual forms of agency that could lead to the dissipation of an institutional practice. Again, we think that a focus on moments of test as occasions when actors may engage in actions and reactions that involve either active challenges to existing organizing principles or related procedures, or more nuanced forms of agency such as choosing not to defend them, may provide a route to better understanding patterns of institutional disruption.

Patterns of institutional evolution

The activities of creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions are often treated as three separate forms of institutional work. A broader perspective would consider them as complementary contributors to an overall pattern of institutional evolution. However, few studies have examined the lifecycle of institutions and the types of institutional work that have shaped the emergence, persistence and possible dissolution of institutions over time. Rare exceptions include Farjoun's (2002) study of the history of pricing arrangements in the online database industry and Zietsma and Lawrence's (2010) study of the evolution of the coastal forestry industry in British Columbia. By studying the continuum of institutional lifecycle stages, the authors of both studies reveal the arbitrariness of the path of institutional evolution. Thus, rather than a determinate linear pattern, the authors highlight moments that appear crucial in the transition from one stage to the other, when actors expose contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002) and express dissatisfaction about existing practices. At such times, it seems that a series of critiques and defensive responses ensued, accompanied by experimental work and

collaborative or competitive actions, leading to institutional change, persistence or ongoing institutional conflict.

Indeed, these moments appear to be an important locus for institutional work. Although not explicitly theorized as such by Farjoun (2002) and Zietsma and Lawrence (2010), such moments constituted key focal points in their analysis of the evolution of institutions and of actors' influence on such evolution. We suggest that the attention granted to these moments may have contributed to the presentation by both studies of more nuanced accounts of actors' pragmatic engagement with institutions and its effects on the path of institutional evolution. We argue, however, that a more systematic mobilization of such moments, that we associate with the notion of test, would allow a richer consideration of institutional plasticity and evolution.

In summary, the extant literature has contributed greatly to our understanding of institutional work, and continues to grow and stimulate further thinking and exploration of the multiple ways in which actors may influence the institutions that shape their own and others' behavior. Recent work that has taken on the task of investigating how more pragmatic, mundane and even emergent forms of agency have affected institutions is, we believe, a welcome addition to the generally more frequent accounts of deliberate, strategic and calculative forms. We argue that more systematic investigation of the processes of creation, maintenance and disruption of institutions would benefit from a focussed examination of the specific moments in which institutional malaise, contest or crisis, are played out. Suddaby (2010: 17) and others suggest that "institutions (...) tend to only reveal their inner workings during times of disruption or stress, when the social order is inverted (...), or the institutional fabric is torn and we can observe, however temporarily, the inner mechanisms of institutions".

Moments where the inner workings of institutions are revealed through the actions of actors and where they may—through their varied enactment of institutional arrangements—affect institutions are, in our view, an important locus of institutional work. These moments, we argue, could be valuably identified and approached by drawing on the notion of test, a core concept of conventionalist theory. More specifically, we suggest that the notion of test contributes by offering: (1) an approach to understanding varied forms of intentionality (agency); (2) a conception of institutional work as relational, i.e., as involving actions and reactions of people and material objects (relationality); (3) an analytical lens that focuses

attention on critical moments of institutional evolution and their inter-relationships over time (temporality). We present the notion of test in the following section, and then discuss in more detail how it may help advance institutional work research according to these three main themes.

1.3 THE TEST AS AN ANALYTICAL LENS FOR EXAMINING INSTITUTIONAL WORK

The notion of test

The notion of test plays a central role in conventionalist theory, and is comprehensively defined in the work of Boltanski and Thévenot, in particular in their 2006 ([1991]) book *On Justification*. Table 1 offers a summary of the key conceptual elements associated with this notion. Broadly speaking, tests refer to familiar occurrences when actors' enactment of legitimate organizing principles is made more visible. These are moments when actors' performance of widely accepted established rules, norms and belief systems are questioned. In moments of test, individual and collective actors' engagement with their context is the object of judgment in terms of correspondence with legitimate organizing principles (Blokker & Brighenti, 2011; Blondeau & Sevin, 2004; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). For instance, when staff promotion is discussed in a firm at the end of a fiscal year, the Executive Director might launch a performance appraisal in order to determine who will be promoted. This could be seen to constitute a test rooted in what Boltanski and Thévenot label the "industrial worth", as staff members' work performances would be judged against explicitly defined measures of productivity. Alternatively, this moment may also constitute a test if it is the first time that staff promotion is being considered in the firm, and the Executive Director and staff members wrestle with the very question of which principles and procedures to use in order to decide on who is to be promoted. Both these moments "put to a test" the organizing principles that ought to guide staff promotion in this firm: in the first instance, "testing" would concern the application (or validity of a particular application) of accepted procedures, while in the second instance, it would be about the very organizing principles underlying promotion decisions.

In abstract terms, conventionalist theory conceives of tests as occasions of questioning of value frameworks, as actors seek to reduce uncertainty by determining the principles that

ought to apply in a given situation. This theoretical framework posits that competing constitutive value frameworks guide individuals' behaviors, constraining but also enabling agency. Specifically, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) propose that six such frameworks exist: the Domestic, Inspired, Fame, Industrial, Market, and Civic orders of worth. They are labeled 'orders of worth' as each constitutes a systematic construction that rests on a commonly valued higher principle, allowing the qualification (or evaluation) of actions, people, and material objects and arrangements as legitimate (or not) in the setting where they are deployed. Each thus points to the legitimate forms of instantiation of a higher ordering principle. In broad terms, the "domestic" order of worth values the principles of hierarchy, loyalty and tradition, while the "inspired" order values the spontaneous creativity of the artist. The "fame" order of worth values public recognition and prestige, while the "industrial" worth is driven by the search for efficiency. The "market" order of worth values competition and success through commercial exchange, while the "civic" worth implies pursuit of civic duty, collective good and community solidarity. Since the original formulation by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) have proposed a seventh order of worth named "connectionist", based on the value of networking and project-based organizing, while others have suggested a "green" order of worth that focuses on ecological values (Lafaye & Thévenot, 1993). In this paper, it is not our intention to insist further on the number of orders of worth that might be identified, but rather on the way in which these may be brought to bear in practical situations.

Indeed, since multiple orders of worth may coexist in the same social space and provide the legitimating systems for actors' actions, to reach agreement in situations of coordinated social action, actors engage in tests (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006). Through these tests, they seek to bring out agreement on the worth of actors involved and the justness of actions performed. Tests do not determine whether an agreement will be reached or not; indeed, their outcomes are uncertain (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2006). They do, however, constitute critical moments through which one may gain a better understanding of human agency in relation to organizing principles.

We argue that the notion of test elaborated by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) offers important theoretical insights into what is involved in the *doing* of institutional work. Indeed, a test is at the heart of the reflexive process leading to the relativization of observed deviations,

the reaffirmation of existing organizing principles, the evocation and integration of new principles into particular situations, or even the framing of new ones. When an actor engages with her context, she may expect certain rules, norms or beliefs to guide behaviors, given the particular situation faced. If she perceives inconsistencies in the performances of other actors, distinction among people or material arrangements, she may opt to gloss over observed discrepancies so as to "get on" with what needs to be done, or question the situation in an effort to reach clarity on "what matters". A test thus represents a moment when conditions are ripe for reflexive behaviors. In these moments, actors may put forth a critique (denounce inconsistencies) or give justifications (enunciate the principles legitimating particular behaviors or arrangements). Taken together, their actions may contribute to challenging the social arrangements invoked in the situation, reproducing them, or working towards new arrangements.

TABLE 1 : THE NOTION OF TEST AS DEFINED BY CONVENTIONALIST THEORY

	CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS	**EXAMPLES**
Definitions	A **test** is a moment of questioning of value frameworks or their forms of instantiation in which actors seek to confirm or determine the principles, or "orders of worth", that ought to apply in a given situation. An **order of worth** is a constitutive value framework that guides individuals' behaviors. An order of worth is defined by a set of internally consistent components (a higher order principle; legitimate forms of instantiation: e.g., appropriate forms of evidence, relevant objects and subjects).	- Performance appraisal; Public hearings; Any moment where value frameworks are drawn on in interaction with others to question or assess the appropriateness of action. - Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) identified six "orders of worth": domestic, inspired, fame, industrial, market and civic, but others have also been suggested. The "industrial" order of worth, for instance, values efficiency while the "civic" order of worth values community solidarity.
Forms of test	1) **Test of "state of worth"**: Questioning of the degree to which the principles appropriate to a situation are being correctly applied. 2) **Test of "order of worth"** (second order test): Questioning of the appropriateness of principles being applied in a particular situation.	- Questioning whether the correct conditions are in place to ensure fair performance appraisal as an accepted criterion for promotion. - Questioning whether performance appraisal is the appropriate criterion for determining promotion (e.g., rather than seniority).

	CONCEPTUAL ELEMENTS	EXAMPLES
Elements brought to bear in tests	- **Justifications and critiques**: Arguments supporting action on the basis of value frameworks, or critiquing actions as violating appropriate frameworks.	- Arguments justifying a promotion on the basis of performance, or denouncing it by suggesting it should have been based on seniority.
	- **Objects**: Material proofs that support justifications and that are associated with different worlds or orders of worth.	- Measurements, charts, tools (related to the industrial worth); Union contracts (related to civic worth).
	- **Subjects**: Embodied qualifications that grant people legitimate voice to say how particular organizing principles should be instantiated. Different qualifications may be valued in relation to different orders of worth.	- Professional qualifications that provide evidence of expertise (related to the industrial worth); Elected roles (related to the civic worth).

Two forms of tests

As noted earlier, conventionalist theory's conception of tests suggests that, as actors confront the unfolding dynamics of situations, testing may occur which questions the particular application of generally accepted procedures (or other forms of instantiation of a given organizing principle) in a given situation; or at a deeper level, the very organizing principle which actors seem to draw upon in that situation (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Dodier, 1993; Thévenot, 2000). Hence, testing can be of two different natures: (a) it can rest on a questioning of the proper instantiation of macro-level organizing principles in the empirical realm (micro-level actions); or (b) it can challenge the macro-level organizing principles in practice, by denouncing the principles that transpire through actors' actions and seeking to promote different principles. These have been described in *On Justification* (Boltanski &Thévenot, 2006) as tests that concern "the way worths have been distributed in the situation at hand" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 133), also referred to as "state of worth" in the case of the first type of tests; and testing which is about the "order of worth" or "the principle that is to govern the way the test is carried out and with the world in which the test has to be set up if it is to be conclusive" (ibid: 223) for the second type. In that sense, the latter are *second order* tests forming part of what Boltanski (2011: 67) labeled the "metapragmatic register", where reflexivity is heightened and participants shift *"*from the task to be performed to the question of how it is possible to characterize what is happening."

If we go back to the example of the firm contemplating the use of performance appraisal at the end of the fiscal year to grant deserving staff a promotion (see Table 1), a test concerning the "state of worth" (the first type of test) could arise if staff members object to the fact that the evaluation is to be carried out by an Executive Director who has only recently joined the firm and, as such, is not well positioned to judge performance over the whole fiscal year. They do not question the use of technical performance procedures to grant promotion, only the importance given to the new Executive Director in this process. This test situation suggests an overall acceptance of principles of technical efficiency (associated with the "industrial" order of worth) to guide staff promotion decisions, but it also reveals a malaise over the proper instantiation of these principles, which actors would normally seek to address. On the other hand, a second order test might arise if a group (such as a union) were to argue that performance appraisal is not adequate for the firm, and suggest that seniority—rather than technical performance—ought to be the criterion for promotion decisions. In this test situation, a broader disagreement over organizing principles is discernible (principles of the industrial versus domestic worths), which may develop into argumentative moves about which organizing principle ought to apply.

The test and the material realm

The notion of test as articulated by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) brings forth another important insight into the confrontation of value frameworks and how they may unfold in practice. It suggests that tests are not just about rhetorical or discursive moves – or what institutionalists have called "theorization" (Strang & Meyer, 1993; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005); importantly, they also implicate the material world, as the arrangements involved in the situation are drawn upon as proofs, to support critiques and justifications (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000; Thévenot, 2009). In fact, in the course of a test, perceived inconsistencies may encourage actors to voice a critique—starting with a questioning of the presence or absence of objects—which throws doubt on the nature of the situation, in an attempt to distinguish legitimate objects from contingent (hence irrelevant) circumstances and work towards a basis of understanding of what matters and what does not. Objects are important signifiers of the organizing principles being enacted.

The import of artefacts or "objects", as Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) name them, is manifest in the following example: in a situation where an organization is about to undergo an external audit, it would seem reasonable that the Director discuss with the auditor the terms of the audit and the criteria that will be used. During their meeting, the Director may point to a copy of the "terms of reference" of the audit lying on her desk, and the auditor could refer to her firm's adherence to the International Standards on Auditing to ground assertion about their professionalism. But, if the Director were to offer the auditor a personal gift, the situation would most likely become awkward and leave a doubt as to the nature of the relationship the Director wishes to institute. A gift is conceivably more germane to familiar relations (domestic worth) where it serves to sustain bonding, and is often accompanied by gratitude. It is not commonly associated with an external audit situation where professionalism, impartiality and auditor independence (industrial worth) are usually expected. The presence of a gift could thus be questioned and this may trigger a series of critiques and justifications.

Objects generally refer to mechanisms which may consist of, but are not necessarily limited to, concrete material things. Just as tools, machines and diplomas could represent objects instantiating a particular order of worth, so too could titles, standards, and unions (Star, 2010). Objects—and arrangements, which are combinations of objects—are socially constructed elements that can serve as support in the coordination of action, as they are commonly identified with one particular order of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; see Table 1).

It is also important to note that tests involve not only objects as described here, but also other accepted forms of instantiation of the legitimate organizing principles, and notably what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) call "subjects". These are embodied qualifications that grant people involved in a situation legitimate voice to say how particular organizing principles should be instantiated; in other words, what matters if a given organizing principle is at work. For example, in the industrial order of worth, a person with professional credentials will be particularly valued, while in the domestic order of worth, seniority and hierarchy will be respected. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) use the collective term "beings" to refer to the arrangement of people and objects brought to bear in particular situations.

Having introduced the notion of test as defined in conventionalist theory, we now explore three key features of this concept that, we argue, renders it particularly useful to enrich understanding of institutional work. These features are summarized in Table 2.

1.4 THE TEST: CAPTURING AGENCY, RELATIONALITY AND TEMPORALITY IN INSTITUTIONAL WORK

The test and varied forms of agency

We suggest that conventionalist theory provides a framework that allows a finer examination of the micro-processes of agency: i.e., the varied forms of actions involved in institutional work at the individual and group levels. In conventionalist theory, individuals are in no way attached to orders of worth; they "can be acquainted with more than one world" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 219), and have the ability to adjust their behavior in accordance with the situation they face. Their knowledge of the orders of worth and their legitimate forms of instantiation is acquired through experience of many diverse situations, and endows them with the faculty to recognize inconsistencies when these arise. Inconsistencies are addressed or smoothed over in moments of test. These constitute key instances or moments where varied forms of work, in terms of the more or less intentional cast put on actions in relation to reproducing or changing institutional arrangements, can be experienced and/or examined.

As activities unfold and tests are deployed, actors' actions may take a variety of forms. As deviations and inconsistencies between micro-level actions and the macro-level organizing principle actors believe ought to guide action in their particular situation are questioned, they may point out these incongruities with an aim to have them corrected, so that a "proper" arrangement of beings and a "proper" enactment of this organizing principle is established in the context they find themselves in. Alternatively, a "second order" test might ensue if actors turn to questioning the very organizing principles that appear to be guiding action; in which case, actors' actions would concern the active promotion of organizing principles that appear appropriate to the situation at hand, or demotion of those that seem inadequate. They may, however, also act in very pragmatic ways by seeking only to get through the activity, thus avoiding the test by leaving deviations and inconsistencies in the background or relativizing their significance (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006).

These are three forms of actions which can develop in a moment of test. Note that all three rest on actors' reflexivity but denote different degrees of reflexivity (see also Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), and more specifically different levels of intentionality with regard to influencing institutional arrangements. The first form of action, which consists in actors' efforts to reinstate a proper arrangement of beings in a situation deemed ambiguous, reflects a

moderately high level of intentionality. Specifically, this form of action, which we label *interpretive agency,* does not primarily seek to affect the extant organizing principle. Rather, it is preoccupied with its instantiation in the specific situations actors find themselves in. Thus, actors reflexively engage with the macro-organizing principle by seeking to establish or reaffirm its legitimate forms of instantiation, in ways that may lead to its reproduction or some contextualization of its application.

The second form of action reflects a much higher degree of intentionality with regard to affecting prevalent organizing principles. We define this form as *strategic agency* since it describes actions that attempt to directly address principles that guide action. This is not to say that they are always planned actions, nor that they do not have unintended consequences. Rather, *strategic agency* refers to actors' reflexive engagement with organizing principles which seek to challenge and undermine the prevalent organizing principle, or to reassert an organizing principle that is being challenged as inadequate for the situation concerned, or even to introduce a new principle.

The last form of action described is what Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) refer to as situations where actors seek to suspend the test without reaching agreement on whether or not the observed inconsistencies are justified (see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999; Jagd, 2007). In so doing, they aim to avoid the continuation of the tension so that action may resume. We label this form of action as *pragmatic agency*, since actors' actions primarily seek the continuation of activities. They engage in operations of accommodations, including relativizing and pardoning (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 35, 339, 355), which consist in treating observed inconsistencies as inconsequential (e.g., "it's nothing", "it's ok") or forgivable given the exigencies of practical action. These are less intentional forms of action in terms of their sought effects on prevalent organizing principles.

TABLE 2 : FEATURES OF THE NOTION OF TEST AS A UNIT AND FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS THAT CAN ENRICH STUDIES OF INSTITUTIONAL WORK

CONTRIBUTING FEATURE	EXAMPLES FROM EMPIRICAL STUDIES
ATTENTION TO VARIED FORMS OF AGENCY The test draws attention to three forms of agency of varying degrees of intentionality with regard to organizing principles that may manifest themselves in combination in moments of test.	
- **First form: moderate degree of intentionality**; ***Interpretive agency*** involves efforts to ensure the proper instantiation of an organizing principle in the specific situations actors find themselves in.	- Production and maintenance of opposing legitimating accounts, all drawing on the civil rights principle, to determine the mode of application of non-discrimination workplace policies to gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people (Creed, et al., 2002).
- **Second form: highest degree of intentionality**; ***Strategic agency*** involves efforts to challenge and undermine the prevalent organizing principle, or to reassert an organizing principle as adequate for the situation at hand, or even to introduce a new principle in a situation of ambiguity.	- Efforts by environmentalists to change the basis for logging decisions in the forest industry (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). A form of agency that constitutes disruptive institutional work in this setting.
- Third form: lowest degree of intentionality; ***Pragmatic agency*** involves the suspension of the testing and avoidance of confrontation around value schemes so that action may resume. It consists in pragmatic accommodations and relativization.	- Tolerance of rule violations within the Cambridge University Boat Race team to enable action to continue (Lok & de Rond, 2012). A combination of the third form of agency (called "containment work" by the authors) and the first form of agency (called "restoration work" and found in cases of severe deviations) promoted institutional maintenance.
ATTENTION TO RELATIONALITY The test draws attention to the relational nature of institutional work, where actions engender emergent reactions as forms of agency develop and evolve in context. It is this relational interaction that generates outcomes, not the specific behaviors of any particular agent.	- McInerney's (2008) conventionalist study of a field configuring event in the non-profit technology assistance field. The study illustrates a moment of test in which the highly deliberate efforts of one actor based on one set of principles were countered by the more opportunistic reactions of another actor that succeeded in structuring the principles in the field (an example of creative institutional work). The outcome could not be explained without understanding the nature of actions and reactions in context.

CONTRIBUTING FEATURE	EXAMPLES FROM EMPIRICAL STUDIES
ATTENTION TO TEMPORALITY Tests punctuate the evolution of institutions. The test provides a strong unit of analysis for considering the interplay of "quiet periods" and moments of contestation in institutional evolution. There is value in moving the unit of analysis away from specific actors and towards the sequence of moments of test to better capture the continuing nature of institutional work.	- Yamaguchi and Suda's (2010) conventionalist study of controversies about genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Japan over 20 years. The study examines the interplay of quiet periods and moments of controversy in the evolution of social representations of GMOs.

The forms of actions described above and summarized in Table 2 resonate with actions found in the institutional work literature. However, a clear majority of studies have addressed the higher level of intentionality, while fewer have dealt with the moderate and more pragmatic forms of agency. Indeed, the most radical form of agency in which underlying principles are questioned or new principles are put forward (strategic agency) seems at first sight to be most naturally associated with disruptive, defensive or creative kinds of institutional work. This is the case, for example, for the environmental activists in Zietsma and Lawrence's (2010) study of the forest industry, as they questioned the principles underlying existing institutionalized logging practices. In contrast, interpretive agency—in which attention is drawn to problematic instantiations of extant principles—seems to be associated most obviously with institutional maintenance work, potentially incorporating negotiation over accepted interpretations of existing principles and their stretching or adjustment to accommodate novel concerns. An example of this can be seen in Creed, Scully and Austin's (2002) study of the production and maintenance of legitimating accounts in relation to employment non-discrimination policies, in which neither proponents or opponents contested the overarching civil rights principle underlying these policies, but debated whether and how these policies should apply to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

And yet, the patterns of agency involved in institutional reproduction and evolution may not be as simple as hinted at by more recent studies. In particular, the third lesser form of agency discussed above, though less studied, may also play an important role in both institutional maintenance and change. For example, Lok and de Rond's (2012) study of the processes through which "rules of engagement" of the Cambridge University Boat Club (especially rules concerning criteria for crew selection and behavior) are maintained shows

how certain overt deviations were smoothed over, or normalized and accounted for, as acceptable exceptions to institutional prescriptions so as to carry on with ongoing activities. Under a conventionalist theory reading, these instances of deviation would constitute moments of tests, and the ways in which actors manage these challenges to institutional practices and principles exemplify actions we have termed as *pragmatic agency*. Interestingly, the study by Lok and de Rond (2012) also shows that as deviations persisted or became more serious, participants began to call attention to the inconsistencies, resulting in what the authors call "restoration work" and reflecting the first and stronger form of agency described above. Lok and de Rond (2012) argue that both the initial containment and the following restoration work are both important for the preservation of the institution. If no minor deviations were tolerated, the institution would appear to be too rigid to survive through application in a multitude of varied situations. However, the awareness of inconsistency that these deviations eventually create results in the regular reaffirmation and rehearsal of underlying principles that also contribute to sustaining the institution.

Pragmatic forms of agency in which principles are glossed over in order to pursue ongoing activities may not, however, always be associated with institutional maintenance. The subtle disruptive effects of such actions may accumulate over time, gradually undermining the foundations of the institution and potentially introducing principles and objects associated with alternative orders of worth. Lounsbury and Crumley's (2007) account of the emergence and legitimation of active money management in the mutual fund industry provides a telling illustration. Active money management practices were pragmatic experimentations, initially regarded as nonproblematic since observed deviations were viewed as inconsequential by industry insiders wanting "to protect the stable world they created" (ibid: 999). The new practice grew and, aided by a parallel professionalization process, eventually triggered a questioning of the principles underlying mutual fund money management, resulting in institutional change: active money management became legitimate alongside passive management practices.

Lawrence et al. (2011: 53) note that "the concept of work implies some kind of intentionality, however varied that intentionality might be", and suggest that institutional work may involve multiple forms of agency, ranging from deliberate strategic acts that aim to reshape institutional arrangements, to more practical management of the exigencies of the

situation, or even more conservative selective reproduction of past patterns of action. Our discussion above shows that the notion of test offers a promising analytical apparatus that can uncover the highly intentional as well as the less intentional, and the strategic as well as more pragmatic forms of institutional work. Actions, intentional or less so, do not however occur in a vacuum, but necessarily result in chains of reaction and interaction. As we next explore, the notion of test also contributes by illuminating the relational nature of institutional work.

The test and relationality

We argue that by focussing on moments of tests, more systematic attention can be given to the unfolding situations through which actions and reactions are played out (see Table 2). This provides a valuable opportunity for a fine-grained analysis of the interplay between potentially very different forms of actions. For instance, highly intentional forms of creative work may meet with reactions that are similarly motivated, but edging towards maintenance, or they may meet with reactions that aim to smooth things over and not make a big deal out of the newly proposed practices. It is the combination of varied forms of actions, carried out by a multitude of actors in specific contexts, which imprints particular trajectories to institutional work and its outcomes.

The notion of test inherently embraces the idea that when some action is put to the test there is usually a reaction, and it is the combined effect of both that influences the ensuing action. Specifically, tests give rise to critiques and justifications which, as we have defined, consist in argumentative moves relying on material proofs that actors use in a particular situation to point out inconsistencies (critiques) and justify their actions and choices (justifications) in relation to legitimate organizing principles. Critiques and justifications unfold until the arguments and material proofs deployed are deemed conclusive and a decision is made as to how to proceed, or until testing is suspended – as for instance in the case of relativizing (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Moreover, critiques and justifications evolve concomitantly: justifications are often offered in response to critiques, and new critiques may be laid based on the arguments and material proofs put forth in these justifications. As noted above, another possibility is that actors avoid letting the exchange of critique and justification unfold, so as to get back to their activity. Therefore, we argue that the examination of critiques and justifications—or more broadly speaking, threads of actions and reactions, without due

attention to the link between them—may give us only a partial understanding of institutional work.

A number of studies on agency and institutions have addressed the social and political processes through which institutional creation, disruption and maintenance develop (e.g., Garud, et al., 2002; Maguire & Hardy, 2006). However, they tend to present actors' actions and others' reactions as manifestations of the substantive properties that define them, such as their institutional or professional origins. We do not dispute these conclusions, but we argue that closer attention to the interaction between actions and reactions may reveal other conditions that affect the unfolding of institutional work.

For example, Moreira (2005) draws on Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) to examine the development process for medical practice guidelines, seen as moments of test in which different repertoires of evaluation (industrial, domestic, civic) are drawn on by the varied members of the guideline development group in their collective efforts to instantiate locally adapted versions of "evidence-based medicine". For example, participants refer to scientific data (charts and studies) that represent an industrial-world conception of medical practice, but also to patient experiences that represent a different form of "proof" associated with the domestic worth. Importantly, the author explicitly discusses how viewing members' perspectives as if substantively determined by their position in the organization of medicine would have meant "oversimplifying the diversity of ways in which group members articulate the relationship between the evidence presented and its possible 'worlds'" (Moreira, 2005: 1977). By focussing on the moments of test, and hence not assuming away or under-exploring relationality, the author shows how varying combinations of actions and reactions develop, depending on the issues discussed and repertoires of evaluation drawn upon. These actions and reactions shaped and reinforced the guideline development process and "evidence-based medicine" as an institutionalized practice.

In other words, closer attention to the moment of test would help to open the analytical lens to the multiple ways in which actions and reactions may combine in context, which may deepen our understanding of institutional work (see also Table 2). These actions and reactions may occur in particular moments of testing, but as discussed next, they may also play out over longer periods as moments of test are interspersed with quieter periods of institutional stability.

The test and temporality

Conventionalist theory invites us to explore the temporal flow of actions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Dodier, 1993). It places particular emphasis on the actions of embedded actors, who are involved in frequent work of interpretation, evaluation, deliberation and decision in relation to the enactment of the organizing principles guiding social action. Thus, tests punctuate the flow of actions over time, and the varied engagements of individuals and collective actors in these moments of test affect the outcome of the testing and the instantiation and evolution of the organizing principles they were concerned with.

Tests are frequent occurrences, and actors do not always "open their eyes" to point to contradictions discernible in the flow of action; they may also "close their eyes" so as to engage uncritically in what they are doing (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 232). In conceiving of social coordination as instances where multiple organizing principles may coexist and where actors may open or close their eyes on inconsistencies, the authors also point to the inherent succession of quiet periods of relatively unreflexive reproduction of accepted procedures and meaning systems, and of periods of questioning when the procedures or organizing principles underpinning these have to be explicitly justified. Indeed, a quiet period is never totally protected from disruptive testing, which may tip the situation into a period of questioning or conflict. Likewise, periods of questioning are not permanent either. Actors will seek to reduce uncertainty by trying to reach more or less lasting agreements or relativizing the tension. Thus, quiet periods and periods of questioning jointly shape the evolution of organizing principles, and the varied engagement of actors in tests leads the transition from one period to another.

We argue that tests are endemic to institutional life. Indeed, over the life course of an institution, actors' actions and reactions in moments of test affect institutional emergence, diffusion, persistence, disruption, disappearance, and even the possible merging of institutional forms. Institutions are subjected to tests in practical situations, and the succession of these moments—where actors may voice concerns or engage uncritically in the test—may hence give a particular course to the evolution of an institution. Thus, it is our contention that by focussing on the moments of test in institutional work research, we may better examine institutional stability and change, and also those points when institutional stability may be on the verge of sliding into institutional change (or vice-versa). Studying tests may prove

productive for ongoing research efforts on the unfolding and interweaving of stages of institutional evolution and how human action contributes to particular paths of evolution.

Yamaguchi and Suda's (2010) study of controversies over genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in Japan over a period of 20 years provides an example of research that has examined the interweaving of quiet and questioning periods in the evolution of an institution. The authors draw on conventionalist theory to investigate the controversies that erupted over time and the varied forms of actions, arguments and material proofs that various actors drew on to denounce or justify GMOs. A period of relative calm followed the introduction of GMOs whose acceptability then primarily rested on their superior productivity (industrial worth), but hot debates arose as the introduction of GMO food labeling was considered nationally. These moments of test saw the confrontation of argumentative moves for and against the labeling (reflecting civic and market worths) which finally resulted in the adoption of GMO labeling. A seemingly quiet period ensued but was interspersed with periods of tension when a growing number of tests erupted over the safety of GMO open-field trials. The longitudinal analysis performed by the authors provides a valuable opportunity to see how the sequence of periods of apparent quiet and periods of tension contributed—together with external events—to shaping the evolution of GMOs' acceptability in Japan and the rationalities underpinning its subsistence.

Focussing on the moments of test in relation to institutional evolution may also provide an opportunity to further research the conditions prompting or enabling transition from stability to change. Here, comparative studies of the particular arrangements characterizing these moments and the proofs and arguments that actors bring to bear may help shed light on the relative importance of factors.

In sum, we suggest that there is benefit in shifting somewhat the central unit of analysis in the study of institutional work from the actors involved and their self-interested strategies in singular stages of institutional evolution, to the moments of test which punctuate institutional life. These are moments of confrontation when the principles governing actions in a field and the procedures that support them are brought to the fore, questioned, left to rest or sorted out, and potentially reconfigured in interaction. The actions and reactions of actors as the test unfolds may orient institutional work and the evolution of institutions. We do not argue that a focus on specific actors is not valuable, but rather suggest that a focus on the moments of test

and what actors do in those moments may add depth to our understanding of institutional work.

Based on these ideas, we now examine how a focus on the notion of test might offer distinctive insights into the creation, maintenance and disruption of institutions as well as their ongoing evolution. In particular, we use a number of examples from the conventionalist literature to illustrate its potential and to draw out the contribution that it can make to research on institutional work in terms of an expanded attention to varied forms of agency, relationality and temporality.

1.5 APPLICATION: MOMENTS OF TEST IN THE EVOLUTION OF INSTITUTIONS

The test and institutional creation

We suggest that an analytical focus on the moments of test would help to better analyze instances of creative institutional work which may include decisive promotions of new regulative, normative or cognitive institutional foundations, but also pragmatic arrangements leading to institutional creation without such deliberate efforts, or even without immediate contestation of extant institutional principles. Notably, focussing on the moments of test allows us to adopt a broader view of the forms of agency and relationality involved in creative institutional work.

One interesting illustration can be found in McInerney's (2008) analysis of a field-configuring event that led to the emergence of new rules for the non-profit technology assistance field. McInerney (2008: 1093) defines field-configuring events as "occasions for institutional entrepreneurs to make claims and test the claims of others". The event presented by McInerney was the site of confrontation of divergent expectations on the nature of the meeting and, more profoundly, a clash between different value frameworks associated with the emerging non-profit technology assistance field.

By focussing on the moment of test, the author was able not only to examine the highly deliberate strategic action of the instigator of the field creation idea (promoting civic / inspirational principles), but also to capture the more emergent seizing of opportunity of another field player as the tension born from the confrontation of competing organizing

principles mounted. This field player took the opportunity to propose an alternative account (relying on market / industrial principles) which other participants in the event from the business world were more sensitive to, and which ultimately became the field convention and the bedrock for broader institutionalization. The study shows, in particular, how forms of agency may emerge relationally in interaction and have important consequences. Had the study focussed primarily on the outcome (the creation of the shared conventionalized account) instead of the process (the event and unfolding development), it might have granted the second player a more heroic role than was apparent in practice. The situated actions and interactions among different participants were critical to producing this particular outcome at this particular moment.

The test and the maintenance of institutions

In relation to institutional maintenance work, agency and relationality are also important dimensions that can be illuminated by a focus on the notion of test. In particular, we highlight here the important role that tests may play in sustaining institutions, since tests may be institutionalized and hence constitute a significant legitimate *processual* form of instantiation of a given organizing principle. The study of actors' engagement with these tests may contribute greatly to our understanding of maintenance work, including instances where accommodations are made and through which institutions reveal their plasticity (see for example Lok & de Rond, 2012). Examples of institutionalized tests, which Boltanski and Thévenot (2006: 143-144) label as "model tests", consist of structured and consistent procedures such as courts of law (a model test associated with the civic order of worth), or a standard performance appraisal procedure associated with the industrial order of worth. The nature of model tests, and the work done by participating actors as they interact to conserve their legitimacy, is a particularly interesting focus for research on institutional work.

For example, Reinecke (2010) shows how the institution of "fair trade" in the coffee market is sustained by a complex but institutionalized testing framework in which the minimum price of coffee is established by combining technical cost calculations based on data from producers (compatible with the industrial order of worth) with mechanisms of democratic consensus among representatives of labeling organizations, producers and traders (compatible with the civic order). This "model test" engages participating individuals in continually constructing the

meaning of "fair trade" in interaction. The interpretative agency that actors deploy as they call on and apply its principles in particular historical contexts helps to maintain the institution. As Lamont (2009) notes in her study of another testing framework (academic peer review) participants in such processes cannot leave their personal tastes behind, yet they believe in the processes they participate in as ultimately necessary to ensure the legitimacy of the system that supports their activity, and tend to work to sustain that belief. Such examples show that model test situations are never perfectly predictable. Thus, every situated "performance" of a model test carries within it the possibility of deviance or adaptation—and hence agency—recalling Feldman and Pentland's (2003) notions of performative and ostensive routines.

The test and the disruption of institutions

Moments of test may also contribute quite directly to disrupting institutions when critiques and justifications are brought forward concerning the principles that ought to guide social coordination in the form of second order tests, or when they concern a challenge to the legitimating procedures associated with an existing or nascent organizing principle. These moments also constitute a particularly interesting focus for research on the relation between varying forms of agency and the unsettling, displacement or disappearance of institutions.

For example, drawing on conventionalist theory, Mesny and Mailhot (2005) describe a situation in which "work" being accomplished by actors leaves a nascent institution in a continuing unsettled state. The case related shows how a formalized university-industry partnership was repeatedly disrupted. Although the partnership had been in existence for over two years, its actual implementation was continuously stalled, as every time a project was discussed, actors relentlessly questioned and debated the principles which should guide the selection and management of projects. A focus on these recurrent moments of test reveals how actors' actions and reactions jointly contributed to engendering lasting periods of insider-driven institutional conflict. The analysis further unveils the particular forms of strategic agency that played out during the process.

Another example of disruptive work is perceptible in the case of legitimacy repair work described by Patriotta et al. (2011). Following the publicizing of a nuclear accident it had sought to quieten and ensuing questioning of the legitimacy of this form of energy, a European nuclear power plant (Vattenfall) actively sought to regain its legitimacy. The case described

highlights moments of test during which field players and owners of Vattenfall iteratively drew on a number of organizing principles to respectively debase or legitimate nuclear energy production. As the authors note, the actions and reactions of protagonists in these sets of disruptive and maintenance work contributed to the construction and reconstruction of the place and meaning of nuclear power in Germany.

The test and the evolution of institutions

The above studies, which use Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) theoretical framework, show that the notion of test can be mobilized equally to investigate institutional work involved in the creation, maintenance and disruption of institutions. Thus, it is not a concept restricted to a single moment of development. Moreover, as the studies described above show, a focus on specific moments of test can throw light both on the varied and sometimes subtle forms of agency that are brought to bear in these occasions, and on the pattern of action and reaction composing institutional work and leading to different outcomes.

As we indicated above, the notion of test can also be valuably considered as part of a longer-term pattern of institutional evolution. For example, Kaplan and Murray (2010) investigate the creation of the institutional setup that would govern the biotechnology field, drawing on conventionalist theory and the notion of test in particular. They highlight the contests through which field players sought, and even fought, over a period of 30 years, to shape the specific codified procedures—which the authors conceive as "tests of value"—which were to bear on the patenting of biotechnology-produced organisms, and hence ultimately influence the defining logic underpinning biotechnology. As the authors suggest, studying the evolution of the institutional arrangements grounding the biotechnological field through an examination of moments of test revealed a non-linear evolutionary process consisting of periods of change, stability, and redirection of the evolutionary thread.

Historical analyses, similar to those of Kaplan and Murray (2008) and Yamaguchi and Suda (2010), have also been conducted drawing on an institutional lens. For instance, Farjoun's (2002) study of connect-time as a pricing standard in the online database industry covers the evolution of this standard over an extended period. This research highlights the crucial role of contestations in institutional development, and suggests that such contests are permanent features of institutional life. However, we wonder if there might have been periods when

institutional stability resulted not from forces of inertia outweighing forces of change, but rather from the fact that various actors accepted and took for granted the institutional setup or, in other words, that actors engaged uncritically in activities. A closer look at moments of test (rather than just moments of contestation) might have pointed to such instances in the evolution of the connect-time pricing standard. In addition, we suggest that using the moments of test as a unit of analysis might have allowed a deeper examination of the substance of contestations, and the principles and values they were related to. This might have shown how the nature of the contestation influenced the transition from one stage to another and the sequence of institutional stability and change.

In summary, a focus on moments of test is useful not only for tracing the evolution of institutional arrangements, but also to gain a better understanding of shifts in procedures or prevalent organizing principles, and how and why particular patterns do or do not develop. We argue that institutional work research would benefit from more systematic attention to the sequences of institutional stability and change and how they follow one another, through a mobilization of the notion of test.

1.6 CONCLUSION

The notion of test reminds us that human agency is shaped by legitimate organizing principles, yet in the unfolding of moments of test, the actions of actors may also contribute to the shaping of institutional arrangements and their underpinning principles. In this paper, we argue that the notion of test as developed by conventionalist theory can add a valuable analytical framework to the institutional theoretical apparatus. It invites us to take seriously actors' reproduction, translation, re-interpretation, and re-definition of the principles that guide their actions, and the social interactions through which such production occurs. Moments of test constitute valuable loci that allow us to apprehend and investigate the organizing principles at play in a social sphere, their dynamic coming together and confrontation, the how and why of particular types of institutional work and the effects of this recursive interaction between human agents and the legitimating systems that shape their actions.

In this paper, we identified key issues in the institutional work literature which we believe would benefit from an analytical focus on the moments of tests. First, we proposed that the test offers a way of capturing the varied forms of agency underlying institutional work. Conventionalist theory presupposes that all actors have potential for reflexivity in particular situations, but that this may take a variety of forms, ranging from a tolerant acceptance of institutional accommodations to more deliberate attempts to influence or question the principles underlying action. Second, we have shown that the notion of test favors a conception of institutional work as relational and distributed, i.e., as involving actions and reactions of people and material objects in situation and over time. This shifts the focus from the initiatives of particular individuals towards their dynamic interactions during and surrounding critical moments. Third, we proposed that the notion of test offers an analytical lens for institutional work that emphasizes temporality – i.e., a focus on critical moments of institutional questioning and their interweaving with moments of "quiet", in which novel practices may develop and grow through more pragmatic arrangements, distant from critical scrutiny. We illustrated these ideas by drawing on recent examples from the conventionalist and institutional work literatures.

In conclusion, the notion of test from conventionalist theory provides a fascinating unit of analysis that allows us to observe institutional work in situ and examine how legitimate organizing principles are instantiated through the actions of actors and the tests they deploy. Tests punctuate the evolution of institutions in important ways: they are moments of questioning in which the organizing principles guiding the actions of individuals and collective actors are made particularly visible, and when the actions and reactions of actors engaged in the situations are opened up for deeper examination (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Bridging the institutional work and conventionalist perspectives, research mobilizing the notion of test can provide useful insights into how actors, by addressing the constraints faced in particular situations, may iteratively affect and reconstruct the principles and value frameworks of tomorrow.

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Chapter 2
EMERGENT STRATEGY FORMATION: OF COPING AND PATTERNS

Abstract

While strategy has been associated with both deliberate and emergent patterns, surprisingly little is known about emergent strategy formation. What's more, traditional approaches to strategy have tended to fixate our analytical gaze on certain predefined actions presumed to shape and direct organizational trajectory – i.e., the official goals, plans and activities labelled 'strategic' – and, as a result our investigations have similarly tended to center around this pre-formed notion of the strategic. This article presents a different way of seeing. It explores emergent strategy formation through mundane organizational doings, by paying attention to how strategy takes shape over time as organizational members cope with the varying situations they face. Through an ethnographic study of nonprofit development organizations, this research turns the attention towards members' everyday work, and shed light on how directionality is ordinarily produced, and how over time patterns form, without design. This research contributes an expanded understanding of emergent strategy formation, and shows how organizational strategies may appear unintendedly through dynamic coping, and aside from the introduction of newness.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

> *"Our knowledge of circumstances has increased, but our uncertainty, instead of having diminished, has only increased. The reason of this is, that we do not gain all our experience at once, but by degrees; so our determinations continue to be assailed incessantly by fresh experience; and the mind, if we may use the expression, must always be under arms".*
>
> - Carl Von Clausewitz (1873, *On War*)

The challenges faced by organizational members when engaging with an environment replete with uncertain and, even at times, unknowable conditions are commonly presented as the reason for needing a formal strategy (Andrews, 1987; Ansoff, 1965; Drucker, 2006; Porter,

1985, 1991). An organizational strategy is here conceived of as "a pattern in a stream of actions" (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985); and a *formal* strategy represents a predefined pattern. In essence, a formal strategy would be a pre-set path articulated in strategic plans, goals or activities; or enacted as the clear and resolutely imposed vision of a leader. The predominant streams of research in Strategy – and in fact, even much of the practitioner literature on this matter – argue that such a conscious and deliberate effort to set a fitting trajectory for the organization, and weave organizational goals, policies and actions into a coherent whole, is necessary for orderly organizational growth and greater performance (e.g., Andrews, 1987; Ansoff, 1965; Bryson, 1988, 2010; Drucker, 2006; MacMillan, 1983; Porter, 1991; Reeves, Love, & Tillmanns, 2012; Rumelt, 2011). This line of thinking suggests that designing a course of action for the organization beforehand would help to more efficiently direct resources towards realizing this thought-out future. Moreover, with a formal strategy, organizational members would be better equipped to fend-off environmental challenges and stay the course despite future disruptive events (e.g., Ackoff, 1969; Drucker, 2006; Porter, 1985). In short, a formal strategy would amount to an orderly trajectory for the organization, not only because it designs a future course through anticipatory analysis of environmental states, but also importantly because it provides guidelines for action in changing environments as it is executed.

However, as has now been amply discussed, there are several organizations with formal strategies that do not manage to paddle through environmental changes unaffected, and where action deviates from the predefined path without necessarily leading to organizational demise (e.g., De Rond & Thietart, 2007; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Formal strategies may besides come from, rather than precede, the actions and decisions that they are supposed to have caused (e.g., Regnér, 2003; Weick, Stutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005). What's more, they may even only play a symbolic role, since strategies are formulated in some organizations not so much for plotting a course through future environmental conditions but mainly as currency in their dealings with external actors, essentially to acquire resources or legitimacy (e.g., Mintzberg, 1993; Stone & Brush, 1996). Overall then, what these findings suggest is that formal strategies may in fact provide a rather narrow view of the patterns that play out or, to put it differently, a limited apprehension of organizational strategies (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). In fact, unplanned activities and everyday actions often shape the trajectories of organizations (e.g.,

Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Tsoukas, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). In other words, what organizational members do as they engage ordinarily with their contexts – for instance as they solve problems on the spot, or engage in (so-called) operational decisions, or simply perform their everyday tasks – may also influence their organizations' streams of actions in particular consistent ways. This everyday work – which involves actions and interactions – is here referred to as mundane organizational doings. Unlike formal strategies, these mundane doings do not generally represent predefined designs. But, similarly to formal strategies, they may shape organizational trajectories – without this being necessarily a sign of pathology (e.g., Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

In fact, one may argue following Mintzberg and Waters (1985) that strategy formation always involves some degree of "emergentness[16]", since patterns often arise through the interplay of formal strategies and more mundane organizational doings. In some instances, organizational strategies may even be primarily emergent. For example, where formal strategies are rare occurrences or even inexistent, it is easy to imagine how this may be the case. But, it is also conceivable that strategy formation would be more aptly discernible in organizational members' mundane doings where formal strategies mainly serve symbolic purposes – and are thus decoupled from what organizational members do as they carry out their activities. Moreover, in settings where prior intentions concerning the organization's future directions only loosely guide actions – whether because these intentions are not fully articulated, or steadily impressed on members through various management control systems, or because of a less pliable or predictable environment – it is likely that the consistencies that might be detected in organizational trajectory would find their sources in members' everyday work. More broadly, if we accept Mintzberg and Waters (1985)'s proposition, emergentness would apply to all organizations, and patterns in their streams of actions would, to a lesser or greater extent, be attributable to mundane organizational doings.

Yet, we still know very little about emergent strategy formation (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). While numerous insightful studies have contributed to our knowledge on formal strategies, our understanding of how strategies may

[16]. In relation to strategies, the quality of being emergent – as opposed to deliberate – is defined by Mintzberg and Waters (1985) as "emergentness".

form otherwise remains rather poor. This research explores the issue by mobilizing the strategy-as-practice perspective (e.g., Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), and also drawing on the ideas of other practice-inspired theorists (Boltanski & Thévenot, [1996] 2005; Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Thévenot, 1990, 2001a, 2006; Tsoukas, 2010) to offer a different way of seeing emergent strategy formation. This alternative way of seeing invites attention to the accomplishment of mundane organizational doings – rather than periodic strategy-making activities – so as to examine more broadly how the patterns that arise over time take form. The practice tradition this research builds from also posits that human action continuously evolves (Thévenot, 2001a, 2006; Tsoukas, 2010); and not unlike the view outlined in Clausewitz (1873)'s earlier quote, it assumes that fresh experience may appear at any moment and unsettle actors' practical understandings of what is going on and what to do. They may well continue carrying out their activities the way they have been doing it, but they may also work out new courses of action. Thus, mundane organizational doings are not considered immutable, but exposed to unexpected events, new realizations and trying exchanges of views. How organizational members go about conducting their affairs may thus always change unexpectedly. How then is an orderly organizational trajectory possible? And, insofar as patterns are detectable in mundane organizational actions over time, how do they form since organizational members may engage dynamically with their contexts?

By adopting a practice perspective, with an avowed processual sensitivity, this empirical study seeks to add to the recently renewed conversation about emergentness in strategy research (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Tsoukas, 2010). Through this study, I investigate the formation of emergent strategies by focussing on organizational members' engagement with their contexts, and the patterns detectable in their actions over time. I draw on ethnographic data collected in three organizations which provided a unique opportunity to explore emergentness, given that they were not articulating or implementing formal strategies. The three organizations studied are Senegalese Nonprofit Development Organizations (NDOs). They are not singularly guided by the vision of their founders, but rather perform various versions of consultative decision-making and participatory management – not unlike other NDOs (e.g., Fowler, 1997; Lewis, 2003, 2007). These organizations are neither newly created NDOs, nor rogue organizations. They are clearly not unfamiliar with formal strategies, nor the events, activities and objects commonly held to instantiate such strategies

(e.g., strategic plans, strategic frameworks, strategic objectives, retreats, strategic workshops, etc.). But, for lack of time and resources, and also what some organizational members labelled 'other more pressing needs', formal strategies were not in place in these NDOs at the time of the research.

My longitudinal analysis followed organizational members' everyday work as they engaged in project activities, staff meetings, discussions with various partners and corridor conversations. I studied how they went about conducting their affairs as various pieces of information, issues and events acquired new importance with time. This fine-grained examination of mundane organizational doings led to theoretical insights about the discursive processes through which organizational work is ordinarily oriented. These processes allowed organizational members to deal with fresh experience: handle the different views put forth, make (new) sense of their organizational activities, and (re)order their actions. I show how through these processes the accomplishment of organizational work was proximally oriented, and also how continuity was produced while actions were being made or remade. Over time, these successive orientations cumulatively gave shape to organizational trajectories. Interestingly, while organizational members engaged dynamically with their contexts – and actions were (re)made each time they handled fresh experience – patterns were detectable over time. Such consistencies arose for the practices they repeated and (re)produced. I show that these unintended patterns were not only generated through the adoption of new unorthodox ways of conducting organizational affairs, but also associated with the continuous replication of certain practices and, moreover, with evolving practice enactment. Building on this, I theorize emergent strategy formation in relation to these varied ways that mundane organizational doings may come to shape organizational trajectories.

This research contributes to the conversation on emergent strategy formation by extending our understanding of this organizational phenomenon. It provides an empirical illustration of the formation of strategy through coping action, which although aptly articulated theoretically by practice scholars (esp. Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010) remains insufficiently addressed in field studies. It thus goes beyond current conceptualizations of emergent strategies which tend to treat their formation as necessarily tied to members' intentional and deliberate efforts at influencing, or even bending, set-organizational directions. This research aims to offer "analytical refinement" (Tsoukas, 2009: 295); and by making finer

distinctions, it helps improve our understanding of emergent strategy formation and contributes to sensitizing us to "seeing new aspects of the phenomenon" (ibid: 296).

Specifically, it makes three contributions. First, it proposes that members' everyday work does not just contribute to the implementation of organizational activities, but may also importantly shape the orientation of ongoing and future actions. This echoes Strategy-as-Practice research findings which point out the fundamental role of embedded human activity (i.e., praxis) in relation to strategy. But, it also importantly extends these insights by suggesting that aside from members' work in strategy formulation and implementation, their organizing work may also be involved in the formation of strategies. Second, it contributes to the literature on emergent strategy formation by helping expand our understanding of the discursive processes involved. Its attention to members' everyday work yields insights on the processes through which talk may contribute to the formation of emergent strategies. Third, it offers new insights by revealing and distinguishing different ways that emergent strategies may form over time. It brings to light modes of formation other than the more commonly cited construction of newness, and shows that consistencies may arise while organizational actions are adjusted over time. The practical adjustment of actions, while not as dramatic, may be more frequent in organizations, and importantly no less influential in strategy formation (i.e., how patterns take form in their streams of actions).

This article is structured as follows. The next section discusses the extant literature on strategy formation and how the issue of emergentness has been mainly addressed. This review points to remaining gaps in our understanding which informed this research and the adoption of a distinctive onto-epistemological perspective to examine emergent strategy formation. Then, the empirical cases are presented, and the research process explained. The third section highlights the research findings, providing first a look at how organizational actions were ordinarily oriented as members paddled through everyday surprises and new realizations, in an effort to continue on with their activities. While not being guided by an overarching design, their ordinary orientations revealed patterns. I present next the different ways in which these patterns formed. This is followed by a discussion which expands on the contributions this research makes to our understanding of emergent strategy formation. The concluding remarks review the main arguments I put forth in this article, and draws attention to the wider implications these may have for the trajectories that develop in organizations.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Research on emergent strategy formation

Mintzberg and his colleagues, and in particular Mintzberg and Waters (1985)'s canonical work on strategy formation, offer that the patterns discernible in organizations' streams of actions over time are not just the result of deliberate strategies that are realized. They may instead represent emergent strategies that took form over time. Emergentness (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985: 258), as the authors make plainly clear, does not mean that "management is out of control" (ibid: 271) and chaos reigns, but rather that the consistency detected in organizational actions is not by design. How might this be? What may then account for the patterns in organizations' streams of actions? And since it is not by design, how do organizational members – i.e., the collection of people constituting the organization – come to produce such patterns? Insofar as organizational strategies always are more or less emergent, further exploration of these questions and more broadly the puzzle of emergentness seem warranted. Yet, few studies have examined this phenomenon so far; and where strategy process research has looked at how strategy may form not by design (i.e., unintendedly), it has, until recently, generally rather narrowly focused on new – unplanned, unexpected or non-mandated – initiatives and how they come to be formal strategies in a roundabout way. The extant literature is reviewed below. The discussion reveals gaps which informed my research questions and the identification of the conceptual framework presented thereafter.

Emergentness within explicit boundaries

For some researchers, emergent strategy formation is partially by design. More specifically, emergent strategies form for the predefined rules, mechanisms and procedures instituted to encourage their development. The study of strategy formation in large venture capital firms by King (2008) offers a representative example. It highlights the explicit boundaries and processes that senior management defines in anticipation, to allow the development of new opportunities and ideas and their later incorporation into the organization's formal strategies. This planned approach, which the author labels "deliberate emergence" permits seizing new investment opportunities in fast-changing environments but within clearly established, even if periodically adjusted, bounds. Similarly, Grant (2003)'s analysis of strategic planning in major

oil companies in the 1990s points to established systems which encourage the rise of new ideas while keeping these within limits to ensure consistency. As the author notes, the strategic planning process was decentralized, and divisional managers could contribute their plans and ideas. But these were to follow pre-defined company-wide guidelines and performance expectations. Osborn (1998)'s study of Frito-Lay's regional management teams also highlights management controls, and in particular the semi-formal information systems, as that which made it possible for new ideas to surface and be recognized, while providing the stability required to maintain organizational focus.

This conceptualization of emergent strategy formation as encouraged and coordinated through specific management processes is also consonant with findings by Eisenhardt and colleagues in studies that draw on complexity theory. They there examine organizational strategy as the often evolving direction of moderately structured corporations operating between stability and chaos (e.g., Eisenhardt & Piezunka, 2011). They offer that experimentations and improvisations inevitably arise since divisional managers face an unpredictable environment. So, by creating simple rules (Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001) and collaboration-friendly contexts (e.g., Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Martin & Eisenhardt, 2010) in anticipation, organizations can capture the promises that unplanned developments bear for internal synergy, innovation, and co-evolutionary adaptation with the environment. Viewed from the perspective of emergentness, this line of research gives helpful attention to loose structuring and serendipity; but it also emphasizes the need for explicit mechanisms, without which it is implied chaos would take over.

In sum, according to these streams of research, the formation of emergent strategies owes to the explicit boundaries created in organizations to deliberately encourage emergentness. Interestingly, this appears to resonate with Bower (1970)'s somewhat more prescriptive propositions concerning the 'structural context'. A rounded structural context – i.e., ensemble of formal administrative, information, measurement, and reward systems – Bower argues, helps to better align a potentially messy bottom-up generation of ideas with corporate goals. In the studies discussed here, the explicit rules, mechanisms and procedures are similarly highlighted as instrumental in the formation of strategies – in this case, emergent strategies. They allow the rise of new ideas, and also foster consonance with explicit organizational preferences and priorities – hence, patterns would form somewhat unintendedly.

Emergentness from autonomous behavior

For other researchers, new organizational directions often crop up inadvertently and somewhat defiantly outside existing organizational rules, mechanisms and procedures. New opportunities at the margins of existing formal strategies may be discovered by some members and haphazardly pursued without the guiding help of explicit boundaries set up by senior management (Pascale, 1984) – as in the case of Honda's penetration of the US motorcycle industry – or even despite such boundaries (e.g., Boyett & Currie, 2004; Burgelman, 1983, 2002; Regnér, 2003). Where novel initiatives take shape outside established bounds, it has been found that this "autonomous strategic behavior" (Burgelman, 1983) often involves work to shelter their development, and later obtain senior management acceptance for their further implementation. Without such sheltering efforts, it is argued, nascent initiatives would most likely be filtered out (e.g., Boyett & Currie, 2004; Burgelman, 2002; Regnér, 2003). Burgelman (2002), for instance, found that autonomous initiatives were continually explored by operational and middle managers at Intel in 1987-1998, and those protected from the selective effects of the structural context developed into enduring new initiatives.

In fact, when the nascent initiatives become broadly accepted and adopted, they then contribute to organizational trajectory and can be identified as emergent strategies. Failing this, the autonomous strategic behavior remains "ephemeral" (Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014), as the related initiatives come to be discontinued. For the transition to emergent strategies to occur, most studies in this line of research have pointed to the importance of the deliberate conceptual and political work performed by initiating members. These members endeavor to convince senior management to retroactively validate and add the nascent initiatives to their organizations' formal strategies (e.g., Boyett & Currie, 2004; Burgelman, 1983; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Their efforts may be met with senior management's refusal or willingness to entertain such alteration or change (Noda & Bower, 1997); there may thus be friction or conflict (e.g., Burgelman, 2002; Regnér, 2003). Initiating members' deliberate political work may also include efforts to persuade colleagues so as to secure greater support for the new initiatives (e.g., Burgelman, 2002; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014).

Mirabeau and Maguire (2014), for example, closely examine the multilevel politicized process through which emergent strategies form. Their fine-grained, practice-based, analysis of emergent strategy formation in a large telecommunication company shows in particular that

actors' discursive work helped to secure wider support for the new autonomous projects, obtain senior management's endorsement, and further their adoption as legitimate organizational activities. Legitimation was achieved by making these new initiatives discursively "consonant with the prevailing concept of strategy" (ibid: 1216) – specifically, by stretching or expanding this concept, which facilitated their integration into the organization's formal strategies.

In sum, from this perspective the formation of emergent strategies does not depend on the explicit boundaries set to channel the unplanned; or at least not primarily. Rather, emergent strategies form as members' autonomous behavior gives rise to new initiatives, and successfully supports their further development and coupling with some version of the formal strategies – by securing official validation. Prominent in this line of research, thus, is the *deliberate* political orchestrations placed at the heart of emergent strategy formation. Senior management's official approval is also therein treated as a requirement for the further adoption of the new initiatives.

Yet, other research works have shown that autonomous initiatives sometimes flourish without official sanction, and become established simply through propagation. Mintzberg and McHugh (1985), for example, describe how, at the National Film Board of Canada, the production of television series – a new initiative – arose from a single decision outside formal strategies and developed into a consistent stream of actions without senior management endorsement. A pattern simply formed through the actions of "many people at the base of the organization", and essentially independently of the organization's formal leadership (ibid: 180-181). Furthermore, some studies highlight the fact that emergent strategies likely form even in the absence of autonomous strategic behavior, and with senior management having little choice but to take on a course of action imposed by their environment (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). While relatively little information is provided by these authors on the specific processes involved – and in particular the actions, efforts or exchanges through which the new courses of actions became established – the cases related unequivocally suggest that emergent strategies do not form only through official sanction, voluntary choices, or deliberate political orchestration aiming to affect organizational directions. Rather, emergent strategies *may just appear*. This possibility, however, remains largely unexplored.

Emergentness through situated action

Very few researchers have studied empirically emergent strategy formation through situated action, and looked closely at organizational members' actions and interactions as they make sense of their local and situated circumstances while carrying out their activities. Lowe and Jones (2004) offer such rare empirical work. Their study of the determination of performance measures in a fisheries holding company in New Zealand focuses on the exchanges taking place at successive senior management meetings and how these produced outcomes which influenced organizational directions in unexpected ways. More specifically, a new previously unforeseen key performance indicator was identified, and new understandings about the organization were collectively generated, which came to shape actions in the ensuing period. These outcomes, as Lowe and Jones emphasize, were not arrived at through deliberate efforts to produce these specific consequential effects. There were no such prior intentions. Rather, as the authors put it, the process had "more likely, a combination of both reflective, conscious and unreflexive, unconscious elements" (ibid: 1331), which they argue provide evidence of some degree of emergentness. In other words, the pattern which arose in the holding company's stream of actions – relating to its performance control system – cannot reasonably be viewed as wholly intended. It also clearly owes to spontaneous idea development and "the dynamic nature of team interactions" (ibid: 1314).

Through their close examination of the process, the authors indeed reveal that managers' iterative engagement in talk came to produce outcomes that were co-constructed and largely unanticipated, and this gave rise to unintended consistency of actions. Moreover, they show that the identification *and* acceptance of new ideas and understandings could be concurrent. This would suggest that emergent strategies may not just come from past experimental actions which are later validated. New ideas, untried by the organization, may just crop up during interactions and be accepted in vivo (so to speak) – in this case, during management team meetings – and develop into enduring new initiatives.

Finally, while this research focuses on the creation of formal strategy – and leaves largely unaddressed the issue of broader adoption beyond the strategy formulation phase – it convincingly shows that even in the strategy formulation process – typically considered the locus of deliberate moves and counter-moves to intentionally set organizational directions – spontaneous and unreflexive actions may be present and can produce emergent elements. The

suggestion that unreflexive modes of action are involved in the formation of patterns that are not wholly intended, and in fact even unintended, seems an important insight into emergent strategy formation. However, this research does not fully explicate it.

Emergentness through coping action

In recent years, a contrasting view on strategic behavior has developed which offers theoretical grounding for understanding emergentness in relation to unreflexive modes of action (Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010). These authors suggest that, from a practice perspective, consistency of actions over time is not necessarily associated with the intentions and deliberate choices of organizational members to support and further new initiatives, or the often centralized directed efforts to create and apply formal strategies. Rather, the patterns one may discern in streams of actions may emanate from a "modus operandi" (Chia & Holt, 2006: 644, drawing on Bourdieu). In other words, they may form because organizational members have *non-deliberately continually engaged* with their contexts and dealt with the practical requirements of the situation at hand *in particular ways* (Chia & Holt, 2006; 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010). Consistency of actions, then largely unintended, would come from the social practices that members have acquired and internalized, and which they accomplish and reproduce over time.

Action, as these authors argue following Heidegger (1962), may take place in deliberate and reflexive or non-deliberate and unreflexive ways; the latter in fact being the primary mode of engagement with the world. This primary mode is what the authors call 'practical coping'. Thus, organizational members would, more often than not, carry out their activities by dealing *unselfconsciously* with the situation at hand. This, of course, does not mean that they are unaware of what they are doing – and for instance that a manager attending a project meeting would not be aware that she is taking part in this, and of what to do as a participant in such a meeting. Rather, it means that they would perform those actions without thinking, or as Tsoukas (2010: 51) notes "their awareness is largely 'inarticulate' (…) and implicit in their activity".

The transition to greater awareness occurs when there is a breakdown, when something is perceived as not being as it should be. Organizational members then become more conscious of what they do (Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010). Tsoukas (2010), in

particular, aptly points to two ways in which increased awareness may manifest itself. One is a highly deliberate form, which the author associates with 'strategizing'. This mode of action is characterized by detached engagement with the world and reflexive distancing from immediate concerns. It is, for instance, often conspicuous when formal strategies are being created (e.g., strategic planning meetings). In these situations, more generally, members' concerns turn to the organization as a whole, and deliberate thinking (for example about changing market conditions, important technological developments) and intentional directing occur. The second form that increased awareness may take is 'deliberate coping' (ibid: 54). Here, there is no detached engagement with the world, and actors continue to deal with their immediate concerns, but pay more attention to what they are trying to accomplish. Thus, in contrast to practical coping, actors' engagement with their context is here more consciously apprehended; there is more explicit awareness, and actors think about and often articulate, or even reinterpret, aspects of their non-deliberate actions. Compared with strategizing, however, their engagement is still oriented towards resolving immediate concerns, rather than intentionally directed at defining broader organizational preferences and priorities. This would be the case, for example, if after hearing about project issues in a long-run activity (i.e., a breakdown), organizational members set out to fix these and better implement it (i.e., their concerns and actions remain oriented towards carrying it out; compared for instance to re-evaluating its relevance to the organization).

The radical contribution of this line of research is to argue that coping action – whether practical or deliberate coping – can also be understood as strategic since it may produce consistency of actions over time. The implications for emergent strategies are not trivial. This different 'onto-epistemological stance' (Tsoukas, 2010) shows that actors' more or less unselfconscious engagement with their contexts may come to produce patterns unintendedly. Thus, in contrast to previous work, it invites attention to *coping action*, in lieu of an exclusive focus on highly deliberate modes of action – including exploratory actions induced by explicit boundaries, or skillful scheming and deliberate political orchestration aiming to get autonomous initiatives validated and added to the organization's formal strategies. It also suggests that much could be learned about emergentness by exploring actors' *everyday work* – i.e., mundane organizational doings – and not just their periodic engagement with activities often considered a priori strategic (e.g., strategic planning meetings, retreats, strategy review sessions). Finally, it hints at the possibility that emergent strategies may not just be about

newness – i.e., the introduction and broad adoption of new initiatives. They may in fact also form when non-deliberate actions perpetuate habituated ways of doing things over time, giving thus rise to unintended patterns. In short, this distinct practice-based stance invites new exploration of emergent strategy formation. It points to a new way of seeing which can help us gain complementary insights into this seemingly common organizational phenomenon. The research herein presented explores emergent strategy formation through this alternative way of seeing, and draws on 'the moment of test' (Boltanski & Thévenot, [1991], 2006; Dansou & Langley, 2012; Thévenot, 2001a) as an analytical lens to do so.

Approaching emergent strategy formation empirically through Moments of Test

Drawing on the moment of test helps to closely examine mundane organizational doings, and follow members' dynamic engagement with their contexts as they make more explicit – and discuss, debate, (re)affirm or rework – their practical understandings of what matters and hence what to do. The notion of test, elaborated by Boltanski and Thévenot ([1991], 2006) in their seminal book *On Justification,* and Thévenot (1990; 2001a; 2006) in his notable work on *pragmatic regimes of engagement with the world*, draws attention to the key moments when there is a break in the ordinary course of action as actors "realize that something is wrong" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999: 359). These are moments that give rise to questioning. Actors then relate more explicitly to the beings – people and objects – involved in the situation they find themselves in, and their awareness of what they are doing become more articulate (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Dansou & Langley, 2012; Thévenot, 2001a). Thus, not unlike the Heideggerian breakdown, moments of test offer an opportunity to examine actors' *deliberate coping*. They help us (researchers) better apprehend how actors achieve coordination, and the practical understandings that influence what they do.

On Justification proposes that, in moments of test, actors' attempts to make sense of the unsettled situation they find themselves in reveal important inarticulate premises of action. These inarticulate premises are rooted in what the authors call 'orders of worth' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; see also Thévenot, 2001a). Orders of worth are multiple. They are socially and historically shaped legitimating systems which are 'embodied' in social practices and everyday objects, and internalized by actors (ibid: 144-148; see also Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999: 366; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 211). Examples of social practices and objects include genealogical

trees, polling stations, organizational audits, and meditation which we, as social actors, would probably implicitly associate with different ways of engaging with the world. Orders of worth provide the higher-order background references against which actors recognize and judge conducts and ways of doing things (e.g. how they carry out their activities) as socially appropriate or not, in other words, as legitimate or not. For example, someone might judge appropriate a meditation session that unfolds as a self-focussed process made up of contemplative activities – as opposed to one playing out as a performance appraisal exercise – because his practical understanding of 'doing meditation' rests on such background references (i.e., inner movement to attain illumination, as a principle). The importance of the moments of test is that these otherwise inarticulate premises that actors rely on come to be more visible then (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Dansou & Langley, 2012; Thévenot, 2001a). Indeed, actors' practical understandings come to be more explicit – as they critique and/or justify certain actions, and try to deal with the differences in view then made apparent, in an effort to carry on with their activities. A focus on these moments, thus, gives us an opportunity to apprehend organizational members' coping actions through what *they themselves* hold as the appropriate ways of doing things in their contexts.

In his work on *pragmatic regimes of engagement,* Thévenot, in addition, sheds light on more personal and local background references that "the snags of testing moments" may also reveal (Thévenot, 1990, 2001a, 2006, 2008: 10; see also Blokker & Brighenti, 2011; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 347-358). In contrast to the orders of worth, these are relied upon when public justification is not called for; in other words, they are the background references against which actions are judged as convenient (or not) in situations requiring lesser generality. This would be the case, for example, if a manager, upon learning that a new industry now needs to be covered in his regular quarterly policy brief, explains to his colleague that this is not quite right and usually it is the annual report which deals with other industries. The inconsistency, that this manager voices, reveals what he holds as the proper approach: in this case, a local background reference as he simply describes how they usually handle things without offering arguments that suggest some broader principles. Similarly, more personal background references may be revealed in moments of test. An incongruity could, for instance, help better discern actors' personal attunement with a familiar context – .e., help us better grasp the premises of their unselfconscious idiosyncratic actions. Overall, what is important for our present purpose is the opportunity that this expanded view of the background references

which may be revealed in moments of test offers to approach a stream of organizational actions and study it more fully.

In sum, as an analytical lens, the moments of test provide an entry point into mundane organizational doings and helps us get closer to what organizational members ordinarily do to organize and carry on with their activities while facing fresh experience – i.e., new realizations or obstacles, and differing understandings – and how what they hold as 'the appropriate ways of doing things' shape organizational actions and the trajectories that form over time. Appropriate ways of doing things are the practices that members enact. Broadly speaking, practices are "the accepted ways of doing things, embodied and materially mediated, that are shared between actors and routinized over time" (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 287); and they are here more specifically conceived of, following Thévenot (2001a: 58-60), as that which actors view as appropriate. Indeed, as this author notes, the force that governs practices "is based on some conception of the good" (ibid: 59). Practices are here also not construed as static. Indeed, in moments of test, as actors work to make sense of the unsettled situation, they dynamically construct or reconstruct the appropriate ways of doing things in their contexts (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001a). Such continual construction is possible because actors may engage with their contexts in various ways, owing to the multiple orders of worth and more personal and local background references that they can rely on. This pluralistic potential is a feature currently less specified in the Heideggerian framework. Moments of test, thus, help us remain attentive to the dynamic aspect of organizational members' coping actions, rather than presuming that these actions are wholly defined by bureaucratic controls, or determined by stable internalized dispositions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001a, 2001b, 2006).

My interest in studying strategy formation through actors' situated action resonates with Strategy-as-Practice (SaP) research concerns (e.g., Jarzabkowski, Balogun, Seidl, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Tsoukas, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). This line of research has enriched our knowledge and conversation about strategy for its attention to what organizational members do, and the practices implicated in such work. By focussing on deliberate coping action, this study has potential to add to SaP research, and contribute to our theoretical and practical knowledge of emergent strategy formation (Tsoukas 2010; see also Vaara & Whittington, 2012). It complements existing studies which have largely tied emergentness to the fortuitous

(i.e., not officially planned), round-about – but nonetheless intentional – production of formal strategies. By combining insights from the Heideggerian framework with the rich analytical lens that the moment of test affords, it looks at how emergent strategies may form through the combination of unconscious and conscious modes of action, as organizational members attend to their everyday concerns. It thus explores emergent strategy formation by addressing the following questions: 1) How is organizational direction ordinarily produced, given members' dynamic engagement with their contexts? and 2) How does strategy form unintendedly then over time?

2.3 METHODS

To study the formation of emergent strategies, I draw on ethnographic data collected in Nonprofit Development Organizations (NDOs) located in Dakar (Senegal). The three organizations here studied offered a particularly fitting setting for an examination of strategy formation where, in contrast to the traditional view of strategy, consistency of actions could not be readily associated with formal strategies. Indeed, the objects, events and activities commonly presumed to represent strategy (e.g., strategic plans, retreats, strategic workshops, and strategic activities) were not developed and/or pursued in these organizations during the time of the research and even in the years preceding it. These are, however, not rogue organizations; simply, formal strategies, although not nonexistent, are not prevalent in developing countries' NDOs. Instead, the studied organizations carry out development projects which are congruent with their wide-encompassing missions; have short-term project-specific implementation plans; and organize meetings to see to the effective implementation of their projects. Moreover, these organizations' actions could not be easily described as solely driven by the previously set intentions of their founders or executive directors. Like many other NDOs, they tend to apply various versions of consultative decision-making and participatory management (e.g., Fowler, 1997; Lewis, 2003, 2007) which contribute to creating space for members to talk about, critique, consolidate or revise how they carry out organizational activities. Finally, as development organizations providing support to the poor and disadvantaged, these NDOs operate in a field characterized by greater uncertainty about cause-effect relationships. New ideas, ill-defined concepts, and competing approaches about development and poverty alleviation regularly appear, circulate, and are taken up unevenly in

the international development field (e.g., Bebbington, Lewis, Batterbury, Olson, & Siddiqi, 2007; Lélé, 2005), which tends to make their environments somewhat less predictable and pliable.

In sum, these organizations did not produce nor apply formal strategies and, when implementing their activities, they usually had to deal with new realizations, obstacles, and shifting information about the approaches needed to attain their charitable aspirations. For these reasons, they represented an apt setting for investigating emergent strategy formation. Furthermore, their geographic location also offers an advantage. Indeed, because of their "differing contexts" – owing to their political, economic, and socio-cultural environments – developing countries do not just allow us to think of various forms that organizational phenomena may take, but they also importantly provide us with broader opportunities for substantive learning about the phenomena themselves (e.g., Hafsi, T. & Farashahi, M., 2005: 505; see also Mbembé, 2001; Mintzberg, 2001). Thus, the three Senegalese NDOs appeared a well suited setting for this research, given its objective to go beyond the familiar forms that Strategy is traditionally assumed to take, so as to contribute more broadly to our understanding of emergent strategy formation.

Data collection

The ethnographic study carried out in the three Senegalese NDOs was over an eight-month period (from May to mid-December 2012, followed by two weeks in October 2013). More than 300 Senegalese NDOs operate in Senegal, and provide support to local communities through service delivery and advocacy work, and occasionally through the distribution of goods (such as bed-nets, textbooks, farm implements, etc.). The three organizations studied here are duly registered Senegalese nonprofit development organizations; they are administratively independent from governmental agencies, the private sector, and international aid agencies. They manage their own affairs, and collaborate with national and international organizations to secure financial and technical resources, and with local community-based organizations to carry out projects on the ground. Each has a main office in Dakar and official representation in the regions, given that they implement development projects in various corners of the country. Vy4Wellness[17] is primarily active in the Health sector, and also provides broader community

[17]. All names are fictitious

development support with a view to improving revenue generation, and access to health and social services. EducAll operates in the non-formal education sector where its development activities aim to improve learning outcomes as well as health and living conditions. The third NDO, ProLearning, works in the formal education sector, and mainly orients its actions towards the betterment of knowledge and learning on health and societal issues. The three NDOs were created in the 1990s, and have been active in their respective areas of work ever since. All three are managed by a relatively small team of project officers and administrative support personnel – supplemented occasionally by local consultants – and headed by an executive director.

In the initial stages of the research, several Senegalese NDOs were contacted to gauge their interest in taking part. The three NDOs analyzed here agreed to participate in an extended study on strategy conceived in broad terms, and provided the needed access to their everyday work, staff meetings, office discussions, and occasional meetings with various partners; as well as to retrospective data through staff interviews; and historical data through organizational documents. As noted previously, no strategic plan was in use in any of these NDOs during the research period, and no related work – e.g., retreats, strategic workshops, or meetings aiming to develop overarching future organizational directions or strategic activities – was being carried out. This was however not because organizational members (and especially senior officers) were not aware of what such plans and work consisted of – in fact some of them had developed strategic plans and retreats in the past. Rather, as they noted, these gradually faded away in face of other pressing demands on their finances and time. Thus, they conducted their affairs without such plans and strategic activities, and visibly also without chaos. Their willingness to grant access to real-time, retrospective and historical data offered a valuable opportunity to explore their everyday coping actions and emergent strategy formation.

In all three NDOs, mundane organizational doings consisted mainly in work performed at their offices and, from time to time, meetings with partners and visits to project sites. In the office, their work often involved actions to carry out their activities, but also frequent exchanges between organizational members which contributed to their continued actions. These exchanges generally related to the activities being carried out. They were for instance about how projects were unfolding, what now needed to be taken into account, and how project activities should be implemented. Collaboration was frequent between staff. This was

further aided by the fact that some projects required the involvement of several members; and it was also not uncommon that project officers be asked to assist punctually on files other than their main ones in order to help address emergencies or unexpected challenges, or grab new opportunities. Aside from these exchanges, these organizations also commonly organized staff meetings involving all staff members or more targeted project meetings on a need basis with those working on specific projects. These meetings were the occasion for discussing progress on ongoing activities, for dealing with implementation challenges and deciding on needed actions, and also at times for talking about new projects and tendering opportunities. Flexibility was built in my research design so that I could immerse myself as much as possible in each organization's life, and follow to the extent possible the accomplishment of organizational members' everyday work, and their occasional meetings with partners, and visits to project sites.

I collected data on these mundane organizational doings through non-participant observation. This method was here particularly fitting since it allowed me to join in and follow what organizational members were doing as it unfolded, regardless of the project or action being carried out. I might have otherwise been limited to a project activity (e.g., an upcoming workshop) or a specific task (e.g., writing proposals) if I were viewed as a volunteer staff member, or a consultant bearing 'best practices' and novel management tools. Thus, as a non-participant observer I was able to follow these organizations' everyday work as members engaged in project activities, meetings, and corridor discussions. There were some rare occasions when I was not permitted to attend meetings with partners (for instance, when partners were not comfortable with my being present) or project meetings (for example, a meeting in one of the NDO where some staff members were being lectured for poor performance). However, I easily obtained information on what had occurred in those cases by taking part in ensuing corridor discussions, or during interviews with staff members.

I took detailed hand-written notes about organizational members' everyday work; and when concurrent note-taking was not possible (e.g., corridor discussions), I reported the actions and exchanges witnessed promptly afterwards in my notepad. Overall, I spent on average 1.5 days a week for 8 months in each NDO. The data collected inevitably included naturally occurring *moments of test*, as organizational members routinely pointed out to colleagues what they felt was incongruous, which often led to more discussion. The notes

taken capture how these moments unfolded and the flow of utterances, exchanges and actions – e.g., what members were working on or discussing, what was presented as incongruous, what views were then put forth and debated, what actions were taken and/or suggested in order to carry on. In total, 55 such moments were identified.

This observational data was complemented by retrospective and historical data. Thus, at the level of each studied NDO, I conducted semi-structured interviews with staff based in Dakar and in the regions (i.e., the executive director, project officers, and administrative support personnel). Almost all interviews were tape-recorded, and later transcribed. In the very few cases where participants objected to being recorded, I took detailed notes which were also later transcribed. The interviews were on average one-to-two hours long, and covered a broad range of issues relating to the organization's past, present and future. In particular our conversations centered on: its genesis; mission; projects; partners and collaborators; and its structure, work and planning, and/or decision-making, processes. Former staff members were also interviewed, whenever possible, to gather additional information on past actions and contexts. Several organizational members were interviewed more than once in order to gain greater clarity on organizational actions, or obtain updates on developing projects or situations. During the course of the research 33 members were interviewed in total in the three NDOs. In addition, I also collected and reviewed organizational documents such as brochures and pamphlets; meeting minutes; project proposals and reports; and planning documents. As noted previously, planning documents were mainly short-term (usually quarterly plans with a few annual ones) and project specific; none of the plans consulted related to the organization's overall portfolio of projects or future directions. Table 1 provides an overview of the three sites and the data collected.

Data analysis

Overall approach

The methodological approach used for the analysis follows from my interest in gaining an appreciation of emergent strategy formation, and the distinct onto-epistemological stance adopted for this research. Thus, the analysis was centered on organizational members' everyday work, and in particular their unselfconscious and non-intentionally deliberate engagements with their contexts – since this research is concerned with what members

ordinarily do and relatedly the patterns that then form unintendedly. This meant paying particular attention to the observational data, and more specifically the moments of test. Given that these are instances when noticed incongruities unsettle organizational actions, they allow us to better apprehend: *on the one hand*, the process of organizing through which members come to agree on 'what to do' to carry on – which ordinarily produces direction; and, *on the other*, the otherwise inarticulate background references that orient what they do, and which reveal aspects of the practices they are enacting. The analysis was then furthered by examining what they do and the identified practices longitudinally – using the historical and retrospective data – to see if these were recurrently accomplished over time, and how. Repeated practice performance produces consistency of actions over time, and importantly, unintendedly (Tsoukas, 2010; see also Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007). Overall, thus, the analysis helped illuminate the formation of emergent strategies.

In terms of the specific methods used, the analysis followed an iterative interpretive approach – presented in more detail below – which unfolded roughly in three stages. Briefly, the initial stage served to address *the first research question* – i.e., how direction is ordinarily produced. I analyzed the moments of test which unfolded in each organization and, more specifically, how organizational members' utterances, exchanges and actions contributed to their getting past the incongruity noticed (and the disagreements then made manifest), and their continuing on with the activities at hand. The second and third stages of the analysis helped to address the *second research question* – i.e., how strategies form unintendedly. In the second stage, I investigated the practices made visible in these moments of test; and next looked beyond these specific instances to see if they were present over time. Lastly, in the third stage, I closely examined the various ways that patterns formed unintendedly (i.e., emergent strategies) in each organization and across organizations, and sought to draw out the nuances of this organizational phenomenon (e.g., Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Yanow, 2014).

The analysis of everyday organizational work

In the first stage of analysis, thus, I started with the moments of test that unfolded in each organization. I repeatedly read the observational data collected, and reviewed the utterances, exchanges and actions constituting each moment of test, in order to retain only those

moments when deliberate coping was involved. These were the instances when, in face of a snag, organizational members' engagement with their contexts remained primarily concerned with the situation at hand. To make this determination, I followed the Heideggerian-inspired framework (Tsoukas, 2010), and proceeded conservatively to distinguish these moments from others when organizational members' engagement became more detached and highly deliberate, as they shifted to more general and abstract terms and relatedly more intentionally deliberate design work (see Figure 1). The highly deliberate instances ruled out included, for example, discussions where organizational members argued about their project portfolios in abstract terms when methodically planning an external evaluation[18]. So, instances of deliberate coping were identified in each NDO. Each such moment concerned an aspect of a project or project activity which was brought forward in conversation – to draw attention to an oddity, a new information, or an unmet expectation – and dealt with practically then.

I next studied these instances of deliberate coping *processually*, and paid particular attention to the real-time flow of actions and interactions through which these moments unfolded. The analysis centered on the process, since this research does not rest on the assumption that members' actions and/or views invariably reflect some entrenched goals or interests pre-assigned to social categories (e.g., professional groups, cultural groups, women, or others). I thus started with one NDO, and used an interpretive approach to analyze the processes involved. An illustrative example of the analysis performed is presented in annex (see Table 2). Thus, for each instance of deliberate coping, I first prepared a detailed narrative which fore-grounded: what organizational members said about the situation faced, what they were trying to do, what matters most, what to do in that case; and the material proofs, and/or physical acts that they drew on in so doing. Then, I used visual mapping (Langley, 1999) to graphically represent the flow, which helped bring to the fore the succession of sayings and doings through which 'what to do' next was constructed. All instances of deliberate coping were similarly mapped, which revealed different successions of sayings and doings through which activities were continued. This analytical process was repeated for the other two sites, and yielded similar findings, but also added nuances which helped refine and further specify the findings (cf. Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). This provided early insights on the discursive processes involved in the continuous construction of organizational actions.

[18]. It is worth noting that none of the highly deliberate instances found related to the elaboration of formal strategies.

Going through these early findings, I noticed that the continuation of activities did not always mean that a direction developed. In other words, organizational members sometimes got past the snag without settling on what ought to be done next. In those cases, the instances of deliberate coping unfolded, but they visibly had limited orienting effects on organizational actions[19] (examples are provided in the following pages). I identified these instances of deliberate coping as having 'no notable effects', in contrast to the others which visibly oriented organizational actions. In the latter case, it is worth noting that no organizational directions were deliberately designed or pressed for then; rather, through their sayings and doings, members came to converge and/or agree on what needed to be done next. So, I compared the two types identified, i.e., the cases which produced 'notable effects' versus those with 'no notable effects'. This revealed a set of discursive processes that are characteristically involved in the ordinary orientation of organizational actions. In sum, this analysis overall generated insights on how mundane organizational doings may influence the implementation of organizational activities, and contribute to orienting organizational actions.

The analysis of organizational actions over time

Beyond the ordinary orientation of organizational actions, I was interested in emergent strategies. So, I sought to find out if organizational activities were implemented in particular consistent ways over time, in other words, whether patterns were discernible in these organizations' streams of actions, or not. Let us recall that the onto-epistemological perspective adopted for this study proposes that patterns in streams of actions would arise for the practices that actors enact (Tsoukas, 2010; see also Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007). Practices are however not the activities themselves; rather they are revealed in the "historically and culturally shaped regularities of such activities" (Chia & MacKay, 2007: 227). They are also not just 'ways of doing' that happen to be repeated; they, instead, entail meaning, and reflect what actors see as 'the *appropriate* ways of doing things' (Thévenot, 2001a; see also Nicolini, 2009: 1402-1405; Rouse, 2001). I thus examined more closely mundane organizational doings to see if practices were being mundanely enacted, and also

[19]. These instances did not produce direction, in the sense that they had limited effects on how activities were carried out afterwards, and even later on (i.e., I did not find any sign of a possible effect up to the end of the research period).

studied organizational actions longitudinally for traces of these practices in how organizational activities were carried out over time.

I hence started with the instances of deliberate coping since, during these moments, what members hold as the appropriate ways of doing things comes to be more visible (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001, 2006). I drew on Thévenot (2001, 2006) and Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)'s theoretical frameworks to code and analyze organizational members' sayings and doings so as to reveal what they hold as the appropriate ways of carrying out their activities – i.e., their practices. The codes were developed based on Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)'s work on the orders of worth and their semantic descriptors of the forms of instantiation that these various orders may take (ibid: 159-211). This initial list was further elaborated for context-relevance (for instance, attention was paid to include synonyms and refine these descriptors to reflect local vocabularies, whenever required). It was also expanded to take account of more local background references (as defined in Thévenot (2001; 2006)). The final list of descriptors is presented in table 3. By using these descriptors as an interpretive guide, I analyzed each instance of deliberate coping, and identified what members held as the appropriate ways of carrying out their activities. Table 4 provides an illustrative example of the analysis performed.

Next, I looked beyond the instances of deliberate coping to see if the practices identified were detectable in the ways that organizational activities had been and were being implemented. I drew on the historical and retrospective data, along with the remaining observational data, to trail backward and forward the implementation of organizational activities. I started with an examination of these activities looking forward, to see how they were carried out following the instances of deliberate coping. In particular, I sought to identify what actions were performed, how they were performed, and how long they were performed in that manner. I also looked back, and similarly analysed how organizational activities were carried out in the past. Overall, this analysis revealed practices that were consistently accomplished in each NDO over time, which produced unintended consistencies of actions – i.e., emergent strategies.

The analysis of the formation of emergent strategies

The last stage of the analysis investigated how these emergent strategies formed. While the identified patterns all arose unintendedly, they visibly did not all form in the same manner. The data, for example, did not suggest that organizational members simply carried out their activities in the exact same ways all the time. I thus sought to examine more closely how the identified patterns came about. So, for each NDO, I studied *how* the practices (giving rise to consistencies of actions) were in fact enacted over time. I looked back at the analysis of the instances of deliberate coping which pointed to what organizational members held as 'the appropriate ways of doing things' and debated both in terms of *what they were trying to do* and *what to do to carry on*. I interpreted the former as a reference to how a practice had been performed (i.e., previous actions), and the latter as how that practice was to be performed (i.e., actions onward). This helped me develop a sense of how the practice was enacted over a stretch of time, and in particular whether and how the actions involved might have evolved. Next, by examining the actions performed over the longer time, I was able to confirm, revise or expand on these early insights. In short, for each practice, the analysis shows how it was enacted over time and whether the actions performed had evolved. At the level of each organization, then, it revealed that although the patterns identified formed through actions that were consistent over time, there were different modes of formation. In other words, consistency of actions came about unintendedly in more than one way. Finally, these insights were further refined by comparing the modes of formation identified across sites (see Figure 2). In sum, this last stage of analysis resulted in the identification of different ways that emergent strategies formed in these organizations.

The research findings are presented in the next section. First, I describe how mundane organizational doings contributed to ordinarily orient actions in the three studied NDOs. These ordinary orientations were not intentional efforts to chart a future course for the organizations; rather, they were produced simply as members went about their work and dealt with ever-present fresh experiences. Second, after a brief review of the actions performed over time which came to produce consistencies of actions unintendedly, I present how emergent strategies formed in these organizations.

2.4 COPING AND EMERGENT STRATEGY FORMATION

In the three studied NDOs, a number of development projects were typically implemented concurrently. Over the research period – and during the four to five years preceding it – their project portfolios were primarily composed of a number of one-to-three years projects, and even some shorter ones to be completed under a year. Upon completion, some projects were renewed, but this rarely meant that they were continued unaltered. What's more, while implementing project activities, it was not uncommon for members to experience changing local conditions, new developments affecting the approaches being used, learning from evaluations, or requests from funders or local partners and communities, among other things. In each organization, thus, mundane organizational doings were often the occasion of new discussions and agreements about how project activities needed to be implemented. As noted previously, during the research period, these organizations were not implementing strategic plans; yet, it would be hard to suggest that their actions showed no coherence, and chaos reigned. In fact, as the research shows, members' everyday work and coping actions contributed to orienting activities, and shaping organizational trajectories.

The ordinary orientation of organizational actions

In each NDO, the implementation of project activities involved a set of actions whose performance was often unsettled by fresh experience – for example, a member pointing out issues at the ground level, or denouncing the late arrival of funds, or flagging certain actions as no longer on par because a new awareness raising approach now exists in their sector. Such comments often led to exchanges during which organizational members put forth and discussed different views and ideas – suggesting different understandings of the situation they faced and what needed to be done. Through their discussions, they were often able to continue on with their activities. Importantly however, as the analysis reveals, this does not mean that *how organizational activities should* be carried out was always clarified or decided on. In other words, in most cases, members' utterances, exchanges and actions during these moments had an orienting effect on organizational actions, but not in all. Indeed, in a few cases, the actions that members performed onwards to carry on were dissimilar and visibly less oriented by a common sense of 'what to do'. I first present these cases which generated less

direction and then show, in contrast, the instances which contributed to the ordinary orientation of organizational actions, and how this was accomplished.

Carrying on loosely: performing actions on the fly

Instances which produced little effects on organizational actions unfolded unexceptionally – i.e., visibly organizational members' utterances, exchanges and actions were not summoned, discouraged or silenced. These were also not special circumstances. They were naturally occurring situations which came about as members performed their everyday work, exchanged casually with others in corridor discussions, or took part in meetings to discuss organizational activities. Simply, in these cases, their unfolding sayings and doings did not produce a common sense of what was going on and 'what to do' to continue on with organizational activities. Their ensuing actions revealed little convergence, lingering confusion and doubt, and peculiarities which were continually organized on the fly. In all three sites, there were such instances, even if only a few. They included, for example: instances when flagged discrepancies did not elicit any comments from other members present; or gave rise to different interpretations but no resolution; or led to exchanges that simply fizzled out, as another matter arose and became the point of discussion. So, members continued on with the activities, but the unsettled concerns often re-appeared and frequent irregular adjustments were required.

The following description of an instance observed at ProLearning provides a telling illustration:

> Following a debriefing on the activities carried out in the last trimester – including a successful site visit to implement an activity together with local actors – a program staff pointed to something that was not quite right: the tardy drafting of official documents for the visit which he presented as problematic. He noted that it would be better if these official documents were prepared ahead of time to avoid last-minute work, and stress etc. During the ensuing exchanges, other staff members (including the administrative staff, and the executive director) commented, but various readings of the situation were presented and various interpretations offered – e.g., the problem was the tardy drafting of official documents (by the administrative staff); the reason for this was the poor quality of the background documents (prepared by program staff), the revision of which took time; it was the last minute approval of the activity (by administrative staff) which did not leave sufficient time for properly drafting the background documents; program staff should be proactive and prepare background documents anyway, and when this is

not done, administrative staff has to step in at the last minute so that project commitment can be met.

The exchange regarding this matter ended there. It did not produce a common sense of 'what to do'. The conversation simply shifted to another matter.

(*Deliberate coping occurring during a meeting observed at ProLearning*)

As the above abstract shows members' exchanges did not bring about a common sense of 'what to do'. The absence of such orienting effect on organizational actions was further evidenced in ensuing conversations as participants slowly came out of the meeting room and mingled, as they usually did. One program staff provided yet another interpretation by noting that the problem was in fact the delays at the level of the funder, since it was not prudent to initiate work for the implementation of an activity without a confirmation that funds would be disbursed; and others echoed these concerns, but again the discussion did not progress further. Later, as members implemented other site visits, it was clear that there was no common sense of 'what to do': the actions performed were varied and changeable, and continually adjusted. Interestingly, site visits were undertaken periodically at ProLearning and were often very successful. But, they continued to be implemented very flexibly[20] as organizational members experienced their contexts differently and hence approached 'what to do' differently. The coordination of efforts towards the implementation of site visits was done on the fly.

In sum, the analysis of this and similar instances observed in all three sites points to the fact that members' sayings and doings while coping deliberately may have no orienting effects on organizational actions[21]. In other words, experiencing their contexts with more explicit awareness did not by itself give rise to a common understanding of what actions ought to be performed. I now turn to the cases where, by contrast, a common sense of 'what to do' to

[20]. Flexibility in action does not mean that there was no procedure in place. The variegated actions followed existing procedures, which outlined an elementary process for developing site visits. But, how things were done took various forms. In a way, this particular case presents a situation where one may suggest that tolerance for ambiguity (i.e., the fact that things may be understood in two or more possible ways) has served this organization well since its site visits were generally very successful.

[21]. I am not here suggesting that the absence of an orienting effect on actions causally determines the success or failure of organizational activities. While in the example presented above, it did not adversely affect the implementation of that organization's activity, in other cases, the analysis suggests that it might be constraining implementation.

carry on arose. These help illuminate how such sense of direction came about through mundane organizational doings.

The ordinary orientation of actions: how it is accomplished

Thus, in several instances, members' deliberate coping actions helped them understand what actions ought to be performed to carry on – even if, at times, only for a while until fresh experience later unsettled understandings anew. These instances also unfolded unexceptionally in all three sites, and organizational members' utterances, exchanges and actions flowed visibly unforced and unhampered when discrepancies were flagged while implementing their activities. But, as the analysis reveals, they were distinctive in that members' sayings and doings in these cases appear to proximally direct organizational actions. I first present three examples of such instances below to show how they unfolded, before discussing the research insights on the discursive processes involved in the ordinary orientation of organizational actions.

> Organizational members were sharing updates on a project being implemented in various regions in collaboration with local and regional authorities. This was a new project, and staff members involved in its implementation were presenting, and responding to questions about, the progress made in launching project activities in the regions they each served. One program staff (M) put forth a suggestion. He proposed that project meetings held with partners in the regions be restricted to a fewer people so that they could focus on technical issues. During the ensuing discussion, other staff members commented and presented various considerations. One (L) noted that they should not lose sight of the fact that regional people have to be kept informed, and that in any case this was a matter to discuss with regional authorities. Another (B) said that the meeting should have broad participation, to encourage greater involvement. He added that the agenda could always be structured so that technical issues are discussed first. Another (N) mentioned that, as they have come to know, partners' involvement in that region is crucial and should be maintained, along with the commitment of regional authorities. Staff member (L) noted again that they should recall that regional authorities are those who opted for broad participation at these meetings. The program staff (M) who put forth the suggestion then concluded by saying "let's retain that and continue".

The exchange produced a common sense of 'what to do' to carry on, which was made visible through their heeding to the challenge raised and deciding to not change current ways of doing things.

(*Deliberate coping occurring during a meeting observed at Vy4Wellness*)

Three staff members were working on a project under development. The NDO had successfully taken part in a Call-for-Proposals, and just received updated information on the project from the potential funder. While discussing how they would monitor project activities given the remoteness of the region where the project was to be implemented, one member (E) said that the available budget will play a part. Another member (J) retorted that they should aim for a thorough monitoring process, list the resources needed to do that, and after that they will see how to rearrange the budget accordingly. The initiator (E) then pointed at the budget proposal received from the potential funder, and noted that there is not much room currently to rearrange the budget for monitoring activities. The other (J) insisted, stating that changes could be made. They went over the budget proposal a couple of times; each pointing to words and sentences in the document which supported his/her interpretations. They finally came to the conclusion that the total of a budget line item could not be modified. Staff member (J) then resignedly noted that it was unfortunate that they were not consulted prior to the drafting of the budget proposal, or that if ever such consultation took place, they did not take part in it. They then moved on to discuss and work on the documents remaining to be submitted to the potential funder; this reflected an acceptance of the budget restrictions and an understanding that monitoring would be approached on that basis.

This instance thus brought about a common sense of 'what to do' to carry on with organizing monitoring.

(*Deliberate coping occurring during project development work observed at EducAll*)

A program staff provided a debriefing on his work to advance a project being revived. It was a collaborative undertaking which had to be suspended for several months because of an adverse natural event. The activity he was developing consisted in helping local actors host an upcoming awareness raising campaign on radio. Another member (administrative/financial coordinator) then asked whether local actors had been properly trained, and if they had the required knowledge about the NDO. The program officer and the executive director both responded yes, noting that these local actors were in fact partners of the NDO. The inquirer reiterated her question, adding that it was not always that simple. The executive director conceded, and asked the program officer to organize a meeting with these local actors quickly where the

organization's philosophy would be clarified. The inquirer then asked about content validation, stating that it was key to ensure alignment with the organization's philosophy, and that local actors could not just go and say whatever they wanted on behalf of the organization. The executive director responded by saying that it was indeed an important point, since hosting a radio show does not mean imposing one's views but rather facilitating discussions. He added that this philosophy that the NDO has on hosting radio shows should be made clear to local actors during the meeting. The program officer nodded. The inquirer also agreed, adding that it was important and the thing to do. The discussion then moved to another point.

An understanding of what it means to develop such a project was produced, and relatedly a common sense of 'what to do' to carry on with this activity.

(*Deliberate coping occurring during a meeting observed at ProLearning*)

All instances which similarly ordinarily oriented organizational actions allowed members to understand how to continue on, whether because their sayings and doings converged on, or their discussions gave rise to, those considerations deemed most important for the proper implementation of the activity at hand. Indeed, what members did and said then: co-constructed the actions that needed to be performed; or generated an understanding of what it was in fact that they were trying to do; or revealed what was expected of them. The shared understanding that developed, the decisions reached, the actions laid out, and/or the directives given, allowed members to understand 'what to do' to carry on – and such common sense of 'what to do' was also clearly perceptible in the subsequent implementation of these activities.

As the analysis reveals, the processes involved in generating such orienting effects were distinctive from those implicated when deliberate coping did not produce such outcome. Here, organizational members' sayings and doings involved: (1) the acknowledgment of fresh experience; (2) the legitimation of action; *and* (3) the shaping of action. These discursive processes – through which their ways of doing things were (re) produced, (further) shared and/or put to use – are presented in figure 3 (see annexes) and discussed below.

Acknowledging fresh experience

While doing their everyday work, when ongoing actions were unsettled by fresh experience, organizational members started talking anew about how they were carrying out their activities.

The analysis suggests that members' acknowledgment of the fresh experience brought forth is crucial for reaching a common sense of 'what to do' and orienting organizational actions. Such acknowledgment made the flagged discrepancy an issue that was relevant and worth dealing with; and it came about through ready acceptance, or debate leading to validation. Ready acceptance was manifest in members' quiet or straightforward assent followed by efforts to accommodate the newly perceived issue. By contrast, validation through debate unfolded with members presenting and discussing various readings of the situation faced, which eventually contributed to their admitting some version of it.

The acknowledgement of fresh experience is a discursive process that was observed, under one form or the other, in all instances which ordinarily oriented actions in the three organizations. For example, at EducAll, in the case presented earlier where staff members were doing project development work and trying to figure out how to approach monitoring, the new realization (budget limitations) was initially rejected, then debated by drawing on the budget proposal – parts of which were highlighted or benched to ground their differing views – and finally validated as members' understanding of the budget notes converged.

The following provides another example. These exchanges took place at Vy4Wellness about a health centre that the organization was supporting. The fresh experience highlighted (i.e., electricity insufficient for effective operation) was taken on after being expanded with additional readings of the situation.

> During a meeting, the responsible officer (P) noted that frequent power outages in the last few weeks were affecting work at the centre and preventing its laboratory from operating well. The executive director said that the NDO had done a lot with little and given significant support to the health centre so far, and that communities should know that and not be too demanding. He then asked for an update on another project, which was discussed then. Following this, the program staff (P) talked again about the health centre. The financial officer pointed out that there was a generator on site which was obtained thanks to the NDO, but since people kept using the wrong kind of fuel, it was often out-of-order. The program officer (P) retorted that one generator was not enough for the whole centre. Another program staff (N) then suggested that the generator be used for the laboratory only, and to assign responsibility for refueling to one person and one person only. The situation thus re-interpreted – i.e., the problem was not only the disruption due to power cuts but also how the generator was being used – was validated and decisions made on that basis.

Finally, as noted above, there were also cases where the fresh experience brought forth was simply acknowledged through ready acceptance, as members appeared to consent to the reading of the situation so presented. This was the case for instance in ProLearning, during an impromptu conversation between the executive director and program staff where the issue highlighted (quarterly technical reports not sufficiently detailed) was not debated, and visibly accepted as is.

> The executive director had just returned from a meeting with a funder, and was asked by a program staff how it went. He reported to all present that it did not go well and he was unhappy, because the quarterly technical report did not sufficiently detail the target population and impact. His reading of the situation was not commented on nor challenged. He noted that more disaggregation was needed, and the data should be presented by region and age group. He added that the report should always be shared with regional authorities, and concluded by asking for a consolidated approach. So they did.

Legitimating action

The legitimation of action is another key process involved in the production of ordinary orientation. Indeed, in all cases, organizational members' sayings and doings proximally directed actions when they allowed members to understand the approaches being proposed to carry on with their activities as legitimate. The findings show that efforts to legitimate a proposed approach always involved presenting it as relevant for dealing with the issue at hand. In most instances, establishing such relevance took one or several of these three forms: members explained the approach in relation to their past actions (historical congruity); and/or in relation to an essential aspect of the organization character (character congruity); and/or even in relation to existing organizational procedures (procedural congruity).

For instance, the exchanges at Vy4Wellness described above concerning the health centre illustrate how past actions are drawn upon to legitimate the approach being proposed. The NDO's history of support to the health centre and contribution towards a generator (i.e., how they did things frugally but effectively) serve to buttress the relevance of the action settled on (i.e., a sparing use of the existing generator and better maintenance was proposed, in keeping with the past (frugal) actions highlighted).

By contrast, in the following example, relevance was established in relation to organizational character. These discussions unfolded at EducAll about a newly started educational project, and the approach proposed to carry on (i.e., send the information to all) was connected to organizational responsibility.

> There was a problem with the list of beneficiaries – the various national agencies involved in the project requested that the lists that their respective surveys generated be used. Reconciling the lists had proven too complicated. The NDO thus decided to work with one list only, and make this clear through an information note. The program staff had just prepared the note, and was letting the executive director know. The executive director asked that the list and note be shared broadly, including with local authorities. The program staff retorted that it was not necessary to share it beyond concerned national agencies. He added that it would be a waste since local authorities will not read it. The executive director said it was the NDO's responsibility to share such information no matter what. The conversation turned to the rocky start this project had had. At the end, the executive director said again to send the list and note to all, and enumerated who those were (including the local authorities); and this was accepted.

This other example below, which briefly describes discussions at ProLearning, shows how action was legitimated by pointing to past actions *and* highlighting conformity with existing procedures.

> During a meeting, several program officers were working to develop a project activity – an upcoming training workshop. They were used to developing training workshops, but since the upcoming workshop was to cover a new theme, they were meeting to define how they were going to develop this activity. They used PowerPoint and other visual displays as material support during the meeting. The responsible officer presented a draft proposal for the training programme. He was interrupted a number of times by other members who brought up various concerns about aspects of the programme and suggested alternative ways of shaping it – i.e., alternative actions which they related to their past experiences (e.g., how they selected trainees, defined technical aspects, put together a fitting programme, etc.). The responsible officer dealt with each comment, sometimes explaining further the proposed approach and others amending his propositions. He too referred to their past experiences. In addition, he also often asked "do we all agree" and waited for confirmation before proceeding further, which suggests that presenting an action as consensual was also important in establishing its legitimacy. In the end, an understanding developed about how the training programme would be structured, and the actions to carry out, including each member's responsibility in that context.

Lastly, it is worth noting that the analysis also reveals a few instances where the legitimation of action proceeded quite differently from the above forms. Indeed, organizational members simply presented the proposed approach in a matter-of-fact way; and their sayings and doings in those cases suggested that the action was understood as the unquestionable thing to do. This happened, for instance, in a case related earlier, when members of ProLearning were having an impromptu conversation about quarterly technical reports, following a meeting with a funder. The need for greater data disaggregation was simply presented as self-evident action, and *the* way to deal with the issue identified (i.e., insufficiently detailed reports). Members' sayings indicate that the proposed approach was straightforwardly understood as relevant – it was as though the preparation of quarterly technical reports unequivocally meant that data would be presented in such disaggregated form.

Shaping action

The third discursive process identified in all instances which produced a common sense of 'what to do', and ordinarily oriented organizational actions, is the shaping of actions. Simply put, as members' sayings and doings converged on a legitimated action, they also talked about what it involved – in more or less detail – or proceeded to act it out. This contributed to a further understanding of the actions to be performed, and their further construction as that which needed to be done to carry on with organizational activities.

As can be seen from the example below – where two staff members of Vy4Wellness were dealing with discrepancies when working on the first technical report of a new project – action was sometimes shaped basically as members acted out their common understanding of what constitutes legitimate action.

> A program staff (L) and a financial assistant (F) were going through the supporting documents provided by local partners, trying to match these with the regionally reported results. The office table was covered with neat piles of receipts, and pages listing regional quarterly targets, and result statements. While sorting through these documents, the two staff members exclaimed when they saw something that was not quite right. They lamented the fact that there were calculation errors on a few receipts, some others bore visible traces of correction, and others yet did not match the expected regional targets. The program staff (L) noted that everything had to match; and that was the understanding their actions reflected. The overall sentiment appeared

to be that a perfect match was required between the receipts, the expected and the achieved results. Indeed, both members were setting aside the few troublesome receipts, including those which showed that the results achieved surpassed expectations. As staff (L) noted those receipts that could not be rightfully revised would be written off.

In other cases, action was shaped as members progressively defined aspects of what they were going to do. This did not however happen through analytical decomposition of action into a series of precise steps to follow. Rather, it seems when there was a sense that other members would know what to do, very little further specification was provided – as a number of previous examples show. In other cases, action was shaped gradually as various aspects of it were spontaneously put forth, talked about, and excluded or retained based on practical considerations (e.g., resources, time, and logistics). An example follows:

During a staff meeting at ProLearning, members discussed the possibility of making changes to a project activity in order to attend to a newly perceived problem – the insufficient management capacity of some local partners. As some members noted, attending to that problem would mean carrying out this activity differently. But, everyone readily agreed that it was indeed an issue worth dealing with; and they deemed it relevant to make changes to the said activity. They thus started defining their actions. Various suggestions were put forth and discussed: in particular, who to target and what low management capacity looks like, which regions made sense given the available budget, and which presented fewer logistical challenges. Through these exchanges, they shaped action – while gradually defining what it meant to target low management capacity partners – and outlined some of the particulars of this action.

The formation of emergent strategies

Mundane organizational doings played an important role in ordinarily orienting actions, as has been discussed in the previous section. What's more, in the long run, these ordinary orientations of actions shaped organizational trajectories. Indeed, the common sense of 'what to do' which members produced or reproduced in performing their everyday work and attending to immediate concerns, meant that, over time, organizational activities were carried out in particular ways. Importantly, as the analysis reveals, in some cases, this led to consistencies of actions. In fact, in all three NDOs, when successive ordinary orientations of actions essentially carried through a common sense of 'what to do', what members did over time offered to view streams of actions with discernibly consistent, even if not always identical,

actions. I first present the various streams of consistent actions found. I then show the ways in which these consistent actions came about over time, in other words how emergent strategies formed in these organizations.

Organizational streams of actions

The findings show that the streams of consistent actions were diverse. In some cases, the actions performed over time to carry out organizational activities were the same continually repeated. In others, members' actions evolved as the months and years went by. In others still, new actions were discovered or adopted en route and performed onwards. The following example may help illustrate. Since the steady repetition of actions (whether habitual actions, or new ones performed onwards) might be somewhat self-evident, below is a case that might be less so, i.e., a stream where actions were adjusted over time.

> The implementation of ProLearning project activity, presented in the previous page, was changed to accommodate a newly perceived challenge (i.e., local management capacity issue). This was a well established activity which ProLearning had been carrying out in a particular way for some time (as members' exchanges during the instance of deliberate coping reveal). It was viewed, and implemented, as an experience-sharing event which was to focus on educational and health matters, and target new partners (as documents and interview data reveal). The actions previously performed to carry it out reflected this understanding – e.g., terms of reference were drafted, participating partners were identified, and materials were designed, produced and used accordingly. Following an instance of deliberate coping where members agreed to tackle low management capacity, the activity was continued but implemented differently. Without being completely changed – after all, experience-sharing was also about building capacity – it then acquired another aim: improving local partners' management abilities. This meant that it also focussed on management issues, targeted a different audience – i.e., existing partners with low management capacities – and members' actions (e.g. drafting the terms of reference, identifying participants, preparing the material) were modified. By the end of the research, this adjusted form had been carried out, and repeated three times (as corridor discussions reveal). In sum, the actions performed to implement this project activity (a regular organizational event) were adjusted over time.

Overall then, as the analysis reveals, organizational streams of actions also show consistency of actions in some cases where, similarly to the stream discussed above, actions

evolved over time. In these cases, the actions that members performed over time, while adjusted, still enacted the same practices (i.e., what members held as the appropriate ways of doing things).

For instance, in the example presented above, the ProLearning activity was altered in an effort to deal with a newly perceived challenge; yet, it continued in effect to be understood just as before. Indeed, members still approached it – and implemented it – essentially as a capacity building event concerned with improving local partners' skills and performance, and entailing efficiency [i.e., appropriate way of doing things resting on performance and efficiency as background references[22]]. They did not, for instance, suddenly re-interpret it and implement it as a competitive event aiming to weed out partners with low management capacities, nor an occasion for increasing the NDO visibility by selecting management topics, partners or regions which would get media attention. Thus, what members viewed as the appropriate way of carrying out this important activity was upheld and influenced actions, while the particular forms that their actions took at various moments of time reflected members' dynamic engagement with their contexts.

In sum, without being necessarily constant (i.e., invariable), the organizational actions composing each of the various streams identified were consistent (i.e., marked by regularities for the practices enacted). In the three NDOs, these consistencies of actions appeared over time through members' everyday work – and handling of fresh experience along the way – and not by design. I next describe in more detail how these unintended patterns formed.

Emergent strategies: how they formed

Thus, unintended consistency of actions owes to continuous practice enactment over time; and as the analysis reveals, such continuous enactment came about in different ways. Indeed, in the studied organizations, this occurred not only in the various cases where organizational actions were continuously repeated over time, but also when actions that were visibly

[22]. As noted in the *Data Analysis* section, practices were identified by analyzing members' sayings and doings with the help of the interpretive guide developed based on Boltanski & Thévenot (2006) and Thévenot (2001, 2006) – see table 3 in annex. In the case related here (i.e., the ProLearning activity), the analysis revealed that the 'appropriate ways of doing things' continued to rest on principles of performance and efficiency – i.e., Industrial organizing principles (see table 4). By contrast, if the analysis had shown that members talked about and implemented the activity as a competitive event or an opportunity to gain greater visibility – i.e., different background references – this would have suggested that the practices enacted rested on Market principles for the former, and Opinion/ public image for the latter.

modified over time remained in effect congruent with what members held as the appropriate ways of doing things (see table 5). More specifically, the findings reveal three different modes or pathways by which consistencies of actions arose unintendedly – or said differently, emergent strategies formed: (1) The replication of established ways; (2) The evolution of established ways; and (3) The adoption of new ways – see figure 4 and description below.

The r*eplication of established ways: unabated perpetuation of actions*

One pathway of formation is the unabated perpetuation of established actions. Indeed, the findings show that, in each NDO, certain project activities were implemented in the exact same ways over time which produced recognizable consistencies in its trajectory. In other words, certain practices were continuously replicated as members worked to carry out organizational projects. The actions performed were notably constant over time[23]. This means that they were continuously viewed by members as the appropriate ways of doing things, and accordingly repeatedly performed over time.

For instance, in Vy4Wellness, a contract-based/legal approach continuously oriented their work: the actions performed to implement collaborative activities consistently reflected an understanding that work is contract-governed and the terms of the agreements the NDO signed with its partners – local partners and funders alike – ought to be strictly applied. This particular way of doing was detectable in (and influenced) its operational decisions, its partnerships (e.g., how it dealt with local partners), and how it serviced local communities. This contract-based/legal approach produced a noticeable coherence of actions over time; however, not by design. Similar unintended patterns were also detected in the other NDOs. In EducAll, for example, a concern for community engagement was perceptible in how they carried out project activities. Engaging directly with, and showing respect to, local community members was considered the organization's responsibility and the right thing to do. For instance, when exploring or implementing project activities, members invariably conducted detailed consultations with local communities, carried out extensive site visits, and sought to

[23]. Over the period covered by the data collected in the three NDOs (through observation, interviews, and documents review), certain practices (i.e., appropriate ways of doing things) were continuously replicated. This made for durable patterns. This however does not imply that these practices would be the everlasting defining ways of doing things in these organizations. Indeed, under the perspective here adopted, it is always possible that new or altered ways of doing things might arise at some point in the future since members engage dynamically with their contexts.

maintain good rapport in the manner in which they dealt with them. This way of doing shaped their project development process – and to some extent the scope of the projects they engaged in – and also affected their resource allocation (time and money). In the case of ProLearning, for instance, actions were repeatedly performed which showed a concern for technical rigor in project development and delivery. This was clearly not a formal strategy, but the implementation of workshops and other project activities revealed a number of actions performed to generate and provide technically sound content (e.g., drafts, group reviews, validation, and preparing facilitators/implementers). Interestingly, the analysis also shows that technical reporting (i.e. reporting on project progress) was accomplished in all three NDOs in the exact same way over time. Surprisingly, it was constantly performed through three set of actions – field missions, data compilation, and report writing – oriented by a concern for quantification and financial exactness. The perpetuation of these established ways meant that technical reporting was done in the same way over time, which produced detectable consistencies of actions in the three NDOs, especially in terms of how accountability was done and how projects were managed.

The examples above illustrate how consistency of actions came about unintendedly for the unabated perpetuation of certain actions over time. This suggests that emergent strategies may form through the continuous replication of established ways. Importantly, this does not however mean blind execution or unfailing automatic order. In fact, each time members dealt with fresh experience, the existing (familiar) course of actions was tested, and established ways questioned. Only, they continued to be reproduced. Members, it seems, understood the actions they usually performed as the legitimate approach to carrying out organizational activities or accomplishing their work, despite or maybe even because of the fresh experience faced. Indeed, as the analysis shows, the fresh experience (e.g., the new information, circumstances or event) heeded to was often occasion for reaffirming the appropriateness of these actions. They were then *restated* or even *further anchored* by setting in words and deeds 'what is the correct way of doing things and what is not', and similarly what was expected – resulting, in effect, in the fine tuning or finer delimitation of the established ways of doing things.

Thus, the *restatement* or *further anchoring* of established ways contributed to reaffirming organizational preferences and priorities, and the appropriate actions to be performed. They

did so singly or jointly in the cases identified. While *restatement* occurred when members' exchanges easily converged on, or gradually confirmed, their habitual actions as the appropriate ways of continuing on, the *further anchoring* of established ways often involved more definite accounts and prescriptions. For example, in the case of Vy4Wellness, the tendency noted earlier to work through a contract perspective was reaffirmed in both manners over the research period. This established way was restated when it was explained to a prospective local partner (a budding youth organization) that the drafting and signing of a contract was the proper way to start working together on a small awareness-raising activity. This habituated way of doing things was also further anchored in another instance: when some local partners showed hesitation about using an organizational bank account to receive their funds, this challenge was attended to by flagging the signed contracts as all that mattered, and defining unequivocally members' actions as consisting in seeing to the application of contract terms – which included the use of such bank account for local partners' funds.

Another example is the previously highlighted technical reporting performed in all three NDOs. Members' coping actions related to this important activity showed arising issues being settled with definite accounts, which further anchored the established ways. The following illustrates such further anchoring at EducAll:

> This was a project meeting where regional members and the executive director were taking stock of a new activity aiming to help trainees from the non-formal education sector get their credentials recognized. A staff member briefly mentioned the objectives of the activity, chiefly in terms of the number of people to reach – which was written down on the blackboard – the information to obtain, and the localities where the activity would be conducted. Following a detailed presentation by staff members of the number of people reached, information collected and the process they used, questions of clarification were asked and answered. The executive director then asked: "and what's about the monitoring forms? You haven't used a monitoring form?". The staff members said quietly "no". Then, the executive director noted that those forms are important, since they allow members to record important details such as the duration of the interview, the cost of transportation, who was present for the interview, etc; and asked that such forms be used. These forms were thus used in subsequent work.

This example shows the reaffirmation of an established way of reporting on project implementation – more specifically recording data towards technical reporting. Members' exchanges clearly set what mattered (i.e., what was to be recorded), and what was expected.

The tendency to capture project data primarily in terms of numbers, quantities, and amount spent (i.e., a concern for quantification and financial exactness) – which was detected in EducAll's usual handling of technical reporting – was here further anchored.

On the whole, f*urther anchoring* occurred more when fresh experience was approached as a previously addressed issue, as if in an effort to be done with remaining ambiguity concerning 'what to do'. This suggests that whether *restatement* rather than *further anchoring* plays out might depend on how novel the challenge or opportunity faced is believed to be to those involved. Overall, the perpetuation of established ways of doing things in these organizations – through restatement and/or further anchoring – contributed to the detected consistencies of actions – i.e., the patterns that formed unintendedly.

The evolution of established ways: reproduction of actions through practical adjustments

The reproduction of actions through practical adjustments is another pathway by which emergent strategies formed in the studied NDOs. Under this mode of formation, the actions performed to implement project activities were similar over time but not the same. They were in fact adjusted and these adjustments carried through, sustained by what members held as the appropriate ways of doing these activities. What this means is that the practices enacted were reproduced – which generated the consistencies detected in organizational trajectories. But, their enactment evolved, as these organizations' established ways of doing things were altered (without being transformed) through mundane organizational doings.

The case related earlier of a ProLearning project activity whose implementation was adjusted to attend to a management capacity issue provides a telling illustration. As noted previously, the adjusted activity was carried on, and interestingly its onward implementation reveals a continuous concern for performance and efficiency. Indeed, organizational members visibly continued to understand and undertake this activity as a capacity-building effort, and while their actions were adjusted to incorporate the perceived need to also strengthen management capacities, they continued to be oriented by the same concern. Their established ways did not change so much as evolve.

EducAll provides another example. In this NDO, financial reporting was understood as a technical activity aiming to track project expenses and give accounts. Expense tracking was habitually carried out manually (i.e. using Microsoft Excel and funder-supplied template). An

opportunity arose to obtain an accounting software, paid for by a prospective funder. This was rejected at first by the NDO as the financial officer noted that "accounting softwares have flaws" and "for a local NDO they are not cost-effective". Over the next few months, the new project gradually took shape, and there were more exchanges (among members, and with the funder). Members came to the agreement that their financial reporting on this project would be done with the accounting software *and* a funder-supplied template – template which they requested be provided. As the financial officer noted "this option is acceptable". Thus, EducAll established ways of doing financial reporting evolved[24]. Their actions, while remaining consistent, were adjusted over time.

Another example where actions were reproduced over time through practical adjustments is the work done at ProLearning for awareness-raising on radio. Members understood this activity as one of facilitation, where the NDO helped local actors host radio shows to raise awareness on social issues. This understanding carried through over time. The actions performed to help local actors (i.e., radio training, dry-run, content validation) were however adjusted, and content validation in particular was adjusted to accommodate a seemingly revised view of the NDO's facilitation role (see abstract of members' related exchanges on p.107).

Thus, the actions carried on differed from past actions, but were still consistent for the practices reproduced. In fact, it seems, the enactment of these practices simply evolved, producing differences of form not substance. The analysis also shows that the actions carried on were *broadened* in some cases – e.g., ProLearning capacity building activity; EducAll financial reporting – and, in others, *reoriented* on some aspects perceived as core – e.g., ProLearning radio activity. Broadened actions meant that members' understandings of the appropriate ways of doing these activities came to include expanded forms, while reoriented actions suggested that their understandings refocused. The altered forms carried through and, it would seem, members' understandings of their organizations' preferences and priorities similarly evolved.

[24]. It is worth noting that by incorporating this accounting software, the organization was not just adding a tool to manage one project, but in effect its budget management was being altered (even if not transformed), since the use of such software affected the way in which budgets were prepared, spending done, and expenses tracked.

As mentioned previously, this happened as members carried out their everyday work (and not by design). This evolution was likely aided by particular contextual conditions which had a bearing on the accomplishment of their practices. For example, the greater importance given to local NDOs' management capacities is unmistakable in the development aid field nowadays[25]; equally, greater accounting automation and community involvement in project execution are trends associated with accountability movements[26] which few in this field would find surprising. In such historical and social/field contexts, organizational members' understanding of aspects of their work – e.g., what strong local partners, sound accounting, or facilitation meant – would have simply and non-deliberately evolved. This would have affected (although not determined) the scope of actions members viewed as appropriate for carrying out those types of activities. In face of fresh experience, then, adjustments to their habitual actions might have seemed rather normal.

In sum, consistency of actions came about unintendedly where established ways of implementing organizational activities evolved over time. Thus, emergent strategies may form where the actions performed over time continue to be oriented by the same (meaning-ful) concerns or tendencies, even if these actions are visibly adjusted to some new conditions affecting organizational work along the way.

The adoption of new ways: acceptance and performance of new actions

The third pathway of formation that the analysis reveals is the reproduction of new actions which could be described as unorthodox to the focal organization because they do not reflect its established ways. In other words, new appropriate ways of doing things are acquired along the way, and reproduced over time. They represent new practices which take hold and in effect replace how members used to carry out organizational activities.

For example, at EducAll, new practices were adopted – visibly not by choice or deliberate selection but rather through hasty imitation or resigned acceptance – which notably transformed how they carried out organizational activities. This happened in the early development stages of a new project originating from a Call-for-Proposals. As the description

[25]. See for instance *The Aid Chain: Coercion and Commitment in Development NGOs* published in 2007 by Tina Wallace, Lisa Bornstein, and Jennifer Chapman.

[26]. See for example *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action* published in 2009 by the OECD Development Cooperation Directorate.

below shows, members adopted new ways of doing things – then merely presented as "the standard" processes reportedly used by successful local NDOs to implement that type of project. They visibly knew little about these processes. They just took them on, without thoughtful consideration and without coercion, primarily to do as others did.

> Monitoring activities at EducAll were oriented by a concern for frequent interaction and engagement with local actors (as revealed through the analysis of this NDO's documents, and interview and observational data). They were carried out through what might be called a hands-on approach, involving the use of a number of systematized forms to collect data, while the approach itself remained flexible and minimally codified. Following the presentation of their monitoring process to the funder – through submission documents and during a face-to-face meeting – members were invited to further specify their approach and explain how ground-level data once collected would flow to the NDO's central office. This request put members in a state of disarray; and exchanges among members later on reflected their bewilderment and perplexity. It was during these exchanges that one staff member said that they needed only present a clearer "standard monitoring and evaluation process". This suggestion was not further explained, examined or debated. It became the monitoring process adopted for this project. It was included in the final documents submitted to the funder – its depiction following the information collected from a friend. This standard process was then applied in monitoring this project's activities.

Such off-the-cuff adoption of a 'standard monitoring and evaluation process' meant that in effect EducAll established ways of monitoring project activities were changed. Indeed, the 'standard monitoring and evaluation process' was oriented by a concern for efficiency and objectivity/detachment, which was substantively different from how EducAll had implemented its monitoring activities in the past. This new monitoring approach was however adopted – without much thought – and performed onward. Incidentally, the hastiness of their decision to go with 'the standard process' was further revealed in exchanges that unfolded at EducAll a few months later when members attempted to define their ground monitoring activities (i.e., data collection, oversight, etc.). They had then received a detailed project document and budget from the funder. Going through the budget document, they debated the scope of these activities, and realized that they could not do extensive site visits to oversee progress and collect data – which was their previous modus operandi. Eventually, they outlined their ground monitoring activities for that project in a manner that – according to the same staff member who had suggested the standard process – was congruent with how other NDOs reportedly

applied the standard process. As this example shows, a range of new actions were gradually adopted and performed onward at EducAll which transformed the way in which they implemented all monitoring related activities for this project. Members' understanding of their organizations' preferences and priorities relating to that area of activity would have changed as this new appropriate way of doing things was being appended and reinforced over time.

In sum, under this mode of formation, new actions adopted haphazardly – as members accommodated fresh experience – engendered new appropriate ways of doing things; the continued reproduction of which produced consistency of actions over time. In this case, emergent strategy is associated with newness; but newness that becomes established with little to no deliberate efforts to change organizational processes or affect organizational trajectory. Thus, emergent strategies may form as off-the-cuff decisions thrust organizations in a direction which none of their members intentionally chooses.

2.5 DISCUSSION

Strategies do not form just by design (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; De Rond & Thietart, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012); and emergent strategies are not a marginal organizational phenomenon, nor necessarily a sign of anomaly (e.g., Araujo & Easton, 1996; Lowe & Jones, 2004; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). Yet, we still know very little about these patterns that form unintendedly. By studying how they come about over time through what organizational members do in their everyday work, this research adds to our understanding.

It asked in particular two questions: how is organizational direction ordinarily produced?, and how does strategy then form unintendedly over time?. The findings show that members' everyday work importantly orients organizational actions; and, over time, these ordinary orientations may produce emergent strategies – in more than one way. Thus, this research provides new insights on the dynamic process of organizing collective action, and how this may lead to the formation of unintended patterns over time.

It makes, more specifically, three notable contributions. Before discussing these, it is important to acknowledge that working from details of the performance of everyday

organizational work in a few sites may understandably invite questions about broader relevance and generalizing the findings. With this in mind, I purposefully drew on multiple sources of data – i.e., not just data from observations of everyday organizational work, but also historical and retrospective data – in order to offer a clearer portrait of the strategy formation process. In addition, I have sought to make my meaning-making process transparent – by outlining in detail my research methods and providing rich descriptions – and, in so doing, help in the appreciation of the trustworthiness of the findings and the transferability of my theoretical ideas (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, Van de Ven, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). I also discuss below characteristics of the research sites which point to boundary conditions to consider when judging the broader relevance of the findings, and highlight possible future research work. Finally, it is important to recall that this research offers "analytical refinement", or said differently heuristic generalization (Tsoukas, 2009: 295). It thus grants new insights on strategy formation and the processes involved, but it does not purport to present an exhaustive mapping of all processes operating across contexts, nor rank their occurrence. Rather, its contribution overall is to further elucidate a poorly understood organizational phenomenon, in particular by allowing us to apprehend key aspects that have so far passed unnoticed. The three specific contributions are discussed next.

The doings of strategy: beyond formulation and implementation

Mundane organizational doings, as this research shows, contribute to shaping organizational trajectories in important ways. Indeed, these mundane doings – which might also be called organizing work – do not merely consist in a mechanical execution of predefined tasks and routine actions. Instead, as members perform their everyday work, they often find themselves in situations requiring that they reaffirm, remake or even create a common understanding of 'what to do' and 'how things should be done'. This is because new challenges or opportunities may arise, new realizations may be made, questions may appear, and differences in view may become manifest. Thus, members in effect often have to make sense, and make sense anew, of organizational activities in order to carry on; and this may lead to the production or reproduction of practices. As the findings illustrate, when practices are continuously enacted over time, consistencies of actions develop (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006; 2009; Tsoukas, 2010), which means that mundane organizational doings can give rise to realized strategies. This constitutes an important insight.

It, of course, does not mean that the contribution of strategic planning activities and events (e.g., retreats, strategic workshops, and town halls) to strategy formation is here being discounted. As a number of strategy-as-practice and strategy process studies show such targeted periodic doings may indeed shape strategies and foster their implementation (e.g., Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson & Schwarz, 2006; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Lowe & Jones, 2004), even if not always (e.g., Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd, & Bourque, 2010). The Strategy-as-Practice (SaP) perspective, in particular, has generated rich insights on strategy work, the actors involved, and the practices enabling and constraining actors' actions and decisions that affect strategy formation (e.g., Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 20012). My findings complement the contributions of this stream of research, and help extend it. Indeed, they highlight the often neglected, yet significant, role that mundane organizational doings play in strategy formation. My research thus shows empirically how such mundane doings may dynamically produce consistencies of actions over time; and, in so doing, it reveals forms of praxis and practice enactment that are implicated in emergent strategy formation – an area of research which has so far received less attention in SaP work (Vaara & Whittington, 2012: 313-315).

This research also offers new insights into *the investigation* of practices associated with emergent strategies. Indeed, these practices may not always be readily apprehended at the outset as 'strategic', whether by an observer or members themselves. In the studied organizations, for example, the patterned actions found were not viewed as 'strategic' by members, and they were scarcely noted as critical to organizational survival. They might even seem trite to some observers. Yet, the consistencies of actions were notable and affected their products (i.e., the delivery of their development assistance programs), their position (e.g., regional coverage), and their operations. My research thus also makes a contribution by showing empirically how emergent strategy research may be approached differently, without predefining the 'strategic' – e.g., without treating activities or practices labelled 'strategic' as that which undoubtedly has a bearing on strategy formation, and thus the main locus of research. In a way, these predefinitions tell us more about dominant representations of strategy than the phenomenon itself as it happens in organizations. Hence, this research suggests broadening the scope of our investigations so as to better capture emergent strategy formation. Future work could, for instance, build on an examination of mundane organizational doings to explore further strategy formation, and its varied real-life manifestations.

The discursive processes involved: orienting actions through talk

Another important contribution that this research makes is in pinpointing the discursive processes through which organizational direction is ordinarily produced. Indeed, collective action is rarely organized once and for all; and, as the findings show, more often than not a common understanding of 'what to do' and 'how things should be done' is (re)constructed as members ordinarily work their way through arising issues when carrying out organizational activities. The common understanding that they construct may simply reaffirm enacted practices, but it may also bring about change. On the whole, it allows actions to be *orderly* continued. The discursive processes identified reveal how such common understanding is arrived at, in other words, the work customarily performed by members to confirm or settle on the (appropriate) actions to perform – in a way, their organizations' preferences and priorities. In the studied organizations, talk was the occasion for such work. Their talk, thus, oriented action and, in what was said and done, sustained their practices. The discursive processes identified comprise: *Acknowledging fresh experience*, *Legitimating action*, and *Shaping action*.

Thus, as the findings show, for talk to orient action, the point at issue – e.g., the challenge, opportunity, or realization brought forth by a member – needed to be accepted by organizational members as relevant. Once they so *acknowledged it,* members tried to accommodate it in an appropriate way, and *a legitimating process* then unfolded. In other words, members put forth various approaches and ideas which were justified and/or critiqued, visibly in relation to what they viewed as appropriate and the particular representations they held of their organizations – i.e., what they are and what they do. Some approaches and ideas 'took' while others were destabilized, which led to implicit or explicit agreements about 'what to do'. At the same time, through these exchanges, members *shaped action* by defining inductively and mainly gradually details of the actions to carry out. Overall, these discursive processes contributed to legitimating certain actions (and the practices sustaining them) and thus their (re)production. This ordinarily oriented organizational actions, and also contributed over time to emergent strategy formation.

In highlighting these discursive processes, this research echoes previous studies which have convincingly established that discursive practices and processes have a bearing on strategy formation. These studies have illuminated the discursive acts (i.e., the activation or mobilisation of (accepted) discourses) by which strategies are created or implemented in

particular contexts (e.g., Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristö, 2004); and shed light on more detailed aspects of the processes involved – e.g., language use (e.g., Samra-Fredericks, 2003); discursive work, i.e., "the production, distribution and consumption of texts[27]" (e.g., Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014: 1206) – in shaping strategies.

Most of these studies have however focussed on deliberate strategy formulation or implementation, with the exception of Mirabeau and Maguire (2014)'s research. Like these authors, my research highlights the work involved in the production of organizational orientations which would qualify as emergent rather than deliberate. Mirabeau and Maguire (2014) show the crucial role played by PowerPoint slide decks in the discursive work of members across levels, which resulted in greater support for the new orientations, their official recognition and integration in the organization's formal strategy, and their further embeddedness through the alteration of structural context. My findings shed light on a complementary dimension: the discursive work done through talk. More specifically, they reveal the processes at play when talk – rather than other texts such as PowerPoint presentations – is primarily involved in members' discursive work. As my research shows, through these discursive processes – i.e., Acknowledging fresh experience, Legitimating action, and Shaping action – organizational orientations were (re)produced, shared, broadly accepted, and (further) established; and this contributed to consistencies of actions over time (i.e., emergent strategies).

The findings also suggest that for talk-based discursive work to influence organizational directions, it needs not involve deliberate orchestration or intentional moves aiming to so affect the organization. In fact, as was the case in the three studied organizations, members may simply be dealing with some immediate concerns and trying to carry on with their activities. This research thus highlights a less deliberate form of work which may easily pass unnoticed, yet significantly affect organizational trajectory over time. In so doing, it offers additional insights on the discursive work associated with emergent strategy formation.

This research also contributes an expanded understanding of the process of 'legitimating action' through which certain approaches and ideas come to orient organizational actions. In particular, it reveals that past experiences may be diversely evoked in this process. For

[27]. The authors' definition of *texts* follows from Hardy and Maguire (2010: 1367), who described texts as "symbolic expressions that are spoken, written or depicted in some way (…) making them accessible to others".

example, members of the studied organizations, in their attempts to legitimate the approaches and ideas put forth, appealed to and reinterpreted various representations or views of their organizations. So, in trying to establish congruity, they not only drew on specific past actions (i.e., attempt at historical congruity), but also pointed to organizational identity (i.e., attempt at character congruity), or noted and/or acted out accepted organizing processes (i.e., attempt at procedural congruity). This suggests that in discursively legitimating the proposed approaches and ideas – and indirectly, particular organizational orientations – past experiences are likely to be referenced, but in more than one way (e.g., Mintzberg et al., 1998). Without claiming exhaustivity, this research thus suggests that the process is likely more intricate than currently appreciated. It brings to light a diversity of ways that organizational members may draw on past experiences to present and reinterpret their organizations, and in so doing come to produce and reproduce organizational preferences and priorities.

Finally, although talk-based discursive work may be more prevalent in smaller organizations – for their relatively small staff size, limited geographical dispersion, and flatter hierarchies; such as was the case of the three studied organizations – it is important to note that the discursive processes identified are likely not limited to small organizations. In fact, I would argue, they may occur in other organizations where talk is implicated to some extent in members' discursive work associated with emergent strategy formation. Indeed, in most organizations, members ordinarily face fresh experience (i.e., arising issues); and they would likely try to deal with it so as to carry on (e.g., Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). It is thus conceivable that the verbal exchanges which may take place at the team, divisional, or corporate levels in relation to 'what to do' in face of fresh experience would be occasions for orienting organizational actions, and in so doing (further) establishing or destabilizing appropriate ways of carrying out organizational activities. So, for instance, newly perceived market conditions, technological opportunities or delays in production would likely be discussed and, if acknowledged as relevant issues, efforts would be made to deal with them in a manner that is deemed appropriate – hence legitimating certain approaches and shaping actions accordingly – so as to get on with organizational activities. Obviously, these discursive processes – i.e., Acknowledging fresh experience, Legitimating action, and Shaping action – are likely not the only ones taking place in organizations. In particular, in settings where other types of texts are more institutionalized and prevalent (e.g., use of more written guidelines, briefing notes and memos, than meetings or teleconferencing), the talk-based processes identified would likely

occur along or together with other types of discursive processes, and may be less important overall in the discursive work that comes to orient organizational actions. Future research could investigate their relative effect on emergent strategy formation in those settings.

The formation of emergent strategies: beyond newness

The findings also contribute to strategy process research and the Strategy-as-Practice perspective by offering new important insights on emergent strategy formation, that is, by clearly illustrating that emergent strategies may form in various ways. More specifically, the research reveals three possible modes or pathways of formation. It shows that strategies may form unintendedly over time owing to: the adoption and broader acceptance of new ways of carrying out organizational affairs; the continuous replication of established ways; and the evolution of established ways through practical adjustments. The first pathway shows us that unintended patterns may form over time when new unorthodox ideas or projects – unorthodox because at odds with expressions of organizational preferences and priorities, or intents – are taken on, leading to new ways of doing things carrying through. The second illustrates emergent strategy formation through continuous, and rather unconscious, reproduction of the organization's established ways of doing things. The third pathway of formation highlights yet another possible mode where orthodoxy and change coexist; it shows that unintended patterns may also form where organizational actions are visibly reworked adaptively over time but remain in effect consistent.

By shedding light on these diverse modes of formation, the findings extend existing research on emergent strategy formation, and help us better understand this rather common organizational phenomenon. First, in showing that it may happen through the adoption and broader acceptance of new unorthodox projects or ideas, the findings resonate with recent work which has enormously contributed to our knowledge on the formation of emergent strategies in that manner (e.g., Boyett & Currie, 2004; Grant, 2003; King, 2008; Lowe & Jones, 2004; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014). These studies helpfully point to the rise, acceptance and adoption of outlier initiatives – born despite or in the absence of senior management's prior intentions – through the work of operational, middle, and/or senior managers. My research suggests that the outlier initiatives (i.e., the unorthodox) which become broadly adopted may not arise from within the organization – a possibility raised by Mintzberg and Waters (1995).

These authors indeed noted that the patterns that form could reflect explicit or implicit impositions from the organization's environment. My findings illustrate one such case: the approach taken on and which carried through was borrowed haphazardly from the organizational field, through imitation (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). It was not directly imposed upon the organization, but it was visibly viewed by members, facing a situation experienced as perplexing, as what was obviously desirable. The findings thus enable us to see that emergent strategies may form through the broad adoption not only of homegrown initiatives arising from the creative endeavor and improvisational work of members but also of ideas and approaches borrowed from the organizational field without much consideration or choice.

Second, beyond newness, the findings clearly show that emergent strategies may also form through the continuous non-deliberate replication of organizational ways of doing things. As convincingly argued by Chia and Holt (2006) and others (see Chia & MacKay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010), insofar as strategies are patterns in streams of actions, they would form unintendedly over time for the continuous reproduction of practices (i.e., appropriate ways of doing things). As these authors note, such patterns would arise without members' deliberate intents, reflecting instead their modus operandi, or habituated tendencies, acquired as they partake in organizational activities and learn what to do and how to do it. The findings provide an empirical illustration of this mode of formation. Patterns formed in the studied organizations for the unabated perpetuation of certain actions which were simply performed to carry out organizational activities over time. What's more, even in face of newly perceived opportunities or challenges, these actions were reaffirmed and even fine tuned at times. For example, the tendency detected in one organization to always deal with local partners through a contract-based/legal perspective carried through, even in face of recurrent difficulties to get partners to adhere to contract terms and when dealing with smaller community organizations. By showing empirically this pathway of formation, the findings build on the theoretical proposition that emergent strategies may form through the continuous replication of established ways, and further suggest that such continuous reproduction may occur even as members face fresh experience.

Lastly, by revealing that emergent strategies may form when organizational actions are altered but remain consistent over time, the findings shed light on an important aspect which has so far been largely ignored. Indeed, actions may be adjusted over time – e.g., simply as

organizational members implement their activities – and yet not amount to a transformation of the practices enacted. Rather, nuances are brought to the ways that activities are carried out; and members' actions, although altered, continue to reflect the same habituated tendencies. Thus, their practices in effect remain unchanged, while enactment evolves. For instance, in one of the studied organization, the doing of 'capacity building' evolved – i.e., the actions performed were altered because a broadened understanding of the 'capacity' to strengthen was acquired over time – but the meaning it entailed remained the same. Similarly, one can imagine for example that, in a commercial corporation, 'delivering customer satisfaction' might evolve through "mutual adjustment" (Mintzberg, 1979) and become visibly changed, yet members' actions over time would be consistent. The findings thus show that emergent strategies may also form when members engage in incremental, and somewhat spontaneous, adaptations which do not transform their practices – in other words, altered actions may reproduce established ways unintendedly.

In sum, this research shows that emergent strategies do not form in organizations only when new ideas and projects are introduced, skillfully promoted, and broadly implemented following their successful incorporation into the organizations' strategic plans. Rather, it reveals three possible pathways of formation which are likely to be found in organizations. By making finer distinctions in the ways that consistency of actions takes form, this research helps refine our existing knowledge of emergent strategy formation, and our ways of thinking about emergentness.

Finally, while this article offers some important insights on the complex texture of emergent strategy formation, my study has some limitations. It does not, of course, provide a panoptic view of this organizational phenomenon across contexts; and future research could elaborate upon these pathways of formation by exploring other ways by which patterns may *just* form in organizational streams of actions. It is also important to note that the empirical setting that this research draws on has its particularities. These are relatively small NDOs which do not currently formulate and implement strategic plans. The varied pathways identified for emergent strategy formation might then possibly be interpreted as more reflective of modes of formation in small organizations. It might be argued that their small staff, and (generally) fewer formal rules and more nimble procedures, would make for the less orchestrated modes of formation here revealed. Yet, large corporations may also adopt new directions largely as a

result of field pressures rather than the deliberate change efforts of any of their members (e.g., Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). One can also reasonably speculate that, even in large organizations, established ways of doing things which are not recognized as official (deliberate) strategies may be continuously enacted over time – in a way, out of habit – and influence organizational trajectories. Further, it also seems quite possible that, in large firms, ostensible changes in organizational activities – for example, following the hasty adoption of a fashionable management concept (e.g., Benders & van Veen, 2001) – may in fact largely amount to "old wine in new bottles", and the actions performed over time would essentially remain the same. For these reasons, it would appear that the pathways of formation identified are not tied to organizational size.

The possibility of their occurrence may however depend on other factors. Indeed, in environments where formal strategies are highly institutionalized – and thus where 'not having' and (outwardly) following a strategic plan is frowned upon or discouraged – the explicitly formulated would be given greater importance, and emergent strategies might more readily form through deliberate orchestration or intentional efforts to link up budding initiatives or recognized patterned action with explicitly formulated strategies. Likewise, in settings where decision-making is highly centralized and/or the official directions are tightly enforced (e.g., an extremely focused structural context), emergent strategy formation may involve more calculated moves to protect budding initiatives and enable them to grow, and eventually obtain official validation for their further development. Thus, while the modes of formation identified through this research remain possible in all organizations, future research could examine the influence of higher degrees of institutionalization of strategic planning, and of centralization, on the ways that emergent strategies form.

Further, deliberate strategies are talked about and articulated in numerous organizations. Assuming that these become realized, another interesting research question may be how they coexist and interact with (realized) emergent strategies, and thus how they jointly contribute to shaping organizational trajectory. Future research could build on studies that have approached emergent and deliberate strategies sequentially – i.e., emergent strategies becoming deliberate – and explore, for example, whether they may also be staggered or how they combine (e.g., further or annihilate one another, or simply co-occur), and if they overall thus reveal dominant patterns that characterize the organization (or not).

2.6 CONCLUSION

This article approaches emergent strategy formation from a different viewpoint, a way of seeing which draws attention to mundane organizational doings and sets aside the assumption that strategy is primarily to be found in the documents, activities and events which we commonly label 'strategic'. By probing this assumption, and our common understanding that strategy in effect involves intentionality, this research captures the remarkable work that goes into ordinarily orienting organizational actions, and illuminates a diversity of ways that strategy may form unintendedly. In particular, it sheds light on the discursive processes through which organizational members mundanely orient their actions while implementing organizational activities. It also shows how such successive orientations influence organizational actions over time, and importantly reveals that emergent strategies may form in more than one way. By so doing, this research helps us better appreciate aspects of this rather common organizational phenomenon that have so far remained underexplored.

In revealing that different modes of formation are likely at play, this research shows that emergent strategies may form in organizations not only because of clever or surreptitious change efforts championed by some enterprising organizational member(s). Patterns may also form unintendedly in organizations' streams of actions over time without them being the product of any member's intentions. They may simply result from new approaches being taken on somewhat unthinkingly, or the continuous (and more or less unconscious) reproduction of organizational ways of doing things, even when changes take place. It is important to note that these various modes would not be exclusively associated with some settings. In other words, it is highly unlikely that one would find certain modes only in certain industries, organizational fields, or regions of the world – which, after all, is not particularly surprising. Previous studies of emergent strategy formation similarly suggest that they would occur in a variety of settings, whether they come about through members' creative or improvisational work (e.g., Boyett & Currie, 2004; Jäger & Kreutzer, 2011; Lowe & Jones, 2004; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014) or through the steady reproduction of actors' modus operandi (e.g., Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009). Emergentness, thus, is clearly relevant to all organizations; and this research suggests that emergent strategy formation may occur in various ways in any organization – each mode of formation being possibly more or less present at some point in time.

In the case of the organizations studied, the particular conditions they found themselves in at the time of the research may help explain the appearance of one mode or the other. Indeed, their levels of activity at the time of the research, their project pipelines and future prospects, their previous victories and failures, and their understandings of their environments are all elements which appear to have had an influence. While it is difficult to determine the effects of each of these elements, it would seem that they varyingly combined to affect how members dealt with fresh experience, and relatedly how organizational actions were ordinarily oriented (i.e., as established ways of doing things were reaffirmed, repeated, or discounted) and the patterns that formed unintendedly over time. For example, in one organization (EducAll), the hasty adoption of a new approach through imitation happened at a time when members were dealing with a type of project they were less familiar with, and facing questions that left them perplexed. In addition, they then had a low level of activity, fewer prospective projects, and visibly an overall less favorable opinion of their environment (e.g., a disappointing early termination of another project visibly left several members disheartened, and with the impression that their environment might have become less pliable).

These elements possibly combined to affect members' coping actions (in relation to the new project), and their hasty decision to forego their ways of doing things and imitate what other organizations reportedly do. Thus, the markedly perplexing situation and overall instability that members were experiencing then might help explain why they adopted rather quickly and somewhat unthinkingly a new approach that carried through over time. By contrast, when the organization was experienced by members overall as in less troubled waters – e.g., good level of activity, slightly growing pipeline of projects, stable and recurrent funding partners; such as was the case at Vy4Wellness – and project development and implementation appeared less disturbing for members, emergent strategies were found which took form through the steady reproduction of habitual actions over time. It is thus possible that the conditions that organizations not only face but also importantly how their members experience these – i.e., how they enact their contexts – might provide the reasons for the forms that emergent strategy formation takes at various times in their histories.

This research also importantly shows that even without formal strategies, organizational actions may be consistent and activities may unfold in rather orderly manners over time. While, the formulation of deliberate strategies – and especially strategic plans – is generally

praised in contemporary organizations and much of the literature, the findings of this research echo previous work in suggesting that their absence does not necessarily mean that chaos reigns and everything goes. In effect, it seems, strategic plans are (implicitly or explicitly) viewed as essential for steering organizations competently and achieving better performance. Not surprisingly, voices are mounting that nonprofit development organizations should systematically engage in strategy formulation. One could, of course, hardly argue that thinking more comprehensively about the organization as a whole and its actions – as opposed to focusing on its projects separately – would not be beneficial to some NDOs, and even possibly most. Such reflective moments may indeed help members take stock and consider the path that their organization has traveled. But, to see the formulation of strategic plans as a silver bullet for greater performance and effectiveness in aid delivery would clearly be hasty (e.g., Lewis, 2007). As suggested by Slevin and Covin (1997: 202) several decades ago we "should refrain from too quickly labeling planned strategies *or* emergent strategies as indicative of enlightened strategic management practice". The success of either type of strategy most likely depends on a "broad range of contextual forces" (ibid). Thus, it may not be as important that nonprofit development organizations 'have' strategic plans, as it is that they are able to better reflect on organizational decisions and actions, and whether and how these contribute to better programming, improved coordination, and intelligent responsiveness to changing local conditions – so, ultimately, greater development effectiveness.

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ANNEXES

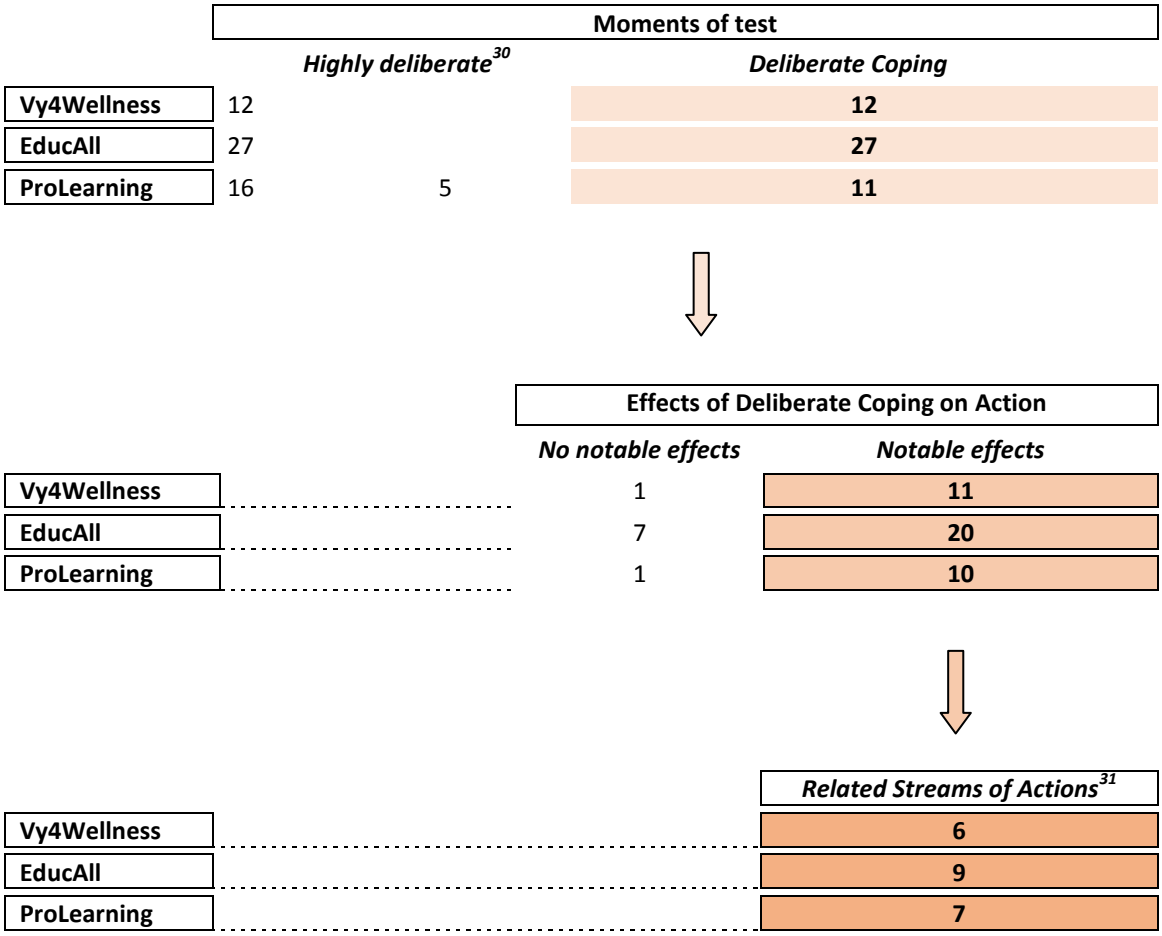
Table 1 : Overview of research data

	Research sites		Data collected			
	Organizational profile[28]	*Areas of work*	*Observational data*		*Complementary data*	
			Organizational work	Moments of test	Interviews	Documents[29]
Vy4Wellness	• Permanent staff: under 15 pers. (incl. 2 new staff members) • Consultants: rarely hired • Portfolio of projects: varied (projects at various stages of development) • Project activities carried out in collaboration with local actors	• Health sector (and economic development for better living conditions & better access to health services)	• Staff meetings • Project meetings • Project-related workshop • Meetings with partners • Project implementation • Corridor discussions	• 12 separate moments	~ 15 hours (10 pers., incl. all senior and technical staff)	70+ documents (>1000pages)
EducAll	• Permanent staff: under 10 pers. (incl. no new staff member) • Consultants: hired periodically • Portfolio of projects: varied (projects at various stages of development) • Project activities carried out in collaboration with local actors	• Education sector (and improving living conditions & health)	• Staff meetings • Project meetings • Project-related workshop • Meetings with partners • Project implementation • Corridor discussions	• 27 separate moments	~ 6 hours (5 pers., incl. all senior and technical staff)	65+ documents (>900pages)
ProLearning	• Permanent staff: under 20 pers. (incl. 2 new/returning staff members) • Consultants: rarely hired • Portfolio of projects: varied (projects at various stages of development) • Project activities carried out in collaboration with local actors	• Education sector (and improving health behaviours & living conditions)	• Staff meetings • Project meetings • Project-related workshop • Meetings with partners • Project implementation • Corridor discussions	• 16 separate moments	~ 30 hours (18 pers., incl. all senior and technical staff)	75+ documents (>1500pages)

[28]. The permanent staff of all three NDO included an executive director; program/project officers; and administrative support staff (i.e., financial officer and/or financial assistant; monitoring and evaluation officer; communication/outreach officer; administrative assistant). All executive directors were founding members, and at the time of the research they had occupied their positions for well over 15 years. All three NDOs had experienced relatively little employee turnover in the years preceding the research.

[29]. The documents reviewed included project and organizational documents. Project documents were often available on ongoing projects and also older projects (i.e., dating back to 2007). Organizational documents included overview documents (i.e., undated brochures or pamphlets) outlining the organization's *raison d'être*, broad statements about its areas of work, and a listing of its achievements. Meeting minutes were also available from 2008 onwards. Finally, there were also some fact sheets on specific projects or partners.

Figure 1. Deliberate Coping and Organizational Actions over Time



[30]. These instances – i.e., highly deliberate modes of action – where identified in the analysis of members' utterances, exchanges and actions, by drawing on the Heideggerian framework (Tsoukas, 2010) which proposes that in such instances, actors' sayings tend to be more general and abstract, and their engagement with their contexts more detached from the situation at hand, and turned towards organizational structures or directions. Importantly, although the identified instances show that members intentionally and deliberately tried to shape some organizational matters, they nonetheless did not try to create formal strategies or define future organizational states. Instead, these few instances were about: taking stock of past actions – e.g., planning a funder-led evaluation together with the funder; preparing a document providing an overview of the existing project portfolio for clearer communication with local authorities – or formed part of efforts aiming to streamline regional presence.

It is also worth noting that there was insufficient data to determine if these instances had any effects on these organizations' trajectories. Indeed, by the end of the research period, the actions so devised had not yet been fully articulated, or carried out.

[31]. Four points are worth mentioning here. First, these streams of actions represent all the cases for which the data available suggests that organizational members performed similar actions over time as they carried out their activities. These do not thus include the cases which appeared to be one-off actions, of those where no action had been agreed on and/or performed by the end of the research. Second, these streams of actions indicate that similar actions were performed over time. These actions had many similarities, but were not necessarily identical. Third, the streams of actions were identified not only through the instances of deliberate coping, but also by reviewing the interviews (retrospective data), the documents collected (historical data), and the remaining observational data. Finally, several instances of deliberate coping may be involved in each stream. This is because successive instances may relate to the same project activity and deal with the same matter. Indeed, as project activities took shape or were implemented, sometimes organizational members perceived new contextual cues (e.g., certain events, pieces of information, deficiencies) and came to talk again about 'what to do'.

Table 2. Emergent Strategy Formation: Identifying the discursive processes involved

The following provides an illustrative example of the interpretative analysis carried out to identify the processes by which direction is ordinarily produced.

This situation analyzed is an instance of deliberate coping observed at ProLearning – .e., a moment when fresh experience (i.e., the poor management capacity of some local partners flagged as a challenge) led to different views being voiced and members debating anew how they should implement a core organizational activity (i.e., a capacity building event known as Share/Learn Days that they had been carrying out for years). This instance occurred during a staff meeting where members reported on various work, including the drafting of 'a consolidated programme'. It was attended by the executive director (F), finance/administration officer (T), program officers (N; A; D), financial assistant (M), and administrative assistant (S).

The findings of the analysis here reproduced were compared and contrasted with those of other instances of deliberate coping (similarly analyzed) to bring out the discursive processes through which members oriented organizational actions. While, for lack of space, the entire analytic process cannot be presented here, the table below shows how each instance was carefully analyzed by: bringing out and examining the succession of arguments (using narratives, and visual mapping), and how fresh experience was dealt with, agreement reached and actions oriented.

The instance is presented first and the analysis next. NB: The abstract was translated from French to English, and all names are pseudonyms.

One instance of deliberate coping as it unfolded

A : (...)
Also, another limitation, I think, is the fact that there are only 20 young people and 15 technical support people for the Share/Learn Days; this is a small group [of local partners]

T : I am thinking, I mean thinking as we are talking about this, that maybe we could organize the Share/Learn Days where there are currently some concerns, and that way, try to use the Share/Learn Days to strengthen the capacity of the technical people, could we not ?

A : If we go with this idea, and I mean if, we will have to rework the materials for the Share/Learn Days since the participants are going to change.

T : I don't think that everything must be reworked. I think that the material on ProLearning, the info on the pandemic etc., still fit. I think that what is going to change is the thematic sessions stuff.

F : Well, I see three Share/Learn Days. If it is to do this strengthening, you cannot do it in the regions currently identified. When S came to me with the letters to sign, I did not want to upset her so I signed, but

T : the activity has not yet been validated since she said no when it was presented to her. So, they skipped the existing procedure and went straight to the executive director. That's great, carry on; in any event, the activity is not validated.

S : I did not try to pass over anyone. I was asked to get the letters signed.

F : It is not for S to respond; rather it shows that when a meeting like this one is coming, it means holding off anticipatory actions such as the invitation letters for example.

You see N. We ask you to make an effort to create a consolidated programme because donors, they now expect activities to be integrated and well justified. We are asked to give the reasons for our site selection, and why we do what when. So, the schedule of activities is very important, and besides it allows us to better fit our activities together.

T : The procedure in place has not been followed. In any event, even if the letters are signed, well we will see, because I will not at any rate bear responsibility for this; and since the boss is here and he has signed, go ask him for the budget, and if he signs, the responsibility will lie with him.

M : There is a local partner who wants to be paid, and he is insisting a lot.

N : Tell them all to wait.

F : I think we have to be very concrete here. So, there are three Share/Learn Days: where do you want to do them?

There was then a discussion during which several regions were proposed and debated, in an attempt to identify the sites (that are sources of concern) described as 'not very active' where the Share/Learn Days could be organized.

F : We have to identify the points of weakness, and get people together to address these points of weakness, that it's.

Upon this remark, F offered a few sites as suggestions. This gave rise to a series of other suggestions put forth by several members who backed up their propositions with the reason(s) why they viewed those sites as weaker.

D : We have to take into account the number of local groups they service, the state of these, and the abilities of the technical support people; we have to take all that into account.

N : The site must be one where ProLearning is still not very well known; that way we can boost activities and be more visibly present in the region. In Goudi, for example, there is a young energetic person who even uses his own funds for activities. The idea is to go where ProLearning has not been, has not carried out activities recently.

D : I suggest Daga since it is a site with problems.

N : I think we should go to Goudi. Every time they invite ProLearning, we don't go; so now it would be really important to go.

F : I suggest that we do a community outreach activity in Goudi with the objective of reinvigorating and boosting current efforts.

N : That's a good alternative.

F : One has to keep a cool head when going over what can be done, and leave aside subjectivities, frustrations, and ask oneself 'what is the best use I can make of this opportunity?'. If you carry out a community outreach activity in Goudi, would that be ok?

N : Yes, we can cover Goudi with a community outreach activity; that is fine. It's because there are certain pressures and strains that I face and have to deal with for ProLearning. This young person does a lot with his own funds; if we do not encourage him, it is not right. Plus, we have not done anything in Goudi.

F : We have identified regions that must be reenergized. Now, based on these regions and accessibility, choose the sites for the Share/Learn Days.

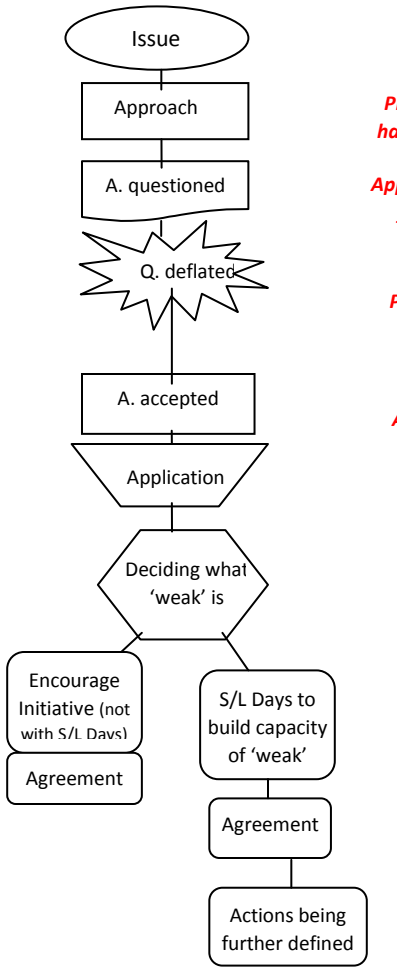
T : A remote area, and transportation alone will take up all the funds available for the training

More discussion ensued between the program officers, with some occasional comments from T. N then proposed that the first Shared/Learn Days be held in Guin. (...). They discussed some more on possible sites for the Shared/Learn Days, and it was proposed that the two remaining ones be organized in Nioro, and Sabata. Then Nioro was replaced by Daga as discussions continued to unfold: several members pointed out that they were not familiar with Nioro and planning it out there would be more difficult for the logistics, and N stated that he really didn't have a good grasp of that area; and it was then that Daga was suggested again. N said that in his view organizing Share/Learn Days in Daga was not necessary because they could simply invite partners to come to ProLearning. But, no other suggestions came forth, and the comments made suggested that everyone agreed that Daga as a site was experiencing problems. Following this, T asked that they draft one ToR (i.e., terms of Reference) for the three Share/Learn Days. Members then debated that suggestion and different views were put forth as not everyone agreed. F then suggested that the ToR be adjusted for each region so that, in describing the context, they speak to the specific challenges that the Share/learn Days will help address at the site level.

Following this, F said that they were approaching the end of the meeting, and asked if anyone had other matters to bring forth or news to share

ANALYZING THE INSTANCE OF DELIBERATE COPING

Narrative fore-grounding the succession of arguments	*Visual mapping and Early insights*
1) T gives new importance to a problem: insufficient management capacity in regions = *Issue*	
2) T suggests organizing S/L Days with view to strengthen this capacity = *Approach*	
-> 3) Comments (A; F) that doing S/L Days this way means changing how they usually do it and existing plans	
-> 4) Responses: T questions expressed concerns and validity of existing plans (procedures not respected)	
5) Discussions re-opened on S/L Days: where do we do them concretely to do *this* strengthening	
6) Capacity problem (not debated) is now basis of talk on S/L Days (= *Issue accepted*)	
7) Several suggestions made based on which site is weak or weaker (= *Approach Accepted*)	
8) N proposes region where work done is embryonic, but people do activities with own funds -> 9) D proposes another region	
-> 10) N insists, and states that site has been neglected and it is important to go there now	
11) F proposes to do another activity instead in the region suggested by N	
-> 12) N accepts, and says it is a good alternative (+add more justification for why he was insisting)	
13) Discussions then focus on S/L Days and several members suggest various weak regions; what is understood as 'weak' being gradually clarified	
14) Three regions identified (weak + logistically accessible) and agreement reached	
15) Discussions conclude with decisions on the drafting of ToRs (ToRs adapted for each site).	



Fresh experience

Proposed Approach to handle fresh experience

Approach questioned (but not fresh experience, visibly accepted)

Procedural error noted to undermine objections

Approach accepted ("this strengthening" seems commonly understood)

Organizational actions shaped iteratively (and in so doing, Approach similarly further specified)

Specific things to do for doing 'this strengthening' during S/L Days gradually defined

THEN: *by* comparing and contrasting findings across instances of deliberate coping, I was able to refine these early insights and identify the discursive processes.

Table 3. Interpretive guide used to identify actors' background references (i.e., the driving force governing practices)

(*Descriptors defined based on the theoretical frameworks of Boltanski & Thévenot (2006, esp. p.159-211), and Thévenot (2001 (esp. p.61-68), 2006))*

Conventional utility	**Semantic descriptors**
Ordinary talk	- *Format of relevant information*: Ordinary semantics of action, i.e., loose denomination (description stays close to what actors suppose is their common knowledge of things and their usage) e.g., a project talked about as the work to do - *Which reality is engaged/What counts*: Typical actions and objects, i.e., as they are typically assumed to be (actions and objects evoked reflect their assumed typical utilization and functional capacity (NB: without efforts or talk to ground such assumptions) e.g., a project proposal utilization is for knowing the activities to do - *Which Good is engaged/ What grounds coordination*: Confirmation of mutual understanding is sufficient to close exchange/judgment e.g., agreement to move on a project without needing to recourse to justification
Orders of Worth (legitimate conventions)	- *Format of relevant information*: Codified, i.e., denomination systematized and conventional (talk more formalist which reveal various orders of worth) - *Which reality is engaged/What counts*: the forms that saying and doing may take to be deemed appropriate are defined (e.g., appropriate objects, subjects, capabilities, states, evidence, judgment, actions, etc.) and depend on the order of worth instantiated (see semantic descriptors below) - *Which Good is engaged/ What grounds coordination:* Different common good appear as the organizing principle for each order of worth (see below)
Industrial	- Efficiency, performance, future - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Functional, reliable, operational (*Appropriate States*); Inefficient, unproductive, not optimal, inactive, unreliable (*States of Inappropriateness*); Work, human potential, human energy, human performance (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Professionals, experts, specialists, technicians, operators, one who has received reputable training <i.e., from international institutes> (*Appropriate Subjects*); Means, tool, resource, method, task, homogeneous plan, criterion, definition, list, chart, calendar, goal, quantity, variable, series, average, probability, standard, factor, cause, template, disaggregated data, monitoring system, performance indicator, CV <i.e., curriculum vitae>, trail of documents (*Appropriate Objects*); Organization, system (*Appropriate Evidence*); Trial, setting-up, putting to work, achievement (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); Effective, correct, in working order, functioning (*Appropriate expression of judgment*); Progress, investment, dynamic <i.e., avoid obsolescence>; Integrate, organize, control , stabilize, order, anticipate, implant, adapt, detect, analyze, determine, measure, formalize, standardize, optimize, solve (*Appropriate Actions*) - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]

Market	- Competition, rivalry, competitors - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Desirable, of value, salable, being rich, being a winner (*Appropriate States*); Losing out, being unwanted (*States of Inappropriateness*); Self-interest, love of things, satisfying own desires (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Competitor, businessman, salesman, client, buyer (*Appropriate Subjects*); Wealth, luxury item, marketable thing, the very latest thing/fashion, building as assets (*Appropriate Objects*); Market <i.e., where goods acquire their price>, money <i.e., standard defining market value>, commission, fee, honorarium (*Appropriate Evidence*); When deal is done/ in the bag, settled, deal materialized by signing a contract (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); Price, value that is justified in relation to a general price (*Appropriate* E*xpression of Judgment*); Opportunism, engaging in transactions with emotional distance; Possess, doing business, buy, sell, negotiate, benefit from, pay, compete, being paid for, getting money for (*Appropriate Actions)* - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]
Civic	- Preeminence of collectives, collective persons, union of all - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Rule governed and representative, common to all, duly mandated, authorized, legal <i.e., officially recognized; regulatory texts> (*Appropriate States*); Aspiration toward what unites people, civil rights aspirations, political aspirations, appreciating participation (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Collective persons <e.g., public collectivity, party, federation, chapter, committee>, and their representatives <e.g., elected official, representative, delegate, secretary, member, local authorities (*Appropriate subjects*); Polling stations, legal forms, rights, legislation, decree, courts, procedure, official transcripts, policy, official statement, memorandum of understanding <i.e., roles and responsibilities of all involved codified in texts> (*Appropriate Objects*); That which ensures the representation of collectives, democratic republic, electoral bodies, the legal text, legal rules, statutes (*Appropriate Evidence*); Demonstration for a just cause, assembly, congress, meeting of the membership, recourse to the law (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); Verdict of the vote, voting, consultation, mobilization, supporting a cause (*Appropriate Expression of Judgment*); The renunciation of the particular, solidarity, struggle for a cause, gathering for collective action, active mobilization, legalize, publicize policies, debating democratically, refer to legal texts/ rules or the law, sacrificing own needs for the welfare of the collective <i.e., altruism> (*Appropriate Actions*) - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]
Domestic	- Engenderment according to tradition, generation, hierarchy, tradition - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Hierarchical superiority, benevolence, distinguished for being appreciated by superiors or leaders, deferential in face of superiors, rooted in tradition, well brought up, attentive to intimates, discreet, reserved, trustworthy, honest, faithful (*Appropriate States*); The poise of habit, good sense, habits, character (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Superiors: father, ancestors, parents, family, grownups, leader, boss, elder; inferiors: unmarried person, foreigner, woman, child; and others: visitors, guests, neighbors, third parties (*Appropriate Subjects*); The rules of etiquette, good manners, proper behavior, rank, title, introduction, signature, announcements, gifts, flowers, filiation, genealogy (*Appropriate Objects*); Household, family, milieu, principles, customs, exemplary anecdote, prejudice (*Appropriate Evidence*); Family ceremonies, celebration, birth, death, marriage, social events, occasions such as the receipt of a distinction (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); Knowing how to render judgment (e.g., bestow trust, appreciate, congratulate, compliment, criticize, report) in person (*Appropriate Expression of Judgment*); Reject selfishness for duties, have consideration for others, reproduce, give birth, inculcating proper behavior, invite, give, receive, return, make recommendations, thank, respect (*Appropriate Actions*) - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]

Opinion / Fame	- The reality of public opinion <i.e., the public at large> - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Famous, reputed, recognized, being known, visible, distinguishing oneself, getting attention (*Appropriate States*); The desire to be recognized, desire for respect, aptitude for self-love (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Stars and their fans, famous personalities, opinion leaders, journalists, public relations agents (*Appropriate Subjects*); Names in the media, brand name, name on public medium (e.g., banner, label, badge), slogan, public relations, communicating an opinion through press, interview , radio show (*Appropriate Objects*); Public image, audience (*Appropriate Evidence*); Presentation staged for visibility, open house, press conference, inauguration (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); Public opinion, rumor, a standing, sensation (*Appropriate Expression of Judgment*); Give up secrets, reveal, persuade, influence, get a message across, propagate, amplify (Appropriate actions) - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]
Inspired	- The outpouring of inspiration, illumination - [*ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE*] - Inexpressible and ethereal, bizarre, unusual, marvelous, unspeakable, disturbing, exciting, spontaneous, emotional (*Appropriate States*); Desire to create, love for the object pursued, passion, anxiety of creation (*Appropriate Capabilities*); Visionaries, spirit, fairy, madman, artist (*Appropriate Subjects*); Mind, body, dream, fantasy, unconscious, drug (*Appropriate Objects*); Exploring the imaginary, descending into the unconscious, symbols, signs, images, myths (*Appropriate Evidence*); Vagabondage of the mind, adventure, quest, mental voyage, meditation (*Appropriate/Telling Events*); The stroke of genius, illumination, intuition, bubbling up, revolution, aura, divine inspiration (*Appropriate Expression of Judgment*); Escape from habits, call into question, accept risk, accept detours, create, discover, put oneself in a questing state, imagine, dream (*Appropriate Actions*) - [*WHICH REALITY IS ENGAGED*]

Table 4. Emergent strategy formation: Identifying the appropriate ways of doing things (i.e., practices)

This provides an illustrative example of the analysis performed to identify the appropriate ways of doing things (i.e., practices) in studied organizations. Practices are meaningful ways of doing things which shape organizations' actions. Thus, finding out the practices that members (re)produce – through their mundane doings and the meaning these entail – and how they are enacted, help us better appreciate the nature of the actions performed in organizations.

Next, to determine whether actions were consistent over time (i.e., unintended consistency of actions), I look at practice reproduction over time. In other words, in addition to the close study of the observational data (such as what is presented below), I analyzed the historical and retrospective data collected (i.e., the interviews, and documents) to see whether the practices identified were reproduced (or not), and how those reproduced were enacted over time.

The instance of deliberate coping used for this illustrative example took place at ProLearning – for ease of visualization, this is the same instance used in Table 2. During this instance of deliberate coping, ProLearning members faced the realization that poor management capacity of some local partners was an important challenge. Their exchanges led to a debate about how they should implement a core organizational activity (i.e., a capacity building event known as Share/Learn Days that they had been carrying out for years). This instance occurred during a staff meeting where members reported on various work, including the drafting of 'a consolidated programme'. It was attended by the executive director (F), finance/administration officer (T), program officers (N; A; D), financial assistant (M), and administrative assistant (S).

NB: The abstract was translated from French to English, and all names are pseudonyms.

One instance of deliberate coping as it unfolded	***Identifying the appropriate ways of doing things*** Analysis done using the interpretive guide (see Table 3)
A : (...) Also, another limitation, I think, is the fact that there are only 20 young people and 15 technical support people for the Share/Learn Days; this is a small group [of local partners]	⟩ Industrial principles (cf. number/quantity [Appropriate objects]; Small group for S/L Days, i.e., not optimal size [State of Inappropriateness]).
T : I am thinking, I mean thinking as we are talking about this, that maybe we could organize the Share/Learn Days where there are currently some concerns, and that way, try to use the Share/Learn Days to strengthen the capacity of the technical people, could we not ?	⟩ Ordinary talk (e.g., "*concerns*")[loose denomination] ⟩ Industrial principles (cf. S/L Days to strengthen capacity / human performance [Appropriate Capabilities]).
A : If we go with this idea, and I mean if, we will have to rework the materials for the Share/Learn Days since the participants are going to change.	⟩ Ordinary talk [loose denomination]

T :	I don't think that everything must be reworked. I think that the material on ProLearning, the info on the pandemic etc., still fit. I think that what is going to change is the thematic sessions stuff.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination; typical objects referenced without further information / definition]
F :	Well, I see three Share/Learn Days. If it is to do this strengthening, you cannot do it in the regions currently identified. When S came to me with the letters to sign, I did not want to upset her so I signed, but	Industrial principles (cf. number [Appropriate Objects]; inadequate regions for S/L Days for *this* capacity strengthening [State of Inappropriateness])
		Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
T :	the activity has not yet been validated since she said no when it was presented to her. So, they skipped the existing procedure and went straight to the executive director. That's great, carry on; in any event, the activity is not validated.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination] Civic principles (to suggest signed letters = not appropriate; procedures [Appropriate Objects]) Argument serves to leave proposed change on table
S :	I did not try to pass over anyone. I was asked to get the letters signed.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
F :	It is not for S to respond; rather it shows that when a meeting like this one is coming, it means holding off anticipatory actions such as the invitation letters for example. You see N. We ask you to make an effort to create a consolidated programme because donors, they now expect activities to be integrated and well justified. We are asked to give the reasons for our site selection, and why we do what when. So, the schedule of activities is very important, and besides it allows us to better fit our activities together.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination] Ordinary talk [loose denomination; Reference to another work being done by N - actions and objects evoked without further information / definition]
T :	The procedure in place has not been followed. In any event, even if the letters are signed, well we will see, because I will not at any rate bear responsibility for this; and since the boss is here and he has signed, go ask him for the budget, and if he signs, the responsibility will lie with him.	Civic principles (cf. not respecting procedures in place [Appropriate Objects]; signing authority, qualified representatives [Appropriate Subjects]) Argument reiterates fact that activity is not settled

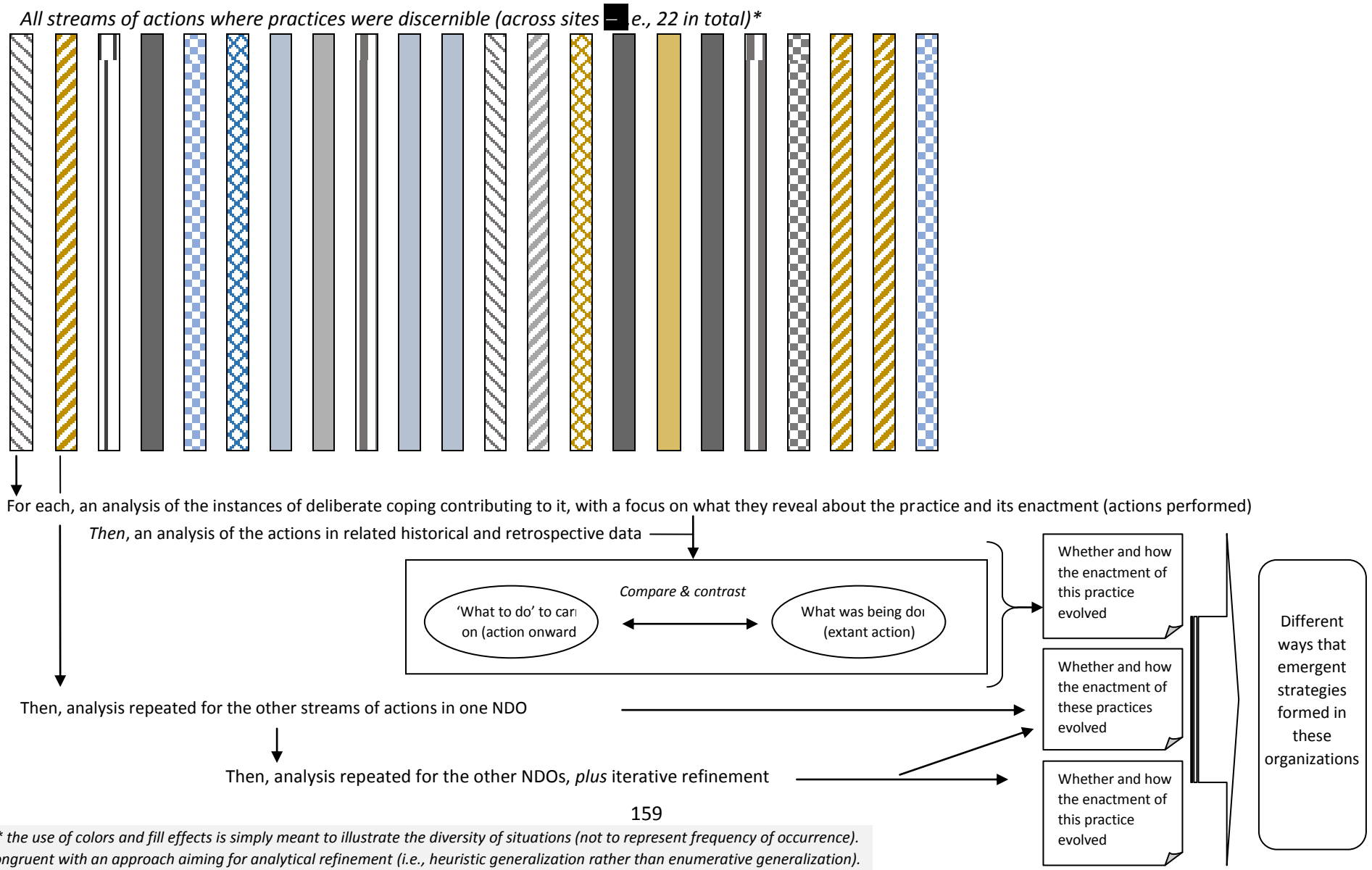
M : There is a local partner who wants to be paid, and he is insisting a lot.	⟩ Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
N : Tell them all to wait.	⟩ Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
F : I think we have to be very concrete here. So, there are three Share/Learn Days: where do you want to do them?	⟩ Industrial principles (cf. being specific: operational view to move forward on S/L Days [Appropriate States]; number [Appropriate Objects])
There was then a discussion during which several regions were proposed and debated, in an attempt to identify the sites (that are sources of concern) described as 'not very active' where the Share/Learn Days could be organized.	⟩ Industrial principles (cf. inactive regions [State of Inappropriateness] to target for the altered S/L Days)
F : We have to identify the points of weakness, and get people together to address these points of weakness, that it's.	⟩ Ordinary talk [cf. for instance "*points of weakness*", "*get people together*" [loose denomination])
Upon this remark, F offered a few sites as suggestions. This gave rise to a series of other suggestions put forth by several members who backed up their propositions with the reason(s) why they viewed those sites as weaker.	
D : We have to take into account the number of local groups they service, the state of these, and the abilities of the technical support people; we have to take all that into account.	⟩ Industrial principles (cf. number [Appropriate Objects]; state/working order [Appropriate Expression of Judgment] as key considerations for carrying out altered S/L Days)
N : The site must be one where ProLearning is still not very well known; that way we can boost activities and be more visibly present in the region. In Goudi, for example, there is a young energetic person who even uses his own funds for activities. The idea is to go where ProLearning has not been, has not carried out activities recently.	⟩ Industrial/Opinion principles (cf. being known & being operational [Appropriate States]; boost activities [Ind. Appropriate Actions]; Industrious person [Ind. Appropriate Capabilities]).
D : I suggest Daga since it is a site with problems.	⟩ Ordinary talk [loose denomination]

N :	I think we should go to Goudi. Every time they invite ProLearning, we don't go; so now it would be really important to go.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
F :	I suggest that we do a community outreach activity in Goudi with the objective of reinvigorating and boosting current efforts.	Industrial principles (in relation to doing another activity in Goudi - cf. boost efforts [Appropriate Actions])
N :	That's a good alternative.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination]
F :	One has to keep a cool head when going over what can be done, and leave aside subjectivities, frustrations, and ask oneself 'what is the best use I can make of this opportunity?'. If you carry out a community outreach activity in Goudi, would that be ok?	Industrial principles (in relation to reaching decision for Goudi - cf. analyze objectively, optimize [Appropriate Actions])
N :	Yes, we can cover Goudi with a community outreach activity; that is fine. It's because there are certain pressures and strains that I face and have to deal with for ProLearning. This young person does a lot with his own funds; if we do not encourage him, it is not right. Plus, we have not done anything in Goudi.	Ordinary talk [loose denomination] Industrial principles (in relation to Goudi's situation; cf. industrious person [Appropriate capabilities] who ought to be supported)
F :	We have identified regions that must be reenergized. Now, based on these regions and accessibility, choose the sites for the Share/Learn Days.	Industrial principles (cf. where to do altered S/L Days are regions to boost/potentiate [Appropriate Actions])
T :	A remote area, and transportation alone will take up all the funds available for the training	Industrial principles (cf. optimizing use of funds/ seeking efficiency [Appropriate Actions])
More discussion ensued between the program officers, with some occasional comments from T. N then proposed that the first Shared/Learn Days be held in Guin. (...). They discussed some more on possible sites for the Shared/Learn Days, and it was proposed that the two remaining ones be organized in Nioro, and Sabata. Then Nioro was replaced by Daga as discussions continued to unfold: several members pointed out that they were not familiar with Nioro and planning it out there would be more difficult for the logistics, and N stated that he really didn't have a good grasp of that area; and it was then that Daga was suggested again. N said that in his view organizing Share/Learn Days in Daga was not		Industrial principles (cf. to master various regional aspects / to organize effectively the altered S/L Days [Appropriate Actions]).

necessary because they could simply invite partners to come to ProLearning. But, no other suggestions came forth, and the comments made suggested that everyone agreed that Daga as a site was experiencing problems. Following this, T asked that they draft one ToR (i.e., terms of Reference) for the three Share/Learn Days. Members then debated that suggestion and different views were put forth as not everyone agreed. F then suggested that the ToR be adjusted for each region so that, in describing the context, they speak to the specific challenges that the Share/learn Days will help address at the site level. *Following this, F said that they were approaching the end of the meeting, and asked if anyone had other matters to bring forth or news to share.*	) Industrial principles (in relation to the actions to perform to implement S/L Days – f. Terms of reference /homogeneous document [Appropriate Objects], with section adapted to reflect the specific regional challenges [Appropriate Actions]).

OVERALL: the findings of this analysis, combined with the analysis of the retrospective and historical data, show that **"doing S/L Days"** was – nd although altered, continued to be – **riented by a concern for performance and efficiency** (i.e., industrial organizing principles).

Figure 2. Analysing the formation of emergent strategies



Legend: the use of colors and fill effects is simply meant to illustrate the diversity of situations (not to represent frequency of occurrence). This is congruent with an approach aiming for analytical refinement (i.e., heuristic generalization rather than enumerative generalization).*

Figure 3. The ordinary orientation of organizational actions

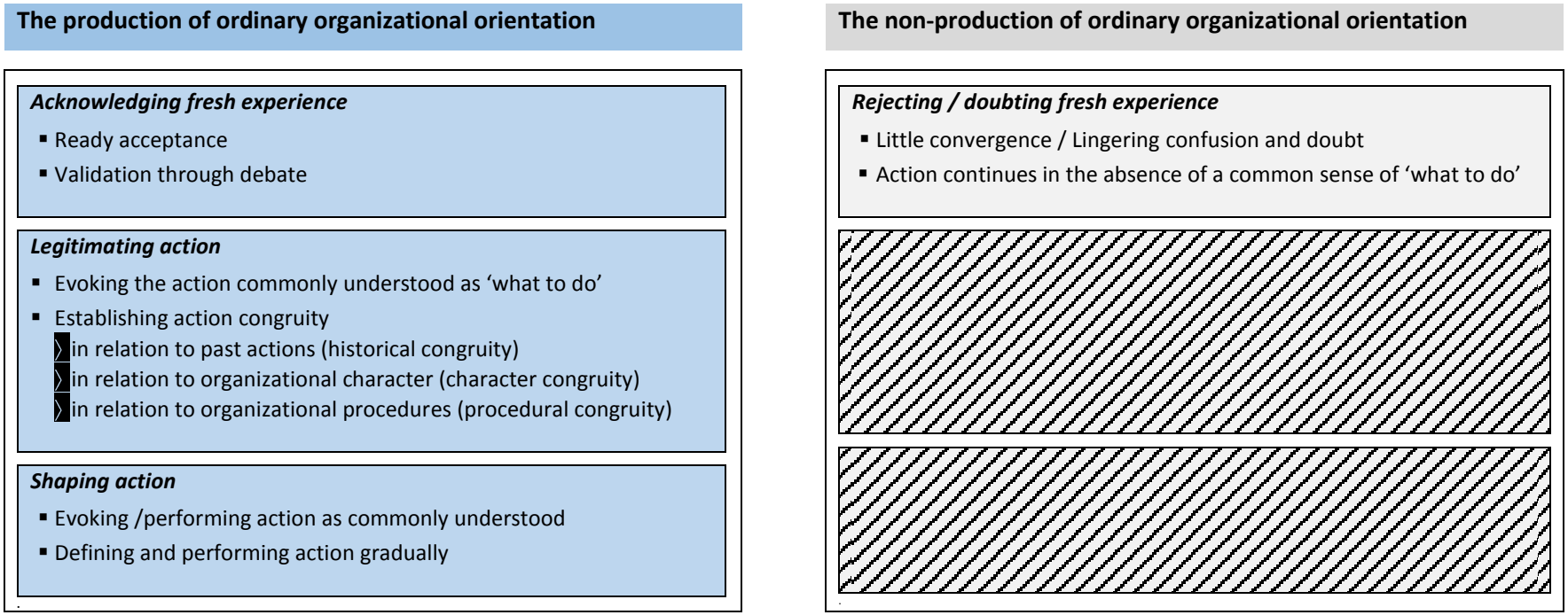


Table 5. Emergent strategies: the patterned streams of actions identified in the three NDOs

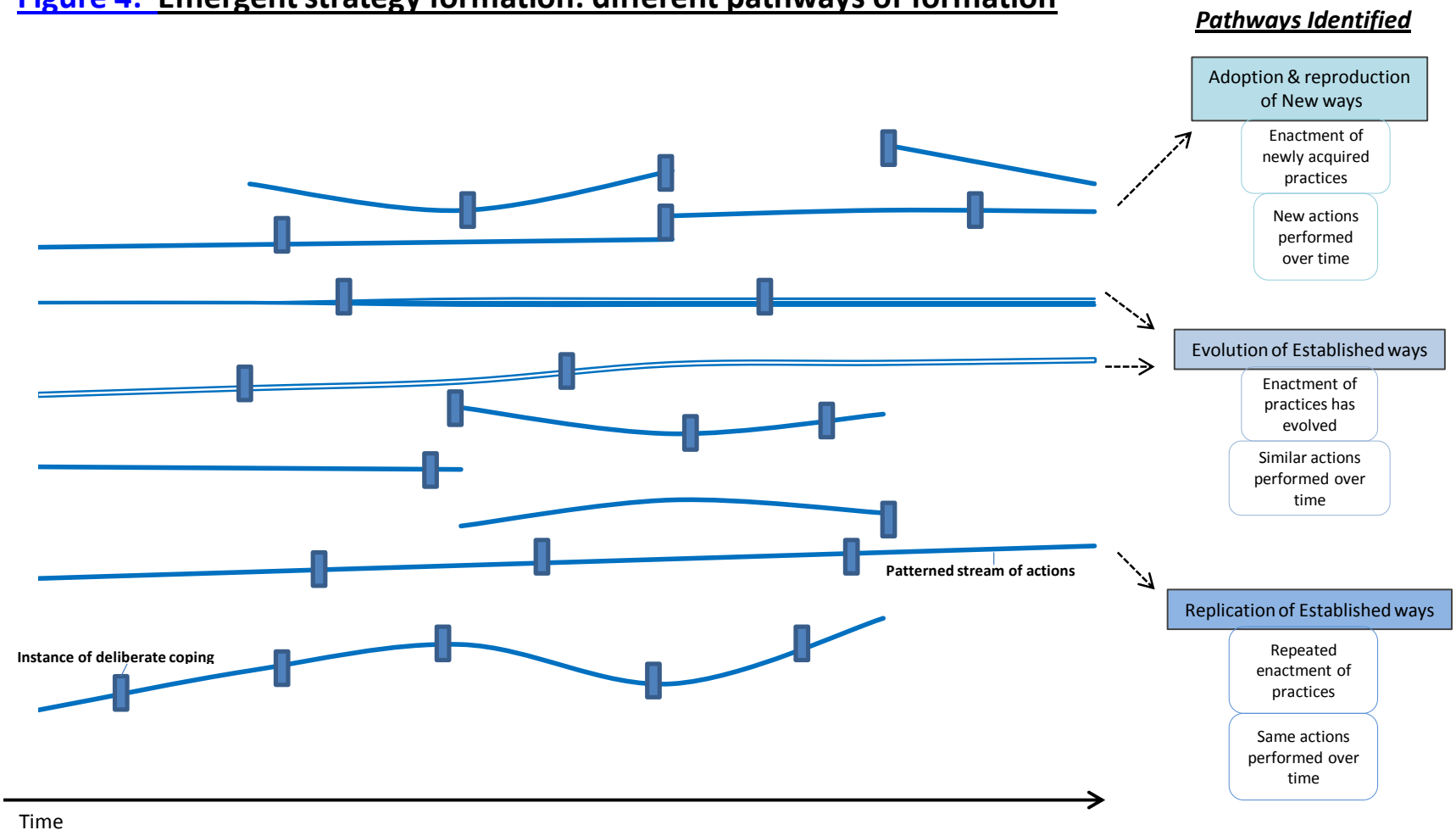
		Data sources → / Patterned streams of actions ↓	Years preceding the field research (2007 - 2012)[32]				Field research (May to Dec. 2012, and Oct. 2013)				
			Meeting minutes	Project documents	Organizational documents	Interview data	Project documents	Interview data	Observation Internal meetings	Observation Meetings w/ partners	Observation work/corridor discussions
Vy4Wellness	R	P1. Awareness-raising/ local partners [c]	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	
		P2. Giving funds to local partners [c]	*			*	*	*	*		
		P3. Managing local actors (health centre)[c]	*			*		*	*		
		P4. Regional project meetings [c], [b]		*		*		*	*		*
		P4. Reporting on performance [c], [t+f]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
		P2. Reporting on project progress [t+f]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*		*
EducAll	R	P1. Sharing info w/local actors [c/e]		*		*	*	*			*
		P2. Dealing w/ local actors - trainees [c/e]		*		*	*	*	*		*
		P3. New / dealing w/ local partners [c/e]		*		*	*	*	*		*
		P2. Reporting on progress - trainees [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		*
		P2. Compiling for reporting - trainees [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		
		P4. Workshop implementation [t/m]		*		*	*	*	*	*	
		P1./P2./P3. NDO regions of work [v]		*		*	*	*	*	*	*
	A E	P3. New / Financial reporting [t+f]		*		*	*		*	*	*
		P3. New / Monitoring process [e]		*		*	*	*	*	*	*
ProLearning	R	P1/ P2/ P3/ P4/ P5/ P6. Developing activities[t/r]	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
		P1. Reporting on workshops [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		
		P2. Reporting / event implementation [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		
		P3. Reporting / quarterly reports [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		*
		P4. Reporting on education activity [t+f]		*		*	*	*	*		
	E	P5. Developing capacity-building event[p+e]	*	*		*	*	*	*		*
		P6. Implementing campaigns on radio [f]			*	*		*	*		*

[32]. Overall, the data available covers the period from 2007 to 2012. But, it is worth noting that data was not always available for all these years – e.g., project documents followed the duration of projects; organizational documents were not produced every year; and although a surprising number of meeting minutes were made available, there were meetings for which minutes could not be found or had visibly not been written. Finally, interview data was mainly retrospective data, and understandably, organizational members indicated that they could not always remember the exact period when something was to have happened (even with the help of prompts; it is worth noting that an exact chronological recollection of events was not in any case what the interviews were aiming at producing).

Table 5 - Legend :

- R= replication of established ways; E= Evolution of established ways; A= Adoption of new ways
- P1, P2, etc. refer to the various projects whose implementation were observed, reviewed through documents and discussed in interviews (although interviews covered broader matters too).
- Tendencies detected: [c] contract-based/legal approach; [b] broad-based regional meetings; [t+f] technical accuracy and financial exactness; [c/e] community engagement; [t/m] technical, management tools such as SWOT, etc.; [v] versatility; [e] efficiency; [t/r] technical rigor; [p+e] performance and efficiency; [f] facilitation.

Figure 4: Emergent strategy formation: different pathways of formation



Chapter 3

Legitimacy Fuelling Marginality? : Reporting in Nonprofit Development Organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa

Abstract

This article examines the recursive reproduction of reporting in nonprofit development organizations (NDOs) in Senegal, and its power effects. Reporting activities are generally considered an essential part of effective management, and consist in discursive and material practices aiming to give account on organizational activities. The cases examined reveal the particular attributes of the reporting practice performed in NDOs, and the operations and processes sustaining its continued, and visibly unabated, reproduction. They shed light on the resulting outcomes, and in particular its effects on organizational members' conception of what constitutes effective project achievement, and relatedly their understanding of their organizations' merits. The findings suggest that the continual performance of the reporting practice contributed to the production and reproduction of categorical distinctions which made these organizations at once legitimate and 'novice' development actors. These concurrent contradictory outcomes and the mechanisms revealed contribute important insights to research on the power dynamics shaping NDOs, and add a valuable complement to current explanations of organizational discretion in situations of high dependency.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Management practices have a long history of diffusion around the globe, with their attendant successes and failures, including cases of wholesale adoption, adaptation to local conditions, or outright rejection (e.g., Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005; Guler, Guillén, & Macpherson, 2002; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006). It is generally argued that the spread of management talk, tools and values started from 'Western' economies, and in particular the United States, as a variety of practices drawing on scientific management and neoliberal thinking have carried principles of efficiency and market competition to different organizational and social settings (e.g., Cooke, 2004; Hallett, 2010; Imas & Weston, 2012).

When management practices are examined in terms of their uses in nonprofit development organizations (NDOs) of the 'developing' world, however, the prevailing story is not one of success. Although fewer in number, studies researching managerial practices in this context tend to point to conceptual or practical frictions between these management practices often described as imported and the particular organizational settings that characterize NDOs (e.g., Lewis, 2003; Srinivas, 2009).

The lack of, or uneasy, take-up has been attributed to a deplorable unwillingness or incapacity of NDOs to embrace a much needed professionalization through the adoption of administrative practices (e.g., Barr, Fafchamps, & Owens, 2005; Burger & Owens, 2010), or justifiable attempts to retain organizational discretion by resisting impositions from funding agencies favoring managerialism – managerial imperatives formalized in rules and technologies (e.g., Ferguson, 1994; Neu & Ocampo, 2007; Roberts, Jones III, & Fröhling, 2005; Smith, 2003). Beyond these rules and norms, others have pointed to the incompatibility of the meaning systems that sustain management practices on the one hand, and the operations of NDOs of the 'developing' world on the other. These accounts have proposed that marked socio-cultural differences and stark contrasts between nonprofits' social missions and the for-profit roots of management practices can explain the lukewarm and ever partial adoption (e.g., Khan & Ackers, 2004; Mangaliso, 2001). Yet, a number of management practices endure in NDOs of the 'developing' world.

This article is about one such management practice: the reporting practice of nonprofit development organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa. Reporting is about accountability (e.g., Wallace, Bornstein, & Chapman, 2007). It is generally considered an essential part of effective management, and commonly involves a set of activities aiming to 'report' or said differently give account on organizational actions and achievements. Not all scholars would agree on the reliability of NDOs produced accounts (e.g., Burger & Owens, 2010); in its current form, it is nonetheless a pervasive organizational practice in nonprofit development organizations in Sub-Saharan Africa, and elsewhere (see e.g., Ebrahim, 2002; Watkins, Swidler, & Hannan, 2012; and Hwang & Powell, 2009). Assuming, as one reasonably may, that great difficulties confront the development of management practices in Sub-Saharan African NDOs, then why has the reporting practice managed to stick, and what conditions, forces, pressures or incentives surround its recursive reproduction? With this question in mind, this article seeks to

interrogate the power relations that shape (and are being shaped by) the reproduction of the reporting practice in Sub-Saharan African NDOs, and its related effects.

The empirical case examined consists of the reporting practice of four Senegalese nonprofit development organizations, and focuses mainly on the activities, talk and tools that organizational members engaged with in the process of reporting, as well as a variety of reports they have produced over time. The analysis draws inspiration from Foucauldian propositions on power (Foucault, 1980, 1982, 2010). In particular, it is guided by Foucault's concern with bringing under scrutiny mundane social practices so that we may unveil their disciplinary effects, and the particular kinds of subjects they may come to produce (e.g., Cooper, Ezzamel, & Willmott, 2008; Foucault, 1982; Miller & O'Leary, 1987; Newton, 1998). Grounding this perspective is the notion that "'Practices' don't exist without a certain regime of rationality" (Foucault, 1991: 79). Thus, according to Foucault, prevalent practices and the discourses they rest on warrant analytical attention because, although they often seem trivial, they can reproduce relations of power and patterns of exclusion. Actors' engagement with these practices may produce undesirable effects, including not insignificant consequences for their subjectivity or the ways in which they come to see themselves (e.g., Foucault, 1982; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Townley, 1993). The Foucauldian-inspired approach pursued here allowed to analyze NDO reporting practice and the discourses it rests on, and importantly to question its normalization and the related power effects. In so doing, this article complements research on the power relations shaping NDO organizing by going beyond the typical (and often exclusive) focus on the constraints and pressures applied by funders to investigate seemingly mundane organizational practices – or said more plainly, what organizational members do, why they keep doing it, and the implications of such repeated performance. The analysis suggests that the reporting practice was made possible by, and reproduced, a particular conception of project achievement which became visibly entrenched and contributed to the construction of particular sense of selves. Active performance of the reporting practice had legitimating effects for studied NDOs. But, it also ironically had less positive effects as they visibly embraced the related conception of project achievement and came to see themselves through this lens and the categorical distinctions it implies between "experts" and "novices" in the international development field. This, it is argued more broadly, has profound structuring effects on organizational discretion since such construed self-identification influences and may come to circumscribe organizations' sense of agency.

This article is organized in five major sections. The first section provides an overview of streams of research which have addressed the reproduction of management practices through an interrogation of the surrounding power relations. The literature considered ranges from more functionalist accounts stressing the importance and helpful effects of senior management authority on practice reproduction to more micro-processual approaches and critical readings revealing multifarious operations of power in practice reproduction and questioning their more or less nuanced effects. The second section zooms in on the critical perspective here pursued which draws substantively on Foucault's conception of power. This allows an investigation of mundane practices which may or may not be readily associated with the exercise of power, and yet have profound and pervasive effects on actors' talk, conducts, and what they come to see as the 'truth' of social reality. This discussion is followed by a brief description of the four Senegalese NDOs which form the empirical case this article draws on, and a presentation of the analytical process used to study the particular ways in which they practice reporting. The fourth section highlights their individual and collective reporting practice, and hones in on its normalization and the constitutive effects on studied NDOs. Concluding remarks are presented in the last section, following a discussion drawing out the main insights of this research and suggesting possible broader implications for NDOs of the 'developing' world.

3.2 THE REPRODUCTION OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND THE OPERATION OF POWER

Management practices are commonly viewed as collective activities organizational members do with some level of regularity, as opposed to individual actions or one-offs (e.g., Jarzabkowski, 2004; Schatzki, 2001). The inherently social nature of these practices has elicited a number of interrogations and propositions about what – forcibly or gently – influences the behaviors of organizational members or the course of actions when management practices are being reproduced. From the more overt to the less obvious and otherwise unobtrusive manifestations of power, organizational studies have examined the interplay of forces, actions or processes which could account for the recursive performance of management practices, with however varying attention to their helpful or harmful effects.

Enforcing management practices: a managerial prerogative

Earlier writings on management practices tend to focus on achieving effective management, and primarily view practice production and reproduction as an effect of good leadership and design (e.g., Barnard, 1968 [1938]; Drucker, 1954). Managers' rightful responsibility is to exercise power over organizational activities, since this is considered the "necessities of cooperative systems" (Barnard, 1968: 184). This is not to say that the difficulties of practice reproduction and social interactions are overlook. Rather, these are analyzed simply as conditions to overturn through managerial control. Thus, the pressures and incentives that made practice reproduction possible are viewed through these studies as normal and necessary, and continued practice performance is no more than the felicitous outcome of the operation of 'legitimate' authority over consenting organizational members. In this way, the reproduction of management practice is largely portrayed as devoid of objectionable power relations.

Management practices: the site of organizational struggles for discretion

It seems however that organizational members are not always so benevolently compliant, nor are managers unquestionably virtuous. A number of studies investigating the messier realities of management practice reproduction show how practice performance often implies ongoing internal confrontations, and bring to light power relations that are not always benign (e.g., Cyert & March, 1963; Selznick, 1957; Thompson, 2008 [1967]). Indeed, some scholars forcibly argue that management practices are often the sites of struggles for control and conflicts over discretion. Various studies have pointed to the fact that engaging in management practices offers organizational members opportunities to fight for greater latitude of choice over various aspects of their work, or against entrenched inequalities of the labor process (e.g., Burawoy, 1979; Parker & Slaughter, 1993). The struggles may not just oppose management to workers, however. They may also play out among workers striving to control critical resources and retain sufficient latitude to advance their individual or group interests (e.g., Crozier, 1964; Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck, & Pennings, 1971). Overall, this stream of research puts emphasis on the politics of practice performance, and suggests that these constitute power relations which shape the production and reproduction of

management practices. The recursive reproduction of a management practice may thus be viewed as reflecting, and occurring through, internal struggles for discretion.

In a similar vein, research drawing on resource dependence theory (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) articulates a view where organizational activities and practice reproduction are associated with organizational discretion (e.g., Björkman & Lu, 2001; Salancik, 1979; Walsh, Weber, & Margolis, 2003). The pressures and demands emanating from external actors are posited as the main impediment to the realization of the organization's own objectives. Regaining control would then mean short-circuiting such dependency on external actors. In particular, studies of high dependency settings – e.g., nonprofit organizations which heavily rely on funders and others for critical financial and technical resources – often tie the prospect for greater organizational autonomy to less external imposition and constraint on management practices (e.g., Foster & Meinhard, 2002; Froelich, 1999). Ebrahim (2002), for instance, examines the maintenance of certain monitoring practices in an Indian nongovernmental organization as the result of the interplay of the funder's information demands and the organization's buffering efforts. Essentially, in this line of work, the power relations implicated in practice reproduction are said to emanate from the organization's transactions and collaborations with external actors it depends on to carry out its activities. These power relations would be most visible in the confrontation of direct demands or impositions from external actors and organizational countermoves to resist these, and retain its ability to advance its own interests.

In sum, viewed from these perspectives, the power relations which may affect and even shape practice reproduction are the ostensible struggles over autonomy, which would occur among organizational members or between the organization and external actors. These visible confrontations, moves and countermoves, affect the implementation of management practices, and their reproduction over time. What is at stake, they overall suggest, is individual, group or organizational discretion. In such context, it is the constraining effects of demands emanating from outsiders that are highlighted and often denounced as normatively condemnable. In contrast, the preferences shown and choices made by actors themselves are deemed unencumbered, and generally viewed as a good thing or otherwise left unexamined. Consequently, the helpful or harmful effects of practice reproduction also come to broadly mirror the degree of discretion actors possess over the performance of related activities; and it

is usually assumed that the more autonomy actors visibly have in managing these activities (autonomy possibly secured through a variety of countervailing tactics), the more beneficial practice performance would be.

Management practices: macro-social tensions beyond rival sovereign actors

The assumption that the power relations implicated in practice reproduction are mainly reflected in the actions and reactions of rational actors acting to preserve their particularistic interests seems however grossly incomplete. Indeed, it has been argued, from an alternative perspective, that organizing principles originating from the broader social context often shape practice reproduction in significant ways (e.g., Boxembaum, 2006; Hallett, 2010; Ponte & Gibbon, 2005). In fact, these researchers, and others tackling institutional phenomena from different angles (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006 [1991]; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Scott, 2008), stress the important structuring influences of these "bodiless beings" (Boltanski, 2009). These organizing principles are said to deploy their directive force through: collective agents such as the state or other regulatory agencies (e.g., Greenwood, Suddaby, & Hinings, 2002; Slager, Gond, & Moon, 2012; Townley, 2002); resource-rich organizations (e.g., Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Lounsbury, 2001; Neu & Ocampo, 2007; Ozen & Berkman, 2007); diffuse social processes (e.g., Perkmann & Spicer, 2008); consultants, management gurus or other individual actors (e.g., David & Strang, 2006; Woywode, 2002); and even procedures, texts and other artifacts actors draw on to carry out their activities (e.g., Bebbington, Lewis, Batterbury, Olson, & Siddiqi, 2007; Giroux, 2006). They influence practice reproduction, but their structuring action is not always obvious, nor does it necessarily occur through overt confrontations between actors. Their influences are not deterministic either, and actors may engage with these 'bodiless beings' more critically, even if within bounds (e.g., Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Scott, 2008; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012).

Under these perspectives, the tensions and conflicts shaping practice reproduction would reflect confrontations between these broader organizing principles, as actors engage in 'tests' (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Dansou & Langley, 2012), or said differently come through their actions and interactions to unsettle, alter or reaffirm the principles shaping their collective endeavour. For example, in her study of the price-setting practice at Fairtrade, Reinecke (2010)

examines the negotiation process for the formation of a minimum price for coffee as such an instance of confrontation. Different organizing principles – reflected in ideas about 'what it is' that should be valued, and whose voice matters – were opposed in talk and text and shaped the price ultimately decided on. Some authors also propose that the structuring influences of these organizing principles may even occur in the absence of marked conflicts; practice reproduction would then possibly take place in even more unobtrusive ways, without visible confrontation or push and pull (e.g., Lok & de Rond, 2013; Sminia, 2011).

The key insight these writings grant is that the power relations involved in practice reproduction may not be bound to consciously defined self-interests, as they find their source in more diverse macro-level phenomena. In addition, they importantly open up the possibility for considering a broader set of conditions and negotiation processes in our investigations of the actions and forces implicated in management practice reproduction. But, it seems, they also generally assume that confrontations between these organizing principles – which play out through actors' more or less confrontational actions and interactions – are unencumbered, and their consequences unproblematic. Generally missing in these writings is a fuller consideration of the social mechanisms that may, in the first place, affect actors' understandings of what matters, and their participation in these political plays. For example, the Fairtrade negotiation process noted above provides a fairly remarkable open setting for the voicing of multiple and divergent views; but organizational practices may not always allow such inclusiveness. In fact, organizational processes or self-restrictions, derived from internalized views of the social world, may considerably shape actors' participation (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Boltanski, 2011; Mann, 1986). What's more – in contrast to Reinecke (2010) cited above – seldom do these analyses critically examine the outcomes of the confrontations and tensions, as if they were innocuous because they are considered the result of the collective will of participating actors (e.g., Cooper, Ezzamel, & Willmott, 2008).

Management practices: inequalities, and structural bias beyond tensions

Yet, seemingly 'neutral' management practices may contribute to the continuous reproduction of fundamental inequalities, generate power relations where the balance is skewed in favor of some actors, or result more generally in less than optimal outcomes for certain groups. Consider for instance Ezzamel and Willmott (1998)'s study of the introduction

of teamwork at StitchCo: these practices, then broadly viewed as a welcome alternative to top-down management systems and line work, generated more division among workers because they disrupted StitchCo's machinists established sense of self-identity and the existing accountability system. In the eyes of StitchCo's machinists, teamwork practices produced more injustice as they tended to benefit slackers to the detriment of hard-workers. Instead of the proclaimed improvement to employees' control over their work, teamwork practices were experienced as disempowering and resulted in more interpersonal conflicts. Besides an analysis of these conflicts and their significance for the particular 'blending' of practices ultimately enacted at StitchCo (i.e., making room for external supervision within teamwork systems), Ezzamel and Willmott (1998)'s attentiveness to the historical and social context crucially permitted the identification of resulting inequalities. Their critical reading shows that the absence of a union, and more importantly the identities that workers constructed through previous social and work engagement mediated their interactions and practice reproduction. This study and other similar research which adopt a critical theoretical stance tend to go beyond reporting on the structural processes and political plays implicated in practice reproduction, to question important aspects of the social world which come into play in practice performance and, yet, may remain unacknowledged (e.g., Gordon, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2009; Knights & McCabe, 2002).

Critical research and writings on the reproduction of management practices also typically question the often unanticipated yet problematic effects of practice reproduction. For example, Oakes, Townley and Cooper (1998) draw on Bourdieu to show the disruptive effects of the introduction of business planning practices in museums and cultural sites in Alberta, a field which they describe as depending on its own internal rules, and whose traditional "cultural capital", employees' identities and core activities were undermined as a consequence. The diversion of resources and attention away from what might be considered traditional or key organizational activities has been explored in other research, such as Rahaman, Neu and Everett (2010)'s study of a World-Bank induced introduction of accounting practices in a Ghanaian alliance of organizations engaged in HIV/AIDS prevention and care (see also Wallace *et al*., 2007). Other studies taking a different approach and drawing on various Foucauldian concepts have analyzed the insidious ways in which the reproduction of management practices may constitute subtle forms of control and come to shape organizational members' subjectivity and identity in particular ways (e.g., Covaleski, Dirsmith, Heian, & Samuel, 1998; Knights &

Morgan, 1995; Thomas & Davies, 2005; Townley, 1993). This article adds to this latter stream of research, and draws on Foucauldian approaches to go beyond the visible tensions and political plays surrounding the reproduction of the reporting practice in NDOs of the developing world and interrogate less visible yet potentially more powerful and normatively questionable influences.

3.3 A FOUCAULDIAN-INSPIRED APPROACH

The preceding suggests that a Foucauldian perspective allows consideration of the forces and influences that traverse and shape management practices in particular ways, and the power effects arising from the reproduction of these practices. "Practices 'rest' on 'modes of thought'" (Townley, 2008: 10). In other words, practices do not just comprise activities whose implementation serves to reproduce them, but they are also widely-shared meaningful ways of doing things. The modes of thought, or discourses, they rest on significantly shape them and influence actors' understanding of what it means to accomplish these practices and to be a competent practitioner. Foucault (1991: 75) also tells us that social practices, or particular ways of doing things, may come "to seem altogether natural, self-evident and indispensable". It would seem that this is the case for the reporting currently performed in nonprofit development organizations. Indeed, previous research shows reporting to be a common occurrence in the field of international development, and their depictions of reporting activities suggest that current ways of reporting may have acquired a certain entrenched normalcy (e.g., Ebrahim, 2002; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Wallace, Bornstein, & Chapman, 2007; Watkins *et al*., 2012). What these studies jointly reveal is that across very different settings, reporting appears to be performed and understood in remarkably similar ways, and this practice as currently performed may have become naturalized. With this in mind, it seems particularly pertinent to adopt a Foucauldian analytical direction for the study of reporting as an organizational practice.

That management practices become widely accepted is a frequent enough phenomenon. What is troubling however, following Foucault (1980, 1991, 2010), is that the constructed naturalness of a practice comes to obscure its inherent contingency. Moreover, the frequent related reification of the discourse it rests on "presupposes subjection both of certain

knowledges and, inseparably from it, certain modes of being" (Haugaard, 2002: 182). In other words, actors performing such practices would view their particular ways of doing things as logically necessary – while in fact they could have done otherwise – and would also tend to filter out alternative realities and ways of doing things. Indeed, normalized practices "structure the possible field of actions" of individuals and guide their conduct (Foucault, 1982: 790). Foucault gives us an example of such structuring influences on actors' ways of doing and being in his work *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977). He shows that the normalized practice of imprisonment which rested on a particular conception of criminality, shaped actors' understandings in complex ways; he reveals through his analysis of the production and reproduction of this practice "how criminality was constituted as an object of knowledge, and how a certain 'consciousness' of criminality could be formed (including the image which criminals have of themselves, and the representation of criminals which the rest of us might entertain)" (Foucault, 2010e: 338).

A focus on the "socially constructed normalcy" (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006: 228) of management practices thus entails eschewing a search for the source of power. It invites instead attention to the complex ways in which the normal is created. In other words, it means investigating the nature of these practices, the discourses they rest on, the disciplinary techniques and processes sustaining them, and the productive or repressive effects they produce (e.g., Cooper *et al.*, 2008; Haugaard, 2002, 2003). Hence, it encourages us to examine the push and pull and relations of power surrounding the practices performed by organizational members, but not only that. In fact, it importantly invites consideration of their link to the social context, the macro-social structures and the related power relations. Finally, such analysis also concerns itself with the effects of practice reproduction, critically questioning the normalization process and the outcomes of practice reproduction. These outcomes may hold important implications in terms of the particular kinds of subjects constituted through recursive practice performance (Foucault, 1982).

The normalization process as might be suspected "imposes homogeneity", but as Foucault (2010b: 196-197) notes by so doing "it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels (…) the norm introduces, as a useful imperative and as a result of measurement, all the shading of individual differences". Hence, not only are standards of behaviors and performance constituted through the process but, for being the norm, they

often encourage and sustain efforts to monitor and enforce proper enactment, which may be varyingly resisted. This process may support subjectification, as the practices being reproduced may construct particular self-understanding and sense of self in relation to the discourses they rest on (Foucault, 1982: 777-778). Not unlike the criminals of *Discipline and Punish*, mentioned previously, actors may come to see themselves in relation to the discourse sustaining their normalized practice. Indeed, as they are monitored, categorized, and differentiated in accord with these discourses, they may importantly also come to uphold the related form of knowledge and understand themselves in relation to what it defines as competent agency (Cooper *et al.*, 2008; Fleming & Spicer, 2014; Foucault, 1982).

It is worth noting that adopting this conceptual approach for the study of the socially constructed normalcy of reporting does not preclude consideration of relations of power other than those implicating disciplinary technologies. This resonates with Foucauldian propositions (e.g., Foucault, 2010c: 206; Cooper *et al.*, 2008) that various forms of power may be linked together. Fleming and Spicer (2014: 272) even propose that "it might be argued that subjectifying power frequently relies on a coercive backdrop in order to function". Such possible adjoining coercive pressures may for instance come from direct impositions sanctioned by legal agreements, contractual relationships or hierarchical or statutory rights. A Foucauldian perspective on power thus invites attentiveness to the possible subtle combination of forms of power, as each may reduce, intensify or extend the effects of the other(s). A second important mention concerns the analysis of resistance. Although some have rightly noted that Foucault's focus was not on resistance strategies (e.g., Newton, 1998), a Foucauldian perspective does not foreclose resistance nor foretell the demise of resistance attempts. As Gordon (1980: 255-258) reminds us: Foucault's reflection on power and "its illustration of the multiplicity, fecundity and productivity of power-relations" do not "imply their collective imperviousness to resistance" (see also Foucault, 1980a). In applying a Foucauldian-inspired approach to study the reporting practice of nonprofit development organizations of the 'developing world', this research takes account of the apparent normalcy it seems to have acquired, and asks: 1) what power relations shape its recursive reproduction? and 2) what are the effects of continued practice reproduction on these NDOs?

3.4 METHODS

The context

Nonprofit development organizations' ambition is to improve the living conditions of poor and disadvantaged populations in the 'developing world' through the provision of resources, service delivery and/or advocacy work. NDOs are recognized organizational actors in the 'developing world' and, as is the case globally, their numbers have grown significantly over the last three decades (Anheier & Salamon, 2006). Several such organizations operate in Senegal, the large majority duly registered (e.g., Seck, Kane, & Sall, 2004), and many are local NDOs which are administratively independent from international aid organizations. Senegalese NDOs engage in a variety of development activities, and although most of them are based in Dakar, their geographic coverage is greater – they may have specific regional concentration or aim to work in any and all regions of Senegal. In addition to their Dakar main offices, several have small regional field offices or some form of unofficial regional representation. They also tend to partner with community-based organizations – small local associations – for project implementation at the field level. Senegalese NDOs receive financial and technical support from a multitude of funding sources, including aid agencies, regional and international development banks, international nongovernmental organizations, foundations, and to a lesser extent national government projects, and fees from service. Their web of relationships is however wider, and include beyond the prominent formal, more or less extended, linkages with funders and partners on specific projects, a number of informal ties with other actors of the national or even broader international development field through participation in various forums and networks (e.g., Fisher, 1997; Wallace *et al.*, 2007).

The research setting

The four nonprofit development organizations which are the focus of this research project are independent Senegalese NDOs based in Dakar, with formal field representations in the regions. All four organizations agree to take part in the research after numerous phone conversations, email and document exchanges to discuss the research objectives, its duration and what their participation would entail. These organizations were identified following an extensive review of publicly available documents on Senegalese NDOs, and communication

with a large number of potential participating organizations. The final selection was made with a replication logic in mind (Yin, 2003), and following a matrix design, such that two organizations are primarily active in the health sector – Vy4Wellness and AllayPain[33] – while the other two are chiefly involved in educational work – EducAll and ProLearning[34]. In addition, each pair includes one NDO whose self-image, as presented by the Executive Director and through pamphlets, emphasizes its local roots and self-governance, while the other's presentational text grants greater space to the NDO's connections and co-operation with other African and international organizations or individuals. This follows from a concern to study organizations which might be experiencing different types of influences, for the sectors they operate in (i.e., where different ways of doing things might prevail) or for their 'closeness' to external actors (i.e., possibly affecting the extent to which they might be opened – or opposed – to external influences).

All four NDOs have been in operation for more than 15 years. They have worked in several regions of the country, and carried out development activities through service provision and advocacy work in their respective sector of activity. They implement their activities in collaboration with community actors comprised of community-based organizations (CBO) present in their regions of activity and groups of volunteers from the communities they service. Their funding bases are diversified, consisting of a few concurrent project-funding from international nongovernmental organizations, foundations, or national government projects (funded by regional or international development banks). They sometimes share funders, given that it is not uncommon for a funder to seek to address an issue (e.g., combating malaria) through multi-sector interventions (e.g., educating on malaria; distributing bed-nets; improving prophylaxes; supporting local clinics) and as a result financially support different NDOs in this context.

The four NDOs are relatively small organizations: each led by an executive director, and composed of program officer(s), financial officer(s), and a support staff. They occasionally hire consultants for specific technical mandates or provide additional administrative support. See Table 1 for more details.

[33] . Fictitious names are used to honour these organizations' requests for anonymity.
[34] . Fictitious names are used to honour these organizations' requests for anonymity.

The data collection

This research project draws on data collected in Dakar over an eight-month period (from May to mid-December 2012, followed by two weeks in October 2013) in the context of a larger project on strategy formation in nonprofit development organizations. A perusal of the larger data set led to the closer exploration of the reporting practice of NDOs, and the data presented herein concerns this phenomenon more specifically. Like many other nonprofit development organizations, most of the reports written by the four Senegalese NDOs are for submission to their funders, and serve to present their accomplishments on specific projects over time. It is common that the reports[35] produced follow a certain frequency defined with funders and stipulated in project documents and related grant agreements. In addition, NDOs members usually perform a number of activities and actions to record, keep track and/or compile the information they draw on to write their technical reports (e.g., Ebrahim, 2002; Wallace *et al.*, 2007). For these reasons, the reports produced by the four studied NDOs were important, but were equally of interest for this research the processes involved and their outcomes, as well as the broader text, talk and tools surrounding reporting.

Thus, the data comprises four main elements. First, all available technical reports produced by Vy4Wellness, AllayPain, EducAll and ProLearning on finished and ongoing projects were reviewed, as well as other organizational documents such as grant agreements, project proposals, meeting minutes and planning documents. Overall, more than 275 documents totalling over 4000 pages were reviewed. Second, I conducted interviews in all four NDOs. The conversation was broad, but centered mainly on retrospective and real-time accounts of the organization's objectives, decision-making processes, activities and procedures, relationships with partners and funders, and the details of the specific projects and work each respondent was involved in. In each organization, this took the form of semi-structured one-on-one interviews with the executive director and the program and financial staffs; whenever possible, former staff members were also interviewed. In total, I interviewed 43 organizational members. In addition, repeat interviews were carried out with the executive directors and technical staff, in an attempt to obtain clarification on issues outlined in organizational reports, and discuss ongoing projects, monitoring activities or exploration work. Each interview lasted

[35]. It is worth noting that these reports are different from evaluation reports which aim to assess the impact of the overall project over a longer period of time. Evaluation reports are often commissioned by funders and implemented in collaboration with the NDOs.

on average 75 minutes (the shorter were slightly under an hour, while the lengthier exceeded two hours). All conversations were tape-recorded with the informants' consent, and I took detailed hand-written notes in the very few cases where such consent was not granted. All interviews were fully transcribed. Third, I attended, as a non-participant observer, staff meetings (20 hours), meetings with funders and partners (18 hours), and workshops (37 hours), and took detailed hand-written notes. This formal data collection work was complemented by daily corridor discussions with organizational members and active participation in the social life of these NDOs.

Finally, I collected field level data through separate semi-structured interviews with the senior staff (senior program officers or divisional directors) of five key international development organizations and funders active in the health and education sectors in Senegal. These were also later transcribed. Interviewees were asked about a large number of issues including their organizations' objectives and activities; their project appraisal, funding and management processes; their expectations regarding project performance, recipients' interventions and reporting; and to whom and how they in turn give account. To complement this interview data, I reviewed an array of publicly available documents on the programs of these organizations and other international development actors they relate to (e.g., brochures, grant agreements, annual reports, performance frameworks found on their websites). Table 1 also provides additional information on the data collected.

Interview processes may inevitably be occasions where some informants construct particular representations of selves or their organizations, whether deliberately or as a result of the particular ways in which research questions are framed. However, my prolonged engagement with all four NDOs, openness to provide clarification on the research, and visible displays of respect for members' preferences regarding confidentiality appear to have aided the interview process, and facilitated our discussions about their organizations. In addition, interview questions were deliberately broad, and I used the semi-structured format with built-in flexibility to allow informants ample room to present their perspectives on their organizational realities. Finally, as noted previously, multiple sources of data were used, repeat interviews were undertaken, and I also witnessed instances where information was being compiled for report writing. This extensive data collection process has proven useful in

gathering the necessary information for reconstructing a grounded account of the sequences of activities, processes and discourses involved in reporting in each studied NDO.

The data analysis

An initial step in the data analysis process consisted in drawing on the multiple data sources to produce descriptive accounts of the reporting practice performed over time in each NDO. This served to open the analytical gaze and allow a fuller consideration of the sequences of activities – beyond report writing – the actors involved, and techniques employed in the doing of reporting in Vy4Wellness, AllayPain, EducAll and ProLearning. This preliminary narrative step (Langley, 1999) also usefully set the stage for a more detailed investigation of the reporting practice and what may influence its reproduction besides possible funders' requirements concerning report submission.

The ensuing analysis proceeded iteratively, alternating repeated readings of the data collected and the theoretical themes mobilized to incrementally arrive at a set of codes and sub-codes. More specifically, during this phase, an interest in examining the socially constructed normalcy of reporting and its effects led to a closer consideration of Foucault's methodological focus on the forms of knowledge grounding social practices and the techniques and operations sustaining them (i.e., Foucault, 1991; 2010e; Gordon, 1980). Coding was informed by these ideas and the particular experiences of the four NDOs. The codes identified sought to capture: (a) the sequence of activities and actors composing the reporting practice; (b) what constitutes the proper way of doing reporting: i.e., the 'rules' structuring this practice; (c) the discourses and struggles sustaining this particular way of reporting; and (d) the conditions surrounding its recursive reproduction: e.g., the consequences NDOs members associated with it, and their perceived decision latitude. With these categories of issues in mind, I use the NVivo qualitative research software to code the data collected on the four NDOs, so as to sort and organize the pertinent portions of text for subsequent in-depth analysis. For example, in relation to the 'rules' structuring reporting, the code '*the sayabl*e' (i.e., 'what is possible to say') was allocated to portions of text where NDO members (or organizational documents or observation notes) made reference to the information sought after or provided in the context of reporting and which was considered of the proper nature. Table 2 provides an overview of the codes generated. In addition, through the coding process,

emerging features were further identified and qualified. For example, going through the data related to "*the sayable*" allowed further definition of different aspects of the information or action permissible: portions of text concerned with 'what can be said about results' (e.g., text making consistent and exclusive reference to progress indicators in quantitative terms, and presenting project achievements in terms of "x number" of women or men sensitized or trained etc.) were labelled differently from those revealing 'what can be said about the local setting', and those related to 'what can be said about the process of reporting' for instance.

A similar coding process was used to sort and synthesize thematically the data collected on international development organizations and funders. In this case, the codes used aimed to capture their direct influences or demands as funders; their own reporting practices; and their understandings of the broader context as field actors influencing and being influenced by broader field prescriptions. Hence, the coding process drew on some of the existing codes – for example those relating to the 'rules' structuring NDOs reporting; the discourses and struggles; and perceived NDOs latitude of choice – which were supplemented by a new set of codes developed inductively to capture field actors' own reporting practices (e.g., *upward reporting; upward discretion*), their depiction of appropriate forms of conduct and performance (e.g., *NDOs credibility*; *NDOs competency; Good proposal*), and their understanding of field dynamics more broadly (see Table 2).

The coded portions of text facilitated the subsequent in-depth qualitative analysis of themes pertinent to the research question. Query features of the NVivo software helped to pull together coded data from different sources and informants – both within and across NDOs, as well in relation to field actors' accounts – and compare and contrast the data pertaining to the particular ways in which NDO perform reporting activities, organizational actions which facilitate or hinder practice performance, and the techniques and operations that sustain continual reproduction. The findings emerging from this stage of the analysis illustrated the 'doing' of reporting in studied NDOs, its constructed normalcy, attributes and the conditions affecting its continual performance. I subsequently examined the effects of the recursive reproduction of the reporting practice, by cycling between these initial findings, informants' accounts of the consequences associated with reporting and NDOs decision latitude, and information on the broader organizational and social context (drawn from the

larger data set) to closely examine possible relationships before analytically elaborating on the emerging insights.

The analysis process rested heavily on NDO members' own interpretations of their reporting experiences, but it was also inevitably an interpretative and creative process (Langley, 1999). The systematic approach adopted throughout the analysis however helped to create space for reflection and thoughtful interrogation of emergent interpretations in relation to the data. It is through this process that the research findings presented in the following sections have been generated.

3.5 THE RECURSIVE REPRODUCTION OF REPORTING AND ITS POWER EFFECTS

The key insights gained through the data analysis process are here organized in four main sections which together shed light on the particular way in which reporting is performed in the four NDOs, and address the overall research question, i.e., what power relations shape the reproduction of the reporting practice, and what are the consequences. The first section engages with the socially constructed normalcy of reporting by presenting its broad components and the pervasiveness of this particular form of reporting; the second, closely examines its attributes and shows the discourses reporting rests on; the third explores the disciplinary techniques and processes which sustain the ongoing performance of reporting; and the last section demonstrates how its positive effects facilitated the emergence of more debatable subjectifying effects.

The reporting practice: A widespread particular way of doing reporting

A recursively performed sequence of activities

In all four NDOs – Vy4Wellness, AllayPain, EducAll and ProLearning – regardless of their sectors of activity and their self-image as more or less 'close' to external partners, reporting involved a series of activities performed on a regular basis to record, collect, analyse and share information on the project outputs and progress. Information was recorded and compiled periodically; and this process was monitored by NDOs members through frequent field missions. Technical reports were produced on a regular basis drawing on the data compiled to

give account on organizational project work. Together, this sequence of activities constituted the reporting practice (see figure 1 for a more detailed descriptive account of the sequence of activities).

The technical reports were primarily written for submission to funders; even if in the recent past copies of these reports have also been periodically shared with the authorities of the localities where project implementation took place. Technical reports were relatively short documents, ranging typically from 4 to 10 pages, and were produced on a quarterly basis or bi-annually (with sometimes a complementary annual report). In fact, the frequency of report submission was inscribed in the contractual agreements signed with funders, and was funder-specific. In addition, in these agreements, report submission was tied to fund disbursement cycles. This inevitably created incentives for the production of these reports on a defined timeline, and may account for the observed regularity in their submission to funders. The format of the reports produced in all four NDOs was also visibly influenced by the terms and conditions of the contractual agreements signed with each funder. Indeed, where such agreements made reference to particular tables or formats, the technical reports prepared for the related projects unequivocally followed these templates. Interestingly, the data also shows that in the few situations where contractual agreements did not specify a format, the tendency was nonetheless for the writer of the report to use other funder-supplied formats rather than opt for a free-style format.

> *"Well, since this funder did not provide us with a template, I prepared the technical report drawing on the templates provided by other funders."*
>
> (Monitoring officer, AllayPain, Interview Data, 2012)[36]

Indeed, the application of predefined formats in the writing of technical reports had come to be the normal way of doing things, even where no direct funder's pressure existed to that effect.

NDOs produced technical reports were also distinctive for their profuse use of numbers to relate project achievements. In all four cases, project results were presented predominantly in quantitative terms and illustrated through numerical graphs and basic tables offering disaggregated data (e.g., number of teenagers sensitized per region, per district, per sex, etc.).

[36]. The quotes herein presented were translated from French to English

In fact, it appears that NDOs members' attention was primarily focused on presenting results in relation to project progress indicators, which were solely expressed in numbers and percentages. These progress indicators were inscribed in their contractual agreements, which visibly influenced the manner in which results are reported on.

> *"In fact, you have the project objectives; I mean the results to attain. And that's defined jointly with the funder; in fact it is specified in the contractual agreement. Now, when you are preparing the report, they must stand out. As I was mentioning earlier, it is now a result-based management approach, and if you say that you are going to train 50 people, the report must show whether you have trained all 50, what challenges you have faced, why it is not done, etc."*
>
> (Financial Officer, EducAll, Interview data, 2012)

Technical reports however rarely expanded on the challenges faced in project implementation. Rather, they narrowly focused on project results. Moreover, in all four NDOs, from one reporting period to the other, these results were expressed exclusively in relation to project indicators. Indeed, little else was reported on. No technical reports included for instance vignettes depicting some version of community realities, or critical reflections on project activities and their unanticipated or spill-over effects. Even pictures were seldom a welcome addition except on cover pages or in annexes, and only in a few rare occasions. Overall, there appears to be a persistent focus on "getting to the point", which the analysis suggests, in this case, is synonymous with highlighting primarily, if not exclusively, the results attained in relation to project progress indicators. This often meant that the information gathered on project progress was minimally exploited in the report writing process (i.e., AllayPain, EducAll, and ProLearning), or even that data collection was restricted to what was required for the production of the technical reports (as was the case in Vy4Wellness). A program officer at ProLearning made a remark concerning how they use the information provided on activity-based record cards which seems quite to the point:

> *"A number of issues are covered in the standard forms: the results of the activity carried out; the strengths; the weaknesses; and in addition there is a section entitled 'recommendations'. The information contained in this section, well I am one of those who believe we should try to better exploit it*."
>
> (Program officer, ProLearning, Interview data, 2012)

Concerning the other activities constituting the reporting practice, in contradistinction to report writing, the *formats* of the 'field mission' and 'information compilation' activities were not specified in project contractual agreements, nor were they funder-specific. In fact, at the time of the research, Vy4Wellness, AllayPain and ProLearning were engaged in projects supported by the same funder, but they used different arrangements to record and compile their project data. Indeed, in all four NDOs, the formats of these activities feeding into report writing appear to reflect their individual organizing approaches, even if they all relied on field missions and a pyramidal compilation process to collect and prepare the needed data. Field missions consisted in regular visits to project localities to verify that project information was periodically recorded by community actors, and ensure that they properly used the data collection tools they were provided with. Information compilation activities usually mobilized several staff members and required the collaboration, or subcontracting, of community actors often charged with capturing the outputs of the project activities they were engaged in. The activity-based records produced at the community level were compiled from the ground up, validated, and collated for the production of aggregate project-level data. The description given below by the monitoring officer of AllayPain provides a telling illustration:

> *"So, there is a standard form for each activity; there is a form for the monthly synthesis; and there is a form for the quarterly synthesis. There is also an attendance form per activity, and this allows you to disaggregate per age, per gender; and it also serves as a means of verification."*
>
> (Monitoring officer, AllayPain, Interview data, 2012)

Importantly, through the field missions and pyramidal data compilation process, what seems to matter is not only the gathering of information on project achievements but also making visible the trail of documentary evidence which sustains the results presented in technical reports. Indeed, project folders contained the various forms used, allowing a reader to see for himself, and follow, the results achieved by a project activity over time and space (i.e., local results to regional results, obtained per intervention, per month, and per quarter). This trail of documents constituted the tangible evidence NDO members often relied on to ground assertions, and which senior staff strived to have pre-arranged and available for all possible inquirers to see.

> *During a staff meeting at ProLearning where recently completed activities were being discussed, the Financial and administration officer lamented the fact that these activities were not yet*

documented. Without such record, activity results were not made visible, and people don't know what the NDO does. She noted that it is about evidence-based communication, which she had received a training on, and it is very important because nothing proves otherwise that activity x or y was implemented.

(Staff meeting, ProLearning, Observation data, 2012)

Together with report writing these activities form the reporting practice which organizational members performed regularly and surprisingly with few marked differences despite their individual organizing approaches and the various funders they engaged with.

The pervasiveness of reporting in that particular way

The normalcy of reporting in this particular way was hinted at in numerous interviews and highlighted in organizational documents and meetings. The specific activities, structured and standardized techniques, and overwhelming focus on progress indicators and quantitative data, appear to have become normal, and were considered the appropriate way of doing things. As the Executive Director of Vy4Wellness remarked disapprovingly during a staff meeting where project progress was being discussed:

This is a meeting to discuss progress, and this requires that tables prepared in advance with detailed quantitative indicators be presented; nothing else. For, what is expected is not literary work, but to show the progress made against project indicators and the assigned budget. And that's all.

(Staff meeting, Vy4Wellness, Observation data, 2012)

The above account is not unique. Members of other NDOs expressed similar sentiments during interviews, meetings and corridor discussions, suggesting that the concern for showing project results took in budgetary considerations. More substantively, they also portrayed the narrative form as not only unnecessary for reporting progress but even highly undesirable. Likewise, a funder's representative explicitly stated his preference for "technical reports without verbiage" during a meeting with AllayPain project staff, and noted "he needed above all the numbers, for the quarter". Indubitably, international development funders play a part in fostering a focus on quantitative progress indicators and the use of standardized templates in NDOs reporting. However, the phenomenon seems much broader: it stretched beyond the

funder-grantee sphere. Indeed, international development funders were also subjected to similar imperatives and applied similar talk and tools when performing their own reporting activities. For example, while describing their relationship with grantees, a senior staff member of a funder made the following comment about the project indicators they asked them to report on:

> *"… these are quantitative indicators which we too received from our funder, and are obliged to report on every year. And it is on the basis of these same indicators that our funder in turn does its data compilation and reports to their government bodies."*
>
> (Senior staff, International development funder, Interview data, 2013)

There was overall broad acceptance for this way of doing things, and informants – NDOs and international development funders alike – often affirmed its relevance on account of the need for better accountability and transparency in the international development field. NDOs members appear to consider themselves active participants in these efforts. As a result, in their relationships with the community actors they partnered with to carry out project activities on the ground, they strived to infuse a similar concern for measurable results and the use of appropriate data collection instruments. This was generally done during the field missions and data compilation process, and typically took the form of training sessions or problem-solving interventions.

> *"…currently it is about result-based management, compared to before where it was management by objectives. Well, if you have to implement result-based management you necessarily have to organize a training session for the ground team…"*
>
> (Financial officer, EducAll, Interview data, 2012)

The reporting practice: the framing influences of technical and market discourses

Evidently, broadly speaking, reporting as an organizational practice has formed part of the conduct of development projects for many decades. This particular form of reporting is however relatively recent. As indicated by several informants, and the financial officer of EducAll in the previous quote, it had not always been the case that they would focus on result-based management. This particular way of reporting took shape over a number of years in Senegalese NDOs, and notably in the period following the 2005 *Paris Declaration on Aid*

Effectiveness[37]. The reporting practice performed by the four NDOs, as noted previously, rested heavily on quantitative results, tables and graphs, visible documentary trails, and conflated project results and budget to appreciate progress. This particular way of doing reporting, the analysis suggests, instantiates (and reproduces) a technical and a market discourse[38].

A technical discourse is manifest in the appeal to quantitative data, technical instruments, and evidentiary trails. Furthermore, informants commonly associated such reporting with objectivity and rigor, as did the AllayPain staff member below:

> "*One look at the results table and you can tell for each activity, which global and regional indicators were achieved. In fact, it mirrors the gaps you were asked to close, and everything is transparent*."
> (Staff member, AllayPain, Interview data, 2012)

The quantitative data, tables and graphs sought to convey that the information provided was 'technical', hence impersonal, transparent and verifiable, as opposed for instance to the narrative form or vignettes which would be considered subjective and particularistic. Reporting in this particular way also reveals a keen concern for accuracy: NDOs members displayed significant efforts to show through reporting that project expected results were indeed exactly attained. The field missions, data collation, and report writing served to ensure and show precise achievement. Not reaching anticipated results was not only frowned upon but fought through the close monitoring of community actors and the implementation of corrective measures. What's more, when anticipated results were surpassed, this was not always cause for rejoicing as noted by this Executive Director:

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[37]. Through the Paris Declaration, the international development community sought to promote greater country ownership over their own development policies and strategies, less duplication of efforts among funders, and more attention to transparency and the measurement of aid impacts (cf. OECD document "*The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the Accra Agenda for Action*").
[see http://www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/34428351.pdf]

[38]. The discourses were identified inductively through the analysis of the data collected and what this reveals about what organizational members deemed the appropriate way of doing things in relation to reporting (cf. table 2). The background references they relied on, or framing assumptions grounding their understandings, were revealed and further outlined by drawing on conceptual research on organizing principles – i.e., Boltanski and Thévenot (2006), complemented by Townley (2008)'s analysis of the rationalities underlying management techniques.

"The organization which funds our funder expects that 100% of the indicators will be achieved, but if we were to achieve 125% it would also be problematic because they will conclude that it is a sign of bad planning."

(Executive Director, AllayPain, Interview data, 2012)

Indeed, precision and exactitude were paramount. The impetus to be exact when reporting visibly flowed through different levels of actors, whose reporting practices were equally shaped by an understanding of project achievement (or failure) grounded in a technical discourse characterized by scientific principles of objectivity, rigor, verifiability and accuracy. The reporting practice of the four NDOs rested on this particular way of thinking which defined what is appropriate to do, to give account on, and to know in relation to the performance of development projects. What is worth knowing and sharing was narrowed to the countable and that which strictly matched established measures (i.e., the quantitative progress indicators). This mode of thought promoted accounts of project achievement which were stripped of contextual conditions and detached from the account giver's particular reflections.

Moreover, as indicated previously, the normal way of doing reporting also entailed inserting budgetary considerations into the technical reporting process. Interestingly, although in all four NDOs, financial reports were prepared regularly and submitted separately as required by funders, organizational members nonetheless sought through the field missions, the data compilation process and the writing of the technical reports to ensure that project results were aligned with the allotted budget. This concern for aligning the results with the budget generally translated into periodic cross-verification aiming to match the planned results, with the achieved results and the related expense receipts. When such verification gave rise to worries that results might not be achieved by the end of the reporting period, or that changes in the cost of goods might lead to a budgetary overrun, corrective measures were taken to rebalance the situation. But, in the rare occasions where community actors carried out more actions than anticipated, resulting in relatively more outputs produced and proportionally more money spent, actions were also taken. The tendency was then to downplay the project quarterly results, and set aside the extra-outputs and receipts for possible later incorporation into the reporting of the subsequent period. This was the case at Vy4Wellness as the following excerpt, relating an end-of-period data compilation process, shows:

The program officer and the financial assistant are verifying that the expense receipts submitted by community actors for the various actions they carried out match the results presented in the regional result tables. (…). What seems most important is the perfect or quasi-perfect accordance between the achieved results and their related expense receipts, and the expected results, rather than letting any, even the smallest, discrepancy show. The most surprising yet is when the achieved results exceed the expected results. In those cases, the program officer pulled out the expense receipts and subtracted the related results, and noted that they will see if these can be added to the results of the next quarter or else they will be written off.

(Vy4Wellness, Observation data, 2012)

The concern for exactness was hence also in relation to the funds allotted. This seems rather uncanny in the context of technical report production, especially as it appears to be a preoccupation of NDOs and their funders alike. Indeed, NDO members and their funders frequently mixed results and budget in their talks on project progress, as was the case during a meeting held early in the project life cycle at AllayPain:

The program officer of AllayPain makes reference to one of the indicators and notes that they won't be able to reach the anticipated number, because it is very difficult to distribute condoms in that setting and they have realized that this number is overly ambitious. The funder's representative then asks: "how are we going to fix this? Because the budget is set on the basis of that number of condoms being distributed, is it not?". After a short moment of silence, the program officer replies: "We'll manage. We'll find a way. And since we're only in the first quarter, we'll find a way to up the distribution and reach the anticipated target."

(Meeting, AllayPain, Observation data, 2012)

Evidently, it is conceivable that the monetary value assigned by a funder to project expected outputs would serve as a powerful means for inducing high performance while reinforcing the contractual incentive to stay within budget. But, importantly, it also came to shape the accounts given by NDOs as it was used by NDOs members as a measure to appreciate project progress. Not unlike a market commodity, project results were examined in relation to their monetary value, and discussions often proceeded as if planned activities and outputs had their established price-tags. It seems it was this constructed equivalence between expected results and money which fuelled efforts to show a perfect match, even if this ironically entailed underreporting actual project achievements. The fusing of expected outputs

and budget appeared to carry with it a presumption of stability – not dissimilar to that generally associated with money – which extended to NDOs understanding of project achievement being indissociable from what was planned.

In fact, when NDOs' periodic field missions and data compilation activities pointed to the possibility that planned outputs may not be achieved, the corrective actions undertaken with the backing of funders often consisted in reshuffling implementation tactics and occasionally switching localities in favor of those which would allow reaching set targets.

> *During a meeting with the funder's representative, it was agreed that a new approach was required in order to reach the established target and close the current gap in the number of people sensitized. Hence, the budget allotted for carrying out activities in Dakar has been reassigned to regional sites. The activities have been initiated in the regions and are progressing well.*
>
> (Staff meeting notes 2011, Vy4Wellness, Document reviewed in 2012)

In this way, reporting was performed to make it possible for NDOs and funders to seize opportunities that would permit reaching set targets, including exchanging less productive actions and even implementation sites for more promising ones. The reporting practice was also importantly shaped by these considerations which the analysis suggests rest on a market discourse.

In sum, a technical and a market discourse guided reporting at Vy4Wellness, AllayPain, EducAll and ProLearning, and together provided the framing assumptions that constructed the reporting practice. As a result, certain actions and ideas were privileged (e.g., building a quantitative account of progress) and others were discredited (e.g., producing narrative accounts). The ongoing performance of reporting in this way reproduced these ways of knowing and forms of conduct, and contributed to its normalization.

The reporting practice: the disciplinary techniques and operations which guide conduct

Reporting in this particular way had become self-evident, and the large majority of informants – NDO members and international development actors alike – highlighted the importance of showing the impact development projects were *concretely* having. Not everyone

agreed on the type of impact that could be assessed over short time periods, and a few NDO members expressed skepticism and sarcasm about a then recent push for behavioural change indicators given the adjoining expectation for quarterly or biannual technical reports. However, as noted previously, the reporting practice was widely used and accepted. In fact, it was considered an altogether appropriate and even superior way of reporting. More specifically, NDO members widely associated it with greater professionalism, superior resource stewardship, and greater transparency. Despite its particular form, for being shaped by technical and market assumptions as described in the previous section, in the studied NDOs it was visibly considered an essential way of capturing and talking about development project achievement, and precisely of giving account on *concrete* project results.

This does not however mean that the reporting process was perceived as unproblematic. It was often described as time-consuming, requiring the participation of several organizational members, and calling for the frequent nudging of those involved. Indeed, there were a number of challenges to the proper enactment of reporting: mistakes could be made when the data was being captured, recorded on physical forms, or compiled at the regional or national levels; expense receipts might be missing or lacking the proper validation stamps; and some activities could even not lend themselves to the presentation of outputs in the required disaggregated manner. These imperfections made for uneven practice performance which NDO members expended considerable time and energy not only to catch and correct before technical reports were submitted, but also to address more broadly so that future performance would improve. Frequent admonitions (e.g., reminding, scolding, shaming or rewarding) and periodic demonstration work (e.g., coaching by colleagues, one-on-one problem-solving discussions during field missions, or formal training sessions) were varyingly used in the four NDOs to inculcate this form of reporting internally and in the community actors they partnered with. These techniques and operations came to constitute standard inducement to get all involved to continually perfect their reporting activities, and played an important role in sustaining the recursive reproduction of the reporting practice.

> *In relation to the last quarterly report for one of their funders, the Executive director remarked that there was an unacceptable delay in its submission due to miscommunication within the team, and added disapprovingly that the observed slowness in the production of documents forces her to apologize to partners. The ensuing discussions brought forth various suggestions for the preparation of future reports, including: to review the data collection tools used and*

develop a template which focuses on the information required for the report so that the writer is able to report on the indicators even if he did not take part in the activity itself; and to chase up community actors and regional collaborators for the required data before the end of the month, so as to prevent their occasional transmission of the data at the last minute or with errors.

(Meeting Notes 2012, AllayPain, Document reviewed in 2012)

Likewise, NDO members' expressed uneasiness or objections to aspects of the reporting activities appear to feed a series of similar remedial efforts. In effect, these complaints overwhelmingly concerned the difficulties involved in implementing reporting activities in challenging conditions, such as collecting data when working in remote areas, or with community actors whose level of education might be low. Frequent delays in the transfer of project funds were also denounced for their inevitable effects on implementation and the scale of results that could be achieved in a given reporting period. These operational challenges were openly discussed in staff meetings, meetings with funders, and the technical reports NDO members produced. However, they only seem to lead to increased efforts to build capacity in reporting and provide more incentives for proper reporting, or to the further standardization of data collection tools so as to reduce the possibility that mistakes be made. In essence, the analysis suggests that these operations contributed to the refinement of reporting activities and the further systematization and entrenchment of this practice.

"I would like to insist on the second point [mentioned by my colleague]: I mean the need to strengthen local capacity. There are serious challenges when it comes to reporting. It is important to show our regional collaborators how to do reporting well, because right now, it is clear that is not quite the case."

(Program officer, ProLearning, Staff meeting, 2012)

Indeed, the repeated performance of this form of reporting, together with these corrective techniques and operations, visibly disciplined the conduct of community actors and organizational members. Since certain actions, talk and ideas were considered altogether normal, organizational members came to judge actors' conduct according to such norm. Tellingly, ranking systems were established by studied NDOs to measure and compare the quality of the reporting produced by individual community actors; and the ranks they were assigned visibly affected community actors' understanding of their own performance and their

individual efforts to improve on their reporting work. Although such systems had not been applied to NDO members, what proper reporting entailed still served as a norm against which staff members' individual works were examined, before reprimands or congratulations were granted. Interestingly, the Executive Director of one of the NDO had even considered establishing such a formal ranking system for his staff:

> *During a meeting held at Vy4Wellness to review progress on one of its projects, the Executive Director angrily remarked that the organization's results for the last two quarters were subpar. He criticized the regional collaborators for being unable to fill a few simple forms, and threatened to institute a ranking system based on the quality of the reporting and reported results*.
>
> (Staff meeting, Vy4Wellness, 2012)

As in the case of individual actors, high-performance for an organization had also come to be widely defined in relation to the reporting work. "W*hether an organization is performing as it should is determined on the basis of the budget we give them and the target they must reach*", a senior staff member of an international development funder remarked, for instance; and NDOs' technical reports assuredly provided a means for such determination. As noted previously, the contractual terms of the project agreements struck between funders and NDOs visibly influenced NDOs' production of these technical reports. NDOs members were aware that failing to produce a technical report may adversely affect project funding or the continuation of project activities, and these possible sanctions inscribed in project agreements appeared to encourage regular report writing and submission.

However, the disciplinary operations sustaining reporting were also broader. The sharing of information on project achievements was widely encouraged, and this took the form of open forums where NDOs and other actors involved in the same project or a given development issue met at the local or regional level to present their realizations. Multi-actor workshops were also organized occasionally by issue-based national associations of civil society organizations or funders at the end or beginning of a project cycle. These platforms provided an opportunity for discussing project progress and fostering collaboration in multi-actor projects, but also became spaces where individual NDOs depictions of their achievements were inevitably compared in relation to the norm, and their understanding of what constitutes high-performance was further shaped. In this way, these platforms contributed to further disciplining the conduct of NDOs and supporting the continuous reproduction of the reporting

practice. In addition, the processes contributing to making this form of reporting normal stretched across space and time: beyond a project lifecycle, the technical reports NDOs produced could be repeatedly consulted by external audiences and used in large part (albeit not exclusively) as a basis for deciding on NDOs' credibility and merit. The possibility of remote uses and judgments reinforced NDOs' understanding of this form of reporting as that which matters, and encouraged continuous reporting performance. One such remote use was alluded to by the funder's representative mentioned above:

> *"When applying, they must send in a file. So, generally, we ask that they send their statutory documents, i.e., to show that their organization is legally formed; to send normally the last three annual technical reports they have produced..."*
>
> (Senior staff, International development funder, Interview data, 2013)

To summarize, a set of disciplinary techniques and operations and self-disciplining efforts sustained this particular way of doing reporting, and contributed to the continuous normalization of this form of reporting. The mechanisms of discipline were not limited to the funder-NDO contractual space in this case, but extended to field-level processes, and importantly even to voluntary actions and procedures developed and continuously improved on in studied NDOs to sustain proper reporting. In addition to the techniques and procedures described previously, one NDO developed an electronic data recording system; another structured a formal step-wise reporting process; and all four NDOs formally dedicated at least one staff person to the function of project monitoring. Aided by disciplinary techniques and self-disciplining processes, the reporting practice was recursively reproduced and continually constructed as an inescapable proper organizational conduct.

The effects of reporting: the creation of the legitimate yet 'novice' subject

With the normalization of this form of reporting, the individuals and organizations that adequately performed it also came to be regarded as competent implementing actors, not only by funders – both existing and potential – but also by their peers. As noted previously, credibility was bestowed upon those NDOs that could demonstrate through their technical reports that they captured what matters – i.e., project achievement expressed in technical terms and against budget – and adequate presentation of results in open project forums contributed to these organizations' repute. Importantly, NDOs members themselves also

applied a similar evaluative perspective to their own organizations. In their talks about their organizations, it is perceptible that organizational merit was assessed in large part in relation to their reporting work and the techniques and procedures instituted to sustain such reporting. Those who understood their reporting practice as condoned by their funders and other development actors prided themselves on the favourable reputation they had acquired. Likewise, those who viewed their organization's reporting work as congruent with the norm displayed great satisfaction and respect. In both these cases, NDO members relatedly identified their own organizations as legitimate development actors. One Executive director summed up such self-understanding when recounting the genesis of his organization and highlighting the elements that had made a difference:

> *"These are very important procedures [reporting and related management procedures], in the sense that these are procedures that once you get used to them, you will always do a good job. It is very rigorous, it requires a lot of time, it requires a lot of control, etc. etc. But, it is better to have good procedures, clear, straightforward, and all, and to work in excellent conditions rather than to work in conditions lacking such clarity. (…) So, today, we have no reason to be ashamed of our procedures, vis-à-vis any other organization."*
>
> (Executive Director, Vy4Wellness, Interview data, 2012)

Moreover, it was also in relation to this form of reporting that those hoping to see their organization become more (securely) legitimate conceived of their organizational aspiration. Their appreciation of their existing standardized reporting activities as insufficiently rounded and systematized fed their valuation of the organization, and their outlook on organizational growth. This was the case of EducAll, and while their reporting activities were visibly equally shaped by technical and market assumptions, a number of staff comments in corridor discussions and interviews suggested that organizational members felt that the hoped-for optimum was yet to be achieved. This is reflected in the following quote of a staff member who was commenting on a new project under development:

> *"To work with these funders will strengthen the organization's CV, both at the national and international levels. That's for one. Secondly, it gives you an opportunity to benefit from an extraordinary experience (...) in the areas of methods, practice, monitoring, evaluation. Because these people will provide you with numerous tools (...), will strengthen your capacities. (...). So, you are working with them, and these tools will also help you work with other organizations; it gives a different standing to the NDO. So, working with them, although demanding, opens your*

mind, but also strengthens your capacity, your capacity for grasping things. (....). These are people who have rigorous dates and clear metrics. [They say] "We need a report in ten days" and you have to work at it, and do it."

(Project staff, EducAll, Interview data, 2012)

Hence, although this was not the only way in which a NDO's merit was evaluated, this form of reporting was visibly highly valued, and had considerable effects on the NDO members' own understanding of their organization. The performance of this reporting practice was broadly associated with organizational credibility and propriety, and internally it came to be a defining lens through which staff members themselves judged their organization's legitimacy. The occasional materialization of rewards that NDOs members associated with proper reporting – such as repeated funding from existing funders, new collaboration opportunities, or a more relaxed frequency for the technical reports – only served to further such self-identification, and encouraged continued reliance on the framing assumptions sustaining reporting.

However, the recursive performance of reporting in this particular way also reinforced NDOs members' perception that what is to be known to adequately capture development projects was the numbers, the aggregates and the statistics. While proper execution signalled legitimacy, the form of knowledge shaping reporting defined the positions of actors in relation to the technical discourse upheld as meaningful. Indeed, NDOs members fully recognized that the quantitative depictions of project outputs recorded at the community level only gained full meaning when gathered and assembled at the regional, national, or even continental and international, levels to generate that which is considered telling: the "bigger picture". This form of knowing presupposes particular relations of power, and more specifically distinguishes the '*expert*' who can lay claims to such aggregated view from the '*novice*' who merely possesses what would be considered under this regime at best a partial understanding of what matters, and at worst an unreliable view of local conditions because incomplete. It seems that this separation of actors according to such knowledge-ability came to legitimate the fact that project progress indicators were defined by actors situated higher in the aid chain. Indeed, the definition of project indicators by international development funders whether viewed favorably – as did the majority of NDOs members – or resignedly, was often justified in relation to the knowledge advantage granted to these actors. This was reportedly also the case for community actors who broadly accepted that organizational actors higher up in the aid chain,

thus reputed to know better, could define and change project indicators, as explained below by a program officer at Vy4Wellness when asked about reactions to changed indicators:

> *"... they think that since we are higher on the ladder, since we are a little higher up in the chain for this project, they tend to think, wrongfully so, that if we have conceived it that way, it means that it will necessarily work*."
>
> (Program officer, Vy4Wellness, Interview data, 2012)

The indicators discussed in the above quote, the program officer further noted, had in fact been newly defined by the international development funder for this project to further emphasize "results" (e.g., number of persons sensitized) over "process" (e.g., number of talks organized). Vy4Wellness staff members working on this project did not object either, and rather appeared to welcome these new indicators which they described convincingly as "normal" since an emphasis on results was "what was of interest". The reporting process tangibly and repetitively reinforced the notion that results needed to be aggregated to generate meaningful knowledge. In parallel, it seems this facilitated the recognition of expertise in those development (organizational) actors who could generate the higher level aggregation and bigger picture. In the case of studied NDOs, this visibly translated into their identification with a junior position relative such expertise. This is, for instance, the impression that emerges from members' description of project formulation as naturally informed by "international surveys", high-level technical knowledge and the trends so revealed (e.g., Executive Director, AllayPain, Interview data, 2012). Even more telling, perhaps, is the following comment made by the Executive Director of EducAll in relation to a new tender project about which he visibly felt they were not up to par despite their field experience:

> *"… we have worked on this disease [the focus of the tender], the call is for the community level, not the big stuff (...). So we did, we applied. But, really to my surprise, the international development organization said that it was a really good submission. Because it was too small, it did not require big investments and I think that's what seduced them. (...). Our weakness is the technical knowledge on the disease, and the modes of transmission, and the technical terms they use. That's the weak point, that is really our weakness (...). We'll learn with the others, because there will be training, training for the trainers, training for (...) for all involved in the project."*
>
> (Executive Director, EducAll, Interview data 2012)

In some cases, as the account presented below suggests this self-identification appears to stymie initiative even in the absence of external pressures. The taken-for-granted order and the position assumed by the NDO is perceptible in the set of exchanges between the Executive Director and two project staff members of EducAll here related. These were corridor discussions concerning a new project being developed at EducAll which took place a few hours after a meeting with the funder's representatives and following their departure:

> *The Executive Director and two staff members seemed rather pleased with the meeting. Staff member A discreetly critiqued Staff member B for not having properly prepared the diagram of the information circuit. [This is within the NDO prerogative and the funder's call-for-proposals did not pre-define this. The funder's representatives did not provide any specification during the meeting either; rather they encouraged the NDO to describe a little more its proposed approach]. Staff member B retorted that he used a standard monitoring and evaluation diagram and shared it with both of them for comments beforehand, but nobody reacted. With this, the Executive Director noted that in any case they should not kid themselves because it was the funder's funder that will define the indicators and not EducAll. Staff member B replied that this notwithstanding they could propose something and show the funder how they collect and compile data from the ground up. Later on, however, they opted to simply imitate the monitoring protocol reportedly used in successful NDOs.*
>
> (EducAll, Observation data, 2012)

What's more, the appeal of the technical synthetic representation of project achievements appears to increasingly spill into new project development, and constitute the form of knowledge considered appropriate for grounding new development programming. In the studied NDOs, the more recent project proposals made more references to studies and diagnosis having identified "gaps" – expressed in "prevalence rate", numbers and percentages – which project activities were said to address through similarly quantified tasks and levels of efforts. Given that project achievements often foreshadowed next project phases or fed into new rounds of programming, this is overall not that surprising. However, project justifications were overwhelmingly borrowed from funders' project documents and calls-for-proposals rather than constructed for instance (even if partially) on the basis of the NDO's analyses of its own experience. Like in the case of reporting, these project justifications and project proposals more broadly bore signs of the framing influences of a technical discourse, and heavily relied on numbers, tables and statistics. Further, similarly to reporting, it seems that performing

these programming actions contributed to reinforcing organizational members' understanding that this form of knowledge was what was normal, and its mastery was desirable. As the following quote suggests, the notion that meaningful knowledge resided with those who could create the "bigger picture" was also visibly shared by international development funders operating solely in Senegal who considered themselves at the lower end of the knowledge scale:

> *"In fact, international development actors, who are at the international level, accumulate experience and expertise in different countries. If you take for example [Organization X], they have strategic information: they can tell you in West Africa this is the evolutionary trend of these epidemics, and we think that every evolutionary trend has a scientific basis, proven, demonstrated (…). For this reason, it is important to listen to what they are saying because they have accumulated experience, they will have good strategies which are scientifically valid, and these allow good decision-making. So, it is important to listen to them and to take into account what they are saying."*
>
> (Senior staff, International development funder, Interview data, 2013)

The aggregated data and statistical trends, the above quote refers to, were broadly used to define programming directions and priorities, and it seems the knowledge reproduced by this technical discourse is widely deemed a priori preferable, for its scale, cumulative and quantitative nature. Those unable to lay claim to this knowledge openly spoke of their shortcomings, proceeded when articulating their project proposals like followers, and appeared to self-identify as 'novice' development actors in relation to this form of knowledge. This might also provide some insights into the increasing reliance of the studied NDOs on participating in tendering processes and calls-for-proposals to secure new programs instead of defining and promoting project ideas built on their experiences. Surely, a larger number of funders have been resorting to tenders and calls to finance development projects, but many still do not. Yet, in all four cases, at the time of the study, organizational programming efforts were primarily directed towards finding and participating in these largely predefined development projects.

Overall, the findings related in this section provide important insights on the reporting practice performed by NDOs and its power effects. The summative account that the above offers is mapped in figure 2. In essence, the data shows how the particular form of reporting performed

by NDOs – distinctive for the technical and market framing assumptions sustaining it – was continuously reproduced as the normal way of doing reporting, and suggests that this has not negligible consequences in terms of the way in which the members of these NDOs came to see their organizations.

3.6 DISCUSSION

Over the past two decades, NDOs in Senegal and elsewhere have faced increasing calls for transparency and accountability, and experienced a growing deployment of management procedures and practices aiming to foster greater professionalism throughout the international development field (e.g., Ebrahim, 2003; Mitlin, Hickey, & Bebbington, 2007; Wallace *et al.*, 2007). By all accounts, through their recursive reporting activities and oversight of community actors' reporting, studied NDOs sought to act as responsible actors of the international development field, and show accountability towards both their funders and the communities they purport to serve. In principle, reporting, as an organizational practice, could take a number of forms. Yet regardless of the NDO which was giving account, and the funder, reporting performance was uncannily similar. The question then is: how does this practice, which is otherwise only one possible form of reporting, continue to be reproduced and what are the consequences of its recursive performance. The analysis herein presented sought to engage with the reporting practice – i.e., what it is – the conditions making it possible, and its power effects, so as to extend our understanding of a now prevalent management practice and its consequences, beyond customary concerns with the veracity of the accounts given by NDOs (e.g. Barr *et al.*, 2005; Burger & Owens, 2010) or the authenticity or foreignness of the discourses grounding their reporting. The analysis shows that a set of disciplinary techniques and processes sustain NDOs' reporting practice and may thus account for its recursive reproduction. It further suggests that reporting in this particular way has important effects on organizational self-understanding and behavior. In particular, the analysis points to five important implications concerning the reproduction of this particular form of reporting in local NDOs and its organizational consequences.

First, through the recursive enactment of the reporting practice, project performance came to be constructed as the exact achievement of a series of quantitative outputs and, just as importantly, on budget. As a corollary, it constituted as competent implementing

organizational actors those NDOs that reported in this particular way, and deployed staff, resources and specific tools to produce the desirable periodic accounts. Surely, the proliferation of this form of reporting encouraged regular production of NDOs' technical reports and more frequent documentation of the related activities carried out at the community level. It is conceivable that this would contribute to better resource traceability and to some extent improved accountability. The greater standardisation of project progress metrics may also have facilitated the identification of areas of duplication at the regional and national levels, and spurred more efforts towards cooperation and program complementarity between aid actors.

However, this reporting practice also had other more objectionable effects due to its particular attributes. The quest for objectivity and scientific rigor through numbers, tables and data aggregation, and the use of money and visible documentary trails as validation mechanisms, served to reify a form of knowledge where project performance hinges on what can be counted. The numbers tracked, captured and shared about project activities constituted what matters in terms of achievement, in a sense the "truth" of their realization, and consequently took precedence over, if not disqualified, alternative representations of project results and community states. Indeed, for example, other possible project achievements besides those related to the pre-defined progress indicators were simply absent, and the use of the narrative form was discouraged. Such fixation on quantitative performance measurement, Power (1997) and others persuasively suggest, may have a number of dangerous consequences as it may divert resources away from certain organizational functions, or come to circumscribe the range of activities implemented to those amenable to counting, or even invade all organizational life and habits in extreme situations (see also, for example Keepers, Treleaven, Sykes, & Darcy, 2012; Neu & Ocampo, 2007; Rahaman *et al.*, 2010; Thörn, 2011).

The cases herein presented certainly point to some degree of re-definition of NDOs' organizing processes and organizational functions. But the research also importantly suggests that a deeper effect might be that by facilitating NDOs members' identification with this particular form of knowledge, the reporting practice also encouraged their *subjectification*, and their seeing their organizations as 'novice', in other words development actors which unlike the experts could not lay claim to the synthetic unity of knowledge obtained at higher levels of aggregation, in other words the meaningful "bigger picture". This self-understanding appears

to have circumscribed their worlds of possibility. Building on these findings, it is argued that this reporting practice contributes to shaping organizational discretion in significant ways. Importantly, this is not only for the organizational resources, time and energy it takes up, but also because it influences these organizations' ways of making sense of their contexts and tends to contribute to further limiting their own programming efforts – or the particular form of knowledge it reproduces as appropriate and normal for judging development projects.

Second, the analysis suggests that the legitimating effects of reporting performance paradoxically reinforced the marginalization of NDOs in these settings characterized by high dependency. On the one hand, the proper enactment of the reporting practice signalled compliance with the socially acceptable and was often rewarded through access to new funding or continued involvement in subsequent project phases. This made it possible for NDOs members to conceive of their organization as legitimate, and further encouraged the reproduction – and even increasing refinement – of reporting activities. On the other hand, however, practice performance reflected and reproduced a particular form of knowledge and the attendant identification of expertise with the mastery of technical instruments and synthetic representations of development data.

Yet, such mastery evaded local NDOs. The conception of competence conveyed by this practice thus facilitated local NDOs self-identification as both legitimate and marginal organizational actors in the international development field. This seeming paradox resembles the contradiction Brown *et al.* (2010) relate in another context where the prevalent discourse of creativity encouraged junior architects to have pride in their everyday work and conceive of themselves as professionals while simultaneously making them see their distance from the esoteric knowledge and ideal competency it constructs. In the case of the studied NDOs, their self-identification as removed from the ideal was, it seems, in large part influenced by their specific task position within the aid chain. Indeed, the aid chain comprises layers of development actors through which projects results are flown from the ground up and gradually aggregated to obtain the meaningful bigger picture (e.g., Wallace *et al.*, 2007; Thörn, 2011). This introduces for local NDOs several degrees of separation from the locus of 'technical' expertise (Foucault, 1980a; Townley, 2008). For these organizations – as might be the case for other local NDOs in developing countries with similar task positions – the legitimacy acquired through proper reporting may in fact help to further entrench a form of knowledge which

amplifies the existing field-level hierarchical matrix. This, it is argued, induces power-knowledge relations that seem overall less clearly positive for local NDOs.

Third, the power relations implicated in the performance of reporting evidently comprised direct influences from funders, notably through their contractual requirements. These influences, the research suggests, were furthered and surpassed by the disciplinary and subjectifying effects of this reporting practice. Indeed, the contractual relationships between NDOs and funders often created the possibility for direct demands for, or more subtle recommendations of, specific reporting frequency, forms and tools. In addition, compliance could be encouraged through sanctions for poor reporting, or the mere threats of punitive actions. Conversely, those organizations that were doing it 'right' were generally praised and often rewarded with continued funders' support. These direct dependency-related influences certainly appear to have contributed to practice reproduction, constituting what might be called a "coercive backdrop" (Fleming & Spicer, 2014).

However, the analysis also shows that the recursive performance of reporting can hardly be explained only in terms of the workings of resource dependency. Reporting enactment was uncannily similar in studied NDOs regardless of the funders they collaborated with, and even in the absence of direct funders' impositions. Others have provided a similar account where in South Africa and Uganda for instance a focus on producing "the right kind of report" and showing "neatness of results and success" prevailed in local NDOs even in the face of explicit encouragement to write more freely (Wallace *et al.*, 2007: 113). In essence, for the four Senegalese NDOs, it would appear that the contractual relationship and uncertainty concerning access to resources were influential in the reproduction of certain aspects of the reporting practice, and in particular facilitated the repeated production of technical reports for their various funders. But, the analysis further suggests that the reproduction of the reporting practice as a whole was also made possible through the constructed normalcy of a particular conception of project achievement. What's more, the broader disciplinary effects of this form of reporting visibly lessened the need for funders' enforcement actions, while broadly facilitating adherence to funders' requirements regarding the production of technical reports. Indeed, NDOs members themselves developed and applied corrective measures, as they strived to do what was viewed as proper reporting. Equally, their self-identification as legitimate implementing development actors and aspiring 'technical' experts significantly aided

practice reproduction. In a sense, following Foucault (2010c: 207), it might be said that self-discipline and subjectification extended funders' influences, which helped bring their conjoined effects "to the most minute and distant elements". As a result, while NDOs members reported latitude of choice in their reporting activities, they were nonetheless bound to a particular conception of reporting, which in effect restricted their ways of knowing and acting.

Fourth, the self-disciplining efforts of studied NDOs tended to monitor reporting performance but also importantly quieten organizational members' uneasiness about the reporting activities. Their remedial actions could be said to have some affinities with the containment and restoration works Lok and de Rond (2012) propose were used to address practice breakdowns at the Cambridge University Boat Club. Like the Cambridge's team, NDOs members were faced with minor irritants which they accommodated, and more pronounced operational tensions which they corrected before these affected the validity of their documentary trails or technical reports. The minor tensions were manifest in meetings and corridor discussions as skepticism was voiced concerning the feasibility of certain reporting tasks and sarcasm uttered on fewer rare occasions relating to the tracking of some newly introduced indicators. These and other operational tensions at the basis of practice variation constituted instances which could be said to represent resistance, or possibly more broadly described as "criticisms" (Messner, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008) – .e., since they were not fundamental acts of protest and occurred rather routinely – which did not appear to engender substantive change. This is overall not that surprising if one considers that these challenges to the reporting practice were about its practical application and feasibility in particular circumstances. This, Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) might have suggested, constitutes a form of questioning concerned with the proper instantiation of the principles grounding action but not a denunciation of these principles themselves (see also Dansou & Langley, 2012: 511-512).

In fact, as mentioned previously, NDOs members' demonstrations of uneasiness and operational quibbles provided instead ready fodder for further refining and purifying practice performance. While under the theoretical opening proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) or institutional perspectives (e.g., Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) the tensions and ensuing refinement might be considered a normal state of affairs, a Foucauldian perspective allowed to examine more closely the power relations involved, and importantly the foreseeable but also unexpected effects such normalization has

on organizational behavior. In so doing, this research identified the multifarious power effects of reporting which, one may suggest – aided by not negligible concerns for survival – might make it more difficult for would-be dissenting actors to emerge and engage in more radical challenging of the reporting practice by calling into question the form of knowledge grounding it.

Fifth, many studies have pointed to the inadequacy of particular management practices in nonprofit settings, by highlighting organizational members' questioning of the desirability of an instrumental rationality (e.g., Oakes *et al.,* 1998; Treleaver & Sykes, 2005), or pointing out implantation limitations as they engender a disruptive discrepancy between what organizational members do and what they say they do (e.g., Bromley & Powell, 2012; Goddard & Assad, 2006). In the current case, the reporting practice was not merely being paid lip service but was carried out in earnest, and NDOs members convincingly referred to this form of reporting as superior and better for the organizations and the communities they serve. What might explain this broad adherence then?

As this research shows the particular disciplinary techniques and operations sustaining reporting, and the quest for legitimacy played an important role in NDOs' appropriation of this form of reporting. In addition, management practices in NDOs are typically constituted through what Lewis (1998: 339) labels "an improvised process involving the importation of techniques and ideas from a wide range of other fields"; and in these settings it thus appears that the introduction of new techniques is a rather common occurrence. This suggested diversity in, and dynamic mixing of, the components of management practices in NDOs would imply that different forms could potentially coexist. Yet, this was not the case. The ways in which development actors gave account on project achievement reveal greater codification, systematization and standardization. The increasing uniformity may well have appeased concerns over the use of resources, but this form of reporting also appears to have squeezed out other ways of giving account on project achievement, and of talking about local realities. For example, one might imagine that, rather than performing exclusively the current reporting practice, organizations would apply different forms of reporting in light of practical circumstances. This might take the form of accounts which are responsive to the real-life situations and particular problems local NDOs members face when carrying out project activities, and which therefore not only include the successes, but also give due attention to

unanticipated results and outright project failures. Such multifaceted reporting, if it were possible, might allow greater reflexivity with regards to the social and physical environment in which these projects are implemented and in fact, it might be argued, foster better accountability.

3.7 CONCLUSION

This paper examines the reporting practice of local NDOs in Senegal, and interrogates their recursive reproduction and the power relations shaped (and being shaped) by this practice. It proposes that reporting had paradoxical power effects as it encouraged NDOs members to see their organizations as legitimate local development actors while at the same time facilitating their identification as 'novice'. Indeed, although reporting may, in principle, take multiple forms, reporting activities were performed with surprising regularity and reflected *a* particular conception of project achievement regardless of the NDOs and their funders. Reporting was markedly shaped by a technical and a market discourse which translated into a concern with tracking, recording and sharing in NDOs produced technical reports primarily the quantitative outputs of project activities and in relation with the budget. Discourses are the "tacit knowledge which informs particular ways of making sense of the world"(Haugaard, 2002: 185), and in this case, the ways of knowing sustaining reporting constructed particular talks, texts and actions as appropriate and desirable, while disciplining out others.

The reporting practice came to be the "eye of power" (Foucault, 1980) through which a number of techniques and operations served to normalize this particular form of reporting and sustain continued performance. The "normal" way of reporting also meant that categorical distinctions could be established between those doing proper reporting and those who did not, but relatedly also between those who mastered the related form of knowledge and those who did not. This, it is argued, contributed to NDOs self-identification as both legitimate and 'novice' development actors. A number of NDOs of the developing world find themselves in situations similar to those related in this paper, as they unrelentingly work to do proper reporting but only have a partial picture of project achievement due to their task positions in the aid chain, and it is conceivable that they might see themselves through similar lenses. The irony may well be that by reproducing a management practice generally regarded as desirable for NDOs' accountability, these organizations would be bestowed with legitimacy, but their

continual reproduction of this practice may also affect the ways in which they conceive of their agency.

The perpetuation of this form of reporting and its power/knowledge effects also point to another paradox. The systematization and quantification of results, which a proper performance of this practice supposes, serve to reinforce the appropriateness of representations of local realities that can be counted and aggregated. It follows that a competent practitioner of this form of reporting needs not possess a fine-grained understanding of the circumstances surrounding project implementation. In a sense, such reporting could be said to call for more generalized rather than particularized comprehension of the local conditions which may affect project implementation. Yet, local NDOs usually pride themselves on being development actors who are close to local communities and who thus possess a better grasp of the particulars of these environments. This much, it seems, was also assumed by funders in the 1990s who reportedly relied on local NDOs for carrying out development projects, in part because of their closeness to local populations and relatedly their ability to bring about more sustainable outcomes (e.g., Lewis, 2007). The paradoxical consequence of the current reporting practice might hence be to contribute to changing local NDOs into mere executors who would thus also be less substantively important to the process. With the attendant rise of funder-designed Call-For-Proposals as a funding mechanism for development projects – which local NDOs increasingly take part in – and growing funders' direct consultations with local populations to define their own programs, local NDOs risk seeing their bridging and 'conception' role gradually fade away.

What's more, the reporting practice might also indirectly affect these local NDOs' engagement with their contexts. As the reporting celebrates the impersonal, the objective, and the quantifiable, it also risks discouraging practical knowledge and attentiveness to the ongoing confrontation of abstract program ambitions and ground-level reactions. The imagery commonly associated with local NDOs highlights their aspirations for positive and locally-relevant social change. What could be the value of their working closely with local communities, one might ask, if adaptive programming is restricted and learning in action overlooked?

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ANNEXES

Table 1 : Case summary

	Presentation		Data Collected		
	Structure	***Areas of Work***	***Interviews***	***Documents***	***Observation***
Vy4Wellness	▪ Relatively small: under 15 pers. ▪ Staff composed of: Executive director[39]; Financial officer; Program officers; Support staff[40]. ▪ Formal regional representation ▪ Rarely worked with consultants	▪ Active in the health Sector ▪ Project implementation carried out in collaboration with community actors	~ 15 hours (10 pers., including all senior and technical staff)	70+ documents[41] (>1000 pages)	4 meetings Organizational life / dynamics
AllayPain	▪ Relatively small: under 10 pers. ▪ Staff composed of: Executive Director; Financial officer; Program officer; Support staff. ▪ Formal regional representation ▪ Occasional work with consultants	▪ Active in the health Sector ▪ Project implementation carried out in collaboration with community actors	~ 17 hours (9 pers., including all senior and technical staff)	65+ documents (>900 pages)	1 meeting Organizational life / dynamics
EducAll	▪ Relatively small: under 10 pers. ▪ Staff composed of: Executive Director; Financial officer; Project officers; Support staff. ▪ Formal regional representation ▪ Periodic work with consultants	▪ Active in the education sector ▪ Project implementation carried out in collaboration with community members and actors	~ 6 hours (5 pers., including all senior and technical staff)	65+ documents (>900 pages)	6 meetings Organizational life / dynamics
ProLearning	▪ Relatively small: under 20 pers. ▪ Staff composed of: Executive Director; Financial officer; Program officers; Support staff. ▪ Formal regional representation ▪ Rarely worked with consultants	▪ Active in the education sector ▪ Project implementation carried out in collaboration with community members and actors	~ 30 hours (18 pers., including all senior and technical staff)	75+ documents (>1500 pages)	6 meetings Organizational life / dynamics
Complementary informants	International development funders and actors active in Senegal : ▪ Supporting health programs ▪ Supporting education programs ▪ Supporting political and socio-economic development (broadly)		~ 6 hours (5 pers.)	Publicly available documents on field informants and their funders (Websites)	N/A

[39] . All executive directors have been working in their respective NDOs for well over 7 years. Three are founding members who have been leading their NDOs since inception.

[40] . In all four NDOs, the support staff was generally composed of one or several persons occupying the following functions: administrative assistant, monitoring and evaluation officer, financial assistant, communication officer, and outreach/community liaison officer. The number of persons would vary with the size and scope of activity. This was also the case for some program officer positions, but to a lesser extent.

[41] . All four NDOs had documents on ongoing projects readily available – projects usually cover 2 to 3 years – and several organizational and project documents dating back to 2007.

Table 2 : Data Codes and Sources (coding applied to documents, interviews and observation notes)

Categories	Codes	Description	Focal NDOs	Field Actors
Reporting activities	Field missions	Visits to project sites	*	
	Data compilation	Project data collection, collation and validation	*	
	Report writing	Writing of technical reports	*	*
	M&E Officer	Staff member with formal monitoring responsibilities	*	
	Changes in modus operandi	Historicity of the current way of performing reporting	*	
Specific rules structuring reporting	The sayable	What can be said (allowances & limits) in relation to reporting	*	*
	The preserved	What information can be shared, with whom; what is repressed or revised before sharing	*	*
	The accepted forms	What formats are acceptable for reporting (any and all activities)	*	*
Discourses and struggles sustaining reporting	Discourses	Prevalent discourses the doing of reporting rest on	*	*
	Disciplining	NDOs actions and operations facilitating continued reporting in this particular way	*	
	Discourse struggles	Instances of questioning of, or expressed doubts about reporting or its constitutive activities (NDOs + partners)	*	
Reporting perceived effects (NDOs)	Anticipated rewards/ constraints	What rewards/constraints to NDOs are associated with doing reporting in this particular way	*	
	Envisioned positions	What position is associated with NDOs vis-à-vis funders in relation to reporting and programming (e.g., followers or leaders)	*	*
	Imposition	Discussions with funders regarding changes affecting reporting elements viewed as impossible	*	*
	Co-production	Discussions with funders regarding changes affecting reporting elements viewed as possible	*	*
Field conditions	Monitoring NDOs	Activities and principles involved in monitoring NDOs' work		*
	Funders' own reporting	Funders' reporting activities (upward reporting)		*
	Funders' upward discretion	Whether and which changes in project implementation and reporting are allowed by funders' funders		*
	Assumptions / NDOs Credibility	What defines a credible NDO		*
	Assumptions / NDOs competency	What defines a performing NDO		*
	Assumptions/Good proposal	What constitutes a good proposal		*
	Defining current environment	Defining characteristics of the current environment for (funding) development projects in Senegal		*

Figure 1 : NDO Reporting Activities

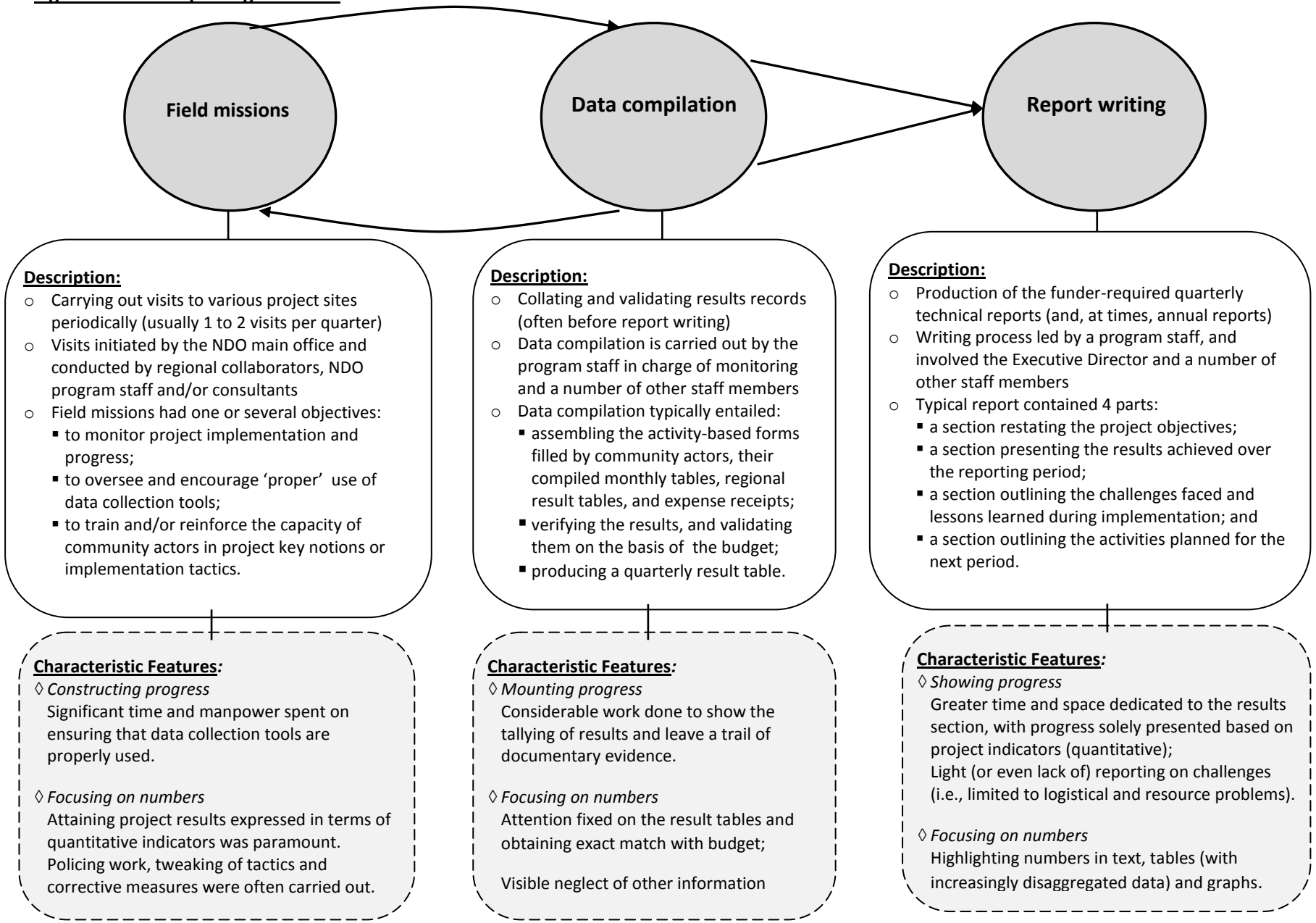
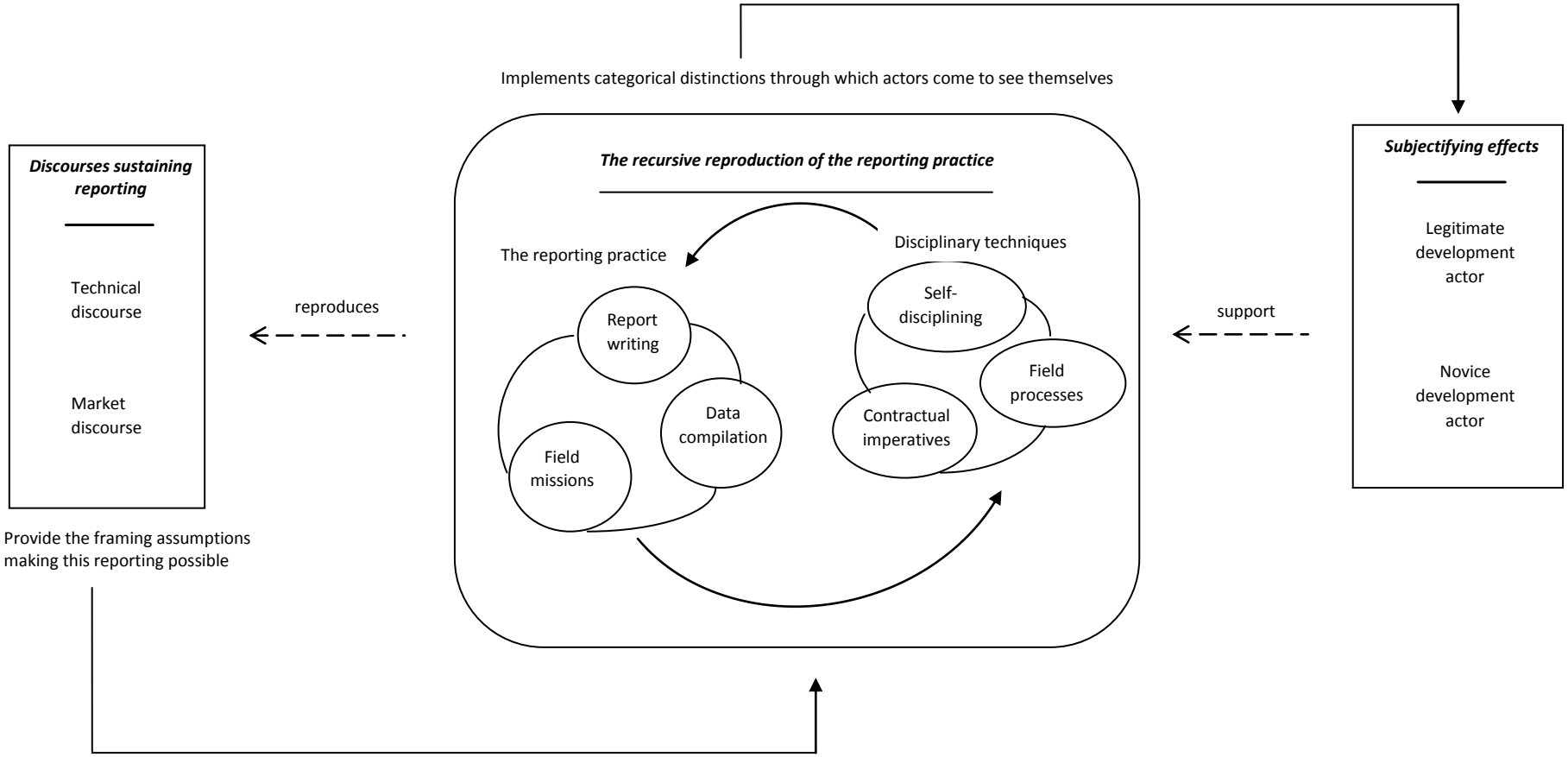


Figure 2 : The reproduction of the reporting practice in NDOs and its power effects



Conclusion

In this thesis research, I set out to examine the puzzle of strategy formation amidst multiple interests, by giving due consideration to the human capacity for "situated judgment", and the preeminently unsettled and dynamic nature of social action (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006[1991]; Thévenot, 2001, 2006a). In adopting this viewpoint, my research – through the three papers presented in previous sections – makes important contributions to our understanding of the formation of strategies in organizations. It also provides key insights into the production of concerted action and, relatedly, the creation and recreation of the macro-social structures involved. These are discussed in more depth later in this section, along with some reflexive and practical implications for research and organizational life.

But first, let us recall what it means to acknowledge situated judgment. Essentially, it means taking seriously the work that actors have to continuously do to construct the social world – including, for instance, to hold in place the meanings that sustain long-standing practices, visibly stable institutionalized accounts, or seemingly singular identities. Put differently, it is actors' sayings and doings that bring social phenomena into being. It is their actions and words that would give life, for example, to what qualifies as bureaucratic thinking or 'lawyer talk'. Thus, the organizational world is not here approached on the basis of *a priori* categorical characterizations of organizations or persons. Members, for instance, are not treated as if they surely 'come with' certain defining ways of thinking or views, and no others – these singular outlooks having supposedly been inscribed in, or imposed on, them once and for all. Rather, organizations are understood as settings where views arise in practical situations; and, while not unconstrained, the views that various members put forth may not be the same and, in fact, even the views expressed by any given member may shift over time and space.

It follows that interests are not seen, in this research, as some fixed attributes that would determine members' actions and views *in all situations* (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). Multiplicity of interests is not equated with variety of set individual motives; and it is neither presumed to surely mirror group diversity (whatever the basis of the classification: e.g., professional, functional, cultural or class). Instead, interests are understood as the concerns that organizational members bring forth as they perform their activities and inevitably confront an ever-mutating reality (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). At any given moment,

differences may become apparent in their understandings of what they are trying to do and/or what they ought to do. They would work to settle the dis-agreement, that is, they would try – whether calmly, heatedly or even combatively – to make their understandings more explicit and reach agreement so as to carry on. This would involve giving justifications for the views advanced, laying out proofs, raising objections, suggesting impartiality, denouncing hidden agendas, and so on. Interests, thus, are brought up by members during their interactions when arguing for or against particular ideas or actions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Whittle & Mueller, 2011). They are, in other words, attributed; and this forms part of making judgment in situation. The overall process – i.e., members handling of the arguments and interests that their colleagues and themselves put forth – shapes the organization of concerted action, and notably also its orientations, given that some understandings come to 'hold' (even if only for a time) and others don't.

Entering the issue by acknowledging situated judgment indeed also means taking account of these orientations, in other words, paying attention to the macro-social structures involved in human action and which give it particular orientations (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). It means seeing organizational members' views and actions as *not merely* locally produced. If this were the case, and their views and actions were invented ex nihilo there and then, each time, for the first time, organizing concerted action would be exceedingly complicated and quasi-impossible[42] (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2000, 2006). Instead, macro-social structures provide the background references that lay the foundation for common understandings. Without such common references, for example, it would be difficult for actors to recognize, and converge on an understanding of, some observed behaviour or line of argument as 'bureaucratic thinking'. Common references are socially and historically constituted. In practical situations, actors rely on them to make sense of what is going on, and identify in the vast array of things (i.e., the profusion and entanglement that is characteristic of local circumstances) what counts, and what to do then (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). But, since these references are multiple, 'what counts' may not be identical for those involved.

This *is not* to say that these common references are tied to social/cultural groups, however. The viewpoint adopted for this research is quite distinct from that which "culturalism" holds (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 145). It is not here presumed that human beings are exclusive

[42]. Conceivably, violence, or the threat of violence, could always be used to achieve (forced) coordination.

members of distinct groups, with each group having its own common references which all of its members, supposedly, only draw on at all times to perceive and act upon the world[43]. Human action is not here seen as so predetermined; the viewpoint adopted allows for more versatility as it acknowledges that the same person can be, without any contradiction, a professional accountant, an aid worker, a member of the middle-class, a theater lover, a father, and a citizen of an African country, for example. The common references here discussed are, in fact, "embedded in situations" (ibid: 145). Actors rely on them to make sense of the circumstances faced, and adjust their conducts "in keeping with *the nature of the situation*" as they recognize it (ibid: 146).

Acknowledging situated judgment, thus, makes it possible to pay attention to how *actors themselves* experience their contexts, and what it is that they are trying to do in terms of meaning. For being multiple, the common references that they rely on orient to different ways of doing and being which are based on different conceptions of 'the good' – i.e. what is appropriate or good (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001). So, for example, organizational members' arguments may suggest that 'The' thing to do to make it through these difficult times is improve efficiency. But, besides efficiency, their utterances, the proofs drawn upon and/or actions taken, could also reveal that they are making sense of their circumstances, and judging what is important, in terms of creativity, competition, reputation, solidarity, or hierarchy (i.e., the Worths finely elaborated in Boltanski and Thévenot (2006)). In addition, what they say and do may also suggest that what is understood as good (or appropriate) is what is in accordance with regular (i.e., less conventionalized) action, or personal affinities (ibid; Thévenot, 2001). As the preceding suggests, some common references are highly institutionalized (i.e., the references associated with the different Worths), and others less so. Not surprisingly, the former are usually more prevalent where a high degree of legitimacy is called for – e.g., in public spaces (including workplace), where in putting forth their views, in particular when a disagreement arises, actors tend to provide justifiable accounts (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001).

[43]. The viewpoint elaborated in Boltanski and Thévenot's works, as these authors repeatedly emphasize, does not follow in the footsteps of those approaches which suggest that: different social/cultural groups have their own (exclusive) common references that are distinctively different from those of other groups; and thus, under normal conditions (i.e., barring successful external assaults), it would be reasonable to assume that all members of the same group would think, perceive and act alike because they would always rely on those references that they share and which are theirs only.

To summarize: investigating strategy formation amidst multiple interests by acknowledging "situated judgment" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Thévenot, 2001) brings attention to what organizational members *actually do* to produce concerted action – both in terms of the sequences of sayings and doings (whether hostile or no), and the meanings and orientations that are handled and settled on (until unsettled anew). In other words, the work that actors do to produce concerted action is examined, without losing sight of its social embeddedness. Concerted action is thus seen as ongoing accomplishment – and not something that flows automatically from official intentions, hierarchical prescriptions, or common cultures. Further, multiplicity of interests – in contrast to other research traditions – is not presumed rooted in a diversity of social/cultural groups whose members would be wholly and firmly shaped by their supposed singular group memberships. Thus, in adopting this viewpoint – which underlies my three thesis papers – I elaborate on a promising line of research and contribute important insights which are presented in the following pages.

Strengths and limitations

In order to better discuss the contributions and implications of this thesis research, I will note here its limitations. Indeed, while adopting this viewpoint helps us better capture the flows and flux of organizational life – and gain a better understanding of the dynamics that come to shape strategies in organizations – there are some situations where this approach might be less applicable.

In allowing us to apprehend the production of concerted action through organizational members' ongoing judgments and deliberations, this viewpoint offers an analytical lens less readily suited for situations where coordination is secured through the use or threat of violence. In such cases, coercion or physical force replace arguments. So, while multiple views are normally involved in the process of organizing and realizing collective action in organizations (e.g., Andrews, 1987; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006; Narayanan & Fahey, 1982; Thompson, 2008; Whittington, 2003), in these contexts, they would seldom be heard and/or allowed expression. And, in lieu of forming through deliberative processes, courses of actions would be harshly imposed, and mainly followed out of fear – e.g., whether for fear of punishment, of losing one's job, or of physical harm. These situations are, it

seems, not that common in today's organizations; but they are sadly not non-existent – e.g., the crisis experienced at France Telecom (France) in 2008-2011[44] may, reportedly, be one such case. Given the heavy toll that these situations tend to take on organizational life and on the employees subjected to such treatments, they obviously should not be discounted. But for being, in effect, situations which represent a shift away from concerted action in favor of violence (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 38; 346), they would, perhaps, be best researched using alternative approaches.

Similarly, "private arrangements" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006: 336-338) would represent borderline cases. These are situations where two parties agree on a course of action that only benefits them, and this is kept private. Coordination then is minimal. It takes the form of an exchange of favours, or as the authors illustratively put it: "you do this, which is good for me; I do that, which is good for you" (ibid: 336). Thus, rather than producing agreements that can be justified and defended in a broader context, those involved make decisions privately and implement them on the sly. Such situations are, of course, possible in organizations. Some members may make private arrangements between them, unbeknown to colleagues and without concern for what is the accepted way of doing things – in other words, away from deliberation and without bringing into play, in their judgments and actions, some conception of 'the good' (i.e., the appropriate). This, of course, may affect organizational operations – for example, how some resources are distributed or who gets what file. But, it is hard to imagine that broader concerted action could be so achieved and, in particular, that organizational strategies could form over time in such manner. This is after all not that surprising, considering that private arrangements are not meant for broader coordination. In fact, these arrangements would be questioned, if discovered, and likely voided (since they cannot be justified). Were such questioning however to incite those involved to launch into giving reasons, the situation would turn into one of justification and deliberation – and thus fall back within the analytical scope elaborated on in this research.

[44]. Between 2008 and 2011, France Telecom experienced a wave of suicides (more than 35 employees) which was reportedly due to psycho-social risks in the workplace, including psychological harassment, bullying, and an overall violent work environment. This was not merely a case of differences of view or conflict gone awry. Employees alleged that it was a case of 'management by terror'. Further, the then-Head of France Telecom and six other executives are currently facing a criminal trial in France for "moral harassment". See CBC and LeMonde articles posted on June 16, 2018 at https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/framce-telecom-suicides-trial-1.4709549, and https://www.lemonde.fr/enterprises/article/2018/06/16/suicides-a-france-telecom-un-proces-pour-harcelement-moral_5316064_1656994.html respectively. See also France Telecom SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission) 2009 Registration Document (Form 6-k) at Htts://www.sec.gov/.

These limitations notwithstanding, this research presents a valuable perspective. By making it possible to take account of situated judgment, this viewpoint helps us better capture and understand how consistencies of actions (i.e., strategies) develop through the work of organizational members – these competent social actors who rarely constitute monolithic groups that see the world, and experience all circumstances, in one way and one way only. It allows us thus to be attentive to "a great variety of tensions" (Thévenot, 2006) that come to shape organizational strategies – and not just the tightly orchestrated political struggles between coalitions seeking to define organizational priorities. It invites consideration, more broadly, of the conflicts over meaning which arise as organizational members make sense of their ever-evolving contexts. Thus, in adopting this viewpoint, my research moves beyond a reductive view of the internal dynamics by which strategies form, and makes important contributions: (1) it fleshes out how we may better capture these dynamics – and more broadly the work that actors continually do which produces and reproduces order, and thus creates, disrupts or maintains the macro-structures that sustain their actions; (2) it extends our understandings of how consistencies of actions form over time in organizations; and (3) it calls attention to the problematic consequences of 'all too convergent' patterns of formation, marked by a penchant for purified coherence and the neglect of the variability of circumstances. These are discussed below.

Contributions

The dynamical aspects of human action and the micro-macro reciprocal link

The notion that producing concerted action is necessarily dynamic as it involves hiccups and surprises, and often requires dealing with misunderstandings, conflicting interpretations, or different preferences is now widely accepted. While, for some, the differences in actors' views merely amount to a preventable or fleeting glitch in an otherwise unified social setting (e.g., Ackoff, 1970; Ouchi, 1980), for others, they constitute a normal state of affairs (e.g., Andrews, 1987; Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006; Cyert & March, 1963; Denis, Langley & Rouleau, 2007; Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Pettigrew, 1977; Whittington, 2003).

Different explanations have been provided for this state of affairs. Leaving aside those lines of reasoning grounded on the heterogeneity of individuals' preferences (e.g., the often decried

under-socialized position of classical economics), research has generally accounted for it by drawing attention to 'the social' – in other words, the fact that macro-social structures are involved and, since they are multiple, they influence human conduct in various ways. Further, these macro structures guide human action, without determining it; and they come into confrontation when invoked in the same social space. This generates reflexivity and usually much activity. Thus, the process dynamically shapes (social) action, but also contributes to the continuous reproduction or the transformation of these macro structures.

These dynamics and the reciprocal effects between structure and agency have rightly received increasing attention in studies drawing on structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), and neo-institutional theory (see e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2008[1995]). Not unlike conventionalist theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) – which is mobilized for this thesis – these research perspectives indeed bring to light the far-from-passive role that actors play in the production of order, even though macro structures constrain action by limiting what actors perceive as "the possibility of actions available" (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2000: 211).

Neo-institutional research, in particular, focuses on such micro-social actions, and refreshingly challenges deterministic varieties of institutionalism by bringing 'politics' back in (e.g., DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). In other words, it rejects the imagery of actors as 'cultural dopes' and highlights the important work that they do, through which institutions (i.e., macro structures) are maintained, disrupted, and created.

Yet, institutional work – as it has been coined by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) – has so far been approached through, what might be called, a 'political-culturalist lens' which (often implicitly) pre-circumscribes this work. More often than not, in this research tradition, the persons or organizations whose work is being examined are presumed exclusive members of distinct institutional domains – they are in effect treated as if they indeed constitute discrete unambiguous cohesive units. It is thus assumed that, under normal conditions, those belonging to a given institutional domain would *always* adhere to its rules, norms and beliefs, and their actions and views *could* thus surely *only* rest on its distinctive organizing principles. Attention to the micro-social work that actors do, then, becomes narrowly focussed on the interactions between different *absolute kinds* of actors; and this tends to offer a representation of institutional change or reproduction as the product of factional conflicts. This has also meant

that institutional work has often been depicted as highly deliberate, and the actors involved singularly committed. Such muscular struggles are of course not only possible but, as a number of empirical studies convincingly argue, have contributed to important social and institutional changes (e.g., Garud, Jain, Kumaraswamy, 2002; Hensmans, 2003; Munir & Phillips, 2005).

My research contributes to the conversation on institutional work by elaborating on a different approach. It highlights a promising alternative framework which recognizes the social embeddedness of human action, without losing sight of its pragmatic variations. My first paper presents the "*moment of test*" – elaborated on by conventionalist theory (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) – and shows how it can support our investigation of institutional work. This framework calls attention to these pragmatic variations. In other words, it invites us to take account of the fact that actors are generally acquainted with different organizing principles, rather than starting from an unquestioned presumption of exclusive membership and adherence. By focusing on the moments of test, we can examine actors' situated judgments; we could thus better capture the institutional rules, norms or beliefs that *they* rely on, how these come into confrontation, and to what effect.

The implications are two-fold. First, by allowing us to take account of the dynamical aspects of human action, "the moment of test" helps us explore institutional work from a less predetermined basis. And this may open the way for a better understanding of the work involved in the reproduction and transformation of institutions, whether this happens because of actors' more or less deliberate efforts, and/or by chance. Second, by drawing on "the moment of test" as an analytical lens, we may investigate the politics involved without predefining these as clashes between social/cultural groups seeking ascendancy, and instead explore political struggles more broadly as that which concerns "the appropriate relationship between institutions" (Di Maggio & Powell, 1991: 30; Friedland & Alford, 1991: 256). In sum, my first paper contributes by offering a more "relational" viewpoint (Emirbayer, 1997), and a practical analytical tool which enables us to expand the scope of our analyses of how human action is variedly involved in the evolution of institutions; and this can only help improve our understanding of institutional work.

Strategy formation: the handling of multiple interests and the consistencies of actions forming over time

By building on a theoretical perspective that calls attention to situated judgment, my research also makes important contributions to strategy research. It follows in the footsteps of strategy process research and the strategy-as-practice perspective. Like both these research perspectives, Boltanski and Thévenot's works (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1999, 2000, 2006; Thévenot, 2001, 2006) stress the importance of seeing collective order as an outcome rather than a state. Understanding order better, in other words, requires taking account of the process, i.e., the many actions and creative arrangements that bring it about. Further, and as noted previously, these authors' works also invite us to take seriously the social embeddedness of the actions and processes involved – a sensitivity to 'the social' which it shares with strategy-as-practice research. My research, thus, approaches strategy formation not just in terms of the actions and decisions that organizational members take. It also pays attention to the macro-social structures they thereby rely on and (re)produce. This means that it examines the meaning(s) that they give to what they do, and how consistencies of actions then form over time – whether intendedly or unintendedly (Chia & Holt, 2006; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Tsoukas, 2010).

Importantly, researching strategy formation by acknowledging situated judgment also adds another dimension. While taking social embeddedness seriously, this approach makes it possible to remain open to the uncertainty that often accompanies human coordination, rather than fixing on the playing out of generic roles. And, this is key – it reflects the pragmatist orientation of Boltanski and Thévenot's works.

In my research, thus, and in particular Paper II, strategy formation is understood as a process influenced by many organizational members carrying out their activities amidst the flows and flux of organizational life, and trying to be/remain on the same wavelength (so to speak). The process involves discussions, deliberations, even heated confrontations, and negotiations; but it is not presumed to typify a conflict between different actors singularly guided by some organizing principles, interests or preferences that define them (and exclusively so), and which constitute their respective inherent driver of action. Instead, the discussions, deliberations and confrontations are seen as reflecting different understandings of 'what is going on' and/or 'what to do' which members put forth and handle along the way, as

they make sense of their ever-mutating contexts. Their exchanges might take the form of active co-construction, indecisive talk, mutual engagement, intense polarization, wavering conversations, organic convergence, and so on. By adopting this approach, my research focuses on what organizational members *actually say and do*, without overlooking the fact that macro-social structures are involved or pre-defining members' scope of action (by treating them as if their conduct were surely shaped by exactly one type of macro influences – which differs from that of their colleagues similarly singularly shaped).

In this context, interests are examined by taking into account the 'interests' that organizational members *actually* contend with in organizing concerted action. In other words, my research starts from the premise that interests are attributed. While they may indeed be considered institutionally constructed (e.g., Di Maggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1991: 245), they influence actors' actions by being implied, asserted, denounced, and negotiated by actors themselves. This process – i.e., actors investigating and imputing intentions – supports the claims they are making, the accounts they are giving, the objections they are raising, or the proposals they are putting forth. Interest attribution and negotiation points to what actors see as appropriate (or not) in the situation faced – which influences the production of concerted action. Thus, in studying strategy formation amidst multiple interests by paying attention to situated judgment, my research, presented in Paper II, focuses on *what is actually happening* – rather than resting on pre-given categorical characterizations of actors and their motives. In so doing, this empirical study sheds light on the unfolding dynamics through which strategies form over time, and offers new insights that extend our understandings of this common organizational phenomenon.

First, it shows how the often overlooked process of organizing joint actions in organizations plays an important role in the formation of consistencies of actions over time (i.e., strategies). It thus echoes the notion articulated in a number of strategy process and strategy-as-practice research studies that strategy formation does not always start with the explicit formulation of strategies, nor even require such formulation (e.g., Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985; Mirabeau & Maguire, 2014; Pascale, 1984). In addition, the insights that my research generated on the organizing work that takes place in organizations, also suggest that the clear-cut contrast usually drawn between strategy formulation and implementation may be somewhat overshot.

Indeed, as Pettigrew noted several decades ago, strategy formation is "a continuous process" (Pettigrew, 1977: 78). But, the formulation of strategies – while generally rather widely practised – is a periodic activity. It follows that such discrete activity could hardly exhaust the possibilities of further elaboration, reinterpretation, or creation of the organization's preferences and priorities, especially since organizational members often have to make sense of what it is that they are trying to do along the way, as new opportunities, realizations or challenges arise. Further, even in the absence of strategy formulation sessions – as my research shows – strategies may form through members' ordinary organizing work. So, for example, regular meetings, debriefing sessions, memos, or even corridor conversations contributed to orienting organizational actions in particular ways. They were occasions for clarifying what a particular project objective means, or specifying how the idea behind a program should *now* be understood, or sharing on what *in fact* Senior Management expects. This ordinary organizing work can go unrecognized. But, it importantly shapes the actions of organizational members. Often, it simply reaffirms previously defined priorities and existing practices. But, it can also, sometimes, open the way for improvisations, creative adjustments, or change efforts. Emergent strategies, which my paper focussed on, often come about in such varied ways.

More broadly, however, it is conceivable that the importance of organizing work would not be limited to cases of emergent strategy formation. As noted above, when strategies are formulated, they are not free from further meaning-making efforts. In fact, as a number of practice-oriented studies have suggested, policies, plans, rules and guidelines are not just executed; they *are interpreted and reinterpreted in practice* (e.g., Nicolini, 2009; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Wenger, 1998). It is thus highly likely that the implementation of formulated strategies would not be a simple application of the organizations' preferences and priorities articulated in those documents. This is, of course, not to say that 'everything goes'. Administrative procedures and coordination mechanisms are usually (varyingly) drawn upon to help put formulated strategies into operation. But, it serves to highlight the importance of this interpretation and reinterpretation work to the realization of strategies – whether this work involves factional politics or not. In this sense, members' understandings of their organizations' preferences and priorities would continue to evolve over time. The construction of these understandings – which sustain organizational actions, and realized strategies – would thus not be limited to the formulation phase, but stretch over into strategy implementation. This

suggests that the formulation and implementation phases would be more interwoven than commonly appreciated.

Second, my findings in Paper II also illustrate how talk plays a key role in strategy formation. The seeming banality of talk in organizations may obfuscate the importance of the talk-based "discursive work" (Maguire & Hardy, 2013) that members do, and which shapes the understandings that carry through and their joint actions. The spoken exchanges of the members of the organizations studied allowed them to handle the multiple views put forth and to reach agreement on the meanings sustaining organizational actions. This contributed to generating consistent actions over time. Other strategy research studies have similarly highlighted the importance of talk-based discursive work. They have examined, in particular, the conversations occurring at strategy meetings and workshops, or high-level communications, which shaped decisions and organizational directions (e.g., Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). The attention they paid to talk-based discursive work in those cases allowed them to reveal members' varied efforts at influencing strategy by mobilizing alternative discourses. The processes identified helpfully tell us about how members purposefully manipulate meanings so as to promote particular strategic orientations. My research complements these studies by examining the processes involved in the context of emergent strategies. It contributes by showing that deliberate intentionality is not required for talk-based discursive work to influence the formation of strategies.

This has some importance for how we see talk versus other types of texts (e.g., planning documents, PowerPoint presentations, written memos) in relation to strategy formation. While, in organizations, much decision-making involves talk, much organizing relies on talk, and much on-the-job coordination occurs through talk, it seems that its importance in the formation of strategies is often trivialized. This might be because, in organizations, talk often coexists with other types of texts. Indeed, the need for – and in fact function of – organizations to systematize coordination means that written communications are relied on for greater reach (both temporal and spatial). In contrast to talk, thus, they are recorded resources which live on. Still, talk-based interactions are pervasive in organizations. In fact, talk often precedes the production of written communications (e.g., strategy documents written up following workshops and meetings); and it also usually plays a central role when members are trying to put these written words to use. Overall, in paying attention to talk, we can get closer to how

concerted action is actually produced, and study more dynamically the (more or less deliberate) work that members do to construct the understandings that sustain their actions.

It is worth noting that while my research shows that talk-based discursive work plays a central role in strategy formation, this is not to suggest that emergent strategies *only* form through talk – extant emergent strategy formation research provides ample evidence that this is not the case. It is not to say either that some organizations *only* rely on talk – as noted above, talk and other types of texts are generally present in all organizations. What my findings suggest, instead, is that talk-based discursive work might play *a greater role* in strategy formation in smaller organizations; a possibility also raised by Mirabeau and Maguire (2014: 1226). In addition, my research also points to the likelihood that less reliance on other types of texts might be related to whether strategy formulation is highly institutionalized or not. Indeed, the institutionalization of strategy formulation often also means the adoption of standard tools, formats, processes and steps for the elaboration of the organization's strategies – there might be, for instance, an expectation that SWOT analysis be used, that proposals be written down in standardized templates, or that PowerPoint presentations be used to share divisional plans or ideas with colleagues and/or senior management. In such cases, it is conceivable that members' strategy-related discursive work would make use of these accepted tools and formats (at least, at some point), and thus rely more heavily on other types of texts (than on talk). Future research could explore in more detail this possible connection.

Lastly, my research also contributes to the recently renewed conversation on emergent strategy formation. My second paper brings to light different ways in which emergent strategies may form in organizations. Extant research often highlights the successful introduction of newness – despite, or in the absence of, senior management's prior intentions. It thus mainly depicts the improvisational or entrepreneurial work of some organizational members who initiate new projects or ideas, deliberately promote them, and skillfully manage their post-hoc validation and official integration into their organization's preferences and priorities. My research adds to these insights, and also reveals other modes of emergent strategy formation.

It shows that the new projects or ideas that become emergent strategies need not be created within the organization. They may instead be borrowed haphazardly from the organizational field without much consideration or thought; and, then, the actions they entail and the associated meanings are reproduced onwards. In other words, emergent strategy formation – manifested in the introduction of newness – may not always be a matter of a successful championing of creative alternatives. The process may, in fact, be spurred by more or less creativity, and involve more or less orchestration or calculated moves.

In addition, my research indicates that emergent strategies may also form in other ways. My findings highlight two other pathways of formation. The first one develops when organizational affairs are managed continuously in the exact same way, and non-deliberately so. Thus, consistencies of actions form over time because the same actions and their associated meanings are repeatedly reproduced, and – importantly – this occurs without any prior deliberate intentions, whether by senior management or any other organizational member for that matter. This mode of formation is not unheard of. But, it is generally seldom discussed. Its conceptual basis has been well established in a number of recent theoretical papers (Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & Mackay, 2007; Tsoukas, 2010). My research provides an empirical illustration of it. It is important to note that this mode of formation is not necessarily devoid of movement or conflict. Rather, as my findings show, the continuous reproduction over time was achieved through members' active discussions and handling of differences in view, as they dealt with new challenges and opportunities along the way. This mode of emergent strategy formation, thus, occurs through members' work – and not the automatic playing out of some collective predetermination – even if their work essentially leads to the continued reproduction of their habitual (appropriate) ways of doing things.

The other pathway of formation identified occurs when organizational actions are altered without the associated meanings being changed. In other words, organizational members, in effect, modify their actions through practical adjustments without however transforming the rationale of what they are doing. Their actions, thus, while not exactly the same, remain nonetheless consistent over time – and unintendedly so. These organizational actions simply come to be adjusted as members deal with new opportunities and challenges that present themselves along the way. To illustrate, let us imagine a corporate philanthropy program which is unintendedly oriented towards improving this corporation's visibility and reputation – i.e.,

while not part of its official intents, this principle came to shape its execution and trajectory. When changes are made to how this program is implemented to take account of new market conditions, it still continues to be guided by the same logic. This corporation's actions, in relation to this program, would thus be consistent over time, even with the modifications made to the tasks or processes involved, and/or to the targets of the program. In short, this mode of formation highlights the fact that it is not only through the unchanging reproduction of organizational actions that consistencies of actions develop. Even when visible changes can be detected, organizational members may continue to rely on the same logic, to evaluate, think about and accomplish their activities over time. It is important to note that this is quite different from decoupling – i.e., a gap between activities and formal policies. The process described here actually points to ongoing congruence. The same principle, in effect, continues to guide actions as the range of actions that members associate with carrying out their activities appropriately is, in a sense, reworked. Such non-deliberate adherence to the same logic – or organizing principle – over time, accounts for the consistencies of actions that develop. This way in which emergent strategies form has been largely neglected so far. Future research could grant it more attention since it may help us better understand organizations' adaptation efforts, and in particular the more reformist (as opposed to radical) approaches that it appears to indicate.

Overall, by studying strategy formation amidst multiple interests from a viewpoint that allows me to take account of situated judgment, I was able to pay attention to what was *actually happening* in the organizations studied, and go beyond an understanding of the dynamics involved solely in terms of the playing out of group conflicts. This is not to say that such conflicts never form in organizations. But, it is to say that approaching conflict in organizations as if it were always (or even most of the time) reducible to clashes between pre-defined social/cultural groups is clearly an untenable premise. What tensions arise, what positions are put forth, and how they are handled, is after all an empirical question. Thus, my research remained attentive to how organizational members themselves constructed, talked about and handled their differences. The findings generated provide important new insights on the organization of concerted action and the formation of organizational strategies – and in particular, the data collected allowed me to focus on emergent strategy formation. The findings, thus, which are discussed in Paper II and highlighted in the preceding paragraphs,

bring to light aspects of these phenomena which would have been overlooked if the research had fixated on capturing the calculated moves and bargaining of pre-defined 'stake-holders'. Much of the nuances of the organizing work that organizational members do and how this variedly contributes to emergent strategy formation would have possibly been missed.

The dangers of 'all too convergent' patterns of formation: purified coherence in doing Reporting

My last paper – Paper III – brings under scrutiny some of the ways in which consistencies of actions are produced over time, and contributes by highlighting positive but also less desirable effects on the organizations and their sense of agency. It builds on the findings of my second paper to critically examine those modes of formation that seem all too purified and linear, and brings attention to the operation of power. More specifically, it asks why, despite actively engaging with an ever-mutating world, organizational members reproduced certain practices unqualifiedly, which came to produce remarkably consistent actions over time. It interrogates the power relations that shaped such unabated reproduction, and the implications that this has for studied organizations.

The Foucauldian perspective (Foucault, 1980, 1982, 2010, 2012), that this study draws on, makes it possible to critically examine the work that actors do, and in particular how certain practices are made "natural, self-evident and indispensable" (Foucault, 1991: 75), and are thus more readily reproduced. Situated judgment is not set aside as premise. The starting point remains the recognition that what actors say and do continuously construct the social world. And, as noted previously, these sayings and doings are not presumed determined by actors' supposed inherent properties or driven by stable 'interests' predefined as distinctively theirs. Instead, they are understood as shaped by the various macro-social structures which guide behavior in accordance with the situation faced (that is, the situation as perceived by those involved), and developing through interactional exchanges. A Foucauldian perspective adds an important critical dimension to the analysis of this work that actors do. Foucault's propositions on power, in particular, help focus on the conditions surrounding relentless practice reproduction and shed light on its effects. My third paper (i.e., Paper III) applies this critical lens to the analysis of the strategies that formed in studied organizations. It shows how, through members' sayings and doings, certain ways of doing things were continually constructed as *the obvious* superior approach (no matter the circumstances). It also brings to

light the power effects of such unabated practice reproduction, and points to the inequalities that it reinforced and amplified.

The practice whose reproduction was so surprisingly relentless is Reporting. Reporting consists in giving account on organizational actions and achievements, and often involves a set of activities and the production of written reports on a periodic basis. In nonprofit organizations – including the nonprofit development organizations (NDO) studied – reporting often serves to communicate to funders, collaborators, government agencies and beneficiaries, what activities have been implemented, actions taken, localities serviced, and results achieved. More often than not, however, the sharing of written reports tend to be more systematic with funders, given that the provision of periodic written reports forms part of the contractual agreement signed with them. In the studied Senegalese NDOs, reporting had been practised for many years – in other words, it was not a newly introduced practice – and it was being reproduced in a remarkably uniform manner. This was surprising. The studied organizations operated in different sectors, dealt with different funders (each having in fact several funders), supported different communities and had different growth paths. Still, across organizations, and regardless of the funders or partners providing financial and/or technical support for the activities implemented, reporting was performed and understood in exactly the same way.

My findings in Paper III show that as an organizational practice, it had become naturalized – a possibility suggested by other research on NDOs (e.g., Ebrahim, 2002; Hwang & Powell, 2009; Watkins, Swidler and Hannan, 2012). In the organizations I studied, it was viewed by members as a series of clear-cut activities oriented towards reporting against project indicators primarily, if not exclusively, *in quantitative terms and in disaggregated form*. The concern for collecting, collating, and putting in writing this data came with tireless efforts to constitute a trail of documentary evidence that showed how those figures were arrived at. This particular way of doing reporting was talked about and performed as plainly normal and, in effect, continuously constructed as the obvious appropriate way of doing things. Yet, the focus on communicating on project achievements in numbers and percentages meant that little else was analyzed and reported on, and other types of information collected (e.g., critical reflections shared by beneficiaries or field-partners on project activities, comments on unanticipated or spill-over effects, or vignettes) were simply set aside and not given importance in the accomplishment of reporting.

My research also reveals that unabated practice reproduction happened through active performance – a point largely overlooked in previous studies. In other words, while these organizations' reporting activities were repeatedly performed in the exact same way over time, their members did not just carry them out in a passive or mechanical way. Instead, members actively engaged with their contexts. They faced arising challenges and new realizations; expressed doubt, confusion, and objection about various practical aspects of their reporting activities; and tackled discrepancies when their expectations were frustrated (e.g., data obtained from the field not sufficiently disaggregated). They thus continually worked to set things right, and do reporting the appropriate way – which for them meant a strict reliance on quantitative data to appreciate and give account on project progress. In short, although there was no change (whether big or small), practice reproduction was nonetheless an ongoing accomplishment, and it happened amidst disagreements and conflicts. In fact, tensions were handled by reaffirming and even further tightening how reporting was (to be) performed. This included catching and correcting mistakes; but not just that. It also importantly involved the deployment of a number of disciplinary techniques and operations. Members themselves used scolding, shaming, rewarding and periodic demonstration work to induce performance in an ever-purified way. In so doing, they continually constructed and inculcated this form of reporting as an obvious, and in fact essential, way of doing things.

Finally, my findings illustrate how the unabated reproduction of a practice may obscure its effects, and in particular its less felicitous implications. As noted previously, doing reporting in this particular way was widely accepted, and practised in nonprofit development organizations. The idea that reporting was necessarily about quantitative data and audit trails – i.e., counting; rigorously matching realized results with expected results; providing data that is later aggregate-able; and showing the data trail – was visibly well established. In studied organizations, this mode of thought sustained members' continuous use of (and almost exclusive reliance on) numbers, percentages, and tracking tables and forms to capture, talk about and share information on development projects. For being repeatedly made 'the normal' way of doing things, this form of reporting perpetuated standards of behaviour and performance. In fact, it had become an important yardstick by which NDO resource stewardship, professionalism and, to a greater extent than one might have thought, technical competency were being measured and self-monitored.

Unabated reproduction thus gave studied organizations legitimacy. Those organizations that accomplished reporting in this particular way were generally looked upon favourably and considered competent actors by all involved – i.e., funders partners, peers, and themselves. And those not quite at par, or visibly lagging, were eagerly working to perfect their practice enactment. The former were viewed as high-performing organizations, and rewarded for it. As Paper III notes, for instance, a good track record in reporting opened the door to renewed collaboration, and possibly also new funding and partnerships.

But, the remarkable unabated reproduction was also a double-edged sword. As noted in preceding pages, continuous performance shaped the way in which organizational members apprehended what was meaningful in talking about the projects they were implementing. Numbers, percentages, statistics and tables were what was important in presenting a sound depiction of their projects; and this way of doing things visibly extended to other areas of their programming, and notably project formulation – i.e., project proposals were increasingly relying on standard formula and similar quantitative data. Reliance on the seemingly superior objectivity and scientific rigor of numbers was thus visibly expanding in studied organizations. Yet, seeing quantitative data as the natural and self-evident way of appreciating development projects also meant placing value in the operation of aggregation which gave this data its full worth. The 'bigger picture' representation that quantitative data promises however eluded studied organizations; and this was in large part because of their task position in the development aid field. Organizational members were well aware of this hierarchy of positions. They saw those 'higher up in the aid chain' as the development actors who could perform such aggregation and lay claim to the meaningful knowledge (i.e., the synthetic unity of the bigger picture). And, relatedly, they recognized themselves as 'novice' development actors in relation to this form of knowledge.

In short, Paper III also contributes by showing that the unabated and exact reproduction of reporting in this particular way did not just give studied organizations greater legitimacy, but it also reinforced their marginalization. They had pride in their keen reliance on the scientific rigor of quantitative data for depicting development projects, but also appreciated their distance from the locus of technical expertise that it actualized. It could thus be argued that while such unqualified practice reproduction contributed to reducing resource precariousness (because of the increased opportunities for collaboration), it was also leading to the formation

of a totalizing view of what matters, which in effect would restrict the ways in which these organizations (through their members) make sense of their contexts and act upon the world (i.e., their sense of agency).

To conclude, my study complements previous research by analyzing how unremitting practice reproduction in nonprofit development organizations is shaped by power relations in ways that have so far received insufficient attention in critical research. My findings show that the operation of power cannot always simply be reduced to the workings of coercive pressures (by funders) and its attendant clever resistance attempts (by NDOs) or, in the absence of overt strife, represented as "false consciousness" (Lukes, 2005[1974]) at play. While these representations of power relations shed useful light on the exercise of power in and around NDOs and the injustices this may engender or counter, they also rest on the implicit assumption of the existence of *a* 'true nature' (distinct for different groups of actors) whose realization when frustrated or impeded would signal domination. So, for example, NDOs' interests are sharply contrasted with those of their funders at the outset – because, what the members of an NDO would say and do are presumed to always fundamentally differ from the sayings and doings of any member of a donor agency. Attention to the operation of power, then, tends to primarily focus on whether the presumed (singular) 'true nature' of NDOs is fulfilled or thwarted, and to illuminate the mechanisms by means of which this outcome is achieved. Some studies thus have examined the direct impositions of funders and NDOs' responses – e.g., research of the resource dependence theoretical tradition (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2003) – while others have analyzed NDOs conforming behaviour and the resulting failure to pursue their 'real interests' – e.g., research drawing on concepts of ideology and false consciousness (Lukes, 2005).

By contrast, in adopting a view which recognizes situated judgment and draws on a Foucauldian perspective, my research was able to study the operation of power by approaching organizational members' sayings and doings from a less predetermined basis. The findings bring to light the fact that normative pressures and cognitive processes may importantly influence NDOs' actions, and sometimes possibly even more so than direct funders' impositions. In fact, in studied organizations, it is clear that the former were at play. It is the constructed 'naturalness' of this form of reporting which sustained its reproduction. So, when some funders provided ample latitude for the production of the technical reports,

organizational members still relied on the same form of knowledge to present their project achievements – i.e., they used quantitative data, and laid down the numbers, percentages and the tables and forms even when free-style reporting was encouraged. This suggests that practice reproduction cannot be simply explained by pointing to direct funders' impositions. It might be that direct pressures by funders in the past (and continuing indirect pressures by some) aided and fueled organizational members' confident reliance on this form of reporting. In any case, it is this 'confidence' in the practice – or put differently, seeing this form of reporting as the self-evident way of doing things – which sustained its unabated reproduction. On a related note, in keeping with a resource dependence view, one might have expected the NDOs to take advantage of the fact that some funders offered such openness in reporting to try to turn around other funders. But, this is not how it played out. Rather the 'normal' way of doing reporting was applied all the way through, for all funders.

Further, the unabated reproduction of reporting in this particular way can hardly be understood, in the cases examined, as starkly opposed to the 'real interests' of these organizations. First, the very notion of 'real interests' is difficult to defend in face of the recognition that interests are attributed, and members in these organizations regularly handled a multiplicity of interests, which guided their actions. This objection aside, the findings also show that the unqualified reproduction of this form of reporting did not just have normatively questionable effects. While, as I argue in Paper III, it contributed to reinforcing existing inequalities and skewing these organizations' sense of agency, it also gave them legitimacy, better visibility and reputation. The power effects of practice reproduction were thus not solely negative. What's more, an explanation that links NDOs' members willing reproduction with some form of 'ideological hypnosis' would be difficult to sustain. It may well be that some members indeed took part in the relentless reproduction for having been deliberately misled about its goals and effects (i.e., false consciousness), but it could also be that some took it on in recognizing it as a necessary evil, or even that they accepted it because they knew better than to challenge such an entrenched way of knowing (i.e., a form of knowledge that emphasizes quantification to the exclusion of other ways of knowing). In short, my research adds to our understanding of the operation of power in the unabated reproduction of reporting in NDOs by showing that willing performance may not mean unreflective and naive rule-following, and its effects are not less important for not arising from direct funders' impositions.

A word on Africa

My empirical studies (i.e., Paper II and Paper III) as indicated in preceding pages, draw on longitudinal data collected in organizations located in Senegal. Senegal is one of the 54 countries that form part of the African continent[45]. My reasons for selecting the studied Senegalese NDOs, however, are *not* to be found in what might be called 'their African-ness'. In other words, my research was proudly conducted in this setting that is too often overlooked, but was not designed to ascertain some African difference or distinctive way of doing things. Indeed, while an organizational phenomena may be studied to assess its differential manifestation in different settings (for example: how management tools are used on different continents[46]; or Total Quality Control, the Japanese way[47]), this is only one research angle among many. In fact, paying attention to different contexts may open up research much more broadly; and it provides, in particular, opportunities for *substantive* learning about the phenomena under study (e.g., Hafsi and Farashahi, 2005; Mintzberg, 2001).

It is on this basis that my research proceeded, recognizing that "surprising insights can occur when new territory is explored" (Mintzberg, 2001: 770). Thus, as noted previously, for this thesis research, I chose these Senegalese NDOs to study strategy formation amidst multiple interests, because they operated in a context where the formulation of strategies, although not nonexistent, was not highly institutionalized, and where participatory management and engagement with different views, multiple development approaches and various practices were common occurrences. They were thus organized settings which presented conditions different from those that usually appear with the typical (orthodox) depiction of strategy as a well-contained design exercise bearing fruit. For this reason, they were fitting settings for my

[45]. *Africa is a continent* comprising 54 countries (i.e., recognized sovereign states), nine territories, and two independent states (i.e., states which have not yet acquired full recognition) (see Wikipedia at https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa). It is a large landmass that has always had numerous climates and topographies, and also a rich diversity of ethnicities, languages, political systems and economic systems. It has been shown, for instance, that pre-colonial Africa had more than 10,000 different states and polities (e.g., Ehret, 2002). This is to say that while Africa is frequently talked about as a unified whole in cultural terms (often even as if it were a country), and its inhabitants depicted as if they were all necessarily (somehow) programmed in the same way, this does not reflect some 'true' state (whether past or present). Rather, such representations of Africa and the Africans are socially constructed.

[46]. See, for example Ridgy, D. (2003) "Management tools survey 2003: Usage up as companies try to make headway in tough times", *Strategy & Leadership,* 31(5).

[47]. See, for example Ishikawa, K., & Lu, D. J. (1985)"What is Total Quality Control: The Japanese way", Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.

research as they could help open up thinking and enhance attention to the dynamic process that strategy formation often is.

This way of approaching, and researching, these Senegalese organizations is also consistent with the theoretical perspectives drawn on for this research. For taking situated judgment seriously, these perspectives call for a close attention to what actors *actually* say and do. This precludes relying on any pre-given group categorization – e.g., whether based on race, class, gender, or religion – that is treated as if it surely encapsulates all the attributes of those identified as members of the groups and, for this reason, certainly reflects their 'authentic' views and actions. Instead, situated judgment invites an engagement with research which gives due consideration to micro-social actions (without neglecting macro-social influences). Simply put, it draws attention to the fact that *each human being is a member of a variety of groups*, and hence capable of engaging with the world in many different ways. So, for instance, instead of presuming that, for being on the African continent, the members of my studied organizations would obviously behave in some particular (so-called 'African') way, my research followed these organizational members and paid attention to the ways in which they actually engaged with their contexts. This attention to the micro-social scale seems warranted when research is concerned with what actors *actually* say and do. There would otherwise be a risk of conflating prevailing representations and standard assumptions with the reality of studied organizations as experienced and constituted day in day out by their members. Of course, other research perspectives could examine (and indeed have examined) organizations located on the African continent by prioritizing prevailing representations and granting firmness to standard (more or less defensible) group categorizations. Such an approach is perfectly compatible with an interest in explaining social phenomena in terms of pre-existing sociological groupings. This, however, as noted above, is neither the purpose of this research nor my research interest.

A look at the few organizational studies carried out on the African continent suggests that the majority have leaned towards emphasizing this continent's distinctiveness. In the main, it has been argued that managing organizations in Africa presents unique challenges, that management difficulties expose its peculiarities, and that models and concepts more germane to its seemingly immutable cultural essence would be more effective (e.g., Blunt & Jones, 1997; Dia, 1996; Jackson, 2004; Kiggundu, 1989; Nzelibe, 1986). Overall, more often than not, the

picture that arises is one of utter difference. African organizations and their members are portrayed as inherently different – that is, they are talked about as if they were, in every way, quite unlike others in other regions of the world. This, it is often implied, would be because of culture – and more specifically an African culture that is seemingly uniquely rooted in tradition, and all-embracing. It supposedly fully shapes actors' views and actions, making them thus unambiguously different. Certainly, the interest in local conditions that such studies suggest is to be commended. Their calling attention to the cultural context serves as useful corrective to *a priori* claims of uniform human experience. But, in presupposing that this context is so unique that African human experience ought to be altogether unlike any other, they tend to make difference absolute.

The problematic prevalence of this representation of Africa has been amply discussed by a number of scholars and writers, including Mbembé (2006: 147) who aptly summed it up when noting that "Africa is (...) perpetually caught and imagined within a web of difference and utter otherness" (see also e.g., Adichie, 2009; Sen, 2007). This needs not be the case. In engaging with Africa in our research, openness to difference needs not mean presuming that actors' views and actions are necessarily always distinctive, or that the only story to tell is about how they differ from what might be called Western (i.e., European or North American) ways of thinking and/or doing things. Research can also simply follow the actors, take account of the (likely multiple) macro-social structures that influence their *actual* conduct, and pay attention to how they handle their ever-mutating world and produce concerted action.

Relatedly, in not being fixated on 'African distinctiveness', such research, as noted previously, may help us open up our thinking, and refine our understandings of organizational phenomena or even generate new insights. Consider, for instance, Hirschman's well-known theoretical work on actors' actions in face of unmet expectations – i.e., the celebrated concepts of Exit, Voice and Loyalty – which, as this author notes, "has its origin in an observation on rail transport in Nigeria" (Hirschman, 1970: vii, 44-45). This and other research have shown that studying what is happening on the African continent can indeed helpfully contribute to improving our knowledge on organizational and social phenomena more generally (e.g., Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Mintzberg, 2001). One can only hope that many more studies will follow suit, and the tendency to only see absolute uniqueness of experience on the African continent will gradually give way to more diverse lines of research, and an

understanding of this continent as a place where, not unlike other continents, actors do not make sense of their contexts in just one way – here is there too not just one legitimate way of being, of seeing, or of doing things.

Implication for researchers and practitioners

The contributions generated by this thesis research have a number of implications for research and organizational life. In addition to those highlighted in the individual papers, some further theoretical and practical considerations are discussed below with the hope that they may support scholarly research and serve as valuable inputs for practitioners in their efforts to carry out their joint activities and realize their organizations' raison d'être.

As noted previously, by acknowledging situated judgment, this thesis research fore-grounded what actors *actually* say and do rather than social pre-givens – namely socio-cultural categories or labels that grant actors distinct, fixed, and mutually exclusive purposes, motives, preferences or dispositions. In so doing, it recognizes that these socially-given attributes are abstractions, the products of group-level typifications, while human beings themselves are rarely exactly of one type or another. This means that organizations comprise members – e.g., engineers, accountants, analysts, receptionists, and so on – whose conducts *in practice* is not a settled matter. Each member, because of his/her many other socializations, is capable of perceiving, understanding, and acting upon the world in different ways. By building on this alternative onto-epistemological viewpoint, my research brings to light important aspects of the process of organizing concerted action that have been overlooked or insufficiently appreciated.

The insights generated point to some critical considerations for research into the work that actors do which sustain (or alter) the logics that ground their actions, and contribute to shaping consistencies of actions (i.e., strategies) in organizations. In studying this work that actors do, the way in which we conceive of the human experience has some importance. Resting such research on pre-given group characterizations, in effect, affirms homogeneity of behaviour for all group members in all situations. So, for instance, all engineers are presumed to always do things in engineer-like ways, and hence always differently from their accountant colleagues. In many cases, and in particular when research is concerned with group-level properties or intergroup comparisons, this is a useful assumption. After all, as professions, engineers and

accountants are indeed socialized in different ways. What's more, working from this assumption clearly grants some methodological ease, as generalized representations can serve as a form of analytical shortcut. However, this way of seeing also produces important blind spots – the more notable when research is concerned with the micro-social scale (i.e., what is actually happening). This is because conceiving of actors as faithful projections of socio-cultural groups (each reflecting only one) tends to restrict attention to the realm of actions seeing as germane to each of those groups. Further, it hides from view the richness of the work that actors do, or said differently, what is happening beyond the confrontation of generic group roles.

Highlighting these possible limitations is however not to fall back on a view of human action that would qualify as under-socialized (to borrow the term from Granovetter (1985)). To problematize an all-around reliance on pre-given group characterizations is not to suggest that socialization has little to no effects on human action, and actors could somehow decide to do without it. Rather, it is to give due consideration to the fact that macro-social structures are multiple, and each human being is likely influenced by many. Put differently, membership in groups is not exclusive; and any organizational member, for instance, is capable of behaving in a way that reflects any of his/her multiple macro-social influences. To rule out this human ability by assumption would amount to seeing human action as fully determined by the norms and beliefs of the one social group the person is identified with – the possibility of alternative actions being then viewed as wholly dependent on the intervention of members of other groups. For a person known to be an engineer, for instance, an 'engineer-like behavior' which might, depending on the situation, be at best a probability – e.g., when this person is designing a prototype of a new product – or just a possibility – e.g., when this person takes part in the drafting of a corporate social responsibility programme – is made to appear a certainty in all situations. Such categorizing of actors of course, as noted previously, may be a fitting starting point when research is primarily concerned with 'macro' patterns of behaving (e.g., the generic roles played by different types of professions). My argument, thus, is not that this research approach should be discounted; it may offer legitimate learning opportunities. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that these presupposed behaviors are generalized characterizations (some well-grounded, others less so) which are not reflective of the varied ways in which actors *actually* engage with the world. For this reason, when research is concerned with what happens at the micro-social level, an alternative way of seeing – such as the one adopted for

this thesis research – which acknowledges the pluralistic potential of human action may prove more fruitful.

Another critical implication of recognizing situated judgment is that our accounts of the organizational world may then do better justice to its heterogeneity. And this, one may argue, has potentially significant consequences for the organizations that our research findings contribute to shaping. Academic research, of course, is more often directly mobilized in academic conversations. But, the ways of seeing that we grant space to, and the stories that we construct and share, offer representations of the organizational world that researchers and practitioners alike may rely upon to make sense of the organized settings they are dealing with. When the politics involved in organizing and strategizing are readily reduced to the workings of divergent *inherent* preferences, it is fundamental schism that stands out. When, research overwhelmingly suggests that conflicts are first and foremost to be understood as disagreements that concern organizational members' *inner essences*, it is their 'vital-ness' and criticality that is affirmed. And when the tensions pervading organizational life are only depicted in this manner, it is existential struggle that is emphasized. There is a risk to making organizational conflicts into a clear-cut matter of self-realization (that is, the fulfillment of the innate possibilities of one's supposedly only group). Unnecessarily harsh face-offs and violent events can easily grow from an understanding of the organizational world as necessarily divided along sectarian or parochial lines.

For practitioners, some additional considerations may be indicated here. These are presented in the spirit of contributing to further reflection and a continually improving understanding of organizational life, more so than to put forth recommendations to be followed in the management of organizational affairs. Organizational research, as Weick (2016: 342) suggests, "builds capacity more than solves problems"; and this is the main thrust of what follows.

My thesis contributions draw attention to a number of ways that the decisions made and actions taken in organizations come to shape their trajectories, even when the latter are not explicitly pre-defined and/or deliberately pursued. One important aspect is the role of mundane problem-solving and directing to the formation of strategies. In a number of organizations, there appears to be a general sense that the mission statements articulated, the

strategies formulated and/or the annual work plans drafted are always fresh in organizational members' minds (and especially in managers' minds), and that they quietly but continually inform the handling of new opportunities and challenges. These presumably assimilated texts are talked about as if they provide unambiguous guidance and serve as a reliable compass day in day out. Yet, texts are in fact always interpreted, and not just in one way. When they are being put into application, organizational policies and plans are often reworked[48]. Over time, they also come to be understood variedly; and members, for instance, may construct different readings of their organizations' rationales for being involved in the activities, sectors or markets they are operating in. In short, policies and plans do not permanently set meaning. The work that organizational members ordinarily do to make sense of what is going on, thus, has important implications for organizational trajectories. In assuaging doubts about what needs to be done; in handling perceived mismatches; and in engaging in problem-solving, they continuously contribute to shaping what is understood as the appropriate ways of doing things in their organizations. This mundane work, in other words, partakes in creating and recreating organizational directions; and for this reason, ordinary problem-solving and directing deserve more attention.

Of course, this is not to say that policies and plans are superfluous. They provide important boundaries and base formulas for how the organization is going to go about realizing its programs and raison d'être. They are also important for coordination as they help communicate to organizational members – and also external partners, in the case of strategic plans – the explicit ambitions, purposes, or objectives of the organization, and can thus help mobilize support for their achievements. But, as noted above, taken alone, they cannot bring about concerted action, and consistencies of actions over time[49]. They are, perhaps, best seen as tools that gain their full strength in organized settings which can also strive for good stewardship and agile management.

[48]. The fact that organizational written rules are adapted when put into application is made, perhaps, most vivid when there is a zeal strike in process. This form of protest involves 'working to rule': in other words, organizational members on strike work strictly to the letter of the rules. This often results in considerable slowdowns.

[49]. This may offer some insights to supporters of nonprofit organizations who, as part of a recent trend to foster greater nonprofit resilience, have been providing assistance for the formulation of strategic plans. The focus, more often than not, has been on helping these organizations secure the written document (i.e., the plan) rather than supporting the planning process (i.e., organizational members engaging in reflections and discussions about what it is that they are doing, and what they should do in the years to come) and subsequent administrative needs. This suggests overall that there may be excessive confidence in the plan and its effectuality.

Another important consideration comes from the fact that, as my research show, consistencies of actions (i.e., strategies) may form, not just unintendedly, but visibly as locked-in tendencies take root. In other words, organizational members may continually, but non-deliberately, carry out some activities in the exact same ways despite facing different circumstances – e.g., different project requirements; a more or less obliging environment; varied reactions from partners, and so on. These tendencies are not necessary unfavorable to the organization – a locked-in tendency may, for example, foster excellence if it means surpassing project requirements – but equally, they may not always be beneficial. The important point, however, is that since they are largely unacknowledged, their effects are generally not considered when organizational members try to make progress on their projects, programs or organizational goals. This may be problematic for the organization, since the locked-in tendencies may distort their actions. Possibly even more so when whole-organization stock-taking and/or planning exercises (as opposed to project-level review or planning) are rare – such as in smaller nonprofit organizations which, for lack of funding, put off such activities. These organizations then miss opportunities to stand back, and discuss and (re)establish their preferences and priorities. Such exercises may not lead to making locked-in tendencies more visible – nor is this their purpose – but they importantly contribute to making more explicit the organizational (chosen) orientations. This may spur more reflexivity when organizational members are carrying out their activities, and they may then notice incongruities – for example, when the locked-in tendency is at odds with articulated preferences and priorities, and risks being detrimental to their efforts – and deal with them.

Finally, and in continuation with the previous point, my research suggests a need for more reflection on the reporting practice in nonprofit development organizations located down the aid chain. This way of doing reporting, currently entrenched and one may argue visibly 'locked-in', contributes to giving legitimacy to those organizations that perform it exactly and perfectly. It also makes for more efficiency in results compilation along the aid chain, and presentation to the international organizations and the governments that provide financing. The appetite for numbers, percentages, and numerical data to talk about performance in the international development sector goes beyond the immediate NDO-funder circle. It is visibly much more extensive – it can even be sensed, in many cases, in public discussions and debates among taxpayers in donor countries. In such context, and given the increased scrutiny that this sector

generally finds itself under, and the profusion of quantitative metrics in many socio-economic spheres the world around, one can understand that local NDOs may not only 'play by the rules' but also take this way of doing things to be rather normal. However, while there is no denying the importance of these numbers and statistics for public policy, there is no obvious reason why local NDOs would limit themselves to apprehending project performance in this manner. Seeing 'what matters' in relation to development projects only as what can be counted seems quite reductive. It, in fact, leads to placing little value on other data obtained on project implementation and site conditions – e.g., information shared by local community members during interactions or on activity evaluation sheets; insights gained from handling the unexpected while implementing project activities; non-countable spill over effects; and so on – which then remain unexploited. Yet, these could provide valuable insights for more responsive implementation, better tailoring of project activities, innovations in sustaining project impacts, improved future programming, and thus, overall, potentially more effective development projects. For not giving greater consideration to data other than the countable (and related inputs), these local NDOs may also be squeezing themselves out of providing a richer picture of the often (even if not always) remarkable work that they do, day in day out, in difficult conditions. Further, and of broader importance, they may inadvertently make it easier for impoverished representations of local realities to prevail.

In summary, my thesis research has elaborated on an analytical lens which makes it possible to study strategy formation in organizations by taking account of the politics involved, and highlighting the power effects of particular patterns of formation – without however taking actors to be of exclusive distinct types. While acknowledging the influences of macro-social structures on actors' behaviors, it also recognizes that each human being is variedly influenced – for being acquainted with different practices – and, thus, places situated judgment at the heart of the analysis. By adopting this viewpoint, the three papers that constitute my thesis research contribute important insights to a number of lines of research, which can help refine our approach to institutional work research, and our understandings of strategy formation in organizations.

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